

FIFA bans Messi for four matches

Argentina to appeal ban

AGENCIES



Barcelona star Lionel Messi was suspended for four Argentina matches by FIFA on Tuesday for swearing at an assistant referee, a decision the Argentinian federation said had left him feeling "sad".

The decision was communicated to the Argentine Football Association (AFA) just hours before their match in La Paz on Tuesday evening.

It followed an incident towards the end of the Albiceleste's 1-0 victory over Chile last week, when the Barcelona star scored the only goal from the penalty spot.

The 29-year-old was penalised for a foul and proceeded to wave his arms and shout insults at the referee's assistant Marcelo van Gasse, with whom he refused to shake hands at the final whistle.

It was not initially recorded in referee Sandro Ricci's report but was followed up by FIFA after video footage of Messi's insult emerged. Both the officials and the AFA were subsequently asked for their observations.

Messi will miss Argentina's next game against Bolivia, with the remainder of the suspension served over his country's subsequent World Cup qualifiers.

He was also fined 10,000 Swiss francs (9,350 euros, \$10,170), with FIFA saying: "This decision is in line with the FIFA Disciplinary Committee's previous rulings in similar cases."

Argentina team secretary Jorge Miadosqui, speaking from the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz, immediately confirmed that the federation would appeal the ban.

"The federation will appeal as it should," he said, noting that Messi had not been warned or sanctioned by the referee of the Chile match at the time of the outburst, and nothing had been mentioned in the referee's match report.

"We feel powerless, surprised," added Miadosqui, noting that the ban came just hours ahead of the match with Bolivia.

"I'm angry, Messi is sad, like us. He could have played, he travelled to play, he should have played."

Argentina's victory over Chile left them in third place overall in the 10-team South American qualifying competition for the World Cup with 22 points from 13 games.



Argentina superstar Lionel Messi was handed a four-match ban by FIFA for swearing at an assistant referee during their 2018 World Cup qualifier against Chile last week.

BHF to sit with clubs for players' transfers

SPORTS REPORTER

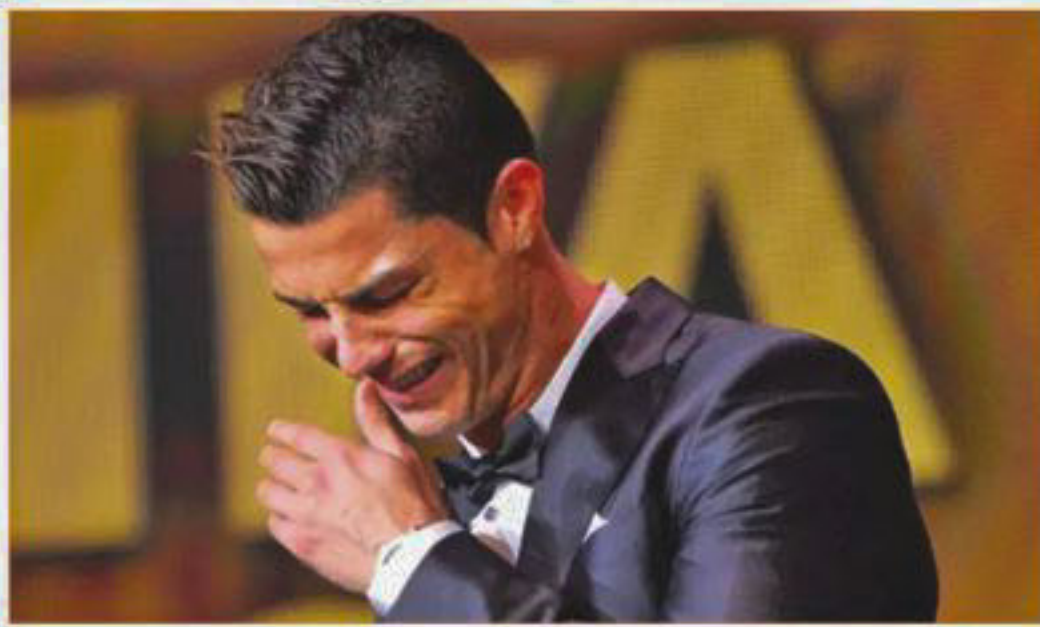


The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) will soon sit with the club representatives of the Premier Division Hockey League to fix the date of players' transfers, which was last held in January 2015.

The decision was taken at the BHF executive committee meeting yesterday which discussed issues like holding the Asia Cup in October, preparing the national team for that tournament, BHF elections, the national hockey championship and successful completion of the Hockey World League Round-2.

"Holding the Premier League is very important and we want to hold it this year, so we will sit with the club representatives within the next 10 days and request them to prepare mentally for the players' transfers," BHF general secretary Abdus Sadeque said. "It seems that it will not be possible to hold the league before the Asia Cup but we will be hoping to complete the transfers before the start of the Asia Cup, so that the players can take part in the tournament with mental relief."

Sadeque also informed that they will also



send a letter to the National Sports Council to take necessary steps to hold the BHF elections as the existing committee will expire on July 9 this year.

"We want the hockey federation to be run by elected members, so the meeting decided to hold the election timely instead of thinking of ad-hoc committee and we will ask the National Sports Council within a couple of days to take necessary steps to hold the elections," said the legendary hockey player.

