

VANDALS DESTROY MESSI STATUE

A statue of Argentina captain Lionel Messi has been destroyed by unidentified vandals in Buenos Aires. The tribute to the Barcelona star was unveiled during 2016 by city mayor Horacio Rodriguez Larreta, during the campaign to convince Messi to reverse his international retirement following the Copa America final defeat. But the sculpture, located on the banks of the Rio de la Plata as part of a 'Glory Walkway' honouring Argentine sports stars, was cut in half in unclear circumstances. "The statue of Lionel Messi fell victim to an act of vandalism that left the footballer's sculpture without its top half," a statement from the Buenos Aires city government read. "The City Government is now working on its repair." As well as Messi, field hockey legend Luciana Aymar, tennis stars Gabriela Sabatini and Guillermo Vilas, San Antonio Spurs idol Manu Ginobili and ex-Formula One champion Juan Manuel Fangio also have likenesses on the Walkway. — GOAL.COM



48-team World Cup in 2026

AFP, Zurich



FIFA's ruling council on Tuesday unanimously approved an expansion of the World Cup to 48 teams in 2026, in a major coup for the body's president Gianni Infantino.

In a bid to widen the game's global appeal and enrich its coffers, the FIFA panel endorsed a format with 16 groups of three nations, a tweet from FIFA's official account said.

The move represents the first major change to the World Cup format since the tournament was boosted from 24 to 32 teams for the 1998 tournament in France.

Infantino took charge of scandal-tainted FIFA 11 months ago with a vow to repair the damage done at the end of Sepp Blatter's tenure by growing football across the globe.

Enlarging the World Cup, the planet's top sporting competition, was the centrepiece of that plan.

The controversial proposal faced tough criticism in some of football's key camps, including warnings that it would dilute the quality of play and overburden already exhausted players.

But Infantino had in recent weeks

voiced confidence that his flagship project would be approved.

The FIFA chief has noted that a bigger tournament would beef up FIFA's coffers.

And a confidential FIFA report seen by AFP projects a 48-team tournament would bring a cash boost of \$640 million (605 million euros) above projected revenues for next year's finals in Russia.

Africa and Asia could be the big winners with a rise in their number of places -- currently at five for Africa and between four and five for Asia.

But in order to smooth over scepticism about World Cup reform within UEFA, it is likely that Europe will also see its allotments rise above the current 13 places.

A source close to FIFA told AFP that under the new format Europe could get 16 places, with Africa earning nine.

But that information remained unconfirmed and world football's governing body was not expected to immediately announce its final decision on allotments, which may fuel a tough debate in the months ahead.

The council officially weighed five proposals during Tuesday's meeting at FIFA's snow-covered Zurich headquarters, including maintaining the status

quo of 32-teams.

The landmark decision to expand the tournament is the latest overhaul of the World Cup, which has seen its global popularity and financial might surge since the inaugural edition in 1930.

That contest, won by Uruguay, had just 13 countries.

The World Cup expanded to 24 teams in 1982 in Spain before moving to its current 32-team version at France 1998.

The format approved Tuesday envisages 80 matches -- 16 more than the current set up -- but crucially will still be played over the same 32 days.

Two teams from each group will advance to a 32-nation knock-out round.

Some have pointed to Euro 2016 -- which expanded to 24 nations -- as evidence that competition can remain fierce with more countries involved, noting the stunning achievements of football minnows like Iceland and Wales.

Bidding to host the 2026 tournament has not yet opened, but Infantino has voiced support for two countries sharing the duty, easing the financial burden on a single host nation.

Sources close to FIFA have said that a joint US-Canada bid, possibly involving Mexico could emerge, while Morocco has also been mentioned.



FIFA president Gianni Infantino speaks during a press briefing closing a meeting of the executive council at the FIFA headquarters in Zurich yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

WHAT THEY SAID

We understand that this decision has been taken based on political reasons rather than sporting ones and under considerable political pressure, something ECA believes is regrettable.

- European Club Association

It's a great idea. Having more teams will inspire people to get out on the pitch.

- Diego Maradona

The World Cup is a fiesta of football so the more teams, the better.

- Carlos Puyol

It's incredible. If they are trying bring an end to the World Cup they only need to continue on the same path. This is no longer my World Cup. I'm absolutely horrified.

- Berti Vogts

Thank you for bringing the World Cup closer to the poor.

- Samuel Eto'o

'A lot of hidden talent here'

The Daily Star (TDS): What made you interested in bringing your renowned academy to Bangladesh?

David Leadbetter (DL): We were always looking to open academies in virgin territories where the coaching and instructions are basic. I think we can bring a level of expertise to take Bangladesh golf to a new level. You have a lot of talented young players, but they need direction and good coaching. That applies not only to potential tour players, but to casual golfers who would have more fun if they knew what they could do. So we're trying to bring a whole new level to teaching with a lot of technology involved.

TDS: What is your idea, in general, about Bangladesh golf?

DL: I know there are a lot of promising golfers here. I know about Siddikur [Rahman] who used to be a ball-picker at this course and now he's winning titles on the Asian Tour. I think he can be made into a great movie. That is very different from some players in Europe and America who are given everything at a very young age. It just goes to show you have tremendous amount of hidden talent here.

TDS: Could you give us a brief lowdown on the technology and equipment set up in this academy? How much of an impact do you think technology makes on performance in golf these days?

DL: Technology is an important part of golf instructions these days. It enables us to see what's going on a little more clearly because we can't always rely on naked eyes. So we have high-speed cameras, we have force plates which shows us the balance and swing and we have trackman which says exactly how far the club is coming from the outside or how much club speed you have. We can analyse all this information and work on the golfers' techniques. The student needs to be able to see and understand what needs to be improved and technology helps in that area.

TDS: What about the personnel? How many coaches will be stationed here or come from abroad?

DL: Right now we have three coaches, headed by Phil Chilton from England. We are going to have one or two more within the next year or so.

The instructors here are highly trained and can train golfers from the beginners' level up to senior, men, women, junior and tour player.

TDS: Who are some of the renowned golfers that you have worked closely with?

DL: I've been involved in the game for about 40 years and I have trained winners of 22 majors including several players who have been number one at different times. Nick [Faldo], Ernie Els, Nick Price, Ian Poulter, Lydia Ko and Michelle Wie to name a few.

TDS: You are credited with helping Sir Nick Faldo rectify his swing which eventually helped him win his first Open title in 1987, with a few more to follow. Tell us about your association with Faldo.

DL: It was almost 30 years ago. Faldo was a really good player who wanted to win the British Open. He used to hit the ball very high, but with the wind he was not as comfortable as he should have been. So we worked on his technique and his swing for about two years. He became one of the best players in the world with six majors. It proved to be a milestone in coaching. At that point not many players had coaches, so our work together really established the coach-player relationship.

TDS: You are just coming from India. What do you think Bangladesh golf needs to do to get to the Indian level?

DL: India is also pretty new; they've just got more golfers and more golf courses. It's just about getting the numbers higher, getting more people to play at the junior level. Bangladesh needs to understand that they need to start with youngsters and develop them with good coaching.

TDS: You are a passionate follower of cricket. Do you find similarities between techniques of a batsman and that of a golfer?

DL: There are similarities in techniques of golf swing with how a batsman slices the ball or plays an off-drive. There are also similarities in bowling. The way you move your body and the way you use muscles. It's not just the arm that you are using it's your whole body, and how you move it makes the difference. Bangladesh is a great sporting country and you love cricket, you've got great hand-eye coordination through that sport. There's no reason why you can't produce some champions in golf too.

Leadbetter Academy opens at KGC

SPORTS REPORTER

Leadbetter Golf Academy (LGA), Bangladesh's first private-sector indoor golf academy, was inaugurated at the Kurmitola Golf Club (KGC) by Army Chief General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiqul Huq yesterday.

The academy, set up at the old clubhouse of the KGC, specialises in training professional and amateur golfers as well as golf trainers.

David Leadbetter, the renowned golf mentor, was present at the occasion alongside Momin Ud Dowlah, chairman of LGA Bangladesh, Bangladesh Golf Federation

(BGF) senior vice-president AKM Abdullail Baquee, BGF secretary general Quazi Shamsul Islam, CEO of KGC Brig Gen Mohammad Obaidul Haque (retd) and others.

The academy boasts state-of-the-art facilities including Trackman 4, Balance Plates, K/Vest, Sam Putt Lab and BodiTrack Online Video Analysis.

During the programme, Leadbetter announced that the academy would select a group of 10 of the best golfers from Bangladesh including both professionals and amateurs who will be coached under a special programme.



David Leadbetter helping a young kid with her swing at his academy at the KGC yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Baridhara, Feni relegated

SPORTS REPORTER



Feni Soccer Club and Uttar Baridhara Club have been relegated from the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) to the Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) after both teams refused to take part in the relegation-deciding play-off matches on January 4 and 7.

The disciplinary committee also imposed monetary punishments on both teams.

"As per the disciplinary code, Feni Soccer Club and Uttar Baridhara Club have been relegated to the Bangladesh Championship League after they failed to turn up to play both fixtures of the play-off. Both teams have also been fined Tk 5 lakh each under article 52 of the disciplinary code," said Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag after a meeting.

"If both teams fail to deposit the fine within one month, then the matter will be

referred to the disciplinary committee again," said Shohag.

Feni Soccer Club and Uttar Baridhara had shared bottom place in the 12-team BPL and were supposed to take part in a play-off to decide which team would be relegated. However, both teams appealed to the BFF president to keep them in the top-flight, a request that was refused. They then expressed their desire to not play in the play-off to the chairman of the professional football league committee. Subsequently, they were absent for both play-off fixtures at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The disciplinary committee also fined BCL champions Fakirerpool Youngmen's Club one lakh taka for threatening match referees as well as officials at the close of their match against Saif SC on January 2. Satkhira Football Association were fined the same amount for withdrawing their women's team from the JFA U-14 Women's Championship from the semifinals.

Malaysia elated at Subri's win

AFP, Kuala Lumpur



Malaysian football fans were elated Tuesday to wake up to the news that their countryman had won FIFA's goal of the year award for his extraordinary swerving free-kick.

Midfielder Mohamad Faiz Subri's cracker for Penang state in the Malaysian Super League in February, reminiscent of the swerving thunderbolt by Brazil's Roberto Carlos against France in 1997, received almost 60 percent of the global vote on the FIFA website.

Dressed in a tuxedo, the footballer thanked his coach, team and his family as he accepted the accolade at the star-studded FIFA awards ceremony in Zurich on Monday night, the first Asian to win the famous Puskas Award.

"Honestly, it never crossed my mind that I would arrive at this level and be able to stand tall among world class footballers in this amazing place," he said.

There was a light-hearted moment when the player fumbled with his phone on stage as he searching for his speech.

Co-host Hollywood star Eva Longoria playfully quipped: "He's checking his text" to laughter from the crowd.

On Instagram, Faiz posted a picture of himself together with Manchester United legend Alex Ferguson and tweeted

Chapecoense opponents awarded

AFP, Zurich

Atletico Nacional collected the Fair Play prize at Monday's FIFA awards ceremony after the Colombian side requested Chapecoense receive the Copa Sudamericana title following a plane crash that decimated the Brazilian club.

Chapecoense were flying to Medellin ahead of the first leg of the final when their plane crashed in the Colombian mountains on November 28, killing all but six of the 77 people on board.

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION EXPO
 LAKESHORE HOTEL, Gul-2
 19th JANUARY | 10am-5pm
 Register today
www.globalreach.in/bangladeshexpo

Career Opportunity

Pubali Bank Limited having largest online network in Private Sector Banking with 453 online branches is looking for an experienced professional for the following position:

■ **Chief Financial Officer (CFO)**
 in the rank of General Manager

For details, please visit <http://www.pubalibangla.com/career.asp>

Interested candidates who fulfill the requirements should apply by 26 January 2017.



Human Resources Division
 Head Office, 26 Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka

KOOL-BSJA MEDIA FOOTBALL Independent TV clinch title

SPORTS REPORTER

Independent Television clinched the title of Kool-BSJA Media Cup Football tournament after beating Boishakhi Television 1-0 in the final at the artificial turf adjacent to Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday.

Biplob Bhuiyan struck the decisive goal of the game and he was later adjudged of the man-of-the-final.

Earlier, Independent Television beat Dhaka Tribune 4-3 in tiebreaker in one semifinal while Boishakhi Television defeated Shamokal 5-4, also in tiebreaker, in the other semifinal.

Jahiduzzaman of Boishakhi Television was named the 'Al Mussabir Sadi' man-of-the-tournament. A total of 24 media houses took part in the five-day meet. Banik Barta were given the Masud Ahmed Rumi fair play trophy.

The champions and runners-up teams were given Tk 20,000 and Tk 10,000 respectively along with trophies.

Sponsors Square Toiletries Ltd's head of marketing Sayeed Mohammad Malik, former captain of the national football team Jewel Rana, BSJA's acting president Aghore Mandol, BSJA general secretary Raihan Al Mughni and BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag were present at the occasion.

Career Opportunity

Pubali Bank Limited having largest online network in Private Sector Banking with 453 online branches is looking for an experienced professional for the following position:

■ **Company Secretary**
 (in the rank of General Manager)

For details, please visit <http://www.pubalibangla.com/career.asp>

Interested candidates who fulfill the requirements should apply by 26 January 2017.



Human Resources Division
 Head Office, 26 Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka