

## Cruise liner in place of hotels!

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka plans to hire a cruise liner to accommodate cricket World Cup fans and spectators at the newly built stadium in the island's south, an official said on Tuesday.

The six-million dollar stadium in Hambantota, President Mahinda Rajapakse's hometown, lacks hotels to accommodate thousands of fans expected to watch the games in February-April next year.

"Star-classed hotel facilities are enough for only two teams and the cruise ship can accommodate up to 1,000 people," Sri Lankan World Cup official Suraj Dandeniyat told AFP.

International Cricket Council rules require each venue to have five-star facilities to house between 500 and 1,000 players, officials, media and fans.

"The ship will be used mainly for spectators, officials and the media contingent that will be following the two games allotted to the venue," said Dandeniyat.

Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh are co-hosting the 14-nation showpiece held every four years. Pakistan, the fourth Test-playing nation in South Asia, were removed as co-hosts due to security concerns in the volatile country.

Known as the Suriyawewa Stadium, the Hambantota venue will host its maiden international game when Sri Lanka play Canada in the World Cup on February 20.

The other match at the venue is between Pakistan and Kenya on February 23.

## LOCAL SNIPPETS

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locked at 1-1 in a 30-minute game at Sirajganj Stadium, Rajbari also followed the footstep of Kushtia and Barguna as they beat Narayanganj 4-3 in tiebreaker at Rajbari Stadium.

Thakurgaon, however, didn't face such fate as they handed a 2-1 defeat to Gaibandha.

### MANIKGANJ CRICKET

Our Correspondent adds, Kulfa Goshthi recorded a 62-run win over Dashara Palli Mangal Samiti in the Colonel (retired) Malek Smriti First Division Cricket League at the Shaheed Miraz-Tapan Stadium in Manikganj yesterday.

Dashara Palli were skittled out for 103 in 23.1 overs in the face of some tight bowling from Somo, Rabbi and Khokon, who shared seven wickets among them after Kulfa Goshthi put on a moderate total of 165 all out in 35.4 overs, riding on a 48-run knock from Kajol.

**The battle**

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Abahani may have slight uneasiness among their ranks after being alleged to have played 'compromised matches' on way to their hat-trick of titles, and they are apparently quite serious to prove others wrong.

And with both sides still unbeaten in the league so far, they wouldn't want to lose this last game and spoil their ending.

So does anyone still think that this is an academic affair?

## Brazil tackling

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Cup and finished first in South America qualifying.

"As the World Cup approaches, it's normal to have the anxiety increase," Dunga said. "We know that everything we won until now is in the past. We understand that the only thing that counts now is the World Cup."

The World Cup has been the main subject back in Brazil for quite some time, and the players are aware the eyes of the entire country are on them.

"We know that if we do things right here we can make history," midfielder Julio Baptista said.

Baptista saw firsthand what the World Cup means to Brazilians, as he had to watch the 2006 tournament back home after being left out of the squad by coach Carlos Alberto Parreira.

"I was a fan like any other Brazilian," he said. "I know what it means to them."

The players are confident they can make their people happy, but they know it won't be easy and are beginning to feel the pressure.

"We get a bit nervous," said Ramires, who like Felipe Melo and Baptista will be playing in his first World Cup. "We are all a little tense, but we have to try to leave the anxiety aside."



PHOTO: AFP

Kazakhstan's Yaroslava Shvedova pumps her fist after defeating Australia's Jarmila Groth during their women's fourth round match in the French Open at Roland Garros on Monday. Shvedova won 6-4, 6-3 to set up a quarterfinal meeting with Serbian Jelena Jankovic on Wednesday.

## Stosur up against Williams

AFP, Paris

Suddenly Australia's Samantha Stosur finds herself in the way of what would be the crowning achievement in the career of Serena Williams.

The laid-back Gold Coast resident will take on the top seed and world number one on Wednesday in the French Open quarterfinals with the American honing in on clinching the second leg of the fabled calendar year Grand Slam title that has always eluded her.

She will take on Yaroslava Shvedova of Kazakhstan, who became the first player from that country to reach a grand slam quarterfinal by defeating Australian wildcard Jarmila Groth in straight sets.

Jankovic, despite reaching number one in the world and being a regular contender in the four top tournaments, has yet to display her best on the biggest of stages - her top performance so far being a losing appearance in the final of the 2008 US Open.

But first she has to negotiate the fast-rising Stosur, a player she wrote off after losing to her in California in August 2009 as a "good framer" who enjoyed a fair bit of luck.

Asked about that comment after defeating four-times former Roland Garros winner Justine Henin in a thrilling fourth round tie on Monday, Stosur laughed and said: "Yeah, I guess a lot of people have changed their idea about what kind of tennis player I am recently."

"I guess that's a good thing. I maybe started to live up to that potential that everyone saw when I was younger."

Stosur reached the semifinals here last year and after breaking into the world top 10, she is confirming that she belongs to be with the best in the women's game after years of under-achievement in singles at least.

Williams, after her straight sets fourth round win over Shahar Pe'er of Israel was careful not to downplay Stosur this time around.

"She is no pushover," she said of her next opponent. "She has beaten me before and I

shall have to play my best game.

You can never underestimate anyone and Sam is a wonderful claycourt player.

"She has a good chance to go all the way. She is fast, she is strong and she has a great serve. She plays a real all-round game."

Wednesday's other semifinal provides battle-hardened Serbian Jelena Jankovic with another chance to move closer to the Grand Slam title that has always eluded her.

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But after a solid season so far she will start hot favourite against a player who will be treading new ground by playing for a country she adopted only because they offered her more financial backing than her native Russia where the competition is intense.

Shvedova though has already beaten Jankovic, defeating her in the US Open last year in three tough sets before going down in three to her at the Kremlin Cup in Moscow.

"We played together twice last year in the US Open and Kremlin Cup, and both matches was three sets," she said.

"It was an unbelievable match in the US Open. I still remember it. I still remember the feelings and emotions."

"In the Kremlin Cup it was a little bit tougher. But still, it's a different surface. We'll see what's going to happen here because before it was hardcourt."

## Zidane starts a legacy

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A welcome return, had little trouble in their group despite an opening draw with Chile in which Lazio import Marcelo Salas scored two great goals. Striker Christian Vieri was outstanding for Italy in all three games.

The highest profile casualties were Spain, who lost in 3-2 thriller to Nigeria and could only draw 0-0 with Paraguay. Despite beating a Bulgarian side well past its sell-by-date 6-1 in the final game, it was yet another tale of underachievement for the Spaniards.

Perhaps the most enticing fixture in the first round was the group match between USA and Iran. Diplomatic differences were put aside before the game when the players exchanged flowers and posed for a joint team picture. Once the game had started, Iran outplayed the Americans and were worthy 2-1 winners. Both teams were also-rans in a group dominated by Germany and Yugoslavia.

Argentina made as good a start to the tournament as they had in 1994. With Gabriel Batistuta and Ariel

Ortega impressive they looked like a side that England would have preferred to avoid in the second round. As penance for a late Graeme Le Saux mistake against Romania, England had finished second in their group. But in that famous second-round game in St Etienne they matched the Argentines, even after having David Beckham dismissed for his petulant kick at Diego Simeone. Despite Michael Owen's great goal, England exited stage left after another penalty shoot-out loss.

Nigeria, who had dazzled in the first round with enterprising football from the likes of Nwankwo Kanu, Sunday Oliseh and Jay-Jay Okocha, capitulated inexplicably to Denmark, who for once in a major tournament had both Laudrup brothers - Brian and Michael -- in tandem.

Italy knocked out Norway in a dull game lit up by a great run and goal by Christian Vieri. Brazil overpowered Chile with Ronaldo at his best while Holland beat Yugoslavia by virtue of a 91st-minute winner from Edgar Davids.

TO BE CONTINUED

France, struggling without the cutting edge of Zidane, were forced to make history when Laurent Blanc scored the first ever World Cup extra-time 'golden goal' against Paraguay. Their reward was a date with the Italians. Perhaps due to many of the Frenchmen playing for clubs in Italy, the two sides cancelled each other out and the game fizzled out, with the end result being the Italians' exit from their third successive World Cup on penalties. While Baggio was able to partially bury the ghost of the Pasadena Rose Bowl, this time it was Luigi Di Biagio who was the unfortunate penalty misser.

Germany, who had shown signs of fallibility all tournament, collapsed in a amazing style against Croatia, playing in their first World Cup. After having defender Christian Worns sent off, the Germans fell behind to a great strike from Robert Jarni and just could not get back into the game. Late goals from Davor Suker and Goran Vlaovic were no more than the Croats deserved.

"We get a bit nervous," said Ramires, who like Felipe Melo and Baptista will be playing in his first World Cup. "We are all a little tense, but we have to try to leave the anxiety aside."

## Finn, a hero overnight

### Cricket

AFP, London

England fast bowler Steven Finn found himself talking about touring Australia, even though the Ashes are several months away, after a man-of-the-match-winning effort in the first Test against Bangladesh.

The 21-year-old quickly enjoyed the familiar surroundings of his Lord's home ground by taking five wickets for 87 runs and match figures of nine for 187 as England beat Bangladesh by eight wickets on the fifth day here on Monday.

This was only the 21-year-old's third Test, and first in England, after he made his debut during England's 2-0 series win in Bangladesh in March where he managed just four wickets in total.

But, given a chance in the absence of the rested Stuart Broad, Finn bowled with pace, accuracy and intelligence as was shown Monday when he dismissed Junaid Siddiqui with a well-disguised slower ball.

England may hold the Ashes but they have not won a Test series in Australia since 1986-87.

And those England fast bowlers who've enjoyed stand out tours of Australia since the Second World War constitute an elite club made up of Frank Tyson, Brian Statham, Fred Trueman, John Snow, Bob Willis and Graham Dilley.

Finn for one played down his chances of joining such company ahead of the

Ashes, which get underway in November.

"There are guys to come back in who are ahead of me in the pecking order," he said. "I'm not going to kid myself."

"But fundamentally, it's up to me to make it difficult for the selectors to drop me... If I keep taking wickets, my name will be there or thereabout."

Bangladesh, following-on, were bowled out for 382 with Finn taking three wickets for eight runs in 15 balls in Monday's morning session.

His second innings haul secured Finn a coveted place on the Lord's honours boards and the only concern was the way in which the paceman fell over several times in his follow-through.

"It's something I do pretty regularly, I'm like Bambi on ice sometimes when I'm going," Finn said of his stumbles. "My legs just go from under me and when one bit goes the rest tends to go."

England were left with 160 to win in two sessions.

They finished on 163 for two with Jonathan Trott, who made 226 in the first innings, unbeaten on 36.

England captain Andrew Strauss, a Middlesex colleague of Finn, returned to international cricket with scores of 83 and 82 after the opener was rested from the tour of Bangladesh and missed the side's World Twenty20 triumph in the Caribbean as he no longer plays in that format.

"He's obviously got some great attributes, his height and a pretty clean action," Strauss said of Finn.

"If you look at bowlers who take wick-

ets in Australia, those kind of heavy, hit the deck bowlers tend to do well in Australia -- Glenn McGrath had a 'reasonable' career in Australia," he added tongue-in-cheek.

"But Finn's right, there's a lot of water to come under the bridge."

"Hopefully we'll have a full complement of bowlers to pick from, the likes of Stuart Broad and Graham Onions to come back."

England have now won all seven of their Tests against Bangladesh but the Tigers were a transformed team from the side that lost by an innings and 261 runs at Lord's five years ago.

This match saw fast bowler Shahadat Hossain take five first innings wickets before dashing opener Tamim Iqbal took a toll of England's attack with a second-innings century at better than a run-a-ball.

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan, speaking ahead of the second and final Test of this series at Old Trafford, which starts on Friday, was delighted with Tamim and the top order.

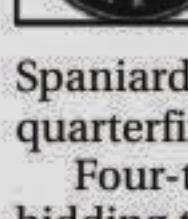
"Tamim played a fantastic game at Lord's but not only him. Junaid Siddique (58 and 74) and Imrul Kayes (43 and 75) showed their character."

Shakib added: "We had a good chance to draw if we'd batted more than 50 overs. It's always frustrating when you lose but we can take so many positives from this game."

"But there are so many negative things too and we need to learn from them and improve."

## Spanish battle in Paris

AFP, Paris



Rafael Nadal insists his perfect record of six wins in six meetings against Nicolas Almagro will count for nothing when the two Spaniards meet in the French Open quarterfinals on Wednesday.

Four-time champion Nadal, who is bidding to become only the second man in history after Bjorn Borg to win five or more Roland Garros crowns, has dominated his compatriot in their six-year rivalry.

The world number two also dropped just three games to Almagro when they met at the same stage of the French Open in 2008.

However, on the clay of Madrid two weeks ago, Almagro, the 19th seed here, took the first set off Nadal in their semifinal meeting.

Nadal, with his 24th birthday being celebrated on Thursday, is aware that Almagro has altered enough as a player to be able to gatecrash the party.

"It's going to be very difficult, because the way he plays is really excellent," said Nadal, who has reached the last eight without dropping a set, and on Monday achieved his 200th career claycourt win by seeing off Brazil's Thomaz Bellucci in the fourth round.

Wednesday's second quarterfinal features third seed Novak Djokovic, a semifinalist in 2007 and 2008, against Jürgen Melzer, the first Austrian man to get this far at Roland Garros since former champion Thomas Muster in 1998.

Djokovic, desperate to add a French Open crown to his 2008 Australian Open

title, has endured a roller-coaster journey to the last eight, dropping the second set in three of his four matches.

But the 23-year-old Serbian is convinced his cause is being helped by all the attention being heaped on Nadal and defending champion Roger Federer, who are widely expected to contest a fourth final in five years.

"I think it's normal to talk about Federer-Nadal final since both of them have been so dominant in last five years," he said.

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