

## Cesc joins Chelsea

AFP, London

Spanish midfielder Cesc Fabregas has signed for English Premier League club Chelsea from Barcelona, he confirmed on Thursday.

Fabregas, who is preparing for the World Cup with the Spain squad in Brazil, is believed to have signed a five-year contract for a fee in the region of £30 million (\$50.5 million).

The 27-year-old former star of Chelsea's London rivals Arsenal said he had "unfinished business" in English football and revealed that Arsenal had decided not to use their option to re-sign him.

He said in a statement: "I considered all the other offers very carefully and I firmly believe that Chelsea is the best choice."

"Yes, everyone knows that Arsenal had the first option to sign me. They decided not to take this option and therefore it wasn't meant to be. I wish them well in the future."

## Blatter ready for new term

AFP, Sao Paulo

Sepp Blatter is ready to seek a new term as FIFA's president, he announced Wednesday, ignoring calls from top European officials to stand down as controversy engulfs football's governing body.

"I'm ready to accompany you in the future," the 78-year-old Blatter told the FIFA congress in Sao Paulo on the eve of the World Cup.

The FIFA leader was helped by a congress vote not to consider age- and term-limits for officials. He later denied having any designs on a life-time presidency.

Isolated boos could be heard among the applause as Blatter said that conditions were good for him to seek a fifth term next year.

# AUSTRALIA V CHILE Odds stacked against Soccerroos

AFP, Curitiba

World Cup outsiders Australia are aiming to punch above their weight and give a Chile side choc-a-bloc with talent a bloody nose in Curitiba on Friday.

The two Group B protagonists are worlds apart in FIFA's rankings -- Chile are 14 with Australia down at 62 -- so the South Americans are heavy favourites to sweep aside the Soccerroos and get their campaign off to the perfect start.

The odds may be stacked against them, but Australia, unshackled by any smidgen of pressure, are not short of self-belief ahead of this clash against a team they held to a goalless draw on their World Cup debut in 1974.

"We don't care who we're up against," said Swiss-based attacking midfielder Dario Vidossic.

"There can be 11 Ronaldos or

Messis out there. We want to make everybody proud back home. We've worked very hard to get to this stage.

"We've got three guaranteed games and we're just going to give it everything that we can to get out of the group stage."

Coach Ange Postecoglou's largely transitional side is skippered by Crystal Palace's Mile Jedinak and features experienced duo Tim Cahill and Mark Bresciano.

The Aussies laid down a marker of their intent in a battling single goal defeat to fellow finalists Croatia in their last warm-up.

Alex Wilkinson, who played a part against Croatia, hopes he's done enough to make it on to Postecoglou's starting XI.

Wilkinson hinted that Chile could be in for a surprise.

"They're expecting us to be physical and we will be physical -- but we also want to show them we can play football as well," said the player with South Korean outfit Jeonbuk

Motors.

Despite the infectious enthusiasm emanating from the Aussie camp the serious money on Friday is on Chile.

Coached by Argentine Jorge Sampaoli, the South Americans take to the Arena Pantanal pitch buoyed by the apparent recovery from injury of midfield star Arturo Vidal.

The Juventus man, who underwent knee surgery last month, was a doubt after battling an inflammation.

But he appeared to have shrugged off that problem when turning out on Wednesday for his first training session since making an unforecast 15-minute comeback a week ago in the 2-0 friendly victory over Northern Ireland.

Like Vidal, another vital component of this Chile team is Barcelona forward Alexis Sanchez, reportedly a target of Manchester United's new boss Louis van Gaal who is in Brazil as Holland manager before moving to Old Trafford.

And Sanchez stoked up expecta-

tions back in Santiago on Wednesday when he told a local newspaper: "I believe Chile are going to win the World Cup, if I didn't believe that I'd be at home watching television."

Of Chile's chances of solving the complex first round puzzle set by a Group B including Holland and world champions Spain he said: "I'd be happy if we finished as runners-up behind them (Spain)."

Sanchez's rags to riches story from a humble background to world class footballer is the stuff of any kid's dreams, and he is fully conscious of the benevolent hand dealt to him by fate.

