



An Algeria fan with an inflatable toy insect on his head smiles before his team's first World Cup match against Slovenia yesterday at the Peter Mokaba Stadium in Polokwane.

It's got to be Diego

REUTERS, Johannesburg

A veritable goldmine of soccer talent was on display at Ellis Park on Saturday but throughout Argentina's defeat of Nigeria a roly-poly, bearded bundle of arm-waving anxiety threatened to steal the show.

If Argentina's lineup of soccer superstars had been in any doubt, they will not be now -- on the World Cup stage nothing grabs the cameras quite like Diego Maradona.

Captain and goalscorer Gabriel Heinze, Juan Sebastian Veron and even world player-of-the-year Lionel Messi were all reduced to supporting roles as Maradona ranted and raved on the sidelines, orchestrating his players like a man possessed.

"I had many emotions. I threw kisses to my daughters and I spent some time with my grandson before the game," coach Maradona bubbled afterwards.

"Today being the [national] team's coach was a great feeling, very beautiful. I want to thank all the people who supported me and who didn't forget that I once too scored a goal in the Argentine jersey."

Even before kick-off, the 49-year-old former maestro, now sporting a beard flecked with grey, grabbed all the attention by hugging the Nigerian players in a pre-match stroll on the pitch at the Johannesburg stadium.

During the pre-match stroll, he stepped over advertising hoardings to blow kisses to his daughter and grandson, whose father is Argentine forward Sergio Aguero.

Maradona reappeared at the start of the game dapper in a grey suit and tie, but his sober attire was never going to cramp his style or cloak a clearly visible state of nervous tension.

From kick-off, he alternated between danc-

ing around with excitement and prowling the touchline like a big cat at the zoo.

When Heinze scored Argentina's first and only goal in the game's sixth minute, he skipped several metres on to the pitch, blazer flapping, and pumped his fists like an overgrown schoolboy.

Despite his antics during the game, he was all calmness and philosopher during the post-match news conference.

"There are a lot of emotions, a lot," he said. "Being in the stadium, being the coach of the national team... it's a beautiful feeling."

"We won a great game and we are on our way. I hope our boys are able to use all that affection from the Argentine people and those who were in the stadium today to keep playing better."

"When you win a game and start to consolidate you get a good taste for victory. It happened to us (Argentine team) in 1986 (when they won) and 1990 (runners-up). They will feel the need to win every day as each game passes."

Maradona returns to the World Cup stage as Argentine coach 16 years after his last cap -- also against Nigeria -- in the United States. He was sent home soon afterward for failing a doping test.

"It's all new this time. You have to make decisions very quickly. This is the World Cup and everything happens to you like it's Formula One," he said.

During his playing career, Maradona stole the limelight at the 1986 World Cup with his infamous Hand of God goal against England and eight years later in 1994 for his stunning exit after testing positive for ephedrine -- something he has blamed on an energy drink.

This time he was high on World Cup fever alone.



Diego Maradona

Messi in power mess

SPORTS REPORTER

When Gabriel Heinze's thumping header found the back of Nigeria's net in the sixth minute to give Argentina a 1-0 lead on Saturday evening, hundreds of thousands of football fans in the city's Azimpur, Gandaria, Lalmatia, Farmgate, Kazipara and Bashundhara areas missed the moment due to the wretched power cut.

And even worse, it wasn't just these well-populated areas which were forced to sit in the dark.

Speaking to a cross-section of people from fifteen different areas of Dhaka, The Daily Star Sport found

Lalbagh managed to watch the goal but after that the power went off for 20 minutes. Purnima, who lives in nearby Siddique Bazar, was among the few lucky ones as the power just went off during the ten-minute half-time break.

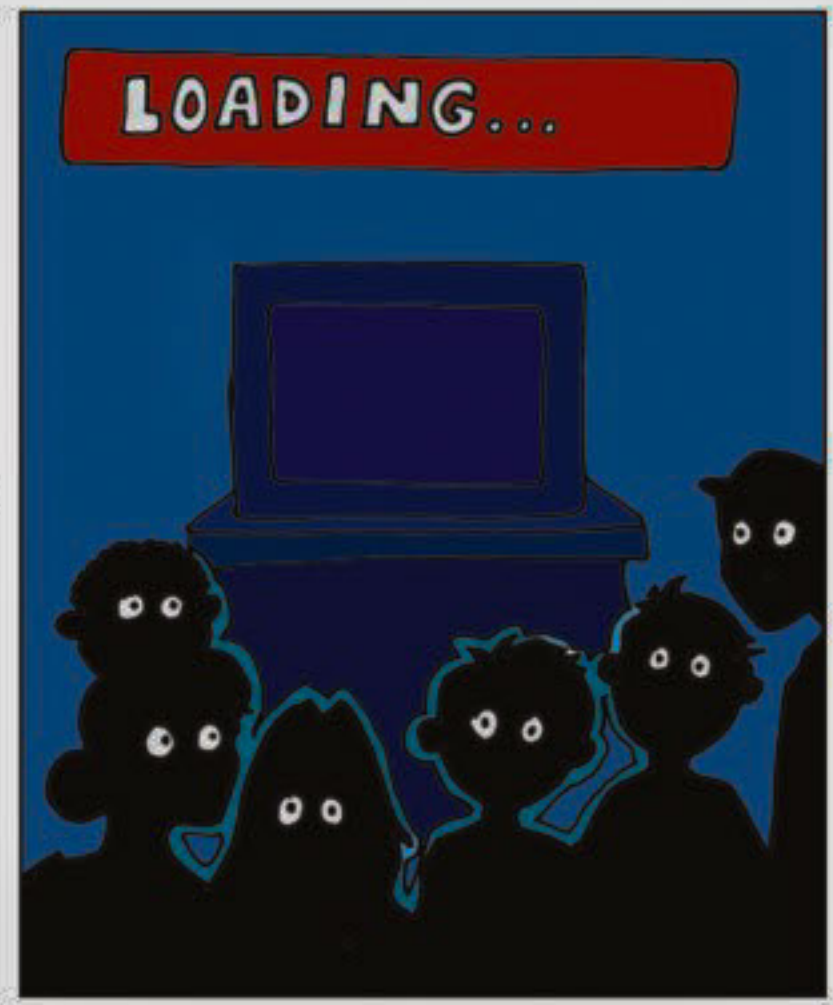
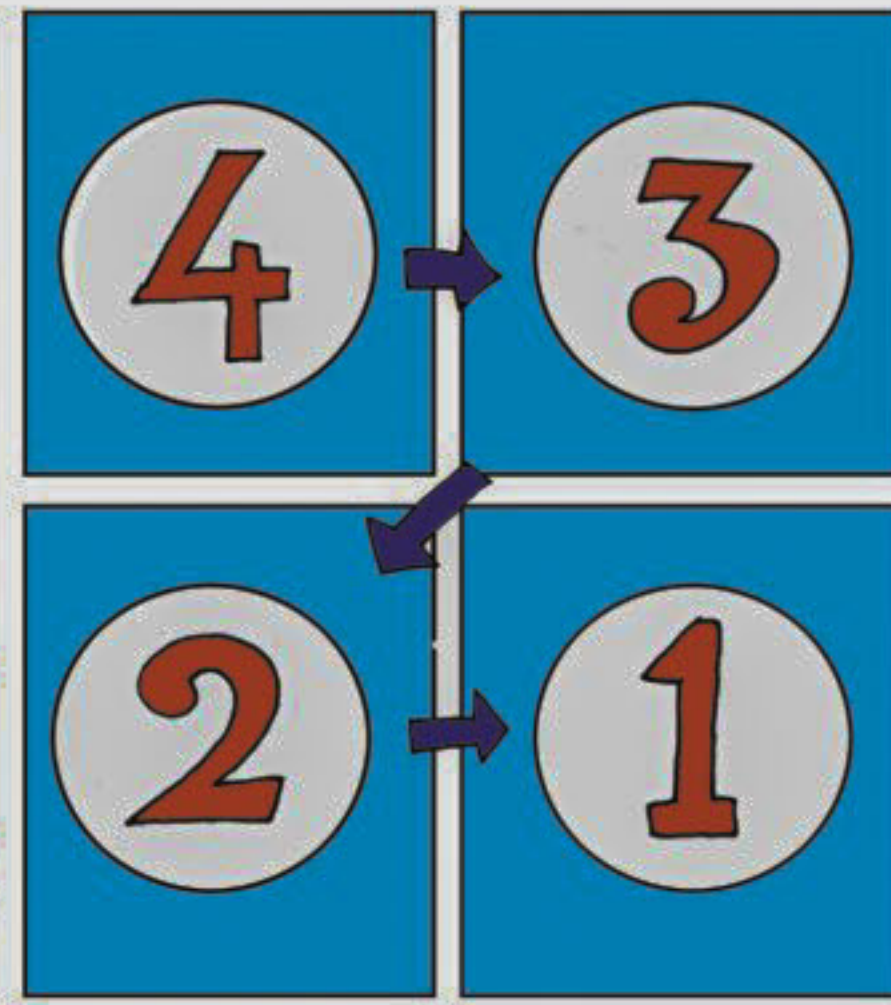
It was as dreadful in Bashundhara where Munira only saw the first ten minutes and the final 20 of the evening game.

Safinaz, living in Lalmatia, spoke of angry reactions in her area after power was taken away in the first 18 minutes of the match. Dhanmondi, where Argentina and Brazil flags don most of the apartments, also had most parts of it plunged into dark-

East Goran missed parts of the second-half that had the magician Lionel Messi mesmerise the Nigerian defence and miss plenty of chances in a helter-skelter 45 minutes.

Farida, a East Goran resident, missed the last 24 minutes of the game and was so concerned that the Nigeria defenders would hurt Messi, she and her husband called friends to ensure nothing went wrong with their favourite player.

Adil from Khilgaon reported that most people in his area missed the entire second half while Ashique Rahman of Farmgate missed the first 12 minutes of the



distressed viewers who not only failed to watch the only goal of the match but also missed large chunks of the 90-minute encounter. And it was also the few million Argentina fans who suffered the most.

Residents of Gandaria probably had it worst. According to Safa, there was no electricity for the first 30 minutes, watched it for 20 and missed the next 20 minutes. It was almost similar in Azimpur. Javed missed the first half-hour while Siraj Uddin from

ness during the first-half. Nasimul of Shyamoli was lucky enough to see the goal but again, he suffered the dreaded power-cut in the first-half that went on for 25 minutes.

In Mirpur's Kazipara, Khalid saw people coming down from buildings into the street in protest of the power-cut that occurred early in the first-half and returned just a minute before the break.

Folks in Kakrail, Malibagh, Farmgate, Uttara and

second half and spent anxious moments thinking whether Argentina doubled their margin or conceded an equaliser as he heard screams from other areas.

This was just the first Argentina game and with several more big matches involving both Argentina and Brazil coming up in the next few weeks, the situation has to get better but if it gets any worse, scenes of more violence will be commonplace.

Mamun slams 6 for Sonali

SPORTS REPORTER

A double hattrick from Mamun powered Sonali Bank to a massive 9-0 win over Bangladesh Sporting Club in the Green Delta Insurance Hockey Premier League at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Apart from the six goals from Mamun, Rocky, Irfan and Sujun scored one goal apiece for the Bankers, who dominated the first half 4-0 with Mamun scoring all four goals.

In the day's other match, Ajax Sporting Club handed a lone-goal defeat to Mariner Youngs Club with Dhiman Mistri scoring the decisive goal.

Fever gets to them too

AFP, Paris

Although preparing for their own tournaments takes centre stage, top champions from other sports are not immune to World Cup fever.

So it is that the likes of Usain Bolt, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Fernando Alonso have been keeping an eye firmly on what is happening down in South Africa.

"When I was a kid everyone supported Brazil," says Jamaican sprint star Bolt.

But, perhaps ironically for a man who has left his rivals trailing in his wake in recent years, "I didn't want to be on the side of the ones who always win."

"So I chose Argentina, who had a good team at the time and good players, such as [Gabriel] Batistuta", recalls Bolt, a self-confessed fan of current Argentine star Lionel Messi.

Swiss tennis legend Roger Federer, whose mind is focused on a yet another Wimbledon title in the weeks ahead, is also keeping abreast of World Cup developments.

"I think it's great that South Africa is organising the World Cup. I remember seeing them win the Rugby World Cup [in 1995], and it was a great thing for the nation. Now I hope the Swiss do well and so I am supporting Switzerland and South Africa," says Federer, whose mother Lynette is South African.

Nadal, who has just moved back above Federer in the world rankings, is a Real Madrid and Spain fan and he

passed on his "good luck [to the Spanish] that they will carry off the title."

Says the Mallorcan: "We have a chance to win but once everything hinges on one game anything can happen. Spain have an incredible team -- they are very complete from the goalkeeper through the defence and in attack," said the French Open champion.

Britain's Andy Murray sees self-interest in it as he believes that all the hype over England's chances of winning

"I told Felipe that when it comes to the World Cup we will leave them [the Brazilians] standing," said Alonso with a smile.

Many pundits expect five-times winners Brazil to meet European champions Spain in the trophy match.

Massa is meanwhile not a convert to the latter day pragmatism of the Brazil team under coach Dunga and appears to yearn for a return to samba rhythms.

"I don't like it. And I don't

Alberto Contador, looking to retain the World Cup this summer, joins Nadal and Alonso in backing Vicente Del Bosque's Spanish while MotoGP serial champion Valentino Rossi will expect Italy to retain their crown.

US basketball star Kobe Bryant said for his part he is hoping for a final between Italy and Brazil.

Top female athletes also have their eye on the action, such as Brazilian Marta,

Nat'l chess begins

SPORTS REPORTER

The preliminary phase of the 36th National Chess Championship got underway yesterday at the Bangladesh Chess Federation hall-room with 111 players including eight FMs taking part in it.

Forty-eight players won their respective games on the opening day as BCF vice-president Mirza Enamul Hossain declared the meet open.

The top nine players will qualify for the finals where five Grand Masters Ziaur Rahman, Reefat Bin Sattar, Enamul Hossain, Abdullah Al Rakib and Niaz Murrshed are expected to play.

India clinch T20 series

AFP, Harare

India beat Zimbabwe by seven wickets in the second of two Twenty-20 matches at Harare Sports Club here on Sunday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ZIMBABWE: 140-5 in 20 overs. INDIA: 144-3 in 18 overs.

Ghana prevail

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improved on 74 minutes as centre-back Lukovic was dismissed for a second booking for tugging Gyan's arm.

And yet it was Serbia who should have broken the deadlock as substitute Danko Lazovic left Pantasil on the seat of his pants and pulled the ball back for Milos Krasic but his left-foot effort was straight at goalkeeper Richard Kingson who palmed the ball over the bar.

From the resulting corner Manchester United centre-back Nemanja Vidic sent a bullet header a touch too high.

Chelsea right-back Branislav Ivanovic then burst forward and hit a dipping drive just over.

But then substitute Kuzmanovic's flailing arm connected with a deep cross into the box and Gyan thrashed the ball home to send the stand wild.

And the Rennes striker was even denied a second by the post in injury time as he curled the ball around goalkeeper Vladimir Stojkovic.

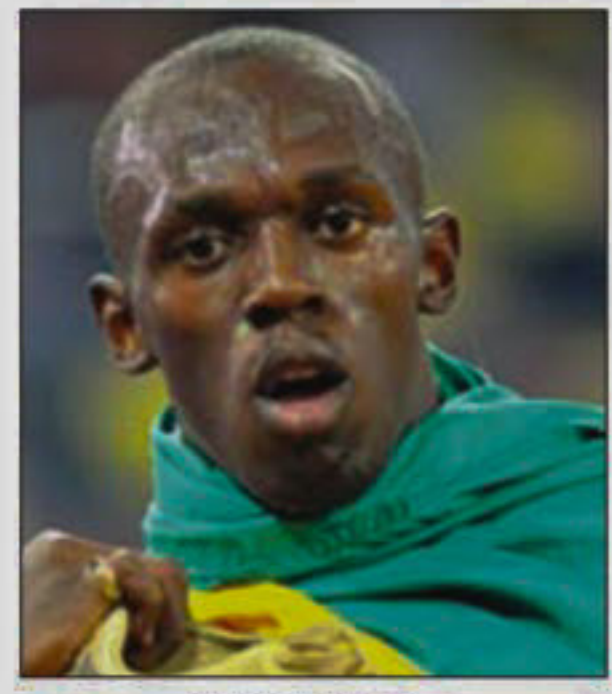
Ghana celebrated at the final whistle as if they had won the World Cup, dancing on the pitch as some players even partook in a lap of honour.



Roger Federer



Rafael Nadal



Usain Bolt

the tournament will take some of the pressure away from him to deliver at Wimbledon which runs at the same time.

Formula One drivers are also been caught up in the emotion and whereas there will be little inter-team rivalry at McLaren, given that Jensen Button and Lewis Hamilton will both be backing England, there will be a difference of opinion at Ferrari, as former champion Fernando Alonso goes for Spain and Felipe Massa for his native Brazil.

think the majority of Brazilians like it," said Massa of the new more cautious and defensive style which has meant no room for the likes of the creative but ageing Ronaldo in the squad.

"You should take your best players to a World Cup and Dunga has not done that," said Massa, regretting that young emergings stars such as Paulo Henrique Ganso and Neymar also missed the cut. Spanish cycling champion

widely regarded as the greatest female footballer of her generation.

She wants Brazil to win, naturally, but has a soft spot, she says, for Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo.

"I'll be backing my boys -- I believe Brazil will win it," says Marta.

Former 400 metres world champion Ana Guevara, however, was critical of her native Mexico.

According to Guevara, they lack ambition.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP

GUZJV MAUWS M YMAJK GUSUYJDS KYJZJLE ZVYF KMLEVYUWDHF UL LVZMKM OJEOXMF: "XVMZJLE HMD ZVEMD." Yesterday's Cryptquip: TO STORE AND CATALOG SOME SMALL FASTENING ITEMS, THE ASTUTE CARPENTER PURCHASED A NAIL FILE. Today's Cryptquip Clue: U equals O

What to Watch: ESPN & SuperSport3 2010 FIFA World Cup Netherlands v Denmark Live from 5.30pm Japan v Cameroon Live from 8.00pm Italy v Paraguay Live from 12.30am (Tuesday)

Senior Div football

SPORTS REPORTER

Fakirerpool Youngmen's Club came from behind to post its fifth victory in the Senior Division Football League with a 3-2 win over Mohakhali XI at the Bi Shreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Kamalapur yesterday. Fakirerpool lead the table with 16 points from seven matches while Mohakhali were stuck to seven points playing six outings.

Messi's spark, Korea's speed

FROM PAGE 17

with Jonas Gutierrez providing the tactical fluidity. Messi combined with Carlos Tevez and Gonzalo Higuain in a dream forward line.

Argentina was bright with good combination play but their formation lacked fluidity and too often Messi had to pull out his individual brilliance to fashion chances. The forward had a direct role in 14 shots (either shooting or passing for a shot) but still failed to score, mostly due to Nigerian goalkeeper Vincent Enyeama who was in top form and often came out on top of what turned into an almost individual battle with the best player in the world.

Argentina's struggles were best illustrated with the fact that they required defender Gabriel Heinze to score the winning goal.

Nigeria also might be ruing their luck in that they failed to make a number of chances to hit the Argentinians on the break; Uche, the chief culprit.

In the day's earlier match, South Korea surprised many with their quick passing game as they completely overwhelmed Euro 2004 champions Greece. The Koreans are

largely an unknown quantity but with a superb youth system many fancy them to be a world power in a few years time.

But if Messi was the star, England goalkeeper Robert Green was the villain of the piece. The England goalkeeper made an absolutely glaring error letting slip a speculative Clint Dempsey shot through his fingers to ensure that the United States finished with a point from an eagerly anticipated clash. And a well-deserved point it was.

Landon Donovan and Clint Dempsey played out of their skins and Wayne Rooney failed to score for his sixth consecutive game in an England shirt. The Three-Lions played a frustrating game as the Steven Gerrard-Frank Lampard midfield yet again failed to click. Only Glen Johnson stood out with a bright performance and England might even count themselves lucky after Green somewhat redeemed himself with a fine save from a Jozy Altidore shot. Fabio Capello's fierce gesticulations from the sideline spoke a thousand words.