

## MARADONA'S NIGHT AT THE OPERA

Diego Maradona steps into the world of high culture on Monday when epic tales of World Cup glory as well as reflections on his colourful private life are played out at Naples' famed Teatro di San Carlo. Sadly for the Argentine, who was idolised when he starred for Napoli 30 years ago, his presence at the world's oldest active opera house has sparked an angry reaction amongst the country's artistic community. "The San Carlo has a rich history, it has welcomed the greatest singers and orchestras. There is music, opera and ballet – it is not the place for football. It is totally inappropriate," sniffed leading composer Roberto De Simone. Maradona, characteristically, has shrugged off the controversy, as have his fans. "It's very emotional to see how much love there is for me," said 56-year-old Maradona on Sunday as he met the press. —AFP



## Fitness camp sans Kottan from Jan 20

SPORTS REPORTER



With Austrian coach George Kottan unavailable till the end of January due to his FIFA assignment in Scotland, the National Teams Committee (NTC) of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) sought two to three more weeks to finalise the appointment of the head coach of the national team.

The NTC, however, decided to start a fitness and assessment camp featuring footballers who have been part of the national team in the last nine months, under the existing staff, from January 20 to February 8.

"As our ultimate target is to produce a good result in this year's SAFF Championship, we need a long-term plan. We are in the process of appointing a head coach. We have already talked to one of the coaches but no one can join us until February 2 to 4. That's why we are taking time to appoint the coach. We have come to an end of discussion with one coach but we have kept the matter suspended for the time being as we will invite a few more coaches," said NTC chairman and BFF vice president Kazi Nabil Ahmed after a meeting at the BFF

House yesterday.

The NTC is likely to unveil Kottan as the head coach in early February after finalising all terms and conditions upon his arrival and ahead of the start of Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup tournament, scheduled to start from February 18 in Chittagong.

"A talk hit the headlines in the last six months that our players are not fit and they can't perform consistently and fail to perform beyond 60 to 70 minutes of matches. We have already discussed the issue with our technical staff. Now we want to see where our national players stand at the moment. If we get an assessment of the players' fitness, then it will help us evaluate which kind of coaching staff we will need for the national team," said Nabil.

NTC members Satyajit Das Rupu and Amirul Islam Babu, local coach Syed Golam Jilani, fitness coach John Whittle, goalkeeping coach Ryan Sandford and technical director BA Jubair Nipu have been given the responsibility to make a list of over 30 players who were with the national team over the last six to nine months. Jilani and Sandford will conduct the fitness training camp at the BKSP.



Swiss tennis legend Roger Federer celebrates his victory against Austria's Jurgen Melzer during their Australian Open first-round match in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Federer back with a win

AFP, Melbourne

Seventeen-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer said it was a "special moment" to return to the big stage as he passed a first-round test at the Australian Open on Monday.

Federer, back in action after a six-month injury lay-off, downed his one-time junior rival Jurgen Melzer of Austria 7-5, 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 in 2hr 6min on Rod Laver Arena.

The Swiss 17th seed will now play American qualifier Noah Rubin in the second round.

"A special moment walking out on the court. A special moment when you get to match point and when you win the match point," Federer said of his comeback.

"I think those three components make it special when you're coming back.

"It's already great to just be here, trying to play with the guys. I'm happy with the more relaxed attitude and also the success came easier."

Federer, at 35, is bidding to become the second oldest man in the Open era to win a Grand Slam title after Australian Ken Rosewall.

Asked about the constant debate about his eventual retirement, Federer said: "It doesn't surprise me because I've been talking about retirement for seven years.

"Naturally that's the perfect opening for people to ask that question yet again, think to themselves, 'Why

more?' I get it. It's fine. I'll keep answering it."

World number one Andy Murray was tested and Stan Wawrinka lost his cool as stars struggled on a hot first day.

Roger Federer and Angelique Kerber, the defending women's champion, both dropped sets on a day which threatened a host of upsets at Melbourne Park.

In the event, fourth seed Simona Halep was the only major casualty as soaring afternoon temperatures gave way to a cool evening at Melbourne Park.

Australia's often hot-headed Nick Kyrgios was uncharacteristically calm as he thumped Gastao Elias 6-1, 6-2, 6-2, despite a nosebleed which halted him mid-match.

But Wawrinka drew gasps as he smashed a volley straight at a static Martin Klizan deep in the fifth set, en route to a difficult 4-6, 6-4, 7-5, 4-6, 6-4 win.

As afternoon temperatures topped 32 Celsius (90 Fahrenheit), Murray came through a two hours, 47 minutes test against Ukraine's Illya Marchenko 7-5, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2.