"If I hadn't become a footballer I'd have probably ended up working down the mines, or something more basic," he suggested.

Chile's record against Australia stands at 3-1. They reached the semi-finals when hosting the 1962 World Cup, and made it to the last 16 in 1998 and again four years ago in South

## All quiet on the Mirpur front India arrive today

SPORTS REPORTER



The India cricket team are due to arrive in Bangladesh today, an occasion which at any other time would garner a lot of attention and fanfare. India have always been a big draw in world cricket, which is why hosting India sees a swelling in the home board's accounts. But it is different now; all is quiet on the Mirpur front where three-match ODI series between India and Bangladesh will take place on June 15, 17 and 19 under lights. The reason is known to one and all -- sports lovers' plates are full with the greatest show on earth. The country is fully gripped by FIFA World Cup 2014 fever and cricket, no matter that it is the number one sport, has little place at this moment to draw the attention or dominate discussions among fans.

The appeal of football is universal and when it comes to the World Cup, every other game is dwarfed in its wake. So the India-Bangladesh series looks like an engagement just to be gotten through and the BCCI's decision to send an under-strength squad under the leadership of Suresh Raina further dampened interest. India chose to rest MS Dhoni, Virat Kohli, R Ashwin, Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan and Ravindra Jadeja.

It is not the perfect scenario for broadcasters Gazi TV, which recently earned the worldwide media rights at a 20.025-million-dollar price mainly focusing on the two home series involving India, as the Indian channels reportedly made an offer of less than a million dollars for the three matches.

The organisers still hope that the fans will come to the ground and are praying that the weather gods will not play foul to make matters worse.



Bangladesh cricketers Shakib Al Hasan (L) and skipper Mushfiqur Rahim (2nd from L) do some stretching along with teammates ahead of their three-match ODI series against India, beginning on June 15, at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday PHOTO: STAR

## Higuain injured

AFP, Cidade Do Galo



Argentina striker Gonzalo Higuain, who has had an ankle injury for the past month, is his team's only major worry for their World Cup opener against Bosnia-Herzegovina at the Maracana on Sunday.

In Thursday's training session, Napoli striker Higuain was replaced by Paris Saint-Germain's Ezequiel Lavezzi.

Inter Milan striker Rodrigo Palacio was also on the sidelines on Thursday after suffering an ankle injury in the 3-0 warm-up win over Trinidad last week.

Meanwhile, defender Ezequiel Garay and midfielder Lucas Biglia claim Argentina have no fear and will go on the attack at the World Cup.

"We're Argentina and we must start winning. We don't fear anyone," said Garay, who said the team would be focusing on supplying Lionel Messi.

"We have to try to give Leo the ball in the best way so afterwards he can destabilise (the opposition) as he's always done."

Biglia said the team was united but warned that their attacking instincts might get the better of them.

"The first defender gets up with the forwards and the first

## Kiwis romp to historic win

AFP, Kingston

Mark Craig's dream debut culminated in a 186-run victory for New Zealand in the first Test against the West Indies at Sabina Park in Jamaica on Thursday.

The off-spinner claimed four second innings wickets to finish with eight in the match as the home side crumbled to 216 all out after being set the daunting target of 403.

There was an unexpected late flourish by the West Indies last-wicket pair as last man Shane Shillingford belted the fastest-ever half-century by a Caribbean cricketer in Tests and dominated a record tenth-wicket partnership against New Zealand of 82.

Yet it only delayed the inevitable with New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum summoning Kane Williamson for the last over of the day.

**SCORES IN BRIEF**  
**NEW ZEALAND:** 1st innings 508 for 7 dec and 2nd innings 156 for 8 dec (Latham 73, Watling 22 not out; Taylor 3-28, Roach 2-12, Shillingford 2-39)  
**WEST INDIES:** 1st innings 262 all out and 2nd innings 216 all out (Shillingford 53 not out, Ramdin 34, Benn 25; Craig 4-97, Sodhi 3-42, Southee 2-32)  
**Result:** New Zealand won by 186 runs  
**Player-of-the-match:** Mark Craig

## Tamim eyes good start

SPORTS REPORTER



With Brazil and Argentina's flags fluttering around the country, the entire nation seems to be engrossed with the football World Cup that began yesterday. Bangladesh's national cricketers will however have to get down to the serious business of an ODI series against heavyweights India before they get caught up in a similar wave.

As national opener Tamim Iqbal put it during training yesterday: "We can only enjoy the world cup after we complete

our jobs as cricketers. That's our job."

A player in search of form, the India series could be the perfect opportunity for the Tamim to get back to his natural aggressive game-play as against India the left-hander boasts a higher average than his career average.

Tamim has an average of 30.09 against all teams. Against India, the mark shoots up to 40. Having trained under the scorching sun the last two weeks, Tamim remains confident ahead of the three-match ODI series which begins on June 15.

"I think we worked really hard during practice. It was hot and we did as much as we could in the heat. We played two practice matches and

everyone seemed in good shape. Hopefully we can come out of the bad patch if we start well on June 15," said Tamim, referring to the poor run of results this year including a below-par World Twenty20 campaign.

While the likes of Virat Kohli and Mahendra Singh Dhoni have not been included in India's team, Tamim still expects it to be a difficult series.

"It's a plus point for any opponent if Kohli and Dhoni do not come. But that does not mean that their team is weak. The best performers of the IPL are coming. They will be under pressure to prove a lot. We just need to play our natural game," said the left-hander.

## Banned 4 players seek pardon

SPORTS REPORTER



Having served seven months of the suspension sanctioned by the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF), four senior players on Wednesday sought the withdrawal of the remainder of their punishment.

Striker Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, goalkeeper Zahid Hossain and defender Imran Hasan Pintu were banned from the national team for three years and suspended from domestic competitions for two years while midfielder Kamruzzaman Rana was handed a two-year ban from the national team a one-year ban from the domestic circuit on November 4 last year after a BHF probe committee found them guilty of violating team discipline during the Asia Cup. Bangladesh performed poorly to finish seventh out of eight teams.

"Having admitted their mistakes, they have sought exemption from their punishments and promise not to repeat their mistakes in future," said BHF general secretary Khaza Rahmatullah, adding that the four players expressed their sorrow and embracement over the performance in the Asia Cup.

Rahmatullah informed that they would discuss the matter in the next meeting of the executive committee if the members of the executive committee take the matter into consideration.

## Time to conquer final frontier

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has achieved to be where he is today."

With Messi having enjoyed a less than stellar campaign with Barcelona this season -- and having seen Ronaldo take the FIFA Ballon d'Or for the world's best player away from him -- the World Cup is his chance to crown a loaded career trophy haul.

Ronaldo, in contrast, comes into

the World Cup on the back of Real's first Champions League win in 12 years -- though his exploits have taken a toll as he struggles with thigh and knee problems.

Yet none other than Pele has in recent months spoken of how he believes Ronaldo is now even more effective than Messi.

Judging players from different eras is an impossible task, but Pele says he

could have been even better had referees given strikers the protection they get in the modern game -- a point which could equally be applied to Maradona.

"In my day we just didn't have the same protection as there is today. I reckon with today's rules I could have scored 1,000 goals more," opined Pele, who famously netted a tally of 1,281.

## Ton-up Root

AFP, London

Joe Root's second hundred in as many Lord's Tests was the cornerstone of England's recovery on the first day of their series opener with Sri Lanka on Thursday.

Root's 102 not out helped take England to 344 for five at stumps on the first day of the first Test after they'd been struggling at 74 for three when the 23-year-old Yorkshireman walked out to bat.

Root, who made a Test-best 180 against Australia at Lord's last year, was well supported by Matt Prior (76 not out) in a so-far unbroken sixth-wicket stand of 135.

However, recalled wicketkeeper Prior was fortunate not to be out for a second-ball duck before completing just his second 50 in 21 Test innings.

Moeen Ali (48), one of three debutants in a new-look England side following their 5-0 Ashes drubbing in Australia, had previously helped Root steady the ship during a fifth-wicket stand of 89.

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