

## Destro agrees Milan deal

AFP, Milan

Roma striker Mattia Destro has agreed to join AC Milan, the struggling Serie A giants announced Thursday.

Milan CEO Adriano Galliani agreed terms with Roma officials on Wednesday and had only been waiting on the 23-year-old Italy international player's agreement.

No further details were given by Milan, although it is believed Destro will move on a six-month loan deal worth 700,000 euros but could secure a permanent deal to the San Siro giants at the end of the summer for 16 million euros.

A brief statement on Milan's website said: "Mattia Destro has said yes to a move to AC Milan."

Destro, who joined Roma in 2012 from Siena, posted an emotional message on his official Facebook to pay tribute to the club.

"Thank you Roma: I was a kid and you helped me to grow up... it was here I discovered that Love with a capital L really exists@

"Now, it's off to Milan for a new challenge but I'm confident and determined!!!! Now the countdown to my first game at the San Siro begins."

Destro could make his debut for Milan in Sunday's home game against basement side Parma.

It is the club's second signing in as many days, following the arrival of Spartak Moscow midfielder Salvatore Bocchetti on a six-month loan deal on Wednesday.

# Scoreline flatters inferior booters

## SYLHETE

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Sylhet



Even an open declaration of a 30-lakh taka cash incentive and the support of a full-house at the Sylhet District Stadium failed to inspire Bangladesh, who went down 0-1 against Malaysia U-23 in the opening match of Bangabandhu Gold Cup yesterday.

The hosts -- visibly inferior in strength, skill, idea and motivation against this very young Malaysian side -- rode their luck in the first half before it ran out. An opportunistic strike from Malaysia forward Muhammad Syazwan in the 53rd minute, after three similar attempts were denied by the woodwork, proved decisive, making the hosts'

chances of semifinal qualification difficult already.

The ingredients were all there for a positive start for the hosts as they hoped to make amends for the defeat against Nepal at this very ground last year. Even the coaching staff and players had vowed for that the day before the match. But there was no reflection of those on the field as the hosts started the match nervously.

The hosts were chasing soon after the kick-off and could have been a goal down had Syahrul Azwari's curling effort not narrowly missed the target. Bangladesh players struggled to keep the Malaysian forwards in check and started to make rash tackles, earning two yellow cards within the 18th minute. The Malaysian players looked like they had done a fair bit of homework,

contrary to their coaches' claim the day before, and tried to take advantage of Bangladesh goalkeeper Rasel Mahmud Liton's tendency to rush out of his line. There were five shots on target from the Malaysians within the first half hour and three of those attempts either hit the bar or thudded off upright.

Bangladesh, in spite of their lack of incisiveness, had their share of moments in the first half, thanks to some enterprising play from winger Zahid Hossain and attacking midfielder Hemanta Vinent Biswas in particular.

Zahid Hasan Emily, who rescued Bangladesh on numerous occasions during his 10-year career, showed all of his age when dealing with inviting crosses, failing to connect with them.

Coming back after the breather, Bangladesh showed more of the same, albeit with a bit more desire. That desire turned into desperation once Liton's adventurism cost his side the decisive goal. Syazwan spotted Liton out of position and, after gingerly dribbling past a few defenders, scored from about 25 yards out.

Bangladesh coach Lodewijk de Kruij brought on Wahed Ahmed and Sakhawat Hossain Rony to partner Emily upfront, but the Malaysians defended the lead efficiently. Bangladesh players could give themselves solace saying that had Rony's attempt in the 83rd minute not hit the woodwork, they would have left the field with a draw, but that would have betrayed the true picture of the match.



It was an anticlimactic finish to a euphoric build-up of Bangladesh's opening match against Malaysia at the Sylhet District Stadium yesterday. Here dejection is the dominating mood in the stands for the home side's 1-0 defeat.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



PHOTO: STAR

Popular singer Mila Islam enthralled the packed crowd at the Sylhet District Stadium during the opening ceremony of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup yesterday.

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Sylhet



Nihar Ranjan, one of two commentators flown in from India by the official broadcasters Channel 9, revealed something interesting during a casual chat. The footballer-turned-commentator claimed he coaches a team of the West Bengal prisoners, where a Bangladeshi boy named Robin is the main goalkeeper. However, his prediction about the opening match was emphatic. "I have watched Malaysia's training yesterday [Wednesday], they are nothing special. Bangladesh will win by at least three goals, you will see," hoped the microphone-man from across the border.

Mila the show-stopper  
A brief cultural show preceded the kick-off, the highlight of which was singer Mila Islam. The pop artist raced towards the galleries as the spectators joined in the chorus to her popular songs. There was also a song performed by Sylhet's own Shuvra Dev and two tribal dance performances.

The Uninspired Pigeons  
Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, officially inaugurated the 11-day event, releasing balloons and a kit of pigeons. But the pigeons were in no mood to fly. Let loose from a small basket and perhaps severely underfed, the pigeons limped in front of the guests. One of them even landed on the head of a photographer, much to the embarrassment of the organisers. The uninspired performance of the pigeons later rubbed off on the Bangladesh team too.

## Tottenham set Chelsea date

AFP, Sheffield

Two moments of magic from Christian Eriksen helped Tottenham Hotspur reach the final of the League Cup with a 3-2 aggregate victory over resilient League One club Sheffield United at Bramall Lane.

Dane Eriksen's sublime first-half free-kick put Mauricio Pochettino's team 1-0 up on the night and they looked to be in cruise control before two goals in as many minutes from 18-year-old substitute Che Adams levelled the tie overall.

But a calm finish from Eriksen with three minutes left meant the Premier League side prevailed without the need for extra-time. Their reward is a meeting with Chelsea in the final on March 1, Spurs' first Wembley final since 2009, and a chance to win the League Cup for a fifth time.

Sheffield United will point to marginal moments that mounted up and cost them the tie and, before Eriksen's opener, they might have taken the lead and levelled the aggregate score.

## De Kruij hides behind phantom nerves

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet



Bangladesh coach Lodewijk de Kruij blamed the team's mental approach and a 'silly goal' while defending his decision to keep Zahid Hasan Emily for the entirety of the match, despite the striker's costly mistakes after the 0-1 defeat against Malaysia U-23 team yesterday.

The 46-year-old coach felt that it was the initial nervousness and taking too much pressure that put them on the backfoot, but felt from tactical, technical and physical aspects, his side's performance was 'okay'.

"In the first 25 minutes, everyone was nervous as we were afraid to do our thing. The first half looked like the game against Nepal (0-1 defeat in

Sylhet in August, 2014) when we came out nervous. Positive mentality is what we were lacking," said the Dutchman at the post-match press conference, not explaining where the pressure came from.

Bangladesh survived three attempts from Malaysia in the opening half, thanks to the woodwork, as the Malaysian players tried to beat onrushing Liton with long-range attempts. Liton ultimately conceded the decisive goal in the 53rd minute when he failed to stop Muhammed Syazwan's shot from outside the box. While not explicitly blaming Liton for the mistake, de Kruij felt the goal was a silly one to concede.

"It was a silly goal to concede. It was not a hard shot and it looked like falling down all the way," said de Kruij. However, the coach backed Emily's performance saying, "One should not

point finger at an individual because it's a collective effort."

The Dutchman, who had joined the team five days ahead of the match, also expressed his satisfaction over the second-half performance, adding that they would try to go all-out in the game against Sri Lanka on January 2.

De Kruij's opposite number, Muhammed Rajip, was visibly pleased with his team's performance ahead of his side's game against Sri Lanka in Sylhet tomorrow and gave most of the credit to his defenders for effectively shutting out Bangladesh in the second half, according to the game plan.

"My players played very well. They could have scored three goals. But once we got the goal, we tried to maintain the lead. I'm proud of my players the way they defended in the second half," exclaimed Rajip.



The winners pose with their trophies at the prize giving ceremony of the three-day long Shah Cement - AKS Cup Golf Tournament recently. Lieutenant General Anwar Hussain, Quarter Master General, Bangladesh Army was the chief guest of the ceremony.

## Neymar sinks Atletico

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona boss Luis Enrique said he had to substitute two-goal star Neymar to prevent the Brazilian from being injured as his side's Copa del Rey quarterfinal, second leg with Atletico Madrid turned nasty.

The Catalans went through 4-2 on aggregate after coming from behind twice to win 3-2 on the night as Atletico were reduced to nine men and were lucky not to be more harshly punished when Arda Turan was

only booked for throwing his boot at an assistant referee.

Neymar had already put Atletico's hopes of reaching the last four to the sword well before he was replaced by Pedro Rodriguez 13 minutes from time.

The Brazilian levelled with his 20th goal of the season after Fernando Torres had brought Atletico level in the tie with a first-minute opener.

Raul Garcia then briefly put Atletico back in front from the spot, but Miranda's own goal made it 2-2 before Neymar pounced again on the counter-attack three minutes before the break.

## Gulf nations want Australia out

INTERNET



On the eve of the Soccerocos battling it out in the Asian Cup final, Football Federation Australia is about to face an even bigger battle after a movement mobilised among some Gulf nations to have Australia expelled from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

Speaking to a newspaper in the United Arab Emirates, AFC president Salman Bin Ibrahim Al-Khalifa revealed he was aware that momentum for Australia's removal from the confederation continued to strengthen among Gulf nations after rumours began swirling in recent months, and that "Arabs are not the only ones" seeking Australia's removal.

The problem of Australia's membership stems from several factors, all of which have been simmering since Australia joined the confederation in 2006. The belief among the agitators is that the relationship sees Australia benefiting hugely from Asian involvement without giving much in return.

Should Australia win the Asian Cup final against South Korea at ANZ Stadium on Saturday night, it will mean they are the region's reigning champions of club and international football, as well as being past female Asian champions. Australia has also proven a dominant force at World Cup qualification time, twice qualifying for the global showpiece event - and is thus seen to be "taking away" a spot from the rest of the confederation. Middle East nations, already behind the likes of Japan and South Korea in their football development, and also concerned by the rise of China and eventually India, see their international exposure being affected by Australia's involvement.

## Costa in hot water

AFP, London



Chelsea striker Diego Costa faces a three-game suspension after being charged with violent conduct for appearing to stamp on Liverpool's Emre Can, the Football Association announced on Wednesday.

Costa seemed to deliberately stand on Can's ankle in the 12th minute of Tuesday's League Cup semifinal second leg at Stamford Bridge, which Chelsea won 1-0 to complete a 2-1 aggregate victory.

The incident was missed by the match officials and reviewed by a video panel on Wednesday.

Costa will not face a charge over a similar incident involving Martin Skrtel that occurred later in the game.

"Diego Costa has been charged by the FA for violent conduct following an on-field incident which was not seen by the match officials but caught on video," the FA said in a statement on its website.

"The charge is in relation to an incident involving the Chelsea forward and Liverpool's Emre Can which occurred in the 12th minute of the Capital One Cup semifinal second leg at Stamford Bridge last night (Tuesday, January 27 2015).

"Following a review of an incident during the game involving Costa and Liverpool's Martin Skrtel, the FA will not be taking any further action."

Costa has until 1800 GMT on Thursday to respond to the charge.

If found guilty, he will miss Chelsea's home game with Premier League title rivals Manchester City on Saturday and subsequent fixtures with Aston Villa and Everton.

Reaction to the incidents involving Costa and Can and Skrtel dominated the aftermath of Tuesday's game, which saw Branislav Ivanovic score an extra-time winner.

Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers said the Brazil-born Spain international's challenge on Can was "poor" and could have caused a "nasty" injury.

But Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho said the two incidents had been "absolutely accidental" and blamed television pundits for whipping up controversy over what had happened.

Mourinho was earlier fined £25,000 (\$38,000, 34,500 euros) by the FA after he claimed Chelsea were the victims of a media-led "campaign" over diving allegations that was putting referees under pressure.