He fared better than Kei Nishikori and Marin Cilic, who were both taken to five sets, while Federer was extended 7-5, 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 by Austria's Jurgen Melzer.

Kerber, defending a Grand Slam title for the first time, laboured past Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko 6-2, 5-7, 6-2 in an unconvincing performance.

The German was an early loser at

both of her warm-up tournaments and she took time to settle against Tsurenko. But she also started slowly last year, when she had to save a match point against Misaki Doi in the first round.

Halep is rated as one of the fastest players on the circuit but her usual zip was glaringly absent as she went down 6-3, 6-1 to American rising star Shelby Rogers.

Afterwards she said a knee injury had slowed her down as she succumbed in the first round for the second consecutive year.

Venus Williams, the oldest player in the women's draw at 36, also found herself with a fight on her hands but she came through 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 against 22-year-old Katerina Kozlova.

Japan's Nishikori, who says he is primed to win his first major title this year, came through a five-set battle with Russia's Andrey Kuznetsov 5-7, 6-1, 6-4, 6-7 (6/8), 6-2.

Cilic, the 2014 US Open winner, also needed five as he came from two sets down to dispatch Jerzy Janowicz 4-6, 4-6, 6-2, 6-2, 6-3.

China's Zhang Shuai, who made a surprise run to last year's quarter-finals, had an easier time with a 6-0, 6-3 win over Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus.

Olympic champion Monica Puig stormed through 6-0, 6-1 against Patricia Tig before Canada's Eugenie Bouchard continued her recent resurgence with a 6-0, 6-4 win over Louisa Chirico.

NATIONAL YOUTH SHOOTING

## Rabiul outguns BKSP boys

SPORTS REPORTER

Rabiul Islam put an end to the dominance of Bangladesh Kriya Shikha Protishthan (BKSP) by winning the gold medal in 10m air rifle event on the concluding day of Hamidur Rahman 2nd National Youth Shooting Championships at the National Shooting Complex yesterday.

Rabiul of Narayanganj Rifles Club came into the eight-shooter final round with a qualification score (589) lower than eventual silver medalist Abu Sufian (590) from BKSP and bronze winner Arnob Sarar Ladif (592) of BKSP too. But Rabiul showed his quality in the final round to snatch the gold ahead of the BKSP students, who had won three gold medals in three events on the opening day.

Rabiul scored 205.5 points in the shoot-off to ensure the gold medal while Sufian and Arnob scored 203.2 and 182.2 points respectively.

A total of 112 shooters from 27 clubs participated in four events in the two-day meet.

## Viola stun Juve

AFP, Milan



Fiorentina blew a hole in Juventus's title hopes with a shock 2-1 win in Florence on Sunday as Nikola Kalinic reassured fans troubled by a possible move to China with a superb first-half opener.

Winning coach Paulo Sousa was riled up Saturday after hearing Massimiliano Allegri claim that Juve were coming to "take command" at the Artemio Franchi stadium.

After a dominant first half that saw Fiorentina miss a host of solid chances, it appeared Allegri's words cut deep.

The memorable Viola win handed Juve just their fourth defeat in 20 games to leave the champions, who have a game in hand, just one point ahead of Roma. Napoli are four points off the pace in third and Lazio a further point back.

Admitting Fiorentina "gave more than 100 percent", Allegri told Mediaset Premium: "It's a setback for us, but we still have the chance to be four points clear.

"Teams usually play the games of their lives against us, they give it more than 100 percent, so we can't afford to be anything less than 100 percent.

"Roma and Napoli are just behind us, so it could go right to the end. But we will learn from this defeat."

After an injury-plagued six weeks, Allegri deployed his trademark "BBC" defence of Andrea Barzagli, Leonardo Bonucci and Giorgio Chiellini for the first time since October 29.

But Fiorentina were fired up from kick-off and it took only seven minutes for captain Gianluigi Buffon to launch a rallying call from the goalmouth.

Viola forward Matias Vecino was a constant threat, the Uruguayan muscling past Juve midfielder Claudio Marchisio to run into the area and unleash a drive had Buffon got down low to parry on seven minutes.

Juve were under the cosh barely two minutes later as Kalinic chased and controlled a high ball, offloading a pass to help set up Vecino for a drive at Buffon's near post that skimmed off the upright.

Federico Chiesa's snap shot after a nice dribble into the area had Buffon down low to parry and Vecino's drive from distance then curled wide of Buffon's upright on the quarter-hour.

The fast start ruffled the champions and their first chance came after 20 minutes, Alex Sandro controlling a clearance from a corner only to shoot straight at Ciprian Tatarusanu.

## BKSP blank Tangail

SPORTS REPORTER

Holders BKSP notched up a massive 11-0 win over Tangail in their second match of the Agrani Bank 26th National Youth Hockey Championship at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Arshad Hossain and Sohanur Rahman struck four goals each while Razib Das, Shafiqul Alam and Razu Ahmed netted one goal apiece for BKSP.

In the day's other matches, Comilla handed a 5-1 defeat to Gazipur with Istiaque Hossain, Javed Hossain, Rakib Hasan netting one goal each and Nazir striking a brace. Maruf pulled one goal back for Gazipur.

Rajshahi beat Manikganj 1-0 in another match, with Joy scoring the all-important goal.

## Sevilla end Real run

AFP, Madrid



A stunning stoppage time winner from Stevan Jovetic ended Real Madrid's Spanish record 40-game unbeaten run on Sunday as Sevilla scored twice in the final five minutes to win 2-1 at the Sanchez Pizjuan.

Cristiano Ronaldo's penalty put Madrid in front 23 minutes from time, but Sergio Ramos's own goal levelled before Jovetic, making his La Liga debut on loan from Inter Milan, curled home from 25 yards.

Victory takes Sevilla to within a point of Real at the top of the table, but Madrid also have a game in hand.

Sevilla had been just seconds away from ending Real's run just four days ago until Karim Benzema's stoppage time equaliser allowed Real to advance 6-3 on aggregate in the Copa del Rey after a 3-3 draw on Thursday.

However, the bad blood from that match boiled over as former Sevilla favourite Ramos's clash with the most fervent section of the home support continued with the Real captain roundly jeered every time he touched the ball.

And the home fans took extra delight as it was Ramos, so often Real's saviour with important late goals, who inspired Sevilla's fightback when he turned into his own net before Jovetic struck in the most dramatic of circumstances.

Until the final five minutes Real had looked defensively solid as boss Zinedine Zidane switched to a back three to match up

with Sevilla's favoured formation.

And in contrast to Thursday's goal fest, the sides cancelled each other out in an intense first 45 minutes short on clear-cut chances.

Ronaldo had the best opportunity of the first-half when he sliced wide from Benzema's dangerous cross.

Luka Modric had a penalty claim waved away at the start of the second-half, whilst at the other end Wissam Ben Yedder tested Keylor Navas with a low drive that the Real keeper comfortably gathered.

However, the match and title race, looked to be swinging decisively in Real's favour when Sergio Rico clipped the heels of Dani Carvajal as the Madrid full-back burst into the area midway through the second-half.

Despite Vitolo's best attempts to damage the penalty spot as Ronaldo prepared to take, the Portuguese comfortably dispatched the ball into the bottom corner for his 23rd goal against Sevilla.

Real's run has been littered with late goals and fightbacks, but for once the European champions were on the receiving end of a stunning turnaround late on.

Firstly, Pablo Sarabia's fiercely dipping free-kick caught Ramos off guard as he powered a header into his own net.

The Spanish international nearly scored another own goal seconds later as he turned Jovetic's dangerous drive over the bar

But Jovetic, who only joined Sevilla on Tuesday, scored his second goal in as many games for the Europa League holders two minutes into stoppage time he curled the ball into the top corner from despite Navas getting a hand to his effort.



PHOTO: AFP

Sevilla forward Stevan Jovetic celebrates his winning goal against Real Madrid during their La Liga clash at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium on Sunday.

SK KAMAL INT'L CLUB CUP

## Eight teams to slug it out from Feb 18

SPORTS REPORTER

The participating teams of Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup tournament, organised by Chittagong Abahani, have all but been confirmed as seven teams out of eight have already given their nod to taking part in the second edition which is scheduled to start from February 18 in Chittagong.

Teams from South Korea, Singapore, Afghanistan and Nepal have been confirmed through their respective national football associations even though the names of the clubs have not been confirmed as yet except for Nepal, who have already decided to send Manang Marshyangdi Club.

The organisers also want to keep one team from India, and Kolkata Mohammedan SC could be that team if they are allowed to play their last match of Kolkata League on February 28.

Holders Chittagong Abahani, Abahani LD and Mohammedan SC are supposed to represent the host nation in this eight-team tournament.

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Office Address: VIEC Bangladesh, House #18, Road # 24, Block # K, Banani, Dhaka-1213  
Tel: +(880) 2 9883545, 9842086, 9895913, 9896134, 01714019160  
Email: viec.bangladesh@vieducation.com  
Website: www.viecbangladesh.com