

KEANE IN A ROAD-RAGE

Former Manchester United captain Roy Keane has denied committing a public order offence in an alleged road-rage incident with a taxi driver. Keane, 43, is said to have behaved aggressively towards driver Fateh Kerar, 44, near traffic lights in Altrincham, Greater Manchester on January 30. He did not attend a brief hearing at Trafford Magistrates' Court in Manchester on Wednesday but a not guilty plea was entered on his behalf by his lawyer. Keane will face trial at Manchester Magistrates' Court on June 19.



— AFP

Russian austerity hits WC

AP, Moscow

Russia's budget for the 2018 World Cup is being cut by 4 per cent by scrapping luxury hotels that might otherwise lie empty after the tournament. The move would help reduce the total cost from 664 billion rubles (\$12 billion) to 637.6 billion, sports minister Vitaly Mutko told Russian news agency Tass on Tuesday.

"We don't want elite hotels built to FIFA's highest requirements to end up out of demand after the World Cup," he said, adding that Russia would be careful to keep to FIFA requirements requiring luxury hotels for teams and officials.

Mutko said 25 hotels would be cut from the organisers' program across the 11 host cities. Russian state revenues have come under pressure in recent months from the low price of oil, a key revenue generator for the government.

Hingis set for Fed Cup return

AFP, Paris

Swiss tennis legend Martina Hingis is set to return to Fed Cup duty following a 17-year absence after being called up on Tuesday by captain Heinz Guntard.

Hingis, 34, will compete in the World Group play-offs against Poland at Zielona Gora on April 18-19.

The former world number one has not played Fed Cup since the 1998 final which Switzerland lost to Spain in Geneva.

Hingis must play the women's team competition if she wants to compete in the 2016 Olympic Games.



Rahmatganj players go ecstatic after holding four-time champions Abahani to a 2-2 draw in their first match of the Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Abahani held, Mukhtijoddha win

SPORTS REPORTER



Title contenders Abahani and Mukhtijoddha Sangsad began their Bangladesh Premier League

campaign in contrasting fashion at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. The four-time champions Abahani twice surrendered their lead to play out a 2-2 draw against promoted Rahmatganj MFS while Mukhtijoddha came out with a 2-1 win against Feni Soccer Club.

Before the start of the eighth edition of top-tier professional football league, Abahani's Austrian coach George Kottan had expressed his worries over the finishing prowess of his strikers. But it was rather the defenders who ruined the forwards' achievement start despite displaying beautiful possession-based football

ABAHANI 2 - 2 RAHMATGANJ
MUKHTIJODDHA 2 - 1 FENI SOCCER

throughout the game.

Abahani gained the upper hand right from the word go with crisp passing and attacks from both flanks but they had to wait for nearly an hour to break the deadlock as Rahmatganj coach Kamal Babu's defensive tactics kept the Sky Blues at bay.

After a barren first half, Abahani took a deserved lead in the 57th minute through Szabolcs Csorba. The Hungarian forward placed the ball at the back of the net after being set up inside the box on the end of a darting run by Nasirul Islam. However Abahani's lead lasted only a minute as Rahmatganj's Nigerian forward Gideon Solomon latched on to a through pass from Sumon Dey and drove

home with a powerful shot.

With the equaliser, Rahmatganj started to come out of their defensive shell and Abahani struck again to restore the lead in the 72nd minute, thanks to an accurate header from Hungarian midfielder Gabor Demjen off a Nasirul Islam cross.

When it seemed Abahani were just a couple of minutes away from victory and strengthened the backline sending on defender Nahidul Islam in place of substitute winger Shakil Ahmed, Rahmatganj surprisingly found the equaliser in the first minute of stoppage time when substitute Mannaf Rabby toe-poked one from inside the box. The goal was all but the last action of the match as the promoted side held their illustri-

ous opponents for the first time since the second edition of the league in 2008.

Under the floodlight, Federation Cup runners-up Mukhtijoddha dominated proceedings and went ahead in the 12th minute with an eye-catching left-footed drive from former national striker Enamul Haque. The All Reds went for the break with a 2-0 lead, thanks to an own goal by Feni Soccer defender Manjur Rahman Manik on the stroke of half-time.

The scenario changed after the break as Feni gave Mukhtijoddha a run for their money, which ultimately forced them to concede an own goal just four minutes into the second half.

Gambian Momdou Lamin Jatta whipped in a cross from the right which Mohammad Biplob turned into his own while trying to clear the ball. Feni Soccer kept on pressing hard for the equaliser but Mukhtijoddha held on to the slender lead.

COPPA ITALIA Juventus in final

AFP, Rome



Juventus thrashed Fiorentina 3-0 on Tuesday to overturn a 2-1 semifinal, first leg deficit and reach the Italian Cup final.

Despite missing star players Carlos Tevez and Paul Pogba, Juve crushed La Viola in the second leg in Florence through goals from Alessandro Matri, Roberto Pereyra and Leonardo Bonucci.

They will face either holders Napoli or Lazio in the final. Those sides are level at 1-1 from the first leg in Rome and meet in Naples on Wednesday.

Juve's deserved victory provided a welcome boost ahead of their Champions League quarterfinal, first leg against Monaco next week.

They simply proved too strong, physically, mentally and technically for Fiorentina.

And with a 14-point lead over second-placed Roma in Serie A, the reigning champions remain on course for a treble, last

achieved by Jose Mourinho's Inter Milan in 2010.

Last year, Juve knocked Fiorentina out of the Europa League, winning 1-0 away following a home draw, and once again they proved ruthless on their travels.

Tevez's replacement Matri opened the scoring on 21 minutes after mopping up the loose ball when Pereyra's shot was blocked.

Pereyra was then on hand to knock home the rebound after goalkeeper Neto saved from Alvaro Morata just before half-time.

Due to the away goal rule, Juve went into the game knowing they had to score at least twice to avoid going out but with 45 minutes to play, they were a goal to the good on aggregate.

Bonucci's volley from a corner just before the hour mark killed off the match, with Fiorentina now needing to score three goals to progress as Juve had the away goals advantage at that juncture.

The only black mark for Massimiliano Allegri's men was a red card to Morata three minutes from time for a tackle from behind on Alessandro Diamanti.

Danish FA to probe Agger

REUTERS, Copenhagen

Denmark captain and Brondby defender Daniel Agger is to be investigated by the country's FA after allegedly elbowing FC Copenhagen's Mattias Jorgensen in a hotly-contested derby on Monday.

The incident in the goalless draw was not seen by match officials.

"The disciplinary authorities have asked Brondby for an explanation of the episode, before making a decision if the offense documented by television images is punishable or not," the DBU said in a statement.

Mats mulls future

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund are facing the prospect of losing a star player for the third year running with Germany defender Mats Hummels waxing lyrical about a possible transfer abroad.

Barcelona, Chelsea and Manchester United are reported to be interested in signing the 26-year-old, who has a market-value of around 35 million euros (£25.5m, US\$37.9m), on the back of outstanding performances at last year's World Cup.

The centre-back's future is a hot topic in the German media, especially after he reportedly told Bild: "It's Man Utd or no-one" should he leave Dortmund.

"You know what I am like: I just say what is going around in my head," he told Sky Sports after Dortmund's 1-0 home defeat to Bayern on Saturday.



Dan Cake were declared as the title sponsors for the upcoming Pakistan series at Mirpur yesterday. Managing director of Axiom Technologies Ltd Rizwan Bin Farouq (2nd from R) and Dhaka Ice Cream Industries Ltd director Khandker Md Touhuzziyaman (R) are seen unveiling the logo of the series.

PHOTO: CBC

Benteke on the treble

AFP, Birmingham



Christian Benteke scored a potentially priceless hat-trick as Aston Villa avoided slipping into the Premier League relegation zone by drawing 3-3 at home to Queens Park Rangers on Tuesday.

After Matt Phillips put QPR ahead, a Benteke brace gave Villa control, only for second-half goals from Clint Hill and Charlie Austin to leave QPR on the brink of a win that would have taken them out of the bottom three at their opponents' expense.

But Benteke completed his treble with an inch-perfect 83rd-minute free-kick to take the Belgian striker's tally to seven goals in five games and leave Tim Sherwood's side three points above the bottom three.

"Christian Benteke was very good.

The second goal especially was excellent," said Villa manager Sherwood.

Chris Ramsey's QPR moved above Burnley on goal difference, but they are now two points from safety having played a game more than fourth-bottom Hull City.

Villa started brightly at Villa Park, but it was QPR who took a seventh-minute lead when Bobby Zamora's feathered cross was headed in by Phillips.

However, Villa quickly forced the visitors back and drew level just three minutes later when Benteke was allowed to drift infield from the left and curled a shot past QPR goalkeeper Rob Green.

Green saved twice from 19-year-old midfielder Jack Grealish, making his first league start for Villa, and Sandro blocked from Ron Vlaar before Benteke put the home side ahead in the 33rd minute.

Gabriel Agbonlahor beat Sandro to the ball and freed Benteke, who eluded Hill and scored with his right foot.

Agbonlahor headed just wide from Leandro Bacuna's cross shortly before half-time and with Villa continuing to dominate early in the second half, Ramsey took action by introducing Karl Henry and Armand Traore.

The changes had an immediate effect as within three minutes the visitors were level, with 36-year-old Hill claiming his first Premier League goal by heading in Phillips's corner.

Twelve minutes from time, Phillips turned creator again, wriggling past Kieran Richardson and crossing for Austin to slam home his 17th goal of the league campaign.

But Benteke had the final say by bending a free-kick over the QPR wall and in off the post past the despairing dive of Green.



Juventus striker Alessandro Matri celebrates his opening goal against Fiorentina during their Italian Cup semifinal at the Artemio Franchi Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP