

Sacked for not fasting

Popular Iranian footballer Ali Karimi has been fired by his club for not fasting during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Steel Azin FC said on its website that it was "forced to sack one of its players, Ali Karimi, for being disobedient and not fasting during Ramadan." Karimi, who was the Asian Player of 2004, had even "insulted officials of the (Iranian) football federation and the Tehran team's supervisor who confronted him on the issue," Steel Azin said.



PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba hammers in a free-kick to score the second goal of his hat-trick in their opening day Premiership fixture against West Brom Albion at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

THE AGAINST SL TODAY

Yuvraj hit by dengue

CRICINFO

Indian middle-order batsman Yuvraj Singh will miss Monday's tri-series ODI against Sri Lanka after being diagnosed with dengue fever in Dambulla. The development is a setback for Yuvraj, who has been battling poor form and fitness issues in recent months and was making a comeback to the limited-overs side after being dropped for the Asia Cup.

"Yuvraj Singh is not available for this game," MS Dhoni, India's captain, said on the eve of the game. "He has dengue. But he is out of danger." Yuvraj has had a disappointing tour of Sri Lanka, where he played only in the first Test. He caught the flu ahead of the second and was kept out of the third by Suresh Raina, who had scored a century on debut.

India's fitness concerns, however, did not end with Yuvraj and new-ball bowler Ashish Nehra is also a doubtful starter against Sri Lanka, while Ishant Sharma is also uncertain to play. "We are monitoring Ashish Nehra," Dhoni said. "He has got a bit of problem with his gluteus. So we will take the exact decision before the game. Ishant is shaping well. As of now these are the two players who may be missing out. And hopefully by tomorrow there won't be any addition to the list."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Chelsea steamroll to top

AFP, London



Didier Drogba scored a hat-trick as Chelsea began the defence of the English Premier League title with a crushing 6-0 victory over West Bromwich Albion at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

Victory left Chelsea on top of the table after an opening day that saw Blackpool mark their first top-flight match in 39 years with a shock 4-0 win away to Wigan.

Florent Malouda, who ended the goal spree in the 90th minute, started Chelsea's rout with a sixth-minute goal after Baggies keeper Scott Carson spilled Drogba's tame free-kick.

Chelsea doubled their lead in the 45th minute when Drogba scored a free-kick from 25 yards against a West Brom side managed by former Blues midfielder Roberto di Matteo.

Ten minutes after the break, Drogba made it 3-0 when he forced home from close range after John Terry's goalbound header from a corner was cleared.

England midfielder Frank Lampard added a fourth goal in the 63rd minute after good work by Nicolas Anelka and

Ashley Cole.

Ivory Coast striker Drogba, who ended the last Premier League season with a hat-trick against Wigan, completed his treble five minutes later with the aid of a shot deflected off Gabriel Tamas.

"I am very happy because we played a good game, we showed good football," said Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti, whose side came into this game on the back of a Community Shield final loss to Manchester United.

Malouda added: "We are champions and we have to improve what we did last season. We had a great record and scored a lot of goals but it's a new season and we have to work harder and be even better than last year."

Blackpool, promoted via the playoffs, have been widely tipped to go straight back down, but the Tangerines were 3-0 up before half-time, with former Villa striker Marlon Harewood scoring twice.

They went ahead in the 16th minute at Wigan's DW Stadium when Charlie Adam played in Harewood, whose cross was tapped in by Gary Taylor-Fletcher.

Harewood then held off Antolin Alcaraz, before beating Chris Kirkland from more than 20 yards for his first Premier League goal in two-and-a-half-years.

Two minutes before the

break, Harewood tapped in after Elliot Grandin's shot was parried.

Then, 15 minutes before full-time, Alex Baptiste made it 4-0 when his cross beat Kirkland at the goalkeeper's near post.

"I don't think any of us in our wildest, wildest dreams imagined we could come here and do something like that," Blackpool manager Ian Holloway told Sky Sports. "I'm so proud of the lads and the work ethic they showed."

Aston Villa showed there was life after Martin O'Neill with a 3-0 win at home to West Ham just days after their former manager's resignation.

RESULTS	
Aston Villa 3 (Downing 15, Petrov 40, Milner 66)	West Ham 0
Blackburn 1 (Kalinic 14)	Everton 0
Bolton 0	Fulham 0
Chelsea 6 (Malouda 6, 90, Drogba 45, 55, 68, Lampard 63)	West Brom 0
Sunderland 2 (Bent 24-pen, Carr 56-og)	Birmingham 2 (Dann 77, Ridgeway 88)
Tottenham 0	Manchester City 0
Wigan 0	Blackpool 4 (Taylor-Fletcher 16, Harewood 38, 43, Baptiste 75)
Wolves 2 (Jones 37, Fletcher 39)	Stoke 1 (Faye 55)

England goalkeeper Robert Green, playing his first senior match since his World Cup blunder, helped give Villa a 15th minute lead when his poor punch ultimately led to a goal from Stewart Downing.

Villa made it 2-0 when Stiliyan Petrov headed in five minutes before half-time.

And in what could be a parting gift to Villa fans, before his possible transfer to Manchester City, England midfielder James Milner made it 3-0 after shooting powerfully from Albrighton's cut back in the 66th minute.

Everton's United States goalkeeper Tim Howard gifted hosts Blackburn a 14th minute winner in a 1-0 victory when he somehow dropped a cross into the path of Nikola Kalinic, who duly scored.

Birmingham came from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 against 10-man Sunderland.

Wolves beat Stoke 2-1 after Kenwyne Jones, Stoke's club record eight million signing, limped off injured after just 14 minutes at Molineux.

Bolton and Fulham shared the points in a goalless draw.

Liverpool welcome Arsenal to Anfield on Sunday while Manchester United, last season's runners-up, face Championship winners Newcastle at Old Trafford on Monday.

Rach to be officially appointed, at last

Hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Hockey Federation has agreed in principle to appoint Germany coach Gerhard Peter Rach for four months up to Asian Games in November.

"Gerhard Peter Rach has agreed to coach the national side for four months till November for a monthly salary of 3,000 dollars month which will be put to paper after obtaining consent of the BHF president," said BHF vice president Protap Sankar Hazra after a meeting with the German coach at a city hotel yesterday.

Hazra was accompanied by chief selector Mamunur Rashid, member Anvir Adil and wing commander Rafique.

Apart from monthly salary, the federation would provide for the accommodation, food and transport facilities to the German coach, informed the former national hockey player.

Among his responsibilities, the German will have to train local coaches and the players to be picked outside the capital. He will have no interference selection of the national side but may make recommendations to the selection committee.

Rach has been coaching the national side for one and a half years without any official agreement. Under his reign, Bangladesh national side finished fourth in a four-team tournament in Russia, a creditable third in the South Asian Games, but was very disappointing when they the top favourites finished fifth in the Asian Games Qualifiers at home.

The German has often been blamed for not spending enough time for the national side which he defended by saying that he was never officially appointed.

"After the official agreement with the coach, we have to pay him advanced salaries of the first two months because he would be touring with the players in Germany and we will seek the financial assistance of the Bangladesh Olympic Association," said BHF general secretary Khondoker Jamiluddin.

The German coach, who arrived in the city on Thursday, has brought 18 invitation cards for the players to play in the German Hockey League, a league where the Bangladesh players played the last season. On that occasion, the players on their return had alleged that they were only given token money instead of promised salary in Germany.

Jamil hinted that he would only allow the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

BFF observes Nat'l Mourning Day

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation observed the National Mourning Day commemorating the 35th martyrdom anniversary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman yesterday.

The BFF took such an initiative for the first time, arranging a Doa Mahfil and Qurankhani and later BFF president Kazi Salahuddin distributed food at its premises.

BFF senior vice-president Salam Murshedi, vice-president Shawkat Ali Khan Jahangir, general secretary Al Musabbir Sadi, members

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

MSC picking up the pieces

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan's officials and its ex-footballers sat yesterday in a bid to make a good side for the upcoming season, but it was too late for them as their rivals have already confirmed the services of the country's top players well before the start of the transfers that will begin on September 1.

The moves from the former footballers and the club's football committee apparently came after the resignation of Mohammedan's ad-hoc committee convener Modassek Ali Falu and they vowed to do their best ahead of the players' transfer.

Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club tore the Mohammedan tent, roping in nine players including Aminul Haq, Zahid Hasan Emily, Wali Faisal and Mamunul Islam.

As if that wasn't enough, Mohammedan were struck by a rejuvenated Muktiyoddha Sangsad that brought out the rest to empty the Black and Whites tent.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Kim-Maria showdown

Tennis

AFP, Cincinnati

Reigning US Open champion Kim Clijsters and Russian beauty Maria Sharapova advanced to the WTA Cincinnati Open final in very different fashion on Saturday.

Belgian fourth seed Clijsters needed only 12 minutes to reach Sunday's title match of the two million-dollar hardcourt event after Serbia's Ana Ivanovic retired due to a left foot injury and left the court in tears.

Sharapova needed two and a half hours to defeat Russian teen Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-4, 3-6, 6-2 in the other semifinal. Sharapova made 40 unforced errors to 35 for her rival.

Clijsters led 2-1 after breaking Ivanovic in

the third game, but the showdown of former world number ones would end after only 25 points being played and with the Serbian's US Open hopes in great jeopardy.

Ivanovic hurt her left foot making a forehand return from the baseline and after one more shot dropped her racket and doubled over in pain.

"I was very scared," Ivanovic said. "All of a sudden on that one shot, I felt something crack a little bit."

"Just on that one forehand when I went to step around it, I just felt like pain all of a sudden, so much pain in my foot and I couldn't step on it anymore."

Ivanovic limped to her chair and called for the trainer who taped the injured foot.

But after the next point, a serve Ivanovic never challenged, she halted the match and

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Maradona wants Villa job

Football

INTERNET

Argentina legend Diego Maradona has informed Aston Villa he would be willing to take over the Villa Park hotseat.

Martin O'Neill resigned as boss last week, with Kevin McDonald leading them to a 3-0 opening-day victory over West Ham in the caretaker role.

Ajax boss Martin Jol and USA coach Bob Bradley have been linked with the West Midlands club - but Maradona believes he could be the man to lead them this season.

"I think Diego would be very open to the idea of coming to England and managing Aston Villa," his official European representative, Walter Soriano, told the Sunday Mercury.

"He is very attracted to English football and the way of life in your country and I know he would be very willing to move there."

"He loves the English countryside and your respect for privacy, so he would be very happy there, especially at a big club like Aston Villa."

Maradona left his post of Argentina coach in acrimonious circumstances last month, having impressed at the World Cup until La Albiceleste were smashed 4-0 by Germany in the quarterfinals.

Soriano added: "If the owner Randy Lerner wants to make him a serious offer, I am sure he would get a very positive response."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Dhoni unhappy with practice wickets

CRICINFO

The Indian team had a less than ideal training session in Dambulla ahead of their tri-series match against Sri Lanka: opening batsman Dinesh Karthik was hit painfully on the hand and MS Dhoni was displeased with what he felt were substandard practice pitches.

The pitches reportedly hadn't been mown and were damp, resulting in balls rearing up from a good length, and bowlers' run-ups weren't firm as well.

"Dhoni was unhappy with the practice pitches," India's team manager Ranjib Biswal told the Hindu. "He felt the bounce was uneven. We have not lodged a protest but have asked the authorities for better practice wickets. The captain wants pitches with more consistent bounce at the nets."

Biswal said Karthik, who was hit by one of the local net

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



Maria Sharapova of Russia serves against compatriot Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova in the semifinal of the Western & Southern Financial Group Women's Open on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL
Do you think Bangladesh is prepared for the cricket World Cup in 2011?
Yes 76.6%
No 23.4%
TOTAL VOTES: 401
TODAY'S QUESTION
Do you think English Premier League has lost its glory?
Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote
Follow The Daily Star Sport on **twitter**
www.twitter.com/dssport

What to WATCH

TEN Sports & SuperSport5
Sri Lanka v India Tri-Series, Third ODI
Live from 3:00pm
SuperSport5
English Premiership Man United v Newcastle
Live from 1:00am (Tuesday)