

HERO'S WELCOME FOR SUBRI

The winner of FIFA's goal of the year award, Mohamad Faiz Subri, got a hero's welcome back to Malaysia Wednesday from some 200 cheering fans as he vowed to seek more first-team action. "I will fight for a regular spot," the diminutive Penang state footballer told reporters. "And, if God willing, (I will) score similar curving goals because I practise hard to hammer the ball into the net," he added, while thanking supporters at Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Faiz failed to be a regular fixture in the starting line-up for Penang last season in the Malaysian Super League. "Faiz has made us all proud. I pray more Malaysians will follow his footsteps," said fan Aida Rasid, 28, a clerk waiting at the airport. The Malaysian government and football authorities have announced a 150,000 ringgit (\$33,500) cash reward for Faiz. - AFP



Atletico Madrid striker Antoine Griezmann (C) scores the opening goal against Las Palmas during their Copa del Rey round of 16 second leg tie at the Vicente Calderon Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Fakirerpool mulling all-local squad

SPORTS REPORTER



After having won the Bangladesh Championship League, Fakirerpool Youngmen's Club are planning to compete in the Bangladesh Premier League without any foreign player in a bid to accommodate more local players as well as bring back its name as the 'breeding ground of star footballers'. At the pre-league briefing three months ago, Youngmen's Club were the only team that promised to display quality football rather than overtly expressing desire of clinching the title of the second-tier professional league. But three months on that low-budget team from Fakirerpool have put behind all the other clubs with high ambitions to emerge champions and return to top-flight football after a long time. "Though we have just completed the championship league, the premier league is on our mind and we want to stay there for long. We are thinking of taking part in the premier league without foreign players in a bid to give more space to the local players as we are determined to bring back our past glory of producing players for the national team," said club's general secretary Sabbir Hossain. "Playing without foreign players is my initial idea and I will discuss it with other club officials soon so that we can take a decision before the start of the players' transfer," said Sabbir, who was yesterday busy clearing dues of players, who are leaving the club one after another.

Youngmen's Club once produced national players like Hasan Al Mamun, Nurul Haq Manik, Amin Rana, Sohel Al Masum, Askar Babu, Dhonu, Poniruzzaman, Golam Rabanni Choton, Mohammad Robin. The club even produced some of the current national players like Wahed Ahmed, Rezaul Karim, Shahedul Alam Jr, but over the last one decade the glory was lost as the club was embroiled in some internal problems. However, the club seems to have revitalised itself after the new committee took over a few months ago. Coach Mahidur Rahman Miraz is backing the club officials' idea of playing the top league without any foreign players. "It is true that foreign players make a difference in the premier league matches, but that mostly happens for teams who are involved in title race. For other clubs, the foreign players have virtually no impact due to the big difference in the quality of foreign recruits of top clubs and the mid-and-low level clubs. I think local players are not lower in quality compared to those sub-standard foreign players," said Miraz, who is supposed to stay with the club in its debut season in the Bangladesh Premier League. Miraz believes that they have succeeded in the championship league due to good management, strong discipline, long selection procedure, continuation of training and efforts from the players. The coach also earmarked a couple of his players including striker Mohammad Jewel and defender Rahmat who he thinks are talented enough to get the nod of the national team in near future.

Schneiderlin close to Everton move

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United's French midfielder Morgan Schneiderlin is closing in on a move to Everton, his manager Jose Mourinho confirmed on Tuesday. British media reports claim United have agreed to sell Schneiderlin, who joined the club from Southampton in 2015, for a fee of £22 million (\$26.8 million, 25.4 million euros). Speaking after United's 2-0 League Cup semi-final first leg win over Hull City, Mourinho said he had been told by executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward that the transfer was close to completion. "No details, but before the match I was informed by Mr Woodward that the situation is too close," the United manager told Sky Sports at Old Trafford. "So Morgan is more than probably going to Everton." Schneiderlin's arrival would be a timely piece of business for Everton manager Ronald Koeman, who has just lost Senegalese midfielder Idrissa Gueye to the Africa Cup of Nations.

Atletico ride on Griezmann

AFP, Madrid



Antoine Griezmann struck for the third time in as many games in 2017 as Atletico Madrid secured their place in the quarter-finals of the Copa del Rey 4-3 on aggregate despite losing 3-2 at home to Las Palmas on Tuesday. Griezmann shrugged off the disappointment of finishing third behind Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi for world's best player at the inaugural Best FIFA Football Awards on Monday to force home the opener four minutes into the second half. A fine individual effort from Marko Livaja gave Las Palmas a brief lifeline, but Angel Correa looked to have killed the tie off just after the hour mark. However, the hosts were made to sweat in the final seconds of stoppage time as two goals in three minutes from Livaja and Mateo Garcia gave Las Palmas victory on the night. "These type of things always happen in the Copa del Rey," Atletico boss Diego Simeone told BeIN Sports Spain. "They finished the few chances they had well which meant, despite us having the game under control, they take away the victory." Despite holding a commanding 2-0 first leg lead, Atletico boss Diego Simeone took no chances by naming a strong side.

Griezmann was included despite making the trip to Zurich to attend FIFA's gala just 24 hours earlier and had the first big chance when he fired straight at Raul Lizoain on 23 minutes. Las Palmas had chances to get back into the tie as Miguel Angel Moya produced a great save to deny Livaja's header at the near post before Tana blasted over when well-placed inside the area. Griezmann scored for the first time in La Liga for three months in a 2-0 win at Eibar on Saturday, but the Frenchman is now on his best scoring run of the season as he tapped home Nicolas Gaitan's cross at the start of the second half to give Atletico extra breathing space. Livaja took advantage of some uncharacteristically lax defending from Diego Godin and Jose Maria Gimenez to drive through the heart of the Atletico defence and smash the ball into the far corner. However, just four minutes later Correa controlled a long ball from Koke and shrugged off his marker before finishing from a narrow angle to put Atletico back in front. The game appeared to be petering out when a great touch and cross from Garcia teed up Livaja for a second equaliser a minute from time. And Garcia then volleyed home himself from Jonathan Viera's free-kick deep into stoppage time, but Atletico held out to progress.

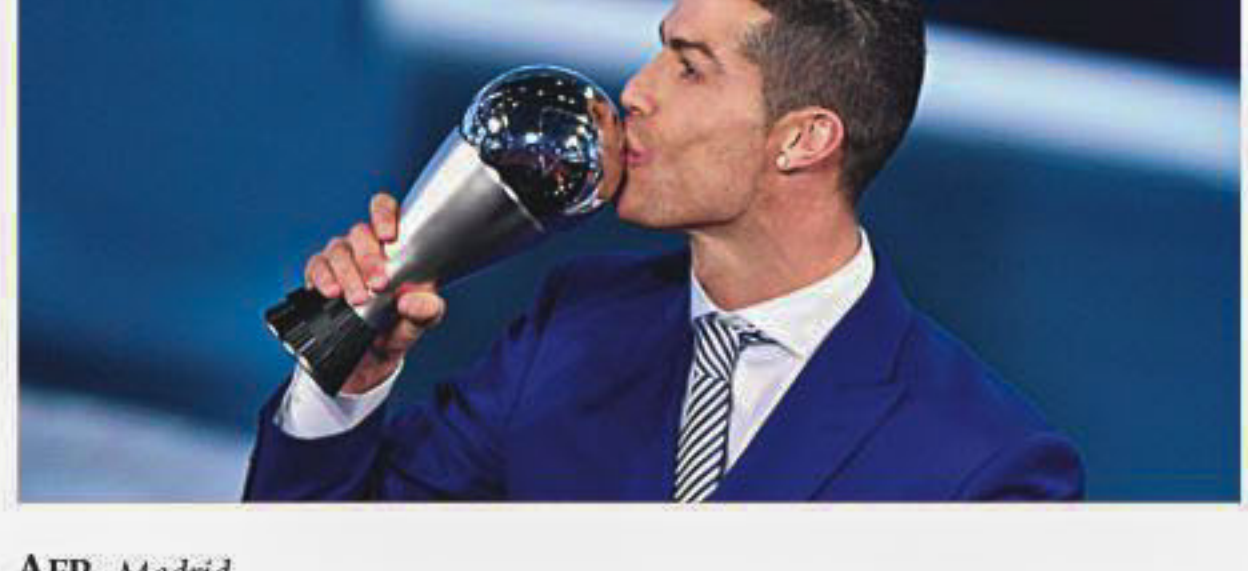
Silva not obsessed with trophies

REUTERS, Manchester

Midfielder David Silva enjoys the competitive nature of the Premier League but the Spaniard is refusing to become obsessed about winning another league title with Manchester City. The 31-year-old has already won two Premier League titles, two League Cups and one FA Cup in the last six seasons at the club and is a regular starter under manager Pep Guardiola. "I have been here for an eternity and I am happy," Silva, told the British media. "I like lots of things, the competitiveness every weekend. But personally I just try to work day to day - I do not get obsessed with thinking about titles." Having racked up two European Championship titles and a World Cup trophy with Spain, Silva is also determined to deliver more success to his national side. "The truth is that this new phase with them is very exciting," he added.

Ronaldo 'part of football's history'

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo said he is "part of football's history" in an interview published Tuesday a day after he won FIFA's inaugural "The Best" prize for the world's best player in 2016. "I have no doubt that I am already a part of football's history. This has always been my major goal, since I started playing: not only to become a player, but to be a star and to constantly strive to be the best," he told Fifa.com when asked whether he sees himself as one of the greatest players ever. "And I did it: the trophies speak for themselves - both the titles, the individual awards, and the records. It is a source of great pride and it motivates me to keep on working the same way I have been doing so far." Ronaldo, 31, lifted the award at a star-studded ceremony in Zurich on Monday after a glittering year on the pitch saw him lead Madrid to Champions League glory and captain Portugal to their first ever major international triumph at Euro 2016. He had already won the Ballon d'Or after his third Champions League title, thanks in major part to his 16 goals in 12 games. The player said he thinks winning Euro 2016 was "the pinnacle" of his career.

WOMEN'S H'BALL C'SHIP Hattrick of titles for BJMC

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) completed a hattrick of titles by winning the 27th National Women's Handball Championship with a massive 27-9 victory over Bangladesh Ansar and VDP at the Shaheed M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium yesterday. It was the 10th crown overall for BJMC, who established their supremacy after dethroning Bangladesh Ansar in 1999. Shipli Begun of BJMC was named the best player of the championship while Bangladesh Police Handball Club finished third after beating Dhaka 30-11. FA charges Sagna AFP, London Manchester City full-back Bacary Sagna was charged with misconduct by the Football Association on Tuesday after appealing to criticise a referee in a social media post. The France international has until 1800 GMT on Friday to respond to the charge.

Mata, Fellaini give MU edge

AFP, Manchester



Juan Mata and Marouane Fellaini struck to give Manchester United a 2-0 victory over injury-ravaged Hull City in Tuesday's League Cup semi-final first leg at Old Trafford. All eyes were on United captain Wayne Rooney, who is chasing a record 250th goal for the club, but it was Mata who broke the deadlock in the 56th minute before substitute Fellaini added a late second. It puts Jose Mourinho's men in the driving seat ahead of the return leg on January 26, although it was not until Fellaini headed home in the 87th minute that they finally put the game beyond Hull. "We are not at Wembley, but the second goal is maybe the important goal," Mourinho told Sky Sports. "I was expecting a difficult match. I wasn't expecting to win by four or five." United have now won nine games in succession ahead of arch rivals Liverpool's visit in the Premier League on Sunday.

Hull's new manager Marco Silva, taking charge of his second game, was able to name only six substitutes and lost both Markus Henriksen and Josh Tymon to injury. "I'm not happy with the result, but I'm happy with the work of my players," said Silva. "With all the problems we had, my boys worked well." Despite Mourinho making seven changes to the team that had outclassed Reading 4-0 in the FA Cup on Saturday, United picked up where they had left off, peppering the Hull goal with shots. Hull goalkeeper Eldin Jakupovic had to produce a one-handed save to thwart Mata inside two minutes and moments later Andy Robertson stopped Rooney applying the finishing touch to Marcus Rashford's shot. The presence of David Meyler and Tom Huddlestone in defence and the fact there were only six players on the Hull bench told the story of the visitors' injury problems and there was more to come. Henriksen was left clutching his right shoulder in agony after being knocked over by Paul Pogba and had

to go off in the 16th minute, with Abel Hernandez taking his place. United, missing the ill Zlatan Ibrahimovic, continued to swarm forward, Henrikh Mkhitaryan twice shooting wide, Rashford lashing over and Jakupovic shovelling a long-range Pogba effort over the crossbar. But Hull, the Premier League's bottom club, began to offer an attacking threat of their own as half-time approached in the club's first ever League Cup semi-final match. Adama Diomande gave United a scare when he headed against the post, only for an offside flag to then go up, and both Robert Snodgrass and Hernandez tested David de Gea before the interval. Rooney's moment of history looked to have arrived in the 51st minute when Pogba's fine, flighted pass set him racing in on goal from the right, but he drilled his shot inches wide of the far post. Instead it was Mata who provided the breakthrough, stabbing in on the volley at the back post after Antonio Valencia's cross from the right was headed back across goal by Mkhitaryan.

STAR WEEKEND in other news... This week our spotlight talks about the law that was drafted by the ministry for women and children's affairs, stating that a girl at the age of 16 will be able to marry as a non-minor with the consent of her parents. We also have a piece that discusses the unthinkable textbook blunders by NCTB and reflects on the possible solutions. Don't forget to grab your copy of the Star Weekend, tomorrow, Friday!