

<b>What to WATCH</b> <b>DAY'S EVENT</b>	<b>GTV &amp; STAR SPORTS1</b> <b>ICC U-19 World Cup</b> Semifinal Bangladesh v West Indies Live from 9:00am	<b>GTV &amp; PTV SPORTS</b> <b>Pakistan Super League</b> Karachi v Peshawar Live from 5:30pm	Islamabad v Quetta Live from 10:00pm <b>SONY SIX</b> Serie A Lazio v Verona
	<b>ICC U-19 World Cup</b> Semifinal Venue: SBNS, Time: 9:00am	Bangladesh v West Indies 7th Place Play-off Time: 9:00am	Venue: Fatullah Namibia v Nepal 15th Place Play-off

### ALLEGRI DENIES BLUES RUMOUR

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri has again distanced himself from the Chelsea manager's job amid claims he will replace interim boss Guus Hiddink at the end of the season. Allegri, who steered the Turin giants to the Champions League final last year, has a contract until June 2017 but is reported to be the Blues' number one choice to replace former Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho. But ahead of Juve's top-of-the-table clash against Napoli on Saturday, he said: "There's no truth in it. I can't deny or confirm something that doesn't exist. Once and for all, let's end this discussion." Reports in England on Wednesday claimed Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich had ruled Diego Simeone out of contention for the job



# WINDIES banking on pace

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite being convincingly beaten by Bangladesh in a three-match series prior to the World Cup, the West Indian contingent believe that they have the ability to defeat Bangladesh in the second semifinal of the Under-19 World Cup today.

"We have got more familiar with the conditions and we have been together as a group for a good period now. We feel more comfortable with our combinations. The players also understand the conditions better, which are clearly different to those in the Caribbean," said coach Graeme West.

"The players have taken time to adapt, to adjust and also to learn. The Pakistan game really showed signs that the players now recognise what is required to be effective and successful here in Bangladesh," he continued.

Their skipper Shimron Hetmyer echoed a similar sentiment. This West Indian line-up has been brimming with confidence ever since they managed to beat a spin-heavy Pakistan and they reckon they can do the same today.

During the first semifinal between India and Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, the wicket seemed to have some assistance for the pace bowlers. The Indian bowlers were able to extract plenty of bounce from the pitch. It was something that pleased the West Indians.

"We watched the game yesterday and we're encouraged to see the ball get through. The seamers from both sides were effective in the first 10 overs. Anyone that would've watched the Pakistan game will know where one of our strengths lies and that is with the new ball attack. And we have got to look to that to really make early inroads into the Bangladesh team," concluded West.

In Alzarri Joseph, West Indies have arguably the fastest bowler of the tournament. His teammates have always backed his pace and believe that a lot in the match will depend on the way Bangladesh's batsmen handle the pacer.

"It's a good feeling to be in a team with express pacers. I think we had one pacer in the last World Cup who really went all the way through the tournament and there was [Kagiso] Rabada from South Africa who was the fastest bowler in the tournament," said Hetmyer.

Ahead of the crucial game, all Hetmyer wants is his boys to do is stick to the basics, an approach he believes can get them through to the final.



Bangladesh batsman Zakir Hasan sways back to play a ramp shot to a bouncer during net practice at the BCB Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday. The under-19s will expect a lot of chin music from West Indies' pacers when the ICC Under-19 World Cup semifinal gets underway here today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# 'We prefer facing pacers to tweakers'

**BISHWAJIT ROY**

The venue of the home of cricket in Mirpur is nothing new. Neither are the West Indies an unknown opponent. The statistics also speak in Bangladesh's favour, but as the junior Tigers are going to play their first semifinal of the ICC Under-19 World Cup today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, everybody was relishing the biggest challenge ahead for Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Co.

When you hear the words from Bangladesh Under-19 captain Miraz, you will barely find any signs of pressure on the baby-faced all-rounder.

A bad day is an ever-present threat in cricket, but the way Miraz defused all talks regarding pressure while speaking at the pre-match press conference yesterday, there was hardly any doubt that he has got the ability to bear the pressure on his young shoulders.

His smile was infectious, he displayed his wit when said that "my family doesn't understand the game and they only count the runs and wickets", and overall he exuded confidence whenever a question about any challenge was raised.

While everybody was anticipating a barrage of pace from the West Indies, Miraz simply dismissed it by saying that his team would rather face pace bowling than slow bowling, so he was relishing a better performance from his top-order batsmen.

With his fiery pace, Alzarri Joseph has already become the man to watch in the tournament and many believe that, alongside Chemar Holder, he may trouble Bangladesh. However, Miraz shared a different opinion.

"I believe that we enjoy pace bowling rather than slow bowling. We face pacers with a lot of confidence because there is less chance of mistiming shots.

"We have played in South Africa and West Indies. So far in this tournament we had little opportunity to face pacers in our four matches. Our openers struggled in the previous matches but I believe they will bounce back tomorrow," said Miraz.

When asked about excitement, pressure and happiness, Miraz said: "When we enter the middle, we hardly think about family, fans or anything. We don't think about the outside world; rather our focus centres only on how we can face the ball, how we can bowl well."

"There's no way you can be excited in cricket; you have to follow your processes," he added.

Miraz said that Bangladesh's batting and spin bowling were their strengths and most importantly they had the confidence and ability to come back from any match situation.

Coach Mizanur Rahman had the same sentiment and added: "The boys are in good rhythm. We are just waiting for tomorrow's game. We are taking it like any other match, not a semifinal. We are only thinking about putting our plan into action."

Many consider India as the toughest test for the home side, but Miraz and his coach Mizanur know very well that they will only face that challenge if they overcome today's hurdle.

That is why they both said that they focus match-by-match and maintain their processes.

# Uruguay psyched for Suarez return

**AFP, Montevideo**

Uruguay are looking forward to their star striker Luis Suarez's return to international football next month after his nine-match ban for biting an opponent, coach Oscar Tabarez told AFP on Tuesday.

"We were waiting for this moment and now it has arrived," Tabarez said in an interview, reiterating his disagreement with what he called the "unjustly excessive penalty" the player received.

Suarez was banned from international matches for nine games after biting Italian defender Giorgio Chiellini during the World Cup in Brazil 18 months ago.

Now the 29-year-old goalscorer could make his international comeback when Uruguay play away to Brazil on March 25 in a qualifier for the 2018 World Cup.

Uruguay then host Peru on March 29.

"Suarez is important for what he does on the pitch, for the goals he scores and the importance those goals have for the team, and for how he overcomes difficulties. That is what he has and it is an asset," Tabarez said.

"Players evolve. As times passes and he makes the most of the circumstances, his potential could grow."

Uruguay beat England and Italy to reach the last 16 of the World Cup before being knocked out by Colombia, although Suarez was missing for that match.

The 'sky-blues' have started the current regional qualifying campaign strongly and are second behind Ecuador.

That was in spite of Suarez's absence and a two-match ban for another key striker, Edinson Cavani of Paris Saint-Germain.

Cavani was suspended after a confrontation during a match against Chile in last year's Copa America.

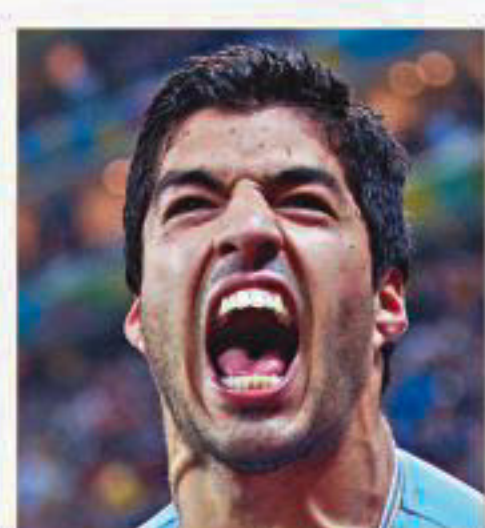
Uruguay have some key defenders injured for the coming qualifiers, including captain Diego Godin of Atletico Madrid.

Tabarez said he hoped South American football would recover from the recent corruption scandal rocking world football.

The scandal has seen several top officials from various countries arrested in a US bribery probe.

Tabarez said he hoped regional football governing body CONMEBOL would be rebuilt for the good of the game.

"It was like a bomb had gone off. It was very tough," he said of the scandal.



# Chiellini to miss Bayern encounter

**AFP, Rome**

Juventus defender Giorgio Chiellini will miss Saturday's showdown with Serie A leaders Napoli as well as the first leg of the Champions League last-16 tie with Bayern Munich due to a calf injury, the club confirmed on Tuesday.

Chiellini, 31, was injured during last weekend's 2-0 victory at Frosinone that extended Juve's club-record winning streak to 14 league matches and is expected to be sidelined for three weeks.

Juve, who trail Napoli by two points in their quest for a fifth successive Scudetto, host Maurizio Sarri's men this weekend before five-time European champions Bayern visit Turin on February 23.

The absence of Chiellini is another blow to Juve's backline after Uruguay international Martin Caceres was ruled out for the rest of the season with an Achilles injury.

# Ogbonna KO's L'pool

**AFP, London**

Angelo Ogbonna headed home in stoppage time of extra time as West Ham United stunned a youthful Liverpool team 2-1 in Tuesday's FA Cup fourth-round replay at Upton Park.

Philippe Coutinho's clever free-kick had cancelled out Michail Antonio's volleyed opener for West Ham and the game was seconds from a penalty shootout when Dimitri Payet curled a free-kick into the visitors' box from the right and Ogbonna rose at the back post to head in the winner.

It was the Italian centre-back's first goal since signing from Juventus last year and it earned Slaven Bilic's side a trip to Blackburn Rovers in the fifth round.

West Ham had never previously beaten Liverpool in the FA Cup, but they have now overcome them three times this season, having beaten them twice in the league prior to the 0-0 draw in their first cup encounter.

Back in the dug-out after having his appendix removed on Saturday, Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp watched his young charges push West Ham all the way until falling at the very last hurdle.

Despite making 10 changes and entrusting the midfield to 18-year-old Pedro Chirivella and the callow pair of Kevin Stewart and Joao Carlos Teixeira, Liverpool made an assured start.

The first chance was theirs, Christian Benteke's volley scrambled behind by Darren Randolph from Coutinho's deep corner, but West Ham were quick to respond, right-back Joey O'Brien almost crowning his first start since July by slamming a shot against the post.

The pace was sedentary but the game was open and the woodwork was rattled again at both ends -- Coutinho for Liverpool, Payet with a free-kick for West Ham -- before the hosts took the lead in first-half injury time.

Enner Valencia wriggled his way to the byline on the left and dug out a cross to the back post, where Antonio leapt to meet it with a crisp side-foot volley that flashed past Simon Mignolet.

Klopp sent his side out early for the second half and within four minutes they were level, Coutinho deviously stroking a 20-yard free-kick beneath the wall and in after Pedro Obiang was deemed to have fouled Benteke.

Klopp sent fit-again strikers Daniel Sturridge and Divock Origi, while injuries to Winston Reid and Cheikhou Kouyate obliged West Ham manager Bilic to bring on James Collins and Andy Carroll, the former Liverpool striker.

Valencia appealed in vain for a penalty when Tiago Ilori appeared to tug him back as he attempted to convert Antonio's low cross.

The teams continued to exchange chances -- Randolph parrying from Benteke and Sturridge, Valencia heading over and Mark Noble testing Mignolet -- but they could not be separated in normal time.

Noble also worked Mignolet in extra time, but the best chances fell to Benteke.

Twice within a minute he should have scored, first volleying wide with the goal at his mercy and then shooting tamely at Randolph in a one-on-one, and Ogbonna



West Ham United defender Angelo Ogbonna celebrates his winning goal against Liverpool during their FA Cup fourth round replay in Upton Park on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Maria out of Qatar Open

**AFP, Doha**

Maria Sharapova has withdrawn from the Qatar Open tournament to be held later this month due to an injury to her left forearm, organisers announced on Wednesday.

It is the second time the world number six has pulled out of a tournament this season because of the same injury.

Earlier this year, Sharapova also had to withdraw from her intended season opener, the Brisbane International.

"Unfortunately, I will not be able to play the Qatar Open because of my left forearm injury," the 28-year-old said in statement released by Qatar Tennis.

"I would like to wish the tournament and all the great fans in Doha a great week of tennis and I hope to see them next year."

Sharapova has won in Qatar twice -- in 2005 and 2008.

This year she was meant to be part of a strong line-up in Doha in a tournament featuring number one seed Serena Williams, Simona Halep and Petra Kvitova.

# Adam admits child sex charge

**AFP, London**

Sunderland's England international winger Adam Johnson pleaded guilty to one count of sexual activity with a child and one count of grooming at his underage sex trial on Wednesday.

The 28-year-old player, capped 12 times by England, continues to deny two other charges of sexual activity with a girl aged under 16.

Johnson appeared in the dock at Bradford Crown Court in northern England wearing a black suit and white tie.

He was initially suspended by Sunderland following his arrest in March last year, but has since returned to action and scored in their 2-2 draw at Liverpool in the Premier League last Saturday.

# Proteas pull one back

**AFP, Centurion**

Quinton de Kock and Hashim Amla hit hundreds and shared a double century opening partnership as South Africa kept the series against England alive by winning the third one-day international by seven wickets at SuperSport Park on Tuesday.

Joe Root made a career-best 125 as England posted a competitive 318 for eight after winning the toss.

But De Kock and Amla made the target look easy as they put on 239 for the first wicket.

De Kock in particular was in majestic form as he made 135 off 117 balls, with 16 fours and four sixes before he hit leg-spinner Adil Rashid, England's best bowler, to Root at mid-off.

Amla went on to make 127 before flashing at a wide ball from Chris Jordan to be caught behind with just eight runs needed.

South Africa won with 22 balls to spare. England lead the five-match series 2-1, with matches in Johannesburg and Cape Town to come.

**SCORES IN BRIEF**  
 ENGLAND: 318 for 8 in 50 overs (Roy 20, Hales 65, Root 125, Stokes 53; Abbott 2-50, Rabada 2-65)  
 SOUTH AFRICA: 319 for 3 in 46.2 overs (De Kock 135, Amla 127, Du Plessis 33 not out; Jordan 1-54)  
 Result: South Africa won by seven wickets.  
 Player-of-the-match: Quinton de Kock.