The meeting also asked the coaching staff and the selection committee to prepare a plan regarding the preparation camp of the national team for the Asia Cup, which was last held in Bangladesh in 1985.

Sadeque also informed that installation floodlights at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium is expected to be completed within next five months as the planning ministry has already sanctioned the project.

As the game's governing body had to draw from its fixed deposit to meet the budget deficit for the Hockey World League Round-2, the meeting decided to raise the funds by collecting new funds as well as promised money from the tournament's sponsors.

Sanchez played in goal at jail

AGENCIES, London

Arsenal forward Alexis Sanchez has graced some of the finest stadiums in the world, and also a Chilean jail as a goalkeeper.

While growing up in South America, Alexis was eager to find game time wherever possible. That meant going wherever there was competition and playing in any position asked of him.

Occasionally his quest would lead him down some unusual avenues, but it is those experiences which have helped to make him the world-class talent he is today.

"My mental approach was always to win and to go as far as possible playing football, said Sanchez.

Chittagong Open tees off today

Siddikur to spearhead local challenge

SPORTS REPORTER



The City Bank American Express Chittagong Open tees off in the scenic settings of the Bhatiyari Golf and Country Club (BGCC) as Chittagong joins the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) bandwagon.

A total of 126 golfers, including a 63-man Bangladeshi field spearheaded by Siddikur Rahman, will compete in the 40-lakh-rupee event, co-sanctioned by the PGTI and Bangladesh Professional Golfers' Association (BPGA).

Apart from two-time Asian Tour winner Siddikur, the first international golf event at the BGCC will also feature 56 professional and six amateur golfers from the host nation. The Indian challenge will be led by the likes of Shamim Khan (PGTI Order of Merit leader), Shankar Das, Honey Baisoya, Udayan Mane, Khalin Joshi and Feroz Ali Mollah, to name a few. Sri Lanka will also be well-represented by the likes of Mithun Perera, N Thangaraja and Anura Rohana.

This is a 72-hole stroke-play tournament where the cut will be applied after the first 36 holes. The top 50 players and ties will make the halfway cut and continue to play for another 36 holes.

BFF takes strict measures

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The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has fined Jessore Football Association Tk 20,000 for fielding an over-aged player in the National Under-18 Football Championship. In addition, the player in question, Zahid Hasan, has also been suspended for six months.

The decision was taken yesterday at a meeting held by the BFF disciplinary committee which also issued warnings to Bhola Football Association and Meherpur Football Association for failing to participate in the championship despite sending entries.

The disciplinary committee also extended the time-frame given to Farashganj Sporting Club to pay back the fund provided by the BFF during the 2014-15 season as well as a fine collectively worth Tk 15.92 lakh by April '13. If Farashganj fail to meet the deadline they risk incurring further punishment or being relegated to the lower division.

Independence Day hockey match held

SPORTS REPORTER

Junmoon Lusai XI notched up a 4-3 win over Abdul Malek Chunnun XI in a friendly match yesterday to mark the Independence Day at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.

Bayezid struck a brace while Ehsan Rana and Mahabub Harun scored one goal each for Junmoon Lusai XI while Ekramullah netted twice and Rafiqul Islam Kamal scored one for Chunnun XI in the keenly contested match.

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Army face PDB in final

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Bangladesh Army and Power Development Board (PDB) moved into the final of the Walton Independence Day Volleyball tournament yesterday.

Bangladesh Army beat Bangladesh Navy in 3-1 sets in one of the semifinals at the Volleyball Stadium to set up today's final clash against PDB, who were declared winners of their encounter as Titas Club refused to play the fourth set due to bad light. PDB were leading by 2-1 sets before the match referee gave the walkover to PDB.

India seal series

AFP, Dharamsala



India thrashed Australia by eight wickets on Tuesday to seal a Test series marked by outbursts and controversies 2-1 and underline their status as the world's number

one side.

Chasing 106 on the penultimate day of the fourth Test, opener Lokesh Rahul hit 51 not out in Dharamsala as India seized back the Border-Gavaskar trophy from Australia.

India's stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane (38 not out) hit two sixes in a row off Pat Cummins en route to the comprehensive win, as fans waved giant India flags and danced in the stands.

India have now won seven Test series win in a row, a run that kicked off with their triumph in Sri Lanka in 2015, and includes victories over New Zealand, England and Bangladesh in an extended home season.

Skipper Virat Kohli, who was forced to sit out the final Test with a shoulder injury, said the hard-fought win over Australia was the most satisfying of the recent run.

"Unbelievable. This is the best series win

so far," said Kohli, who received the Test mace on behalf of India for ending the season as the world's top side.

"The way the Australian team gave us a fight was really amazing, but the way the guys kept bouncing back showed the true character of the side."

In the maiden Test played in Dharamsala, India scored 332 in their first innings in reply to Australia's 300, before the tourists collapsed for just 137 on the third day.

On day four, India lost Vijay to fast bowler Cummins and Cheteshwar Pujara to a run out, but they were the only scares for the hosts who reached their target in less than 24 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 300

INDIA: First innings 332

AUSTRALIA: Second innings 137

INDIA: Second innings 106 for 2 (Rahul 51 not out, Rahane 38 not out; Cummins 1-42)

Result: India won by 8 wickets and clinched four-match series 2-1.

Player-of-the-match: Ravindra Jadeja.

Player-