



Sheikh Russel's Ighir Mohamed (L) fights for ball in an aerial challenge with Mohammedan pair Emeka and Nakib (R) during their B. League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

**'Gypsy' slur aggrieve Romanians**

AFP, Bucharest

The Romanian Football Federation (FRF) on Tuesday announced they will lodge a complaint to their Italian counterparts after Palermo club president Maurizio Zamparini called Fiorentina's Romanian striker Adrian Mutu a "little gypsy" on Italian television.

"I saw in the press that Mutu was called a 'nasty little gypsy', we will lodge a complaint with the Italian Federation and ask for an explanation concerning Zamparini's remarks," fumed FRF director Ionut Lupescu.

According to the Romanian press Zamparini made the comments during an interview on Italian television channel RAI, following the controversial opening goal scored by Mutu against Palermo in their Serie A match last Sunday.

Mutu had scored the opening goal of the encounter, that finished 1-1, while an opponent was on the half injured.

"Normally you kick the ball out of play under these circumstances," commented Palermo coach Francesco Guidolin.

## Touati rescues Russel



SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club and Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra had the top sport for grab but remained just behind leaders Brothers Union after two rounds when they shared a 1-1 draw in yesterday's B. League.

The top three now have four points with Mohammedan at third place due to inferior goal difference. The result also saw all the 11 teams drop points in the fray.

Both the sides came on back of victories in the capital derby at the Bangabandhu National Stadium but failed to rouse the poor crowd in a goalless first half.

Home skipper Nakib finally broke the deadlock early in the second half but Russel's Moroccan striker Touati Younes's second league goal cancelled the advantage within half an hour.

Mohammedan, who fielded an unchanged side, enjoyed superior possession early in the game with the four Nigerians being inspirational but

all they won were a handful of corners. Zahid, who scored their match winner in a 1-0 win over Arambagh in the opening round, put the rival backline under pressure but his centre from the right flank flew harmlessly across the goal.

Russel, who rearranged their entire backline from the first match after inclusion of Moroccan centre-back and captain Bourdif Mohamed, however, got the best chance of the half. Bulbul set fellow forward Touati inside the box in the 19th minute but the Moroccan's powerful drive was parried by goalkeeper Himmel for a corner.

The match came alive immediately after the breather with Belal's long throw-in from the left bringing Mohammedan midfielder Emeka close. But the yellow-haired Nigerian, who was set free by compatriot Paul's toe-poked pass, saw his thunderous volley from 12 yards spectacularly saved by custodian Shakil.

Paul's hard work soon separated the two sides in the 48th minute when the robust striker used all his strength against a rival defender to win a tackle -- ignored by referee Mansoor Azad -- and find Zahid at the right. Zahid's angular drive brushed Shakil's fingertips to the path of Nakib who effortlessly

tapped the ball into an open net.

Russel took little time to recover and Moroccan pair Ighir Mohamed and Saad Fethi in the middle put on a tidy performance to mount heavy pressure on the black and whites goal. They wasted two corners before Touati equalised in the 73rd minute. The top striker in Doha in 2004, he shrugged off his marker Biplob inside the six-yard box and exquisitely tapped the ball into the far post with the outside of his right foot after Ighir cut a low cross from the left flank.

Russel, who edged Chittagong Mohammedan 2-1 in their first game, forced three more corners in the flag end without any avail. Touati, however, caught the Mohammedan defence napping in the 90th minute when he met a cross by fullback Aminul but the header from 15 yards did not have enough power behind it to outgun the goalkeeper.

"To be honest, we weren't quite sure where we were being taken to or where we were going," South African manager Mickey Arthur told reporters later.

"But there were no blindfolds and no secret passwords either."

Other guests at the hotel watched with bemused bewilderment as the players and their partners swept into the complex.

"I know nothing about cricket, but I'm pleased that I'm bolting out of here in two days' time," Alex Spoor of Miami, Florida, told Reuters.

Fellow guest Brian Simons of Fort Myers, Florida, thought the added security amounted to overkill.

"You probably need more security at a Nascar race, where the crowd gets pretty rough and rowdy, than you need to take care of this," Simons told Reuters.

"Cricket is an elitist, genteel game, isn't it?"

## India, Lanka up against history

AFP, Port of Spain

Rahul Dravid and Mahela Jayawardene hope to step out of history's shadow at the World Cup.

India have not won the tournament since 1983 and this time round it is Dravid's turn as skipper to attempt to break that long wait for a second title.

The pressure has been increased by Kapil Dev, the captain of that 1983 side, claiming that the 2007 squad is better than the one which memorably seized the trophy 24 years ago.

"I think you can't really compare teams, it's a different time, a different era, and that was a great team that won the competition," said Dravid.

"We're looking forward. Just take one game at a time and make sure we get through the first round."

India open their Group B campaign here on Saturday against Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka, champions in 1996, have also been touted as potential winners and recognise that a second world title could also act as a unifying factor back home.

"It's (1996) obviously gave a lot of pride and a lot of passion," said captain Mahela Jayawardene.

"We have four guys on our team who have done it, and who have spoken to us about the feeling of winning a World Cup and, hopefully we can do it again."

Like Dravid, the Sri Lanka captain is also reluctant to look too far ahead with the final in Barbados not due to take place until April 28.

"It's a long way away. We would love to be in the final to start off with. That would be our ultimate goal, but it doesn't matter who the opposition is, as long as we get there."

Sri Lanka are also in Group B and start their campaign here against Bermuda on Thursday.

### Too tight for comfort

REUTERS, Frigate Bay

Secrecy and tight security cloaked the arrival of four World Cup Group A squads in St Kitts on Monday.

Champions Australians, top-ranked South Africans and minnows Scotland and the Netherlands all touched down on the small eastern Caribbean island on one flight at 1930 local time (11:30 p.m. British time).

The players were whisked off the airport runway in buses and, without passing through immigration, ferried to their hotel.

Staff at the hotel where all the squads are staying, the St Kitts Marriott Resort, refused to give waiting reporters any details on their famous guests' arrangements.

"We're operating on a need-to-know basis, that's all I can say," was all that security guard Bevren Huggins would tell Reuters.

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## India not crazy yet

AFP, New Delhi

If it's the cricket World Cup, India must be going crazy. After all, a billion Indians, who make up most of the world's cricket-watching population, are supposed to be hooked on the game like no other country.

But as the ninth World Cup opened in the Caribbean on Sunday, the mercury to test the fever gripping the nation barely showed a rise.

The late evening starts on the other side of the globe, combined with career-defining school examinations in March-April and the excessive media hype has dampened the enthusiasm of many a cricket lover.

Estimates Sunday's opening ceremony in Jamaica would draw a worldwide audience of 1.5 billion were clearly off the mark. The country of a billion did not get to watch it.

The event was blacked out by rights-holders Sony, which runs Set Max. "We were not sure how many people would be interested in it," a spokesman for the channel was quoted as saying in Tuesday's Hindustan Times.

The hype and hoopla seem to be restricted mainly to the media. Many believe they have gone overboard with cheer-the-team and good luck campaigns.

A horde of jaded former cricketers in tow, round-the-clock news TV channels are airing shows with imaginative tag lines such as "War in the Windies," "Caribbean Calypso" and "LOC" (love of cricket).

The popular dailies have not lagged behind, devoting as much space as possible to reports, columns and interviews arranged by players' managers.

The fans, meanwhile, are waiting for the matches to begin -- India open their campaign against Bangladesh in Trinidad on Saturday -- to see how the team fares before joining in the madness.

"The hype is meaningless unless our team does well," said Pritam Sinha, an executive.

"The ludicrous coverage by the channels -- some even interviewed astrologers to forecast how India will perform -- only leaves a bad taste in

the mouth.

"I get this feeling that the media is hyping the World Cup only to attract more advertisements for themselves."

For Pratik Mishra, involved in school-leaving exams, the World Cup could not have come at a worse time.

"I really don't know how I am going to balance my studies and watching TV," he said. "If I stay up the night to watch matches, I won't be able to study during the day."

"Cricket is a definite no-no for me till my exams end in April."

College student Rohit Jaiswal said watching matches on television in India was not a pleasant experi-

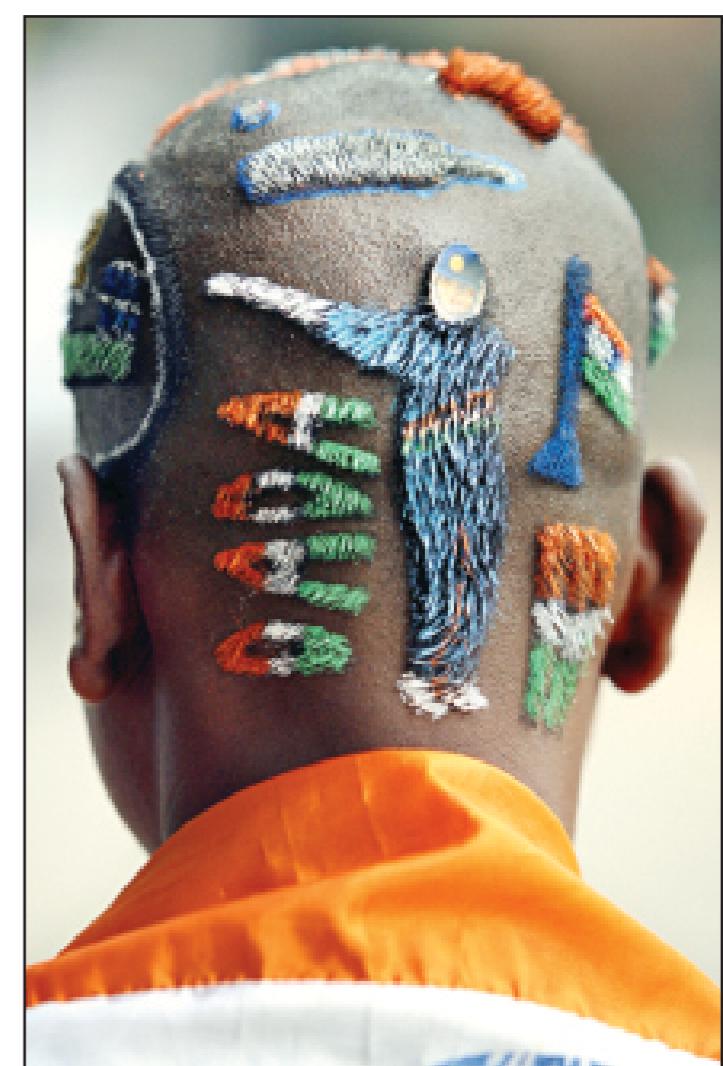
ence.

"There are advertisement breaks at the drop of a hat, sometimes even during overs," he said. "It just devalues the excitement of watching."

The exorbitant cost of travelling to the Caribbean -- with hotel rates anywhere between 500-800 US dollars a night -- is keeping the die-hard cricket fans away.

"We had thousands queuing up to make the trip to South Africa four years ago, but there are very few bookings this time," said travel agent Raja Hoon.

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An Indian cricket fan shows off his new haircut, styled in support of Saurav Ganguly, at a hair salon in Howrah, near Kolkata on Tuesday.

## Sevilla face Shakhtar test

REUTERS, London

ties Sevilla were only saved from a crushing home defeat by Enzo Maresca's equalising 88th minute spot-kick which earned the wrath of Shakhtar coach Mircea Lucescu.

"The referee awarded Sevilla a last-minute penalty under the influence of the crowd. Let us hope the same atmosphere will be created in Donetsk," he said in the run-up to the match.

Lucescu rested six key players in Shakhtar's 1-0 win over Metalist Kharkiv in the league on Sunday, but will be without Croatian midfielder Darijo Srna and Brazilian striker Brandao on Thursday as both are suspended.

Werder Bremen, who also dropped down from the Champions League, scored a potentially decisive 1-0 win at Celta Vigo last week and are now favourites to make the quarterfinals.

Werder drew 1-1 at Bayern Munich on Sunday to stay second in the race for the German title, but were without Miroslav Klose who missed the game in Munich with a sore back and is doubtful for Wednesday.

Midfielder Daniel Jensen and forward Hugo Almeida, who scored the late winner at Vigo, could also miss out after both had to be substituted on Sunday with dead legs.

Bayer Leverkusen, Germany's other representatives, will have to improve on their first-leg performance when they host Racing Lens, with the French side 2-1 up from the first leg.

Leverkusen will be without first-leg scorer Karim Haggui, who was later sent off and is suspended. They expect to have 32-year-old midfielder Carsten Ramelow back after a knee problem kept him out of

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### FIXTURES

UEFA CUP fourth round, second leg (first leg score in brackets):

Wednesday

Leverkusen (GER) v Lens (FRA) (1-2),

Osasuna (ESP) v Rangers (SCO) (1-1),

Werder Bremen (GER) v Celta Vigo (ESP) (1-0),

Tottenham (ENG) v Sporting Braga (POR) (3-2).

Thursday

Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) v FC Sevilla (ESP) (2-2),

AZ Alkmaar (NED) v Newcastle (ENG) (2-4),

Espanyol (ESP) v Maccabi Haifa (ISR) (0-0),

Benfica (POR) v Paris Saint Germain (FRA) (1-2).

Friday

AS Roma (ITA) v FC Porto (POR) (1-1),

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0),

FC Porto (POR) v AC Milan (ITA) (0-0),

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0).

Saturday

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0),

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0).

Sunday

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0),

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0).

Monday

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0),

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0).

Tuesday

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0),

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0).

Wednesday

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0),

FC Porto (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (0-0).

Thursday

FC Porto (