



QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition. However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

Rooney still has a role for club and country: Scholes

England's record goalscorer Wayne Rooney can still play an useful role for both his country and club Manchester United, his former team-mate Paul Scholes told the BBC.

Bale could have broken my leg: O'Shea

Republic of Ireland veteran John O'Shea believes he was fortunate to avoid a broken leg after being fouled by Gareth Bale during his side's bruising World Cup qualifier against Wales.

Dutch coach summoned after Bulgaria 'debacle'

The Dutch football federation have summoned coach Danny Blind for talks following a 2-0 defeat by Bulgaria that leaves hopes of reaching the 2018 World Cup hanging by a thread.

Figo reveals Real regrets over Gerrard

Luis Figo said he wished Steven Gerrard had played alongside him at Real Madrid after watching the former Liverpool captain star in Saturday's charity match at Anfield.

Federer, Wawrinka advance in Miami

Roger Federer survived a brave challenge from American qualifier Frances Tiafoe before emerging with a 7-6 (7/2) 6-3 victory as he got his Miami Open title bid underway.

Brazil can be even better: Coutinho

AGENCIES, Sao Paulo

Philippe Coutinho has insisted that the Brazilian football team still have room for improvement despite winning seven straight matches since the appointment of coach Tite. Despite the confidence gained under Tite, Coutinho said Brazil were far from a finished product. "There is always something that we can improve. Tite pays a lot of attention to detail, positioning and dead-ball situations. We are playing well but he is always talking about what we need to do to get better," the Liverpool midfielder said on Saturday. Brazil currently lead the South American zone World Cup qualifying standings with 30 points from 13 matches, seven points ahead of second-placed Uruguay. "We have to be focused just as we were against Uruguay. Every game is complicated and every team wants to make life difficult for us," Coutinho said. "We had a great result against Uruguay, which showed our maturity. But now we have another challenge. If we are all focused, we are confident that everything will go to plan," he added.

EMERGING TEAMS ASIA CUP
 Time: 9:00am
 India v Sri Lanka
 Venue: Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Chittagong

Afghanistan v Malaysia
 Venue: MA Aziz Stadium, Chittagong
 Bangladesh v Hong Kong
 Venue: Sk Kamal Int'l Cricket Stadium-1, Cox's Bazar

Pakistan v Nepal
 Venue: Sk Kamal Int'l Cricket Stadium-2, Cox's Bazar



England striker Jermain Defoe (C) marked his first appearance for the England national team since November 2013 with a well-taken goal. PHOTO: REUTERS

Defoe strikes on return
Schuerrle double powers Germany

AFP, Paris



Jermain Defoe adorned his international comeback with a goal as England toiled to a 2-0 victory over Lithuania in a forgettable World Cup qualifier at Wembley on Sunday.

Defoe, 34, was making his first England appearance since November 2013, having been recalled by manager Gareth Southgate, and he marked his return with the opening goal midway through the second half.

Substitute Jamie Vardy added a second goal as England tightened their grip on first place in UEFA qualifying Group F in Southgate's first home game as permanent manager.

His side are now the last team in European qualifying yet to have conceded a goal.

Defoe's strike, the Sunderland veteran's 20th in 56 caps, was an obvious high point and second-half substitute Marcus Rashford delivered an impressive cameo.

But the stubbornly unadventurous nature of Lithuania's approach to the game, which made for a soporific match, meant there was little to shout about from an England perspective.

The game was preceded by the laying of wreaths and a minute's silence in honour of the four people killed and over 50 injured in

Wednesday's terror attack in London.

Defoe's penalty-box cunning was one of the reasons Southgate picked him over Vardy and he vindicated his manager's call by putting England ahead in the 22nd minute.

Raheem Sterling slipped past Egidijus Vitkusnas on the left before rolling in a cross that Defoe planted into the net for his first international goal since March 2013.

He threatened to notch a 21st England goal moments later, thudding a shot wide from range. Joe Hart, captain for the day, had been a virtual bystander, but the England goalkeeper was almost embarrassed in first-half stoppage time.

The assistant referee's flag stayed down despite Nerijus Valckis appearing to be blatantly offside and the Lithuanian forward managed to head the ball past Hart, obliging John Stones to hack clear.

As England continued to labour in the second half, they were given another let-off when Vyckintas Slivka was unable to find a way past Hart with a free shot from just inside the box.

Short of an Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain shot that Setkus parried, England were offering little in attack and in the 59th minute Southgate turned to his bench, sending on Vardy and Rashford.

Vardy took just seven minutes to find the net, steering a shot between Setkus and his left-hand post after Lallana delicately flicked Kyle Walker's pass into his path.

England continued to dominate, but could not add to their lead despite Rashford's best efforts.

In another match featuring a high-profile team, Germany leaked their first goal since July but still extended their perfect record in World Cup qualifiers to five straight wins following Sunday's 4-1 victory away to Azerbaijan with Andre Schuerrle scoring twice.

First-half goals by Schuerrle, Thomas Mueller and Mario Gomez put the world champions 3-1 up at the break, although Azerbaijan midfielder Dimitrij Nazarov, who plays in Germany, had netted an early equaliser to the delight of the home crowd.

It was the first goal Germany had conceded following seven previous clean sheets -- a national team record -- dating back to their 2-0 defeat in Marseille against France in the semi-finals of Euro 2016.

However, Schuerrle added a late second goal to reward the faith shown in him by Germany's head coach Joachim Loew despite a series of below-par displays for Borussia Dortmund.

The away win means Germany stay top of Group C with five wins from five, scoring 20 goals and having now conceded just once.

Germany were near full strength, but with captain and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer out with the calf injury, Bayer Leverkusen's Bernd Leno made only his fourth appearance between the posts.

'Want to be champs'
Hosts target title as Emerging Teams Asia Cup begins today

SPORTS REPORTER



All of the focus will be on young Azmir Ahmed as Bangladesh begin their Emerging Teams Asia Cup campaign against Hong Kong at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar today.

The little-known 21-year-old has hogged the spotlight before the tournament because of his scoring ability, but the selectors will also be looking at how other youngsters and players like Mominul Haque and Nasir Hossain take their opportunity in the eight-team competition.

Eight Under-23 teams, divided into two groups, will be participating. India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Malaysia have been drafted into Group A while Group B comprises Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Pakistan and Nepal.

With all of the focus centred on the 'Tigers' tour of Sri Lanka, selector and Bangladesh team manager Habibul Bashar believe that the tournament, which will be held in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, will be a very interesting one.

Captain Mominul Haque echoed Bashar's sentiments and said that the home side were looking to become champions.

"Our target is to become champions. Whenever you play for your country, it creates an opportunity for a player to show his calibre. I think it will be an interesting tournament. Individually, everybody will try to give their best because the Champions Trophy is coming," said Mominul, who last played an ODI in February 2015 in an

ICC World Cup match against Sri Lanka in Melbourne.

"We have little idea about our opponents, but I think it will not be a big problem at all," he added.

Bashar seemed to agree with Mominul. "We play our first match against Hong Kong and although we have little idea about them, we will get the opportunity to assess other teams' strength once the tournament gets underway. It's true that if our national team was not in action this tournament would get much more exposure, but we are

ITINERARY

- March 27:** India v Sri Lanka (ZACS), Afghanistan v Malaysia (MAAS), Bangladesh v Hong Kong (SKICS)-1 and Pakistan v Nepal (SKICS)-2
- March 28:** Sri Lanka v Afghanistan (ZACS), India v Malaysia (MAAS), Pakistan v Hong Kong (SKICS)-1, Bangladesh v Nepal (SKICS)-2
- March 30:** India v Afghanistan (ZACS), Sri Lanka v Malaysia (MAAS), Bangladesh v Pakistan (SKICS)-1 and Hong Kong v Nepal (SKICS)-2
- April 1:** First Semifinal (ZACS) and Second Semifinal (MAAS)
- April 3:** Final (ZACS)

looking forward to a quality tournament as all the associate members, including Afghanistan, are sending full-strength sides."

"We will definitely look to the young players and how they capitalise on this opportunity but we will also keep an eye on players like Mominul [Haque] and Nasir [Hossain]. It's a good tournament for the young players to get international exposure and I am hopeful that they will play good cricket and achieve good results," Bashar concluded.



Mominul Haque will have to be at his best as the left-hander gears up to lead a young Bangladesh team out in the Emerging Teams Asia Cup. The skipper made it clear yesterday that his side would settle for nothing less than the title. PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

INDEPENDENCE DAY SPORTS

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Police clinched both the men's and women's titles of Walton Independence Cup Handball Tournament at the Shaheed Captain M Masur Ali Handball Stadium yesterday.

Police men's team handed a 34-18 goal defeat to Quantum Foundation after leading the first half 19-11 while Police women's team notched up a hard-fought 13-12 goal win over Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation after taking a 6-5 lead in the first half.

FOOTBALL

BFF Green Team came from behind to post an enthralling 5-3 win over BFF Red Team in a friendly football match which was organised at the BFF artificial turf yesterday to mark the Independence Day.

The teams comprised of former national players like Hasanuzzaman Bablu, Abu Yousuf, Jasimuddin Ahmed Joshi, Kaiser Hamid, Nurul Haque Manik, Arman Mia, Iliyas Hossain, Intiaz Ahmed Nakib, Alfaz Ahmed, Firoz Mahmud Titu, Mahbub Hossain Roxy, Nizam Majumder, Kamal Babu, Jakir Hossain and Nazrul Islam.

Manik scored twice while Milon, Munna and Jalal scored once apiece for the Green Team while Nakib struck a brace and Syed Jilani netted the other for the Red team.

BOXING

Bangladesh Army became champions in the senior section of Marcel Independence Day Boxing Competition, which concluded at the Mohammad Ali Boxing Stadium yesterday.

Bangladesh Army bagged three gold medals in three weight categories -- 49kg, 52kg and 56kg while Boarder Guard Bangladesh won two gold medals in the 60kg and 64kg weight categories.

In the junior section, Khilgaon Pragoti Sangsad, Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) and Dhaka Mariners Club won one gold medal each while BKSP and Dhaka District Sports Association won one gold each in women's section.

ROWING

New Gazi Rowing Club were crowned champions in the Independence Day Rowing Competition held at the Hatirjheel Lake in the capital yesterday.

New Young Star Rowing Club and Universal Rowing Club finished second and third while Shuvadda Keraniganj Rowing Club became champions in women's section, followed by North Bengal Rowing Club and Alinagar Rowing Club in second and third positions respectively.

Vettel masters Hamilton

AFP, Melbourne



Mercedes team with a stunning victory in the season-opening Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on Sunday.

Vettel won by almost 10 seconds from Hamilton and Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas in a commanding victory of tactics and superior speed around the Albert Park street circuit.

Ferrari hadn't won in Melbourne since Kimi Raikkonen's 2007 victory and it was Vettel's second triumph in Australia after winning the 2011 race with Red Bull.

It was also a major fillip for the fledgling season and the new generation of quicker cars after Ferrari's superior pre-season test times as they chase their first

world constructors' title since 2008.

The victory was the German four-time world champion's fourth for Ferrari and his first since Singapore in 2015 and his 43rd career win.

"A title challenge is a long way ahead. For now we are just over the moon at the start we have made here today," Vettel said. "I was not entirely happy with my start, there was a bit of wheel spin, but I was trying to keep the pressure on to give the message that we are here to fight. "There was a bit of luck that Lewis came out in traffic."

Ferrari got the better of Mercedes in the sole round of tyre changes which ultimately decided the race.

Hamilton's early stop meant he rejoined behind the Red Bull of Max Verstappen which allowed Vettel to open up a decisive gap at the head of the field.



German Formula1 driver Sebastian Vettel celebrates in the pit after securing a victory in the Australian Grand Prix on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

Coach hangs on
Bangabandhu Gold Cup

SPORTS REPORTER



The National Teams Committee (NTC) is seemingly hesitant to confirm the head coach of the national football team as the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) are yet to declare the schedule of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup. The game's governing body has also not named the six participating teams as sponsors have not been ensured as yet.

On March 16, the game's governing body announced that it would hold the Bangabandhu Gold Cup from the third week of April, but has so far not confirmed any participating teams neither has it set any tentative date for starting the tournament, forcing the NTC to take a go-slow policy in regards to roping in a foreign coach for the national team.

"We have already talked to six coaches from Western Europe and England, but need to decide first whether to sign a coach at the moment or in June. That's why we have taken a go-slow policy. Once the date of Bangabandhu Gold Cup is declared, we will expedite our recruiting process," informed BFF vice president Tabith M Awal, who is also a member of the NTC.

"It is certain that we will give the new coach a one-year contract to guide the under-23 national team in the AFC Championship Qualifiers and the national team in December's SAFF Championship," Tabith said. "Whether we appoint a foreign coach or not, we will start physical training of the footballers in the next month as our plan is to play two international friendly matches in June."

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag had earlier said that the participating teams are ready to take part in the tournament but they can't declare the date of the tournament as the sponsors have not been confirmed.

It may be mentioned here that the game's governing body is yet to clear last edition's championship money of US\$50,000 to Nepal.