

Meril media soccer

SPORTS REPORTER

The Meril Cup Media Football Tournament reached the quarterfinal stage after the group matches ended yesterday at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. All four quarterfinals will be played today at the same venue with reigning champions Jugantor pitted against Ajker Kagaj in the first match. Bhorer Kagaj meet Samakal, Channel 1 face Janakantha while Sangbad play RTV in other last eight clashes. RTV were the last team to progress in the seven-a-side tournament yesterday, thanks to The Daily Star's coming-from-behind 2-1 win over BSS. Man-of-the-match Amit struck both the goals for Star, who played with one man short. However the victory was not enough for them to advance to the knockout stage as they lost their first game to RTV. In other matches, Ajker Kagaj beat UNB 3-1, Sangbad thrashed Observer 4-1, Samakal edged New Nation 1-0 while Janakantha also won by a solitary goal against Financial Express.

Inter-college handball

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Imperial College registered a 9-6 victory over Govt Titumir College in the EXIM Bank Inter-college (Men) handball tournament at the handball ground adjacent to Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. The winners led the first half 4-2. In the day's other match, Bishreshtha Munshi Abdur Rouf College recorded a crushing 17-0 victory over Dhaka State College after dominating the first half 7-1.

Solid start for Hingis

AFP, Tokyo

Four-time champion Martina Hingis made a perfect return to the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament on Wednesday, overwhelming Cho Yoon-Jeong of South Korea in just 35 minutes. The Swiss wild card entrant, the winner here in 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2002, did not surrender a single game to the Korean before winning 6-0, 6-0 in the first round. In the second round, Hingis will take on third seed Nathalie Dechy of France, who received a first-round bye. Second seed Elena Dementieva of Russia became the first player to reach the quarterfinals when she defeated Katarina Srebotnik of Slovenia 2-6, 6-1, 7-5. In the quarterfinals, the Sydney Olympic silver medalist will take on fifth seed Nicole Pietrangeli of the Czech Republic, the winner over Saori Obata of Japan 6-4, 6-4.

Sonargaon

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SCORES IN BRIEF SONARGAON: 282-6 in 50 overs (Al Shahrar 59, Sriam 53, Ashraf 25, Sanchay 48, Salim 7 not out, extras 19; Alamgir 2-62, Monirul 2-50, Sabir 2-46) MOHAMMEDAN: 239 all out in 42.5 overs (Sandeep 21, Aftab 26, Bashir 58, Dhanan 33, Nadif 40, Alamgir 12, extras 33; Tapash 2-54, Mahbul 3-48, Sriam 1-25, Ashraf 3-31) Result: Sonargaon won by 43 runs. VICTORIA: 195 all out in 49.1 overs (Jaffar 31, Mahbul 53 not out, Palash 20; Sunny 5-41) BROTHERS: 197-9 in 44.1 overs (Salahuddin 49, Ehsanul 25, Rubaiyat 30 not out; Palash 3-41, Shaon 2-33) Result: Brothers won by one wicket.

PCB to probe

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"Even if there is a problem with his action, there is a procedure outlined by the ICC and team officials can't imply anything," Shaharyar added. PTI adds, the Indian team management on Tuesday denied media reports that they had complained to the match referee regarding the bowling action of Akhtar. Reacting to reports that India had lodged a formal complaint against Shoaib after the second Test in Faisalabad, Indian team's media manager GS Wallia said, "We have not lodged any complaint against any bowler." Wallia was approached for comments after the third day's play of the Karachi third Test when the news started doing the rounds. Akhtar, on his part, threatened to take legal action against those who claimed that he was chucking. "I don't know why people are saying this. I have been cleared by the International Cricket Council three times. I will take them to court as it's a violation of my human rights," he told a TV channel. "People in India and Pakistan should realise the consequences of saying such things," he said.



Nigeria's Obafemi Martins (L) does a somersault to celebrate his strike against Senegal during their African Nations Cup clash on Tuesday. (R) Ghana's Babu Adamu is being consoled by teammate Stephen Appiah after their team bowled out of the tournament losing to Zimbabwe on the same day.

