

Port city fans get money's worth

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chittagong

It's amazing! It's unbelievable! After a long time, the MA Aziz Stadium in the port city of Chittagong was filled to capacity at the prospect of a tantalising final yesterday.

The continuous rain since morning was threatening to spoil the match, but it stopped in the afternoon and then the groundsmen got to work. As various parts of the pitch were submerged, they were seen bailing out the water with sponges and locally made equipment.

As the rain stopped, spectators in their thousands rushed to the stadium. Locals said the stadium saw the highest number of spectators in 18 years.

However, the trials and tribulations of the hectic day for the groundsmen and the fans did not go in vain as Chittagong Abahani thumped the visitors 3-0.

Despite the 25,000 capacity, tens of thousands failed to make their way inside the stadium to watch the dream football match, where Chittagong Abahani battled with East Bengal for the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup trophy.

Fans began pouring to the stadium hours before the match kicked-off. They were in a

festive mood and while some brought musical equipment, others were seen with painted faces.

There was a mad rush in front of the gates. The queues seemed to go on for kilometres. Even after the match began, there were spectators queued up and waiting to enter.

Raihan Uddin, a businessman, told The Daily Star that he regularly came to games at the stadium, but he never before saw the number of spectators that he did yesterday.

Several thousand spectators had to eventually settle for waiting outside as there was no space for them inside.

A good number of female spectators were also seen in the stadium. One of them, Sanjida Akter, came with her husband Taslim Uddin.

"I have never enjoyed a football match from the stadium, so I asked my husband to bring me as we [the hosts] will fight for the championship," she said.

Sanjida's husband Taslim said they wished that Chittagong Abahani would win. However, he added, "I wouldn't mind if they lost either. I am satisfied that the home team could reach the final and I want to thank all the players and coaching staff for giving us the opportunity to watch a dream match."



The port city crowd turned up in numbers and was in full voice as hosts Chittagong Abahani lifted the title of the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup after a 3-1 victory over East Bengal at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

Imran, Wood to miss 3rd Test

AFP, Sharjah

Pakistan fast bowler Imran Khan has suffered a hand injury and will be assessed ahead of the third and final Test, while England are to rest paceman Mark Wood for the Test in Sharjah starting from Sunday as he recovers from an injured ankle.

Imran suffered the injury in fielding practice, Pakistan's team manager said.

The 28-year-old injured bowler's hand while catching a ball in training at the Sharjah stadium.

Team manager Intikhab Alam said Khan was rushed to hospital for treatment.

Khan has taken six wickets in the two Test matches, four in Dubai where Pakistan won by 178 runs.

For England, the news is worse, as Wood was their best paceman in the 178-run loss against Pakistan in the second Test in Dubai, claiming five wickets in the match.

The England and Wales Cricket Board confirmed on Friday that he would miss the final Test, saying that he needed to rest.

Messi won't be risked for Clasico

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona boss Luis Enrique has said he won't put Lionel Messi's health or Barca's season at risk by rushing the Argentine back for his side's clash against Real Madrid on November 21.

Messi has been sidelined for a month by a knee ligament injury that was originally estimated would keep him out for six to eight weeks.

However, the four-time World Player of the Year cast doubt on his presence for the trip to the Bernabeu last week by claiming he would only return when he feels 100 percent fit.

Messi has been left out by former Barca boss Gerardo Martino for Argentina's World Cup qualifiers against Brazil and Colombia on November 13 and 17 respectively.

And Enrique insisted that with two thirds of the season still to play after El Clasico, it would be reckless to risk Messi suffering another serious injury.

"Within the team the only thing we are contemplating is that Leo Messi recovers 100 percent. That is the only thing that worries us," Enrique said on Friday.

"Whether that is for one particular date or another is indifferent. There is so much of the season to go that the most important thing is that he fully recovers."

Enrique was handed an injury boost on Friday, though, as midfielders Andres Iniesta and Sergi Roberto have both been passed fit to face Getafe on Sunday.

Iniesta has been sidelined for a month since pulling up with a hamstring injury in a 2-1 win over Bayern Leverkusen, whilst the versatile Roberto returns after just 10 days out due to a groin strain.

Their return comes at the perfect time for the European champions with Enrique's midfield options reduced to the bare bones by Rafinha's long-term knee injury and Javier Mascherano's suspension for Barca's next two league games.

Old foes face off again

AFP, London

Facing a crunch match against Liverpool on Saturday, embattled Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho must confront an adversary who condemned him to one of the most painful defeats of his career.

Jürgen Klopp, Liverpool's new manager, was in charge of the Borussia Dortmund side who ousted Real Madrid in the 2012-13 Champions League semifinals, dashing Mourinho's dream of bringing the European Cup back to the Bernabeu in what he knew would be his final season at the club.

The pair resume hostilities with Mourinho reported to be facing the sack if results do not improve after the defending champions slumped to 15th place in the Premier League and were knocked out of the League Cup by Stoke City, but he has drawn hope from their recent upturn in performances.

Asked how hard it would be to lift his players after they relinquished their League Cup crown at Stoke, Mourinho said: "It's difficult. But it's more difficult when you play very badly and lose, than playing well and losing."

"How can (Eden) Hazard or Oscar or (John) Mikel (Obi) or John Terry, to say some names -- I could say everyone -- how can they go home with a lack of confidence? They played well. They didn't make many mistakes."

Mourinho is expected to be in the dug-out despite having been hit with a Football Association misconduct charge after being sent to the stands during last weekend's 2-1 loss at West Ham United.

But the bad news continues to pile up for the 52-year-old.

Young Brazilian forward Lucas Piazon, on loan at Reading, is the subject of an arrest warrant over an alleged sexual assault in Canada, while former team doctor Eva Carneiro is believed to have begun legal proceedings against the club after being

sidelined by Mourinho earlier in the season.

Reports differ as to the likely consequences of another defeat for Mourinho, but there is general consensus that his future at Stamford Bridge is on the line.

The dismissal of Klopp's predecessor Brendan Rodgers was a stark reminder of the cost of failure in the English top flight and while the German drew his first three games, his side will travel to London on the back of a 1-0 League Cup win over Bournemouth.

With his back to the wall, Mourinho needs his senior players to stand up and be counted, but he may be without Diego Costa after the striker went off against Stoke with a badly bruised rib.

Should Costa not be passed fit, Loic Remy is in line to deputise and although Chelsea are nine points adrift of the top four, the French striker remains confident of Champions League qualification.

"Saturday will be a big game, but we can still be in the top four of the league if we win games," Remy said.

"When you know the quality of the group and the fact we were champions last season, which was not by chance, the quality is still here."

Klopp has also been inconvenienced by injury, with Kolo Toure, forced off against Bournemouth, the latest casualty, while Daniel Sturridge is taking time to recover from a knock sustained in training.



JOSE MOURINHO JURGEN KLOPP

FIXTURES	
Saturday (1500GMT unless stated)	Chelsea v Liverpool (1245GMT), Crystal Palace v Manchester Utd, Manchester City v Norwich, Newcastle v Stoke, Swansea v Arsenal, Watford v West Ham, West Brom v Leicester
Sunday	Everton v Sunderland (1330GMT), Southampton v Bournemouth (1600GMT)
Monday	Tottenham v Aston Villa (2000GMT)

Bilal's action cleared

AFP, Dubai

Pakistani newcomer Bilal Asif's bowling action has been cleared after it was found to be within the legal limits, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Friday.

The bowling action of the 30-year-old spinner was reported as suspect during the third one-day international against Zimbabwe at Harare on October 3.

He underwent a biomechanical test of his action in Chennai, India on October 19.

"At the assessment (in Chennai), it was revealed that the amount of elbow extension in all of Asif's deliveries was well within the 15-degree level of tolerance permitted under the ICC regulations," said an ICC release.

The news comes as a relief for the newcomer as his career was in danger of being derailed by questions over his action.

Asif only burst onto the international scene in June this year when he was selected in Pakistan's Twenty20 squad for the tour of Sri Lanka.

Las Palmas dread Real

AFP, Madrid

Las Palmas make their first visit to the Santiago Bernabeu for 13 years on Saturday hoping to avoid the same punishment they received in a 7-0 thrashing on their last trip to the capital.

The Canary Islanders have already changed their coach just nine games into their return to the top flight as Paco Herrera was sacked despite guiding them to promotion.

Quique Setien got off to a promising start with a 0-0 draw at home to Villarreal last weekend, which at least moved Las Palmas off the bottom on goal difference, but is aware of the daunting task that faces his side at the Bernabeu.

"Real Madrid are a team that doesn't need to play well to win," he said on Thursday.

"They have the players to resolve a game in any moment. It will be a difficult game, but during this season we have seen other teams cause them problems and have chances to take something from the game."

Rafael Benitez remains unbeaten as Madrid boss 12 games into his tenure and should have the luxury of welcoming back a host of injured stars who have been absent in recent weeks.

James Rodriguez, Karim Benzema and Pepe could all feature having returned to training this week, but Gareth Bale misses out once more due to a calf problem.

With Madrid and Barcelona tied on 21 points at the top of the table, a Real victory can take them clear for a few hours at least

FIXTURES	
Saturday	Real Madrid v Las Palmas (1500), Villarreal v Sevilla (1715), Valencia v Levante (1715), Getafe v Barcelona (1930), Real Sociedad v Celta Vigo (2105)
Sunday	Eibar v Rayo Vallecano (1100), Espanyol v Granada (1500), Sporting Gijon v Malaga (1715), Real Betis v Athletic Bilbao (1930)

before Barca face Getafe later on Saturday.

The Catalans only managed a 0-0 draw at the Alfonso Perez Coliseum last season and are again debilitated by injuries and suspensions.

Javier Mascherano joins injured Argentine international teammate Lionel Messi on the sidelines due to a two-game ban for being sent-off against Eibar last weekend.

Brazilian duo Rafinha and Douglas are long-term injury absentees, while midfielders Andres Iniesta and Sergi Roberto face a race against time to be fit.

"Statistically, I think Barcelona have never been comfortable coming to the Coliseum," Getafe midfielder Pedro Leon told the club's website.

"There have been all sorts of results and we hope that on Saturday we can make it as difficult for them as possible and get a positive result."

Atletico Madrid have the chance to usurp the big two and go top for just short of 24 hours when they travel to Deportivo La Coruna on Friday night.

Los Rojiblancos produced their best performance of the season in beating Valencia 2-1 last time out.

Blatter reiterates meddling claim

AFP, Paris

Suspended FIFA president Sepp Blatter has repeated claims that government interference from then French president Nicolas Sarkozy resulted in Qatar rather than the United States being awarded the right to host the 2022 World Cup.

Speaking to Friday's edition of Britain's Financial Times, Blatter repeated the claims he made on Wednesday to Russian news agency TASS that FIFA's executive committee had originally agreed to award the 2018 tournament to Russia and the next World Cup to the United States.

Blatter told the FT that there had been a "gentleman's agreement" that the two World Cups in question would go to the "two superpowers."

"It was behind the scenes. It was diplomatically arranged to go there," said Blatter, who has found himself at the centre of a FIFA corruption storm ever since being re-elected to a fifth term in May.

However, as he stated on Wednesday, Blatter, who is set to stand down after February's FIFA presidential election, said Sarkozy's influence moved the goalposts.

"Just one week before the election I got a telephone call from Platini and he said, 'I am no longer in your picture because I have been told by the head of state that we should consider ... the situation of France'. And he told me that this will affect more than one vote because he had a group of voters."

Platini, the suspended UEFA chief, admitted to voting for Qatar at the election in December 2010 when the World Cups were awarded to Russia and the tiny desert kingdom, but denied doing so on the orders of Sarkozy, who was French president from 2007-2012, despite the latter having not long beforehand invited him to dinner with the future Qatari emir.

Eva tables case against Chelsea

AFP, London

Lawyers for former Chelsea team doctor Eva Carneiro have served notice on the club that she intends to seek a claim for constructive dismissal, according to media reports on Thursday.

Several British media outlets said that legal papers were served on the London club this week, which will lead to an employment tribunal unless an out-of-court settlement can be reached.

British employment tribunals are held in public, which could have the potential to embarrass Chelsea.

Carneiro left Chelsea after being removed from first-team duties by manager Jose Mourinho.

To date Chelsea have repeatedly stated that they will not comment on internal staffing matters.

Mourinho was last month cleared by the Football Association of making discriminatory remarks to Carneiro, but she complained that she had not been asked by the FA to make a statement about what had happened.

Inter test for Roma

AFP, Milan

Roma seek to consolidate their summit spot at Inter Milan on Saturday as sleeping Serie A giants Juventus need a much needed pick-me-up in their derby clash with Torino.

Roma arrive at the San Siro on a six-match winning streak after Wednesday's Maicon-inspired 3-1 success over Udinese.

That lifted them back into the Serie A lead, two points clear of Napoli, Fiorentina and Inter, who saw off Bologna 24 hours earlier.

Roberto Mancini's Inter snapped a four-game winless run in midweek to put them in an improved frame of mind for their top-of-the-table clash.

Whatever the outcome Inter's Slovenia keeper Samir Handanovic can expect to put in a busier shift on Saturday than the one against Bologna.

"The team is flying right now. We've got another match coming up and we need to recover before then, plain and simple. Roma will be a big test in our home stadium," he said.

While Roma and Inter's stars are in the ascendancy, Juve's appears on the wane -- Wednesday's 1-0 loss at Sampdoria leaving the defending champions in 12th position.

Coach Massimiliano Allegri did not mince his words about what he wanted from his under-achieving titleholders.

"There's absolutely no excuse for it, we must grow quickly and take responsibility. We are Juventus and our approach needs to be different."



FIXTURES	
Saturday	Juventus v Torino (1700), Inter Milan v Roma (1945)
Sunday	Fiorentina v Frosinone (1130), Bologna v Atalanta (1400), Carpi v Verona (1400), Genoa v Napoli (1400), Udinese v Sassuolo (1400), Lazio v AC Milan (1945)
Monday	Chievo v Sampdoria (1800), Palermo v Empoli (2000)