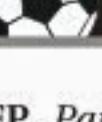




PHOTO: STAR

Recalled Bangladesh paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza sends down a delivery under the watchful eyes of coach Jamie Siddons (L) during a practice game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

## Ribery fights back

 Football

AFP, Paris

He may have been roundly jeered by the home fans, but Franck Ribery's second-half cameo in France's 0-0 draw with Croatia has given coach Laurent Blanc plenty to think about.

Boos and whistles rained down from the Stade de France stands as the Bayern Munich winger entered the fray in the 59th minute as a replacement for Florent Malouda on France's left flank.

Ribery has been widely cast as one of the ringleaders of France's training ground strike at last year's World Cup in South Africa and Tuesday's game marked his first appearance in a France shirt on home soil since then.

His first touches were booed with the same vigour as his initial entrance, but gradually the fans appeared to realise that he had brought a zest to the French attack that had hitherto been lacking.

Ribery's willingness to run at the visiting defenders sowed apprehension in the Croatian defence and freed up space for his attacking colleagues.

Samir Nasri and Karim Benzema both profited from Ribery's ability to suck defenders towards him and it was he who created an 84th-minute chance for fellow substitute Loic Remy that should have seen the deadlock broken.

"It was a strange match," said Ribery, who now has 50 international caps.

"There were some whistles but it's normal. After that the fans reacted well and that gave me confidence in myself."

"I wasn't really tense, I just wanted to show that I was happy to be there."

Ribery has never hidden the fact that he prefers to play on the left and his showing against Croatia followed on from a bright 20-

minute spell in Friday's 2-0 defeat of Luxembourg after he had switched flanks from the right.

Adding weight to calls for Ribery to be handed a starting berth on the left-hand side of the French attack is the wretched current form of Malouda.

The Chelsea man looks a shadow of the player who started the current Premier League season in thrilling form and his performance against Croatia earned him a dismal rating of 3/10 from French sport daily L'Equipe.

"What is happening to Florent Malouda?" asked Wednesday's edition of the paper.

"How can you explain this chronic incapacity to make even the slightest difference for France, where he is racking up performances that are jaded or, as last night (Tuesday), completely insufficient?"

While Malouda flounders, Ribery appears to have rediscovered the form that once made him one of the most devastating attacking midfielders in Europe.

Having missed two months of the season with an ankle injury, his recent performances suggest he has finally moved on from a nightmare 2010, in which he was plagued by injuries and implicated in a child prostitution scandal.

He was superb in Bayern's 6-0 demolition of Hamburg on March 12, scoring one and creating two, while his last league appearance saw him crash home a long-range 88th-minute winner in a 2-1 win at Freiburg.

With Roma's Jeremy Menez and the Marseille pair of Remy and Mathieu Valbuena battling it out for a place on France's right flank, Ribery seems to have set his sights on a straight duel with Malouda for the left-wing position.

France are now out of action until a Euro 2012 qualifier in Belarus on June 3, by which time Ribery will hope to have done enough to prove that the left flank belongs to him.

## Press go

FROM PAGE 16

slow scoring for the defeat. Urdu language newspaper Jang was also critical of the team's performance and criticised the players' "dismal show".

But The News said "the overall performance of the team was much better than expected and (captain) Shahid Afridi rallied his troops brilliantly to take the team to the semi-finals."

"Our boys could not make it in the end but they fought like brave men and lost to a better side, which had the added advantage of playing at home before their cheering crowds," said the paper.

India's newspapers also paid tribute to Pakistan's performance.

The Hindustan Times declared "Pakistan will return home defeated but not bowed" after the team, hit by match-fixing charges and a poor run record, was given scant chance at the start of the tournament.

"The way they played and competed on Wednesday, they certainly leave with their heads held high," the paper said.

## Karim in doubt for Spurs clash

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema could miss next week's Champions League quarterfinal first leg clash with Tottenham due to injury, Spanish newspapers said Thursday.

Benzema suffered a "contraction" in his right thigh during France's scoreless draw with Croatia in a friendly Tuesday in Paris, the sports daily Marca said.

The paper said the normal recovery time for such an injury is 10 days, leaving Benzema uncertain for Real's hosting of Tottenham on April 15.

Another sports paper, AS, said the 23-year-old had suffered "damage" to his thigh and would miss Real's next league match, against Gijon on Saturday.

Both papers said Benzema underwent tests on Wednesday that confirmed the injury. There was no official confirmation of the reports from Real.

After months of sitting on the sidelines Benzema has become a regular in Jose Mourinho's starting eleven, scoring eight goals in five matches.

However his absence will not sit well with Real, who are already without Cristiano Ronaldo after the Portugal star suffered a recurrence of a left thigh injury last week. Brazil winger Marcelo is also fighting his way back from injury.

"There is no clear date for the return" of Marcelo while Ronaldo's injury "continues to cause concern" to Mourinho, said Marca.

Ronaldo, the league's current joint top scorer with Barcelona's Lionel Messi, should be fit for the match against Tottenham but "only just," the paper quoted Mourinho as saying.

## Sultana Kamal awards given

SPORTS REPORTER

As many as 23 women organisers and former athletes including Deputy Leader of the Parliament, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, have been awarded the Sultana Kamal Independence Day Award for their contributions to the country's women's sports.

The Bangladesh Women's Sports Association has introduced the award this year for the first time since its establishment in 1972 and thus organised the award-giving ceremony at the Bangladesh Olympic Association auditorium yesterday with state minister for Liberation War Affairs Captain (Retd) AB Tajul Islam handing over awards, certificates and cheques to the winners.

Sajeda, the founder president of Women's Sports Association, recalled the perspective of establishing the Women's Sports Association after Independence and expressed special gratitude to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and late athlete Lutfunnessa Haq Bakul.

The 76-year old leader promised to keep touch with the Women's Sports Association and try to extend her helping hands if needed.

Winners of the Sultana Kamal Independence Day Award were Sajeda Chowdhury, Late Rabeya Khatun Talukdar, Late Lutfunnessa Haq Bakul, Jinat Ahmed, Hamida Ali, Kazi Jaheda Ali, Rafia Akther Dolly, Dolly Kathryn Cruise, Ferdous Ara Khanm Aleya, Nazma Shamim, Hosne Ara Khan, Ferdous Ali, Late Umma Salma Rafique, Kazi Nasima Hamid, Kazi Masuda Begum, Nirupa Dewan, Rasheeda Rahman, Farida Akther, Shamsun Nahar Amin, Mahfuza Begum, Anjuman Ara Aksir, Bilkis Rashed and Saida Khanam.

## SL ready

FROM PAGE 16

New Zealand by 112 runs in a league match at the ground on March 18.

Sri Lanka, runners-up to Australia in 2007, marched into their second successive final after losing just one match out of eight in the tournament.

Kumar Sangakkara's men, playing at home in Colombo, thrashed England by 10 wickets in the quarterfinal before delivering a five-wicket blow to New Zealand in the semifinal.

Sri Lanka have prevailed in recent one-dayers against India, winning six of the 10 matches played last year in Dhaka, Harare, Bulawayo and Dambulla.

But India have won five of seven matches against the Islanders on home soil over the last five years.

## 'Inter have the edge'

APP, Rome

Inter Milan midfielder Dejan Stankovic believes his side are in a better position coming into Saturday's derby than Serie A leaders AC Milan.

Inter have a two-point advantage on Inter and are the nominal hosts at the San Siro ground the two sides share.

They also won there earlier in the season but Inter have closed a gap that once stood at 13 points in mid-December and have by far the better form since the turn of the year.

"Maybe we're seen as favourites because of recent results, we've made a historic comeback and we don't want to stop there," said the Serbia captain.

"We won't let up, that's for sure, but I am a little worried about their professional pride."

"They will want to show they haven't spent 20 weeks leading Serie A for nothing, to show that they have quality."

Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri previously said Inter have more to lose in this game but it is the nerazzurri who are still in the Champions League and also have the Italian Cup to play for.

Milan's interest in European competition is over for another season and the club's hierarchy surely would not be satisfied with merely a Cup victory for their year's efforts not to mention their economic outlay over the past 12 months.

Inter follow up Saturday's game with a clash against Schalke 04 in the Champions League on Tuesday but Stankovic doesn't believe that will be a distraction.

"We'll give everything against Milan and then we'll be taken by another emotion," he said.

"We know that the better you do at the beginning the better things happen thereafter."

"The Champions League gives you fuel for the league and vice versa."

For Inter coach Leonardo it may be a strange feeling as he takes charge of his third derby, but first on the nerazzurro bench.

Last season he had an awful record in these two games, losing 4-0 when Gennaro Gattuso was sent-off and then being beaten 2-0 in the second match despite Inter finishing the game with nine men.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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39 Man of morals?

40 Scruffs

42 Make on a loom

45 Largest of the seven

46 Hot tubs

48 Spinning stat

50 Prompt

51 Shoe width

DOWN

1 Shriill bark collection

Solution time: 25 mins.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

12 13 14

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18 19 20

21 22 23 24

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**CRYPTOQUIP**

M H E V K C H O S Z U A S T H  
B H U U Z N O N V C N O U A V M Z K S  
T O C H U H E S F O E E H U U C , N V C  
S T V S M V S S H F L B U V S S H F L ?

**Yesterday's Cryptoquip:** WHEN A GROUP OF CONVICTS IS IN ATTENDANCE FOR A SHOW, I GUESS THAT'S A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals T

## Rain mars final day

 Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER