

## DIEGO SENDS ROSES TO CRISTINA

Argentine football legend Diego Maradona sent outgoing President Cristina Kirchner a bouquet of four dozen white roses to thank the leftist leader for her eight years in office, she said Tuesday. "Thank you for everything!" said a card signed by Maradona in a picture Kirchner posted on Twitter alongside a photo of the enormous bouquet. "Here are the lovely roses I received yesterday. Thank you for all your affection," Kirchner wrote. Maradona, considered one of the greatest players of all time, was close to Kirchner as well as her late husband and prede-



## BANGLADESH OPEN INT'L BADMINTON

# Elina, Dulali redeem hosts

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's women shuttlers have saved some blushes of the organisers a day after the male shuttlers flopped in the Yonex-Sunrise Bangladesh Open Badminton Challenge at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium.

National champions Elina Sultana beat Amita Giri of Nepal in straight sets (21-14, 21-4) yesterday to move into the second round of women's singles. Dulali Halder, too, advanced after she beat Lalita Dahiya of India in straight sets (23-21, 23-21).

Elina, who won her second national title beating Shapla Aktar in November last year, said she was eyeing the semifinals despite the fact that there are much better players from India and Malaysia taking part in this event.

"Due to the South Asian Games camp, which has been going on for the last three months, we didn't have to take any extra training. However, there is no alternative to match practice which we didn't have since the national event last year," said Elina, who is

attending the SA Games camp from home.

"It won't be easy to reach the semifinals, but I would try my best to win the next three matches so that I can reach the last four," added Elina, who will take on Russia's Ksenia Polikarpova in the second round today. Dulali, meanwhile, will be up against the top seed, USA's Iris Wang today.

Two other Bangladeshi shuttlers -- Rehana Parvin and Brishti Khatun -- however surrendered meekly against their respective opponents in the first round matches.

Rehana, though, made up for the singles defeat by pairing up with Lal Chand and beating Nepal's Bishnu Kanwal and Amita Giri pair over three sets (21-15, 18-21, 22-20) in the first round of the mixed doubles. Another Bangladeshi pair to advance to the next round was the Shapla and Ahsan Habib Parash -- both former national No. 1s -- as they beat Nepal's Sajan Tamrakan and Sichhya Shreshtha pair in straight sets (21-9, 21-12).

Five Bangladeshi male shuttlers, including two who got walkovers in the first round on Tuesday, were eliminated from the singles events yesterday.



Rehana Parvin shapes up for a return as Lal Chand looks on during their first round mixed doubles match against a Nepalese pair on the second day of the Yonex-Sunrise Bangladesh Open Badminton Challenge at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium. PHOTO: STAR

## Atletico kids fight back

AFP, Barcelona

A youthful Atletico Madrid side came back from a goal down to beat third-tier Reus 2-1 on Tuesday to edge towards the last 16 of the Copa del Rey.

Lucas Hernandez's defensive error allowed Fran to fire the Catalans into a shock lead on the half hour mark.

However, 10-time winners Atletico responded immediately through Luciano Vietto's headed equaliser before Saul Niguez flicked home the winner 27 minutes from time.

The two sides meet again in the second leg on December 17.

Atletico boss Diego Simeone made seven changes to the side that beat Espanyol on Saturday to remain second in La Liga.

And that lack of continuity showed early on against a Reus side that had only been beaten once previously this season on their way to leading their regional division in the third tier.

Vietto should have opened the scoring when he fired straight at Edgar Badia with a clear sight of goal after seven minutes.

However, the opener arrived at the other end as Hernandez slipped under pressure from Fran and the playmaker confidently slotted past Miguel Angel Moya.

Vietto made amends for his earlier miss with a fine header into the bottom corner to level six minutes later.

Atletico had far more control after the break, but needed a set-piece to break Reus down as Saul's clever flicked header from Koke's

## De Bruyne fires City

AFP, London



In-form Kevin De Bruyne struck twice as Premier League leaders Manchester City overpowered Hull City 4-1 on Tuesday to lead three top-flight teams into the League Cup semifinals.

De Bruyne had scored one goal and made two in Saturday's 3-1 win over Southampton and he continued in the same vein as the 2014 winners saw off second-tier Hull, with Wilfried Bony and Kelechi Iheanacho also scoring.

Gerard Deulofeu starred as Everton won 2-0 at Middlesbrough and Stoke City beat Sheffield Wednesday 1-0 to guarantee an all-Premier League last four ahead of Liverpool's trip to Southampton on Wednesday.

City made five changes for the visit of Hull, currently fourth in the Championship, with David Silva captaining the side at the Etihad Stadium on his first start following two months out with an ankle problem.

Sergio Aguero was absent, having taken a knock in the win over Southampton, but Bony ensured that he was not missed by following in to open the scoring in the 12th minute after De Bruyne had hit the post.

Iheanacho replaced Bony in the 71st minute and got on the score-sheet nine minutes later, toeing in a cross from Raheem Sterling.

De Bruyne's brace arrived late on, the Belgium forward exploiting a defensive mistake to prod home in the 82nd minute and then sweeping a free-kick into the top-left corner three minutes from time.

Andrew Robertson tucked away an injury-time consolation for Hull.

Former Barcelona winger Deulofeu stole the show as Everton won at Championship high-fliers Middlesbrough, who had eliminated Manchester United on penalties at Old Trafford in the fourth round.

The 21-year-old Spaniard broke the deadlock in the 20th minute at the Riverside Stadium, wriggling between two defenders and shaping a low shot into the bottom-left corner from the edge of the box.

Eight minutes later he set up Everton's second goal, bamboozling Fernando Amorebieta with a flurry of step-overs and crossing for Romelu Lukaku to head in his 13th goal of the season, and sixth in five games.

Championship side Wednesday had stunned Arsenal 3-0 in the previous round, but their cup adventure came to an end at Stoke's Britannia Stadium.

Peter Crouch limped off with an apparent hamstring injury in the early stages, but his replacement, Joselu, teed up Ibrahim Afellay to volley in Stoke's opener on the half hour.

Phil Bardsley wrapped up the win with 15 minutes to play by driving home from a free-kick as Stoke reached the last four for the first



Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne (R) celebrates his second goal with teammate Kelechi Iheanacho during their League Cup quarterfinal against Hull City at the Etihad Stadium on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

## Valencia hire Gary Neville

AFP, Madrid

England coach and Manchester United legend Gary Neville has been named Valencia boss for the rest of the season, the Spanish side announced on Wednesday.

"Valencia have reached an agreement with English coach Gary Neville for him to be coach of the first team until June 30, 2016," the club said in a statement.

"Neville will officially begin his work on Sunday, December 6 ahead of the Champions League match against Lyon which will take place at Mestalla on Wednesday, December 9."

Neville's brother Phil has been at the club since the start of the season, working as an assistant to Nuno Espirito Santo before he left the club after a poor run of results on Sunday.

"I am very excited and feel very proud to have received this great opportunity with Valencia," Neville told the club's website.

## Unfit coach in kabaddi?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation has recently brought in a female coach from India to train the women's team ahead of South Asian Games, which is to be held in India in February next year. While it is appreciable that a foreign coach has been appointed to improve the skills of players, the coach's alleged inexperience and physical condition have raised a few questions.

The appointed individual, Balwinder Kaur, turned to coaching at the age of 22 after a short playing career for the Indian women's youth team and took charge of Bangladesh women's team on October 27 after the Asian Kabaddi Federation proposed her name.

Fifteen members of the team had been training at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex since August 7 under coach Abdul Jalil and assistant coach Ziaur Rahman before Kaur took over. It has been learnt that Kaur is currently unable to walk due to a back injury.

She was referred to the Apollo Hospitals a week ago after she felt pain in her back and an MRI was done. The doctors then instructed her to restrict her movement. In such circumstances, veteran coach Jalil has

started looking after the players' training again.

"I will have some work to do due to Kaur's illness. I believe we can still win a silver medal with two months of training. Our first target will be to beat Sri Lanka," said Jalil yesterday.

However, it won't be an easy task to beat the Lankans as Bangladesh lost against the same opposition in the Asian Beach Games last year, where they finished fifth among five teams.

The federation's secretary, Nazrul Islam, admitted that Kaur was carrying a back injury in the last few years which forced her to retire early.

"She told me that she sustained a back injury during her playing career three or four years ago. But she had recovered from the injury and continued her playing career," Nazrul said, adding that had they known about her recurring injury, they wouldn't have appointed her.

"We will take a decision by discussing with the technical committee and we will replace her if she is unfit," added Nazrul.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Olympic Association, which provides the wages of the coach, has urged the federation to look into the matter seriously.

## 'I was trying to help'

AFP, Paris



Karim Benzema says his go-between role in the Mathieu Valbuena sextape blackmail case has been misunderstood as the Real Madrid striker prepares to explain himself on French TV on Wednesday.

The pre-recorded interview comes in the wake of comments from French Prime Minister Manuel Valls on Tuesday saying only players with exemplary records should represent France at Euro 2016.

"It's all a huge misunderstanding. All I was doing was trying to help. There's nothing to any of it, no blackmail or demands for money," Benzema told a judge in early November, according to a Le Monde article published on Wednesday.

The scandal is a serious distraction to France before they host Euro 2016 next year -- Benzema has been banned from meeting Valbuena and neither was called up for France's games against Germany and England recently.

In sporting terms Benzema is seen as France's top striker, but Les Blues have a wealth of other attacking options and a record of leaving trouble-makers out of squads for international tournaments.

The blackmail case began in June, when Valbuena lodged a complaint with police after being telephoned by a man who said he had the sex tape.

Four men, including a friend of Benzema, Karim Zenati, have been charged and detained over the blackmail using the stolen sex-tape.

Benzema is alleged to have approached Valbuena about the images at a France national training camp on October 5.

The former Lyon star says he had no need of money nor did one of the accused, Karim Zenati, as he was employed in one of Benzema's companies.

A police telephone tap however on

Benzema and his calls to Zenati cast doubts on their attitude. "I'm mad with myself for having talked that way on the phone, we went too far," Benzema said of comments that appeared to mock Valbuena.

The victim of the affair, Valbuena, in his first public comments told Le Monde last week he was "very, very, very disappointed" by Benzema.

Benzema's lawyer Alain Jakubowicz told Wednesday's le Parisien daily newspaper that the player would use Wednesday's tv interview to apologise to Valbuena for those unfriendly remarks.

The lawyer also used the Le Parisien to hit



KARIM BENZEMA

out at the French prime minister's comments over his clients potential exclusion from the France squad asking: "Is this a prime minister's words or those of a Barcelona fan talking about a Real Madrid player."

Valls hails from the Catalonia region and was in hot water himself in June for using a French government jet to fly himself and his son to Berlin to the Champions League final featuring Barcelona.

Jakubowicz later told RTL radio he would sue Le Monde for contempt of court for having revealed details of Benzema's testimony, adding the revelations would aid the player's defence.

## 'Pep quitting Bayern would help others'

AFP, Berlin

Ex-Germany goalkeeper and current TV pundit Jens Lehmann says it would be better for the German league if Pep Guardiola decides against extending his contract at Bayern Munich.

Under Guardiola, Bayern are currently eight points clear in the German league table and have won the Bundesliga for both of his previous two seasons in charge by dominating their rivals.

Guardiola's current contract expires next June and Bayern bosses are hoping to persuade the 44-year-old to sign an extension during the winter break, which starts on December 20, with a decision expected to be made before Christmas.

Bayern are again peerless in Germany and Lehmann says the current team is the strongest the club has ever fielded, having picked up 40 out of a possible 42 points with 13 wins from 14 league matches plus a single draw.

"The side which won the treble (in 2013) under Jupp Heynckes was already amazing, but Pep has taken Bayern to the next level," Lehmann told German daily Bild.

"They should set themselves the goal of being the first team to go through a German league season

## 'WC could ease global tension'

AFP, Moscow



The 2018 World Cup in Russia could serve as a catalyst for political reconciliation and help ease

global tensions, Russian sports minister Vitaly Mutko said on Wednesday.

"Hopefully, it will become a kind of a conciliating event, which will show the world that Russia is an open-hearted, democratic and hospitable country with a rich history and culture," Mutko told R-sport agency.

"It will be a great occasion not only for Russia but for the entire football world," Mutko said.

Relations between Russia and the West have been tense since the annexation of Crimea in March last year and an ensuing conflict in Ukraine that has claimed more than 8,000 lives.

There is also bitterness amongst other 2018 candidates over allegations Russia was awarded the rights to host the World Cup after a deal with FIFA was apparently agreed in advance.

Russia's cold war rivals Britain are angry with the 2018 World Cup going to Russia while the United States are also uncomfortable with the 2022 World Cup going to Qatar.

Mutko also said Russia was fulfilling its commitments towards FIFA deadlines on World Cup infrastructure perpetrations despite the economic crisis.

"We're doing our best to develop our facilities and to urge the development of football in the country," he said.

"I don't see any really outstanding problems.

"Despite the complicated economic

situation we have managed to keep to our World Cup investment budget. It will help Russia to fulfil all of its obligations in full."

FIFA has approved 62 of the 64 training bases to be used by teams' for accommodation and practice during the tournament, Mutko confirmed.

He also revealed that representatives of certain teams had already visited some of the bases first presented at the preliminary draw ceremony earlier this year.

"The representatives of Germany, Netherlands, England, Brazil, USA, Mexico and some other event favourites have already visited the training bases this year and gave them a positive rating," the minister said.

The 2018 World Cup will take place at 12 venues across Russia between June 14 - July 15 2018.