

Bangladesh move up 8 places

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh took a significant stride in the FIFA World Rankings to move into the 157th position following their brilliant performance in the recently concluded Bangabandhu Gold Cup on home ground.

Bangladesh, who won two matches out of four outings in the tournament, moved eight places up to hold the 157th place from their previous 165 in the FIFA Rankings revealed yesterday but they are still stuck to their previous third position among eight South Asian nations.

SOUTH ASIA RANKINGS	
Maldives	- 135 (-4)
Afghanistan	- 144 (+2)
Bangladesh	- 157 (+8)
India	- 171 (0)
Pakistan	- 171 (+17)
Sri Lanka	- 173 (-1)
Nepal	- 180 (+6)
Bhutan	- 209 (0)

Solid start for Siddikur

SPORTS REPORTER

Having shrugged off his poor performance in the Malaysian Open, country's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman bounced back strongly in the True Thailand Classic at the Black Mountain Golf Club in Thailand yesterday.

The two-time Asian tour winner played three-under-par 69 to stay at joint 20th position along with 19 other players at the close of the first round while Michael Hoey of Northern Ireland led the leaderboard having played eight-under-par 64.

There players – Hung Chien-Yao of Taiwan, David Lipsky of the United States and Carlos Pigeon of Spain – were jointly in the second position after playing seven-under-par 65.

Siddikur, who failed to make the cut in the Malaysian Open, had a good start to get the first birdie on the second hole before playing a bogey in the 13th hole.

The 31-year-old golfer then played three successive birdies in the 15th, 16th and 17th to end the first day on high.

Colombians slam van Gaal

AFP, Bogota

Manchester United manager Louis van Gaal has sparked a frenzied reaction by Colombians for his treatment of beloved native son Radamel Falcao, earning the Dutch coach the nickname "Van Maal" (Mr Evil).

Falcao has seen little playing time since joining United last August in a loan deal worth £16 million (\$24 million, 21 million euros).

Van Gaal said last month the striker -- who had missed the World Cup finals as he recovered from a serious knee injury suffered while playing for Monaco last season -- "has to prove himself" regardless of his price tag.

The snub has outraged "The Tiger's" Colombian fans, with fellow footballers, sports journalists and even celebrities taking to social media to slam Van Gaal.

Retired Colombian star Faustino "Tino" Asprilla accused the Red Devils manager of bias against South American players.

"Riquelme, Rivaldo and now @FALCAO. #VanMaal definitely has something against South Americans.



BFF officials and club representatives pose with team placards at the end of the Federation Cup draw ceremony at the BFF Headquarters yesterday.

Federation Cup draw held

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Sheikh Jamal DC will face Feni Soccer Club in one of two opening day's matches of the Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium as the draw ceremony of the 12-team season's curtain-raising tournament was held at the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) Bhaban yesterday.

Sheikh Jamal and Feni play the second match at 6:15pm after the tournament gets underway with the match between Mohammedan and Rahmatganj MFS at 4:00pm on Monday.

Participating 12 teams including one outfit from Bangladesh Championship League were split into four groups and will be playing the round-robin league matches with the top two teams advancing to the quarterfinals.

As the groupings of the tournament were decided on the basis of the standings of the last Bangladesh Premier League, there is hardly any chance for the giants to be eliminated from the group stage.

Popular club Abahani will begin their Federation Cup campaign against Farashganj SC the next day.

Though popular Abahani and Mohammedan shared 18 titles among them out of 25 tournaments, neither Abahani nor Mohammedan could reach the final in last three seasons as new powerhouses Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel shared last three trophies.

The game's governing body will bear all expenses of the 26th edition of the Federation Cup as they could not approach the sponsors due to their engagement in the just-concluded Bangabandhu Gold Cup, informed BFF vice-president Abdus Salaam Murshey at the press conference yesterday.

GROUPS

Group A: Sheikh Jamal DC, Team BJMC and Feni Soccer Club
Group B: Muktijoddha Sangsad, Sheikh Russel KC and Uttar Baridhara Club
Group C: Abahani, Chittagong Abahani and Farashganj SC
Group D: Mohammedan SC, Brothers Union and Rahmatganj MFS

Mourinho threatens walk-out

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho threatened to walk out of his media conference as he

bristled at questions about a melee involving Branislav Ivanovic in the 1-0 win over Everton.

Mourinho, who also broke off a BBC interview when asked about the incident, refused to give his view when questioned in the post-match press conference.

Defender Ivanovic appeared to head-butt Everton's James McCarthy in a scuffle before Willian's 89th-minute winner preserved Chelsea's three-point Premier League lead.

"I am concerned with my reaction because one more question and I leave," Mourinho said, seemingly

referencing his recent £25,000 (\$38,000, 34,500 euros) FA fine for bringing the game into dispute over the conspiracy claims.

Retrospective action by the Football Association is now a possibility, with Everton manager Roberto Martinez, who lost Gareth Barry to a late red card, strongly critical of the Serbian defender.

Chelsea have already fallen foul of the video replay panel, with striker Diego Costa missing Wednesday's game due to his three-game suspension for stamping on Liverpool's Emre Can in last month's League Cup semifinal.

The Ivanovic incident came directly after referee Jonathan Moss had shown a second yellow card to Barry for a foul on Willian.

Martinez was adamant the official had missed a more serious

offence as players from both sides came together angrily in the aftermath of Barry's challenge.

"From that moment the red card gives an unfair momentum to the home side and allows them to score a goal. And then, if you look at the images, Ivanovic's behaviour is wrong. That shouldn't be allowed," Martinez said.

He added: "First of all he grabs James McCarthy around his neck in a very forceful manner. Then he put his head against him. James McCarthy never reacted one single bit and if you want to be fair with the laws, that's a red card."

"It is even more hurtful because Ivanovic was involved in the goal and there was a deflection on the way in and it went through Darren Gibson's legs."

Despite the incident, it was a vital

win for Chelsea after second-placed Manchester City's 4-1 victory at Stoke, and kept Mourinho on course for a third Premier League crown with the club.

"I don't remember a team becoming champions without a couple of victories in the last minute," he said. "In my case, for sure. Every time I won a league title I had a couple of matches where we won in the last minute."

"This was the first time this season. It was a very difficult match and a difficult Everton. When I say that, it is a compliment. They defended very well, so I am happy with the points."

Mourinho's decision to drop goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and reinstate Petr Cech also paid off as the veteran pulled off two high-quality saves to deny Romelu Lukaku.

'MU must improve'

AFP, Manchester



Manchester United defender Chris Smalling admitted his team's first-half performance had been unacceptable after they overcame Burnley 3-1 to reclaim third place in the Premier League.

The centre-back scored two goals, the first within 22 seconds of coming on as a fifth-minute substitute, but Louis van Gaal's side were outplayed for most of Wednesday's first half by their relegation-threatened visitors.

"The first half, we have to look at ourselves and make sure it never happens again," said Smalling.

"Obviously, it's a good run we're on at the moment, but the manager just said in there that the first half was unacceptable and I think all the players know that."

"If we can keep winning games playing that badly, then it shows that when we do play well it will all click and there will be much better performances at Old Trafford, that's for sure."

"It wasn't a 3-1 scoreline game, especially the first half. We let ourselves down from one to 11. We've got to play much better."

United have now lost just once in 18 games,

RESULTS

Chelsea 1 (Willian 89) **Everton 0**
Crystal Palace 1 (Campbell 71) Newcastle 1 (Cisse 42)
Manchester United 3 (Smalling 6, 45, Van Persie 82-pen)
Burnley 1 (Ings 12)

Southampton 0 West Ham 0

Stoke 1 (Crouch 38) **Manchester City 4** (Aguero 33, 70-pen, Milner 55, Nasri 76)

West Brom 2 (Ideye 60, Berahino 74) Swansea 0

despite disquiet among fans about their style of play and the much-publicised allegation that they adopted a 'long-ball' approach in Sunday's 1-1 draw at West Ham United.

But they required two set-piece goals from Smalling, either side of a Danny Ings equaliser, and a late Robin van Persie penalty to see off Sean Dyche's battling side.

"It was pretty unreal," said Smalling of his first ever two-goal performance.

"I was quite fortunate. When you come on as a defender, it's never easy. But if you have a corner, it puts you on the front foot straight away and I was lucky I got free."

Although Van Gaal was also critical of his side's first-half display, he was defensive in response to claims from journalists that his players are generally not performing well.

Advantage Barca

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona took a huge step towards a fifth Copa del Rey final in seven years with a 3-1 win over Villarreal in the first leg of their semifinal on Wednesday.

Lionel Messi opened the scoring from Luis Suarez's cutback four minutes before the break, but Villarreal levelled shortly after half-time when Marc-Andre Ter Stegen failed to keep out Manu Trigueros's drive.

However, Barca were back in front within a minute through Andres Iniesta and Gerard Pique's header 26 minutes from time made it 3-1.

The Catalans could have had an even healthier advantage to take into the second leg on March 4, but Neymar had his penalty saved by Sergio Asenjo.

"I think it was a very good performance on our part against an opponent that was more defensive than we expected, but against a very good team," said Barca boss Luis Enrique.

"It could have been even better with the penalty we missed, but it is a good result and deserved based on what we saw on the pitch."

RESULTS

Barcelona 3 (Messi 41, Iniesta 49, Pique 64) **Villarreal 1** (Trigueros 48)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Aduriz 11) Espanyol 1 (Victor Sanchez 35)

Villa sack Lambert

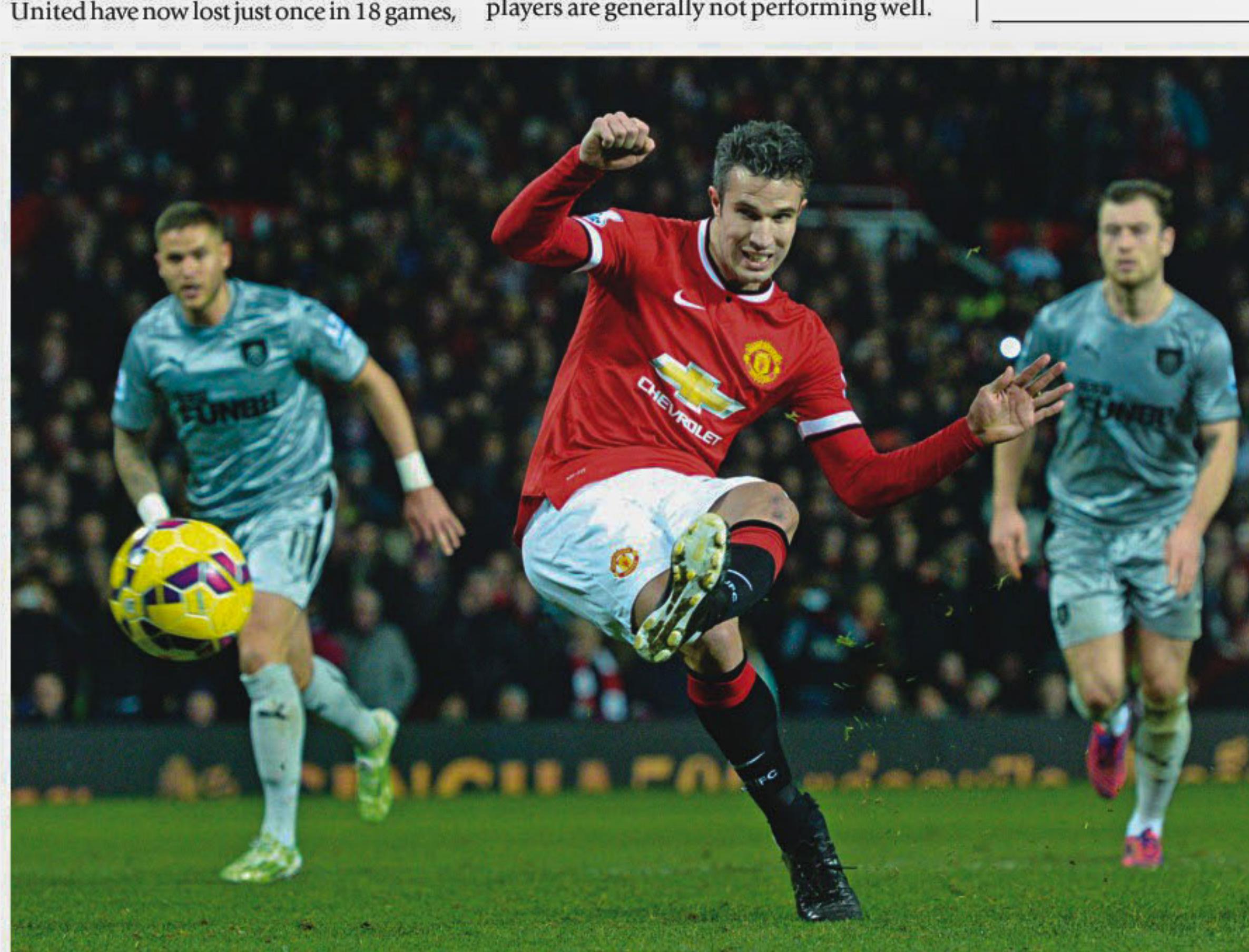
AFP, London

Paul Lambert has been sacked as manager of Aston Villa after a run of 10 winless games took them into the Premier League relegation zone, the club announced on Wednesday.

"Aston Villa Football Club has parted company with manager Paul Lambert," Villa announced on their website.

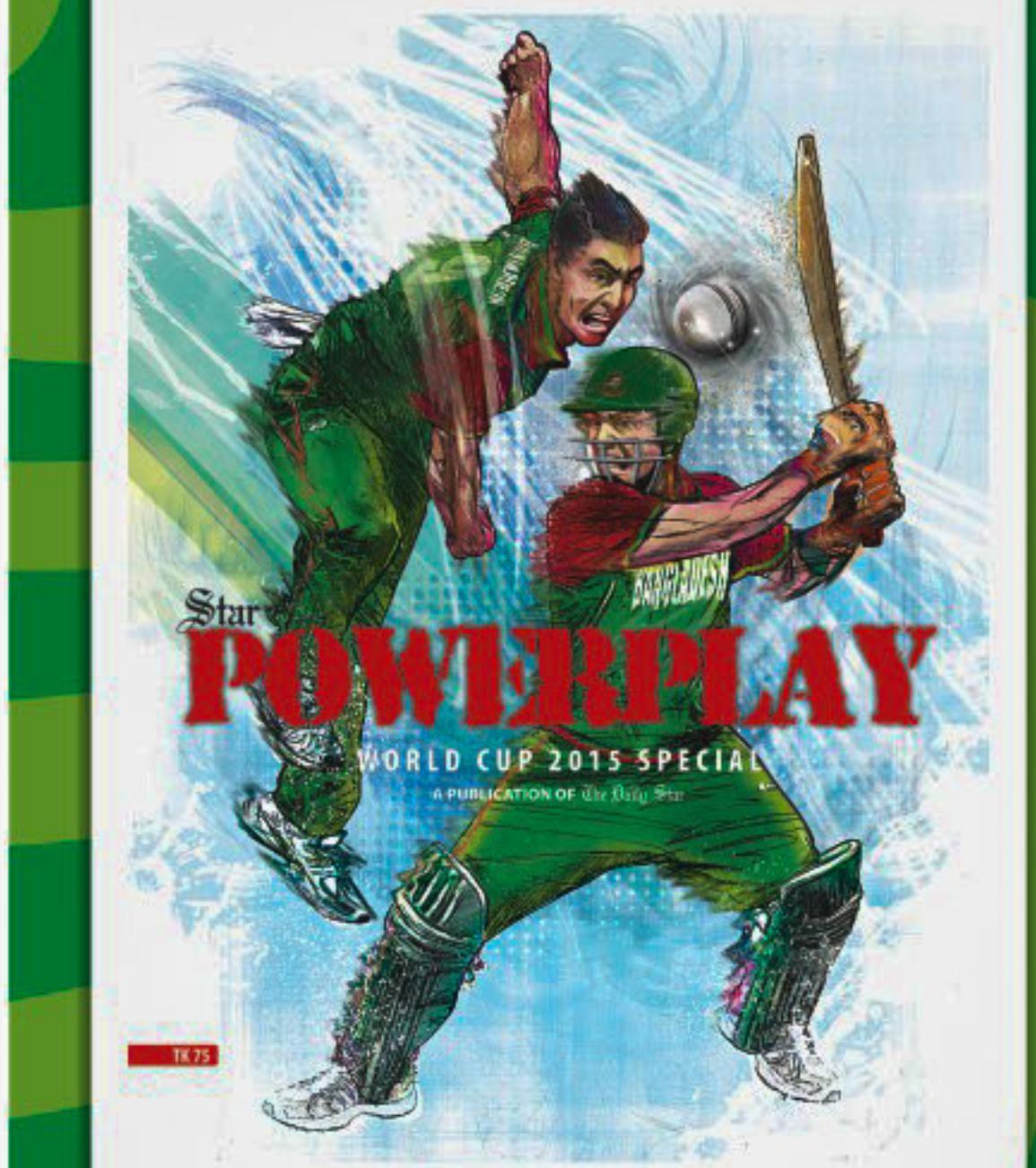
"First-team coach Scott Marshall and goalkeeping coach Andy Marshall will continue to prepare the squad for Sunday's FA Cup tie with Leicester City at Villa Park."

Lambert, 45, took over at Villa Park in 2012 and led the Midlands club to 15th-place finishes in his first two seasons, but the former Scotland midfielder had come under pressure from fans following a poor run of recent form.



Manchester United striker Robin van Persie scores the third goal from a penalty during their Premier League encounter against Burnley at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

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