

Sylhet tickets all sold out

Silverware to have 20 tolas of gold

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) on Tuesday disclosed that tickets for the Sylhet leg of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup football tournament have been sold out.

The six-nation invitational tournament kicks off in Sylhet tomorrow, with hosts Bangladesh taking on the Malaysian Olympic team.

According to the organisers, a total of approximately 70,000 tickets were allocated for four games including a semifinal for Sylhet and those have been exhausted. It is not unexpected, especially after tremendous crowd response in the Sylhet during an international friendly last year. The problem however confronted by Sylhet, one of the two venues of the tournament, is its inexperience in managing an influx of crowd. But the BFF has promised Sylhet, which has gone through a considerable face-lift ahead of the tournament, would be free of any gatecrash this time.

There is also good news for participating teams who want to get hold of the ultimate silverware, the champions trophy. It has been disclosed that the glittering trophy will contain 20 tolas (approx 233.28 grams) of gold. However, the bad news is that there will be no prize money for the winners.

Meanwhile, Malaysia, the first team to have arrived, tipped the hosts as favourites in the opening match of the tournament.

But Malaysian coach Mohamed Razip Ismail said that the pressure of home fans would be the biggest enemy for Bangladesh.

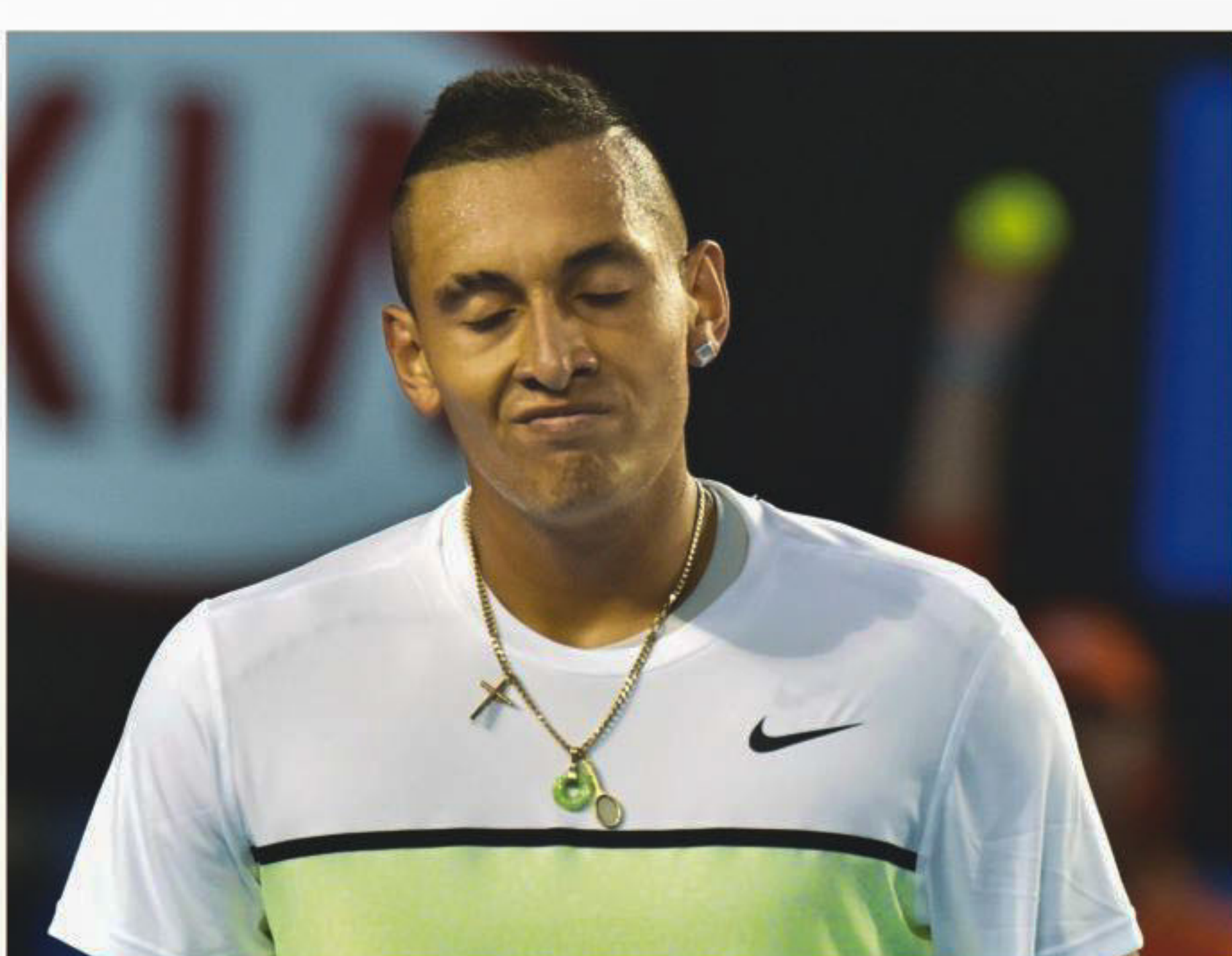
"We have come here to take part in the tournament as part of our preparation for the AFC U-23 qualifiers in March. I think Bangladesh are favourites against us but they will be playing under pressure due to the presence of local crowd and we will be trying to cash in on that opportunity in the match," Ismail told reporters at the Osmani International Airport in Sylhet.

However, captain Nazirul Che Hashim was more confident as he vowed to play the final of the tournament and ready to take the challenge.

The visitors had their first training session at the BFF Academy in Sylhet, where the home team also had their training almost at the same time.



Tomas Berdych (L) of Czech Republic celebrates his win over Rafael Nadal in the Australian Open quarterfinals yesterday. Fan-favourite Nick Kyrgios (R) walks off the court disheartened after being beaten by Andy Murray on his home soil.



PHOTOS: AFP

Berdych finally fells Nadal

Australia's sweetheart knocked out

AGENCIES, Melbourne

For eight of the nine years they have shared a tennis court, Tomas Berdych has stepped up to the mark against Rafael Nadal knowing, in all probability, the merciless, magnificent Spaniard was about to be tear him to pieces.

When the draw for the 2015 Australian Open dictated that they would meet again at the quarterfinal stage, it was reasonable to assume Berdych would have to do something special to avoid his 18th straight loss against Nadal, a record losing streak in men's tennis.

And Berdych did that in some style, completely outplaying Nadal from the outset of the match, perhaps drawing from the spirit of Vitas Gerulaitis given his similar losing streak, winning 6-2, 6-0, 7-6 (7/5).

When Gerulaitis finally beat Jimmy

Connors after 16 consecutive losses, he said, "And let that be a lesson to you all. Nobody beats Vitas Gerulaitis 17 times in a row."

Berdych was expectedly happy to get this particular monkey off his back, and he thanked his coaches and his training regime for helping him overcome the hurdle.

"I was definitely ready for it and set up my plan pretty well and I stuck with that through those three sets," said Berdych. The upset pits him against Andy Murray for a place in the final, with the experienced British sixth seed overcoming the heartbeat of the host-nation, Australian teenager Nick Kyrgios, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3.

Australian teenager Nick Kyrgios said Tuesday he was proud of what he achieved at his home Grand Slam and would learn from the experience after being knocked out by Andy Murray.

But the 19-year-old Kyrgios, ranked 53 but expected to rise in the rankings after

reaching the quarter-finals, showcased his extraordinary talents before his home crowd and a worldwide television audience.

"Yeah, I'm really proud actually. You know two weeks ago I wasn't even sure I'd be playing the event," he said.

"It just has been a massive couple of weeks just trying to get fit. I'm actually happy. I wanted to win tonight, but having said that, I am just happy that was I was able to compete.

It was the second quarter-final inside a year for the 19-year-old after he reached the last eight at Wimbledon, becoming the first male teen to reach multiple Grand Slam quarter-finals since Federer in 2001. And while the nation of Australia was upset at his departure from the tournament, they were very supportive of the teen who appears to have a bright future ahead of him.

Sharapova dominated young Canadian Bouchard to set up an all-Russian semi-final with dark horse Ekaterina Makarova.

BERDYCH'S ODESSY

Tomas Berdych finally ended a nightmare run of 17 straight losses against Rafael Nadal, defeating him after eight years in the Australian Open quarterfinals yesterday. These are all the matches that Berdych has lost against Nadal during his winless streak..

DATE	TOURNAMENT	RESULT
04/21/2007	Monte Carlo Masters	0-6,5-7
07/06/2007	Wimbledon	6-7,4-6,2-6
04/04/2008	Masters Series Miami	6-7,2-6
08/22/2009	Cincinnati Masters	4-6,5-7
12/04/2009	Davis Cup	7-5,6-0,6-2
03/19/2010	Indian Wells Masters	4-6,6-7
07/04/2010	Wimbledon	3-6,5-7,4-6
11/26/2010	ATP World Tour Finals	7-6,6-1
04/01/2011	Masters Series Miami	6-2,3-6,6-3
01/24/2012	Australian Open	7-6,6-7,4-6,3-6
05/18/2012	Masters Series Rome	4-6,5-7
03/16/2013	Indian Wells Masters	4-6,5-7
05/18/2013	Masters Series Rome	2-6,4-6
08/17/2013	Masters Series Cincinnati	7-5,7-6
10/05/2013	China Open Beijing	2-4
11/08/2013	ATP World Tour Finals	6-4,1-6,6-3
05/09/2014	Masters Series Madrid	6-4,6-2



The Malaysian Olympic team, who are set to face Bangladesh tomorrow in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup opener, jog around the BFF Academy in Sylhet yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: STAR

Europe wants 2022 revote

AFP, Strasbourg

A report by the Council of Europe, adopted on Tuesday, has called on FIFA to revote on the "radically flawed" decision to award the 2022 World Cup to Qatar.

Damaging revelations concerning the bidding process mean that "FIFA cannot evade the obligation to hold a new vote," according to the draft resolution by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

British Labour Party Member of Parliament Michael Connarty, who prepared the draft resolution, slammed a "farce" and "a clear whitewash" by world football's governing body.

Connarty said he had consulted

documents obtained by The Times newspaper, proving that Qatari Mohamed Bin Hammam, who was president of the Asian Football Confederation, paid important sums of money to win the backing of African federations in the vote for the 2022 World Cup.

The report regretted that FIFA's Ethics Committee enquiry which uncovered "extremely dubious practices," was not entirely published, and were "amazed at the ease with which the adjudicatory chamber of the FIFA Ethics Committee confirmed the decision to assign the 2022 World Cup to Qatar."

"The claim that Qatar does not have direct responsibility for Mr bin Hammam's dealings should not be allowed to validate a procedure so

fundamentally undermined by illegality," the report said.

"FIFA does not yet seem capable of putting an end to corruption scandals."

The report also called on Qatar, who have been severely criticised for the conditions of foreign workers to take "all necessary measures to secure respect for the fundamental rights of all foreign migrant workers employed in this country."

The text of the resolution will be submitted to the Council of Europe's plenary session in April which brings together more than 300 Parliamentarians from 47 member states.

A resolution from the Council of Europe, which is an advisory international organisation, is not binding but would increase political pressure on FIFA.

PSG's Januzaj bid rejected

THE GUARDIAN

Manchester United have rejected an approach for Adnan Januzaj from Paris Saint-Germain, according to the teenager's agent.

The French champions tried to buy the Belgian winger in last summer's transfer window and have contacted United again about taking the player, his representative Dirk de Vriese claimed.

"Yes, PSG have shown themselves to be interested this winter," the agent told the French website Foot Mercato. "They directly contacted Manchester United for information."

Despite being heralded by David Moyes, the former United manager, as one of the world's standout young players, Januzaj has struggled to achieve regular first-team football under Louis van Gaal, the Scot's successor. He has made only 13 club appearances this term.

Januzaj has been keen to go on loan this January to try to gain more playing time but the manager has so far insisted the 19-year-old must remain at the club.

Aussies brace for Korea final

AFP, Newcastle

Australia struck twice early on and then soaked up the pressure as they downed United Arab Emirates 2-0 to set up an Asian Cup final against unbeaten South Korea on Tuesday.

Quickfire goals from defenders Trent Sainsbury and Jason Davidson in the first 15 minutes proved enough to put the 2011 runners-up in the frame for their first Asian title.

The Emirates' star playmaker Omar Abdulrahman asked constant questions of the Socceroos at Newcastle's Hunter Stadium, but the visitors were unable to craft a way back.

Sainsbury had promised to "choke" UAE "until they're blue" and they barely had time to draw breath when he headed in the game's first corner after only three minutes.

The centre-half rose unmarked to nod the ball down and past goalkeeper Majed Naser, settling any early nerves for Ange Postecoglou's men.

UAE targetman Ahmed Khalil almost hit back on 10 minutes but his low shot struck the outside of Mathew Ryan's near post and went out for a goal-kick.

And on 14 minutes Australia earned breathing space when left-back Davidson coolly passed the ball into the bottom corner for the 2-0 lead.

Australia's front three of Robbie Kruse, Mathew Leckie and Tim Cahill were always dangerous but despite going two goals down, UAE refused to be cowed and they continually probed without being able to crack the home defence.

The Socceroos should have had a third shortly before the break but Mark Milligan could only drag his shot wide.

Khalil drilled a powerful long-range effort narrowly wide after the restart as the Gulf side sought to keep the game alive.

But that was the closest they came and despite their forays forward, the second half played out scoreless for what finished as a comfortable Australian victory.

"In such a big game like a semi-final it's not easy to come back after conceding two goals by mistakes in the first 15 minutes," said UAE coach Mahdi Ali.

"You have to concentrate for 90 minutes, otherwise you will lose. The goals affected us a lot. We tried our best to come back but it was not easy. Many players were tired today and we didn't have enough power to come back into the game."

Australia will be wary of South Korea in Saturday's final, after they lost 1-0 to the Taeguk Warriors at the group stage. Uli Stielike's men are also yet to concede a goal.

"Hopefully the whole nation gets behind them (the Australian team) the next few days and we're going to need it," said Socceroos coach Postecoglou.

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