High drama in Group D

AFP, Ismailia

The so-called Group of Death at the African Nations Cup lived up to its billing on Tuesday as both matches went down to the wire. In the end, Nigeria finished top of Group D after coming from behind to beat Senegal 2-1 while Zimbabwe deservedly beat Ghana 2-1 but still finished out of the money - losing out to the Senegalese by the latter being better off by one goal on goal difference. However they ended the third of the five African World Cup qualifiers interest in the tournament as Ghana - appropriately dressed in black - followed Togo and Angola on an earlier than expected flight home. Nigeria will play champions Tunisia in the quarters while Senegal - finalists in 2002 - will face Group C table-toppers Guinea in their last eight match-up. At one point it had looked like Tunisia coach Roger Lemerre would face the unpalatable reminder of his 2002 World Cup debacle with France by playing Senegal - who beat them in the first match in South Korea - in the last eight. Souleymane Camara had put

the Senegalese ahead before two goals by Inter Milan striker Obafemi Martins gave the 'Super Eagles' victory and a perfect nine points from their three matches. "I am very happy to score two goals in such a big game," he said. "I would like to thank my coach for standing by me in such a big game," added Martins, who had yet to score in the tournament before the match. Nigeria coach Austin Eguavoen thanked his lucky stars. "It was a dramatic finish because before this game all four but we were the luckiest of the teams. Because all four teams had a chance of reaching the last eight. "However we could have been 2-0 down at half-time but we turned it around in the second-half and we deserved to win in the end," said Eguavoen, who played in the 1994 and 1998 World Cup finals. His Senegalese counterpart Abdoulaye Sar laid the blame for the defeat firmly at the door of veteran goalkeeper Tony Sylva. "We dominated 80 minutes of the match and, then a schoolboy goalkeeper error drained the confidence of the whole team," he said. Goals by Cephas Chimedza and Benjami gave Zimbabwe victory over the lifeless Black Stars - a late goal by Baba Adamu was not enough to salvage their pride. However the Zimbabweans were left distraught as a last minute goal by Joel Lupahla was ruled out for marginal offside. Zimbabwe coach Charles Mhauri was dejected. "We are very disappointed," he said. "We could have qualified but we were unlucky. We tried to score the third goal. "The referee disallowed one and if it had been allowed I don't think they would have scored (Adamu's late goal) and we would have gone through," added the dreadlocked coach. Mhauri, though, was honest enough about where they had let it slip. "We lost our chance to qualify in the opening defeat (2-0) by Senegal," he said. Ghana handler Ratomir Djukovic was plegmatic and even smiled at times after the match. "We were under pressure, we could have qualified with victory or a draw but Zimbabwe did not have that pressure and played well," said the Serb. "We did not play well but this has nothing to do with the World Cup as it is still a long way away. "We were missing several key players after all including Chelsea's injured Michael Essien). We will now prepare for the World Cup." There were tears, though, in Ghana. "I phoned my wife and she said everybody was crying in Ghana," said their injured captain Samuel Kuffour.

Becks hails Robinho

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid midfielder David Beckham has praised the return to form of team mate Robinho, saying the Brazilian forward has a good future. "It's important to see Robinho doing well because when he first arrived here everyone was questioning whether he would make it or not," the England captain told sports daily Marca on Wednesday. "But playing as he is at present you can see he is going to be a great football player. "He is enormously skilful. He just needed a little confidence to get back on track again." The Brazil international was

Another thorny

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towards them and said: "Boys, please don't see the match otherwise you will lose your interest if you watch this kind of farce in the name of cricket." And as it has always been the case match referee Belayet Hossain found nothing wrong in the match. "There was no untoward incident and it finished peacefully. Besides, Biman didn't lodge any protest," said Belayet over phone to The Daily Star Sport last night. SCORES IN BRIEF DOHS: 230-8 in 50 overs (Golam Rahman 40, Nazimuddin 20, Manjirul 11, Tikolo 55, Akram 69 not out, Shahadat 13 not out, extras 10; Sharif 2-44, Mosharraf 3-42, Jamal 2-35) BIMAN: 225 all out in 46.2 overs (Javed 109, Sanwar 41, Mushfiqur 24, extras 12; Shahadat 2-24, Razzak 3-34) Result: DOHS won by five runs.

Pakistan take series

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edging catches to the slip region as India slumped to 216-7. Pakistan had never looked back after removing openers Rahul Dravid and Sehwa in the first two overs of the innings. Skipper Dravid was given out caught at the wicket by Kamran Akmal off pace spearhead Shoaib Akhtar's fifth legitimate delivery. Sehwa was dismissed in the next over, his middle stump uprooted by a sharp in-cutter from Asif. Laxman and Tendulkar put on 55 on either side of the lunch interval but Asif stepped in to stop both batsmen in their tracks. Laxman was clean bowled by another in-cutter for 21 and Tendulkar had his off-stump shattered by one that kept a trifle low. Tendulkar hit five boundaries in his 26, but his dismissal saw India slump to 74-4. Earlier, Pakistan batted an hour into the fourth day to take their second innings from the overnight score of 111-5 to 599-7 before the declaration came. Faisal Iqbal moved from 103 to 139 before holing out in the deep off Zaheer Khan, ending a sixth-wicket stand of 196 with Razaq. Razaq hit 90, making Pakistan

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Pathan	25	3	106	1
Zaheer	28	4	103	1
Rudra Pratap	24	1	115	1
Kumble	37.1	3	151	3
Ganguly	16	1	68	1
Sehwag	1	0	2	0
Tendulkar	9	0	40	0

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Akhtar	8	1	37	1
Asif	12	1	48	3
Razaq	18.4	0	88	4
Kameria	18	0	75	2
Afridi	2	0	10	0

Result: Pakistan won by 341 runs and clinch three-Test series 1-0. Man-of-the-match: Kamran Akmal. Man-of-the-series: Younis Khan.

Bafana Bafana booted on return

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's soccer squad, booted out of the African Nations Cup without scoring a single goal, returned home on Wednesday to jeers and catcalls while the coach apologised for the team's dismal performance. A hostile reception awaited Bafana Bafana (The Boys), continental champions in 1996 as their plane touched down from Egypt, where their dismal run ended with Monday's 1-0 loss to Zambia. Players were loudly booed by crowds who made the sound of cattle bellowing as they were led through international arrivals, escorted by a heavy police and security contingent, the SAPA news agency reported. At a press conference later coach Ted Dumitru apologised and captain Sibusiso Zuma admitted "we have a big problem with SA football at the moment." "First of all, a big sorry to the nation, we failed to meet even your lowest expectations," a visibly smarting Dumitru said. "But how big is their crime -- to be booed and to be called names?" he asked. Zuma said "I'm not just going to make excuses. I think we have a big problem with SA football at the moment." "We have got to fix it as soon as possible." But he pleaded for support, saying "Please, you need to take it easy on the boys."

South Africa, a decade ago champions on home soil, finished pointless at the bottom of their group after losing in succession to Guinea, Tunisia and Zambia without scoring a single goal. Coach Roger Lemerre's decision to play a Tunisia second XI in their final Group C game led to a salutary 3-0 defeat by the tournament's surprise team, Guinea, and an unenviable quarter-final meeting with Nigeria. Guinea rattled up nine points with a sparkling brand of sharp footwork and lightning pace, ably

Milan out of Italian Cup

REUTERS, Rome

AC Milan tumbled out of the Italian Cup when they were beaten 3-0 by quarterfinal opponents Palermo on Tuesday. Milan's 3-1 elimination on aggregate was their second disappointment in four days following a 1-1 draw with Sampdoria at the weekend that left them 12 points behind leaders Juventus in Serie A. Milan, fielding a strong side fronted by Alberto Gilardino with Kaka in support, had an early chance to take the lead when the ball broke loose on the edge of the area to Kaka but the Brazilian playmaker failed to get any power on his shot. There was nothing wrong, however, with the shot unleashed by Mariano Gonzalez from 20 metres out that curled into the top of Milan's net in the 10th minute. Palermo striker Andrea Caracciolo grabbed the home side's second goal eight minutes later, running on to Eugenio Corini's through ball before finishing coolly into the bottom corner of the net. At 2-0 down, Milan belatedly began to press forward, but five minutes into the second half Palermo struck again, this time on the break, when Gonzalez raced into the area, rounded Kalac and slotted home his second goal of the night. Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti reacted by sending on Filippo Inzaghi, Andrea Pirlo and Serginho in an attempt to close the gap. The closest they came was in the 86th minute, when Palermo keeper Mariano Andujar saved twice in quick succession to prevent Clarence Seedorf and then Kaka pulling one back.

Smith urges ICC to get tough on racists

AFP, Perth

South African captain Graeme Smith backed a get-tough approach to fight the racial abuse of players Tuesday, saying cricket authorities needed to crack down on the problem the way soccer had. Smith, whose players have complained of racist taunts during their tour of Australia, said it was up to the International Cricket Council, the sports governing body, to rein in the problem. "I think the ICC need to be strong on it," he said. "I think it's something that they need to - just like (soccer's governing body) FIFA -- be very strong on it and keep the game clean." "It's up to them to take responsibility for it. If it's happening constantly in one place then they do need to take some action."

Captain Younis

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"But we should have batted better than we did. We have done well in the past so there is no reason to think we struggle when the ball moves in the air or off the wicket. "We were just not good enough in this game. We need to rethink our strategy and the combination."

The Empire strikes back

REUTERS, Cairo

Cameroon and Nigeria are once again the pride of African football at the Nations Cup, swaggering into the quarterfinals and casting real doubts on the credentials of World Cup-bound Togo and Angola. Talk of a rebel wave of African teams upsetting the old order after Cameroon, Nigeria and Senegal failed to qualify for Germany, have been shown to be, at best, premature. On the strength of the group phase which ended on Tuesday, the finals in Germany will be all the poorer without Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o, midfielder Geremi and Nigeria's exciting 18-year-old John Obi Mikel. Their two nations have so far shown the best assortment of individual talent at these finals, though Tunisia's first XI have been the slickest passing side, buoyed by their title of African champions and their four years together as a unit. Coach Roger Lemerre's decision to play a Tunisia second XI in their final Group C game led to a salutary 3-0 defeat by the tournament's surprise team, Guinea, and an unenviable quarter-final meeting with Nigeria. Guinea rattled up nine points with a sparkling brand of sharp footwork and lightning pace, ably

orchestrated by playmaker Pascal Feindouno who also scored three times. Feindouno is among those to have caught the eye here, though none more so than Eto'o, whose five goals and one assist propelled Cameroon to three wins in Group B. Graceful in motion and lethal in his finishing, the Barcelona striker appears intent on single-handedly bringing home a trophy to make amends for their failure to reach the World Cup. He has scored one of the best goals so far, a snap shot from outside the area in a hat-trick against Angola, rivaling Slim Benachour's superb 20-metre first-time shot into the roof of the net for Tunisia against South Africa. Eto'o has also lined up the cheeky goal so far, providing the cutback for Albert Meyong Ze to backheel the ball into Togo's net. Eto'o's strike against DR Congo, which hit the post, bounced out, struck the keeper and ricocheted back into the net, was probably the most fortuitous of the finals. Mikel, the subject of an acrimonious tug-of-war between Manchester United and Chelsea last year, has made an instant impression on the tournament. Saved until the last 35 minutes of Nigeria's second game, Mikel was only on for six minutes before the midfielder rifled a shot into Zimbabwe's net from the edge of the area. Second to Eto'o in the scoring

charts is Brazilian-born Francileudo Dos Santos, whose hat-trick against Zambia and goal against the South Africans sealed Tunisia's quarter-final slot after two matches. The strikers, who include Egypt's Mido and Ivory Coast's Didier Drogba, have taken predictably taken most of the plaudits. But midfielder Stephan Appiah has been a tower of strength for Ghana and British-based defenders Kolo Toure, Bobo Balde, Talal El Karkouri and Nouredine Naybet all kept things tight at the back. Ghana, hit hard by absences in a final Group D game they lost 2-1 to Zimbabwe, will doubtless be a much tougher opponent in a rematch, notably with midfielder Michael Essien back in the side. The brickbats have been reserved for eliminated Togo and Angola, who now have five months to find a way of avoiding an even bigger embarrassment at the World Cup. "It can be no consolation that their meeting in a final Group B game, which the Angolans won 3-2 as they vainly chased a quarter-final slot on goal difference, has been the most exciting so far. Joining them as the biggest flops of the tournament were undoubtedly South Africa. Becoming the first side since the Nations Cup switched to 16 teams in 1996 to finish the tournament without any points or goals is bad enough. Coming from the nation who are hosting the 2010 World Cup made it even worse.

Sweden forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic heads a list of young stars targeted by Spanish giants Real Madrid to join its band of Galacticos, according to sports daily newspaper AS. Madrid are keen to revive its aging ranks with some young blood and the 24-year-old Juventus striker is one of six players being trailed by the nine-time European champions. Also coveted are Arsenal's 25-year-old left-back Ashley Cole, a long-term target, Liverpool's Spain midfielder Xabi Alonso, 24, Schalke's Denmark midfielder Christian Poulsen, 25, Cologne's German forward Lukas Podolski, 20 and 19-year-old Osasuna midfielder Raul Garcia. After winning three UEFA Champions League titles in five years between 1998 and 2002 and last lifting the Spanish title in 2003, Madrid have been playing second fiddle to Valencia and bitter rivals Barcelona domestically, while also flatter to deceive in Europe. Aging players such as Spain defender Fernando Hierro and Portugal winger Luis Figo have already been shown the door in the last two close-seasons and now Madrid are keen to reduce the average age of their first team squad. "Plan 2006: Ibrahimovic and five young guns," read the AS headline on Tuesday before predicting that the Swede will play as a second striker off Ronaldo in the new-look Galactico strikeforce next season. AS claims Ibrahimovic will set Real back 40-45 million euros although it seems unlikely that the club, which was once more

Real looking for young blood

Football

AFP, Madrid

than 300 million euros in debt, can finance such a large spending spree on six players, each likely to cost a minimum of 10 million euros. The newspaper goes on to claim that Poulsen will replace fellow Dane Thomas Gravesen in midfield with the former Everton man leaving in June. Cole is slated to take the place of Brazilian full-back Roberto Carlos who has found himself the target of abuse among sections of home fans in the last two campaigns. AS dispelled concerns that Real would suffer from bringing in so many young recruits, stating: "The players are all under 26 but loaded with experience." Madrid have been prolifically signing young talent in the last year, bringing in highly rated Brazil forwards Robinho and Julio Baptista as well as Italian starlet Antonio Cassano from Roma.

Cech pens new Chelsea deal

BBC ONLINE, undated

Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech has signed a new contract that will keep him at the Premiership champions until 2010. The 23-year-old Czech Republic stopper had two-and-a-half years left on his old deal, but Chelsea are keen to keep him at Stamford Bridge for longer. "I am very pleased," he told Chelsea's website. "When I joined I just wanted to get in the team and win trophies. "I managed that last season and have been rewarded with a new deal already. Now I want to win some more trophies." Blues' chief executive Peter Kenyon revealed his delight at persuading the 6ft 5in custodian to extend his Chelsea stay. "We are obviously delighted that Petr has committed to Chelsea for another two years until 2010," said Kenyon. "He had a fantastic season in his first year and established himself as one of the top goalkeepers in the world. "It was always our intention to keep him for longer than his initial contract as he has a key role to play in the long-term development and success of the team." Chelsea's second keeper, Carlo Cudicini, also recently signed a new contract, pledging his future to the club until 2009.

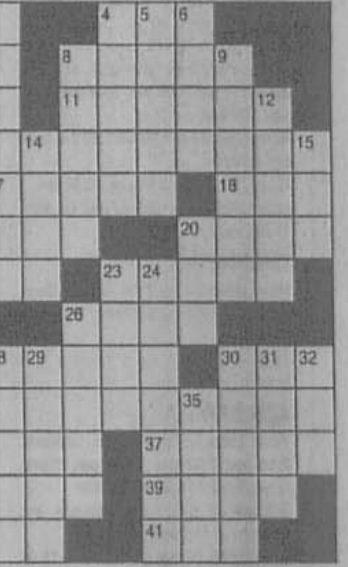
Roma hit with stadium ban

INTERNET, undated

Roma have been ordered to play their next home game behind closed doors at a neutral venue. The punishment comes after their fans held up banners with neo-Nazi and anti-semitic slogans during the 3-0 win over Livorno at the weekend. Roma's game with Cagliari on February 8 will now be played in an empty stadium.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP
NS T ATQNDJ GS TRTCU
ETW CXBJF-CETFB DNCNGA.
N QENAU N'W ITRR E JF
TA GBQNTR TRJXQNTA.
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT COULD YOU CALL THINGS LIKE STRINGS, HAMMERS AND WOODEN KEYS? PIANO PIECES.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: W equals D
The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals Q, it will equal Q throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.