

Visa confirms FIFA deal

REUTERS, Zurich

Visa said on Thursday it had signed an eight-year deal as the new financial services partner of football's world governing body FIFA.

A statement from Visa's corporate relations vice-president Mike Sherman said the contract would run from January 2007 to 2014, and Visa was taking the place of MasterCard.

Visa, which also has marketing programmes with the Olympic Games and the Rugby World Cup, gave no financial details in the statement. Sources told Reuters on Wednesday it was worth up to 200 million pounds (350.4 million dollars).

The agreement will cover the next two World Cups, in 2010 in South Africa and in 2014.

Coca-Cola, Hyundai, Adidas and Sony have already signed up as official partners with FIFA.

MasterCard has been allied with the World Cup since 1990.

Juve enforce media shut-out

AFP, Rome

Juventus' general director Luciano Moggi said Thursday the club would not be speaking to the media until further notice following their Champions League quarterfinal defeat to Arsenal.

The Italian champions and current Serie A leaders were jeered by their own fans and slammed by the Italian press after Wednesday's goalless draw at the Delle Alpi stadium, which gave the Gunners a 2-0 aggregate victory and a place in the last four.

"We're sorry about our elimination, but also about the strong criticism after last night," he said.

"Everything that could have been said about the team was said. This pause for reflection serves to bring some calm, hoping it will bring the league title to our fans and our shareholders, because they deserve it."

Kyrgyzstan stay

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racing into the box by Krasnov. But his scorching missed the mark for inches. Goalkeeper Khabibuloev saved the Tajik fort when he dived full-stretch to deny a long range effort by defender Talant Samsaliev in the 77th minute.

PAKISTAN-MACAU

A brace by Kin Seng Chan helped Macau come twice from behind to snatch a valuable point from Pakistan.

Adeel put Pakistan ahead after 12 minutes when the diminutive striker stabbed a loose ball home from ten yards after the Macau backline failed to clear a long ball from the middle.

But the Pakistan celebration did not last long as Macau brought the score level four minutes later when Chan, completely unmarked by the rival defenders, tapped the ball in from close after meeting a low left-flank cross by Weng Nin Ku.

Muhammad Essa regained the lead for Pakistan three minutes from the break with a coolly taken penalty after midfielder Aziz was felled by Tak Ian Un inside the box.

The seasoned Pakistani striker, however, wasted golden opportunities either side of the breather as his attempts from point-blank range were denied by Macau custodian Hon Ming Chu.

Pakistan paid for the misses as Chan leaped high in the air to spectacularly head home a left-wing freekick by Gefredo Cheung in the 52nd minute.

CAMBODIA-GUAM

In Group C, Cambodia blanked Guam 3-0 in a rematch of the bottom-table sides at the Army Stadium. Palestine and Bangladesh had already reached the quarterfinals from this group.

Sok Buntheang opened the scoring for Cambodia after 37 minutes while his fellow midfielder Keo Kosal doubled the lead three minutes later. Kouch Sokumpeak sealed the victory for Cambodia in the 63rd minute. Cambodia ended with three points while Guam will return from their first major tournament in Asia conceding 17 goals in three defeats.

NEPAL-SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka had the first crack at goal in the 17th minute at the MA Aziz Stadium when Chathura Weerasingha's shot from 25 yards rattled the crossbar. In the very next minute Izzadeen Mohamed Nauffer's curler on a corner stormed into the net to give Sri Lanka a 1-0 lead.

Nepal got two good opportunities before the breather but Vishad Gouchan hit wide in the 29th minute and Tashi Tsering's header was cleared from the goaline by rival defender Kamaldeen.

The boys from the Himalayas were awarded a penalty in the 74th minute when Sanjaya brought down Bijay Gurung inside the area. Pradeep Maharjan made no mistake to restore the parity for Nepal.



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal forward Thierry Henry (R) celebrates with teammates Robert Pires (L) and Fredrik Ljungberg at the end of their Champions League quarterfinal second leg match at Delle Alpi stadium in Turin on Wednesday.

Gunners make history



AFP, Turin

Arsenal outplayed Italian champions Juventus for the second time in a week to march into the semifinals of the Champions League for the first time in their history.

It may have finished goalless at the Stadio delle Alpi but by the time German referee Herbert Fandel blew the final whistle, Arsene Wenger's side were comfortably ahead on points.

Wenger said that his team had outdone themselves during the campaign.

"Nobody expected that from our players," purred the Frenchman.

"Overall I feel we have become better and better. We were in control. We still managed to play in a controlled way. You saw another side of this team tonight."

A miserable night for Juventus, who never seriously threatened to overturn their 2-0 deficit they had conceded in the first leg last week, was compounded when Nedved, the playmaker they had been counting on to pull off an extraordinary comeback, was sent off with 13 minutes left.

Having already been booked, the former European player of the year was ordered off for a crude lunge at Emmanuel Eboue that summed up

his frustration at having been shackled by the young right-back for most of the evening.

Given his starring role in the first leg at Highbury, where he scored Arsenal's first goal and set-up Henry for the second, Cesc Fabregas might have been anticipating somewhat closer attention in the return match.

Instead, the teenage midfielder was afforded generous amounts of space to deliver crosses that generated two good chances for Arsenal in the opening 20 minutes.

The first, after a neatly worked short combination with Alexander Hleb near the corner flag, reached Gilberto slightly beyond the back post but the Brazilian midfielder proved unable to direct his attempted volley goalwards with any menace.

Henry did better with a Fabregas delivery from just inside the Juve half, spinning away from Gianluca Zambrotta with ease on the edge of the area before thumping a low shot into the midriff of Gianluigi Buffon.

With the exception of a threatening low cross from Zambrotta, Lehmann did not have a single save to make before the interval.

The German goalkeeper was relieved however to see Zambrotta's 15th-minute volley whistle narrowly past his right-hand post and a snatched shot by left-back Giorgio Chiellini's fly over the bar following an inviting knockdown

from the otherwise anonymous Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Despite their superior chances, Arsenal could not quite reproduce the composure that had characterised their first-leg display. There was a jittery tone to some of their defending, reflected in a string of untidy clearances and mistimed tackles.

However, Arsenal might have killed the contest at the start of the second half, when Henry, released by Hleb's pass, left Fabio Cannavaro trailing in his wake only to be thwarted by the alacrity of Buffon in coming off his line to smother the danger at the Frenchman's feet.

Instead, they had to endure some tense moments, notably when Trezeguet came within inches of connecting with a low Nedved cross along the edge of the six-yard area mid-way through the half.

Arsenal immediately launched a counter-attack that produced an even better chance at the other end, Fabregas driving his shot from 14-yards straight at Buffon.

Minutes later Lehmann finally had a real save to make, falling smartly to his right to beat out Nedved's fiercely struck half-volley after an Ibrahimovic flick.

Henry lays down the gauntlet

INTERNET, undated

Thierry Henry has laid down the gauntlet to his Arsenal teammates after helping his side into the semifinals of the UEFA Champions League for the first time in the club's history.

"I'm really proud but I'm a winner and this (reaching the semifinals) is not the kind of history I'm looking to make," said Henry.

"We're trying to go all the way and that means winning it. It's a good day for the club but let's extend it.

"I'm a winner and when you wear the Arsenal jersey you have that in your blood. You have to enjoy the moment and then we will see about Villarreal."

The French international hailed his side's unwavering concentration as they successfully thwarted Juve's best attempts to pull themselves back into contention of a tie the Italians trailed 2-0 from the first leg.

"We were good on the day and that is the most important thing," added Henry.

"We are defending well, even when 11 against 10. That is the main thing in football, to defend as a team and with a bit of luck today we could have scored some goals.

"I think it was down to concentration. With a lack of concentration you can pay and we gave them only one chance when we gave the ball to (Pavel) Nedved, but Jens (Lehmann) was there.

"It was a good game and we could have killed it off but you accept it and the game at home was so important."

Fighting India

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have had their chances," the 33-year-old told a news conference after the four-wicket win.

England captain Andrew Flintoff admitted his team would be "playing for pride" in the remaining one-day games in India following a fourth successive defeat.

They once again failed to score enough runs to seriously test the home side as they lost by four wickets in Kochi.

"You've got to score big totals against India with the strength in their batting line-up," he said.

But Flintoff refused to use the weather as an excuse for the result.

"I've played a couple of games in Sri Lanka when it's been just as hot and on similar sorts of pitches.

"Second half (of the game), I thought we stuck at it well. We just didn't score enough runs," said Flintoff.

Mashrafe boosts

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thought that another failure might demoralise him."

Faruque said that they had a very simple task when selecting the team and felt no pressure despite the opponents being mighty Australians.

"The boys are playing good cricket, so we have had very little to think about while selecting the team. And mind it, there is hardly any scope to think about experimentation against a team like Australia. Our main target is to play our normal cricket and to be as competitive as possible against them," he said.

The chief selector however was excited with the fact that boys are not scared to face Australia.

"Once it was our belief that it is impossible to beat Australia but we have overcome that mental barrier after Sophia Gardens. And we now believe that we have the ability to repeat it on a given day," he added.

TEST SQUAD

Habibul Bashar (captain), Khaled Mashud (vice-captain), Javed Omar, Nafees Iqbal, Aftab Ahmed, Mohammad Ashraful, Rajin Saleh, Shahriar Nafees, Alok Kapali, Mohammod Rafique, Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza, Enamul Huque, Shahadat Hossain and Syed Rasel.

Nervy Barca

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break but the effort from distance flew well over.

Moretto, who ahead of the encounter put in a training session where he was obliged to avoid using his hands to make saves from his teammates, then demonstrated the wisdom of the exercise in blocking brilliantly with his legs from Van Bommel.

An early blot on Barca's copy-book was a ninth-minute booking for Portuguese star Deco, who lifted the trophy with Porto two seasons ago before arriving at the Nou Camp, after he clipped Moretto's head with a late challenge.

Benfica badly missed the attacking nous of injured striker Nuno Gomes, who was suspended for the first leg.

Koeman threw on French winger Laurent Robert for the final 20 minutes in place of Beto but the only real Portuguese response was a Miccoli effort high and wide.

Rijkaard relishing Milan showdown



REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard says his side will face a daunting task when they take on his former club AC Milan in the Champions League semifinals following their 2-0 aggregate win over Benfica.

"I think it will be a very interesting game against a very strong team," said the Dutchman who won two European Cups with the Italian giants.

"They've been playing at an extremely high level in recent years and have got a very strong squad of players."

But Rijkaard denied that the game would hold special significance for him because he was facing up to his former club who are managed by his old Milan teammate Carlo Ancelotti.

"Personally for me the tie will not mean anything special because I have faced them before both as a player and as a coach. It will just be a hard fought game between two very strong sides."

Rijkaard said that the additional tension of a Champions League quarterfinal had contributed to his side's nervy performance against Benfica at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.

"Benfica have the reputation of playing very well away from home

and they created a couple of very dangerous occasions during the match, so the tension was understandable," said the Dutchman.

Rijkaard's level-headedness has helped Barca reach the last four for the first time since 2000, that year bringing a humiliating loss to title-bound rivals Real Madrid.

But he will be mindful of the fact that "only" winning Primera Liga is



FRANK RIJKAARD

not enough for those who sup at the top table of Spanish football.

Former Real coach Vicente del Bosque was sacked after delivering the 2002 Champions League and the 2003 league title and Louis Van Gaal, the last Dutchman to coach Barca before Rijkaard, parted company with the club twice after domestic league wins proved his limit.

Sorin baffled at Veron's conduct



REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina captain Juan Pablo Sorin does not know why midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron has apparently fallen out with him.

Sorin, who plays for Villarreal, was involved in several ugly clashes with Veron, who plays for Inter Milan, in Tuesday's Champions League quarterfinal second leg.

The pair had to be separated at halftime when Veron moved towards Sorin in the players' tunnel.

The incidents, replayed numerous times on Argentine television, fuelled speculation that Veron believes Sorin is behind his exclusion from the Argentina team.

Veron, whose poor form was widely blamed for Argentina's shock first-round exit in Japan and South Korea four years ago, has not been picked since Jose Pekerman took over as coach in October 2004. Sorin has been made captain by Pekerman.

"I don't pick or leave players out of the national team," Sorin told the sports

daily Ole in an interview.

"I think that idea belittles a coach (Pekerman) who has won the World Youth championship three times. It's completely absurd.

"I haven't had any problem getting on with any player in the Argentine team. I've always got on well with everyone.

"If anyone has a problem with me, my telephone is always on the hook. He could have called me but he didn't," said Sorin, without mentioning Veron by name.

"I don't know what was behind it all. You'd have to ask him. I was surprised by his reaction...to be honest, I didn't understand it."

Sorin praised playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme, his teammate at club and international level after Villarreal reached the Champions League semifinals for the first time with a 1-0 win over Inter.

"He's a player who controls the rhythm of the team and can open up the horizon at any moment. I hope he can play that sort of match for the national team."

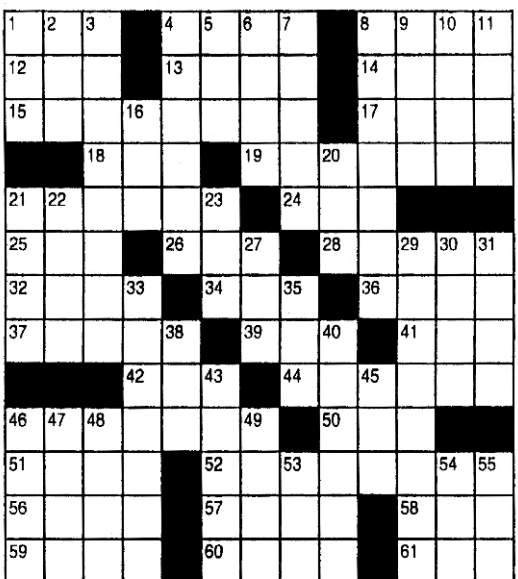


PHOTO: COURTESY

Participants and officials pose for photographers during the opening ceremony of the GrameenPhone President Cup golf tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club on Thursday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid and clues. Across clues include Billy Ray Cyrus series, Assessment, Put an end to, Magda's sister, Grad, Machu Pichu's home, Semi-aquatic rodent, Verve, Turn on the water-works, 'At last!', Outpatient facility, Dutch river, Cartoonist Chast, AAA job, Ticket, State with confidence, Cratchit, Senate staffer, Lower the lights, Trump casino-hotel. Down clues include Wrestling victory, Young seal, Put one's foot down, Tuneful, "— semper tyrannis", Writer Kingsley, Team AOL, Delta deposit, Curved molding, "— and sympathy", Eyelid affliction, Rend asunder, Archery-bow wood, Calendar abbr., Eggs, Overturned, Hasenpfeffer base, In the style of, Sod, AOL delivery, Say something, He got the point across to his son, Exam format, Slight, Thither, Actor Beaty, Grouch, Eros' specialty, Barracks bed, Oscar Wilde's sine qua non, Maximum contents, Not "fer", See to, Retaliatory response, Frenzied, Pie filling?, Court clown, Edging loop, Ms. Farrow, Component of "E = mc^2", Send forth, Easter symbol, "Raising Arizona" star, Shell game need, Born 55, 2004 movie thriller.



CRYPTOQUIP I P L R X L B F S B I ' Y S L Q R U A F B L C U O Q G Y Y U O U U C , V U X G Q P F A L P L Q G Y I P L Y B L S I L X U V G I L S I F U S . Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A MUMMY'S EGO WERE REALLY INFLATED, YOU MIGHT SAY HE'S ALL WRAPPED UP IN HIMSELF. Today's Cryptquip Clue: U equals O The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.