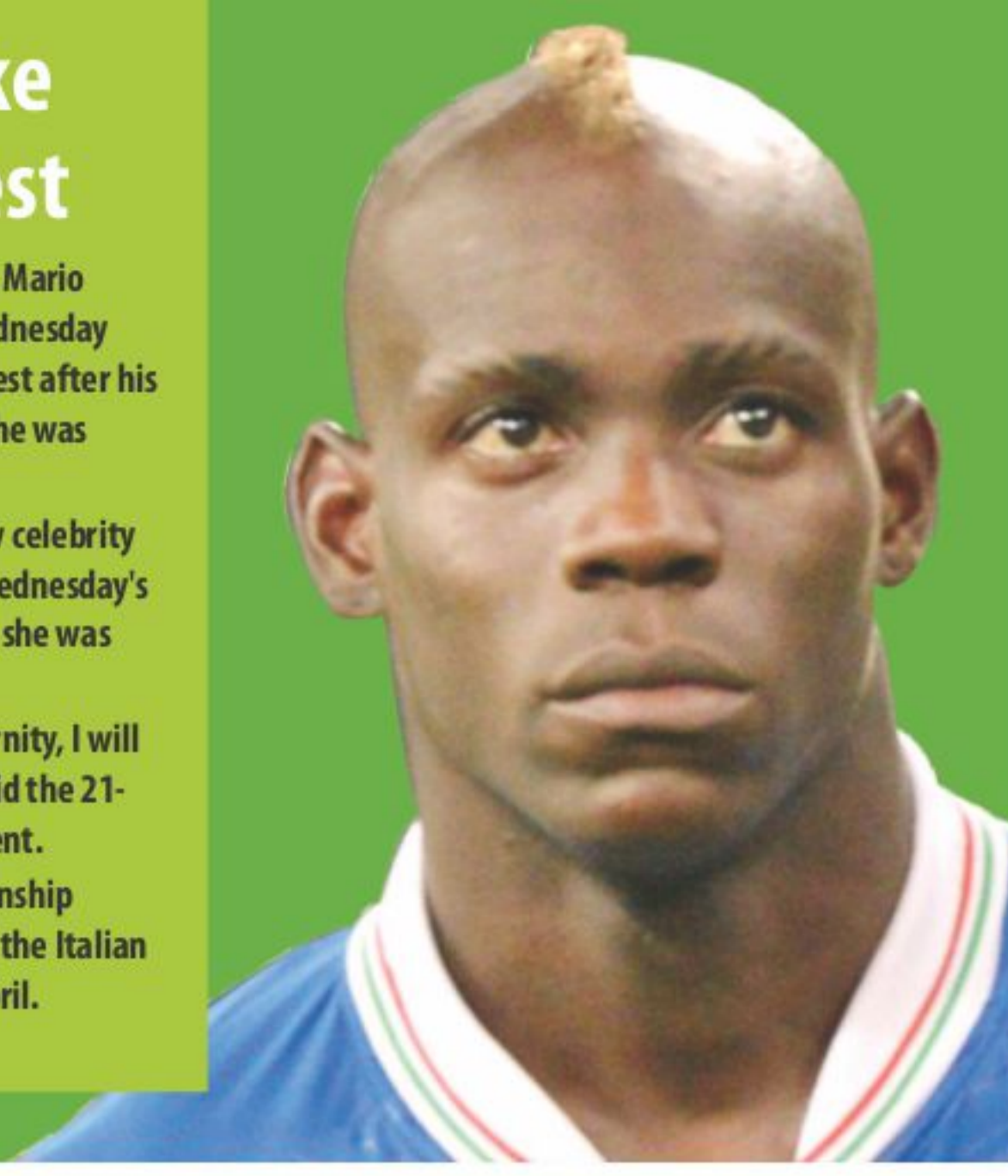


Mario to take paternity test

Manchester City and Italy star Mario Balotelli told Italian press Wednesday that he will take a paternity test after his former fiancée claimed that she was pregnant with his child. Raffaella Fico, a 24-year-old TV celebrity and underwear model, told Wednesday's edition of the weekly Chi that she was expecting Balotelli's baby. "Once I have proof of my paternity, I will assume full responsibility," said the 21-year-old Balotelli in a statement. The couple's 18-month relationship frequently made headlines in the Italian media prior to their split in April.



Final before final!

Djokovic, Federer to clash in semis

AFP, London

Defending champion Novak Djokovic and six-time winner Roger Federer face a titanic Wimbledon semifinal showdown after the two title contenders wasted little time on their last eight matches on Wednesday.

While third seed Federer pummeled Russian 26th seed Mikhail Youzhny into submission in a 90-minute 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 masterclass on Centre Court, Djokovic also took the express route against German 31st seed Florian Mayer, recording an emphatic 6-4, 6-1, 6-4 victory on Court One.

Now Djokovic will attempt to reach his second successive Wimbledon final by extending his current winning streak against Federer to four matches in their first ever encounter at the All England Club.

The world number one has proved a thorn in Federer's side of late, beating him in the semifinals of the US and French Opens, although the Swiss great holds 14-12 edge over their 26 career meetings.

"It's always a pleasure playing against Roger. I'm looking forward to it," Djokovic said. "He is a great champion and has been so dominant and consistent at the Grand Slams. He is the ultimate challenge on grass courts."

While Djokovic has every reason to feel confident, Federer, who has now reached a record 32 Grand Slam semifinals, looked in

peak form as he delivered a royal command performance in front of Prince William and wife Catherine.

"I played great. Maybe my game matches up well against Mikhail," said Federer, who last won Wimbledon in 2009.

"It helps when royalty and other stars come to watch, it's inspiring and a thrill and helps tennis."

Federer, who is without a Grand Slam title since the 2010 Australian Open, cruised to a 14th win in 14 meetings against Youzhny and, just as importantly for the 30-year-old, there were no signs of the back pain which had dogged him in the fourth round against Xavier Malisse.

Federer, chasing Pete Sampras's record of seven Wimbledon titles, also put an end to a worrying sequence at the All England Club where he had been knocked out in the quarterfinals in the last two years.

Later on Wednesday, home favourite Andy Murray will attempt to reach his fourth successive Wimbledon semifinal when the world number four faces Spain's David Ferrer on Centre Court.

Murray, hoping to end Britain's 76-year wait for a male singles champion at Wimbledon, will have to improve on his last meeting with seventh seed Ferrer, which ended in defeat in the French Open quarterfinals last month.

The other remaining quarterfinal on Court One pits French fifth seed Jo-Wilfried

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Serbia's Novak Djokovic pumps his fist after winning his Wimbledon men's singles quarterfinal against Germany's Florian Mayer at the All England Club in Wimbledon yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Elegant Koran passes away

SPORTS REPORTER

Former cricketer Abdul Majid Koran passed away in the early hours of Wednesday at the capital's Square Hospital.

He was 72, and left behind his wife, two sons and two daughters. His namaz-e-ajanaza was held at the Rankin Street mosque before he was buried at the Banani graveyard.

A graceful batsman, Koran was one of the few native East Pakistani players to be picked for first-class cricket for the erstwhile team in the 1960s while also representing the then Dacca cricket team in the regional competitions. He also bowled medium-pace.

Koran played between 1957 and 1976 in Dhaka's first division cricket during which time he played for Mohammedan Sporting Club, Victoria Sporting Club, Dhaka Wanderers, Brothers Union, Azad Boys Club and Rangers Club.

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Tigers return to training today



SPORTS REPORTER

After a short break, the national cricketers return to business today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur to prepare them for the upcoming tour of Ireland and the Netherlands.

It will be a short camp for the Tigers as they are scheduled to leave Dhaka on July 11 for Ireland. In their Europe trip, Mushfiqur Rahim's men will play three T20 internationals against Ireland and one each against Scotland and the Netherlands.

The national selectors led by Akram Khan already announced a 15-member squad making two changes from the one which recently toured Zimbabwe for the Twenty20 triangular series that also involved South Africa.

The team got back its inspirational all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who was rested for the Zimbabwe tour, while pacer Shafiqul Islam has also made a comeback after recovering from the shoulder injury he suffered during the Asia Cup. The axe fell on Anamul Haque, who was asked to concentrate on the Under-19s World Cup, and all-rounder Forhad Reza.

As part of their preparation for the ICC World Twenty20 to be held in Sri Lanka in September this year, Bangladesh took part in the unofficial T20 tri-series in Zimbabwe where they beat the hosts and South Africa in the return-leg matches, but failed to make it to final due to an inferior net run-rate after all teams finished on eight points each. After the Europe trip, the Tigers will play a T20 tournament in Trinidad & Tobago in late August.

Dhaka Bank's football venture

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka Bank Limited is all set to be associated with the Bangladesh Football Federation for a long term which started with a signing ceremony yesterday for holding an exhibition match to celebrate the bank's 17th anniversary.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin and Dhaka Bank chairman Reshadur Rahman signed a Tk 25 lakh agreement on behalf of their respective organisations for holding the match which will feature Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani and Dhaka Bank Eleven comprising players from other professional clubs.

"Dhaka Bank wants to be associated with us and we welcome that. That's why we are going to hold an exhibition match to mark its anniversary as well as celebrate the successful completion of the professional football league,"

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Times have changed

SPORTS REPORTER



There was a time when club tents would turn into a sea of fans and followers following any title triumph in local football. But times have changed and so have the affinity of the club with its followers. There was hardly a hundred supporters gathered yesterday afternoon at the Abahani club tent in Dhanmondi to greet the players for winning the fourth professional league title.

However, there was no shortage of pleasure and satisfaction on the part of the players, who stayed over at the club tent following brief celebration on Tuesday night.

The players looked especially happy as this was a title won, fair and square, they believed. Last year's league title had been won by Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club on the last day too, but their triumph was tainted as they were later found out to have played a fixed match. Even Abahani's previous three titles were not free from such allegations. But this time there had been no such questions raised against the champions.

"We have proved that it is possible to win the league title without playing fixed matches," said midfielder Pranotosh Kumar. "Players can anticipate if there are any unfair means adopted by the clubs and things like that might have taken place in the past. I believe nothing

like that has happened this time."

Pranotosh, who has been a member of all the four squads to have lifted the professional league title, said he would rate his fourth league title ahead of the previous three because the league was very competitive compared to other leagues and it was decided on the last day.

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu believed the discipline and willingness of the players was the main driving force behind this triumph.

"The team management was very strict about the disciplinary aspects. We even served show-cause notices to a couple of players for poor performance and it worked well for them," said Rupu.

"We managed to bring out the best of the players. Even Zahid Hossain, who would be leaving the club soon, had the commitment to give his best in Tuesday's match."

However, Abahani have it all to do ahead of the new season as a host of other stars including defenders Nasir, Linkon, Mamun Mia, midfielder Jitu and striker Robin are leaving the Dhanmondi-based outfit.

Defender Wali Faisal though promised to stay with the Sky Blues and praised the club's management as one of the best in the country. Meanwhile, the club management declared to award each member of the squad Tk 50,000 as bonus for winning the title. Abahani's Iranian coach Ali Akbar, however, left for Iran yesterday

MSC keep winning

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan SC continued their winning streak in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League with a 5-0 win over Wari Club at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The Black and Whites took the lead in the tenth minute through forward Golam Mostafa Manik but faced stiff challenge from Wari Club since and had to be content with a single-goal lead in the first half.

But they showed their character in the second half to add four more goals to make the game a one-way traffic. Mamonur Rahman Chayan converted two penalty corners while Raseel Mahmud Jimmy and Sheikh Mohammad Nannu netted one goal each to ensure Mohammedan's fourth win in as many matches.

Ramprakash tells future plan today

AFP, London

Former England batsman Mark Ramprakash is poised to announce his retirement from first-class cricket after county side Surrey said he would be "making a statement about his future" at The Oval on Thursday.

Ramprakash, a prolific run scorer at first-class level, was unable to transfer his domestic form to the international stage with just two hundreds in 52 Tests.

But it has been a different story during a 25-year first-class career that started at Middlesex before he moved across London to Surrey 11 years ago.

He has scored 35,659 runs in 461 first-class matches since his county debut in 1987, and more than 13,000 in limited-overs cricket.

However, the 42-year-old, widely regarded as likely being the last man in cricket history to make 100 first-class hundreds because of the reduction in domestic

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Oscar Pistorius will become the first double amputee to compete at the Olympic Games after being included yesterday in the South African 4x400-metre relay team for London Games.

PHOTO: AFP FILE

Oscar makes London cut

AFP, Johannesburg



Oscar Pistorius will become the first double amputee to compete at the Olympics after being included Wednesday in the South African 4x400-metre relay team for 2012 London Games, an official said.

The 25-year-old's selection comes five days after conceding defeat in a battle to run in the 400m at the Games as he finished 0.22 of a second outside the qualifying mark of 45.30 seconds when coming second at the African championships in Benin.

Pistorius did clock 45.20 at a meet in Pretoria last March, but could not repeat the feat at an international meet, a requirement for selection in the South African team.

Called the 'Blade Runner' and 'The Fastest Man on no legs', Pistorius was part of the South African 4x400m relay squad that came second at the 2011 world championships in South Korea although he did not run in the final.

There had been fears that South Africa would not send a relay team as no athlete qualified for the 400m and the World Championship silver medal-winning team has been hit by poor form and injuries.

Pistorius runs with carbon-fibre artificial 'blades' and was cleared to compete at top level in 2008 when the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) overturned an IAAF ruling that his blades gave him an unfair advantage.

The South African had both legs amputated below the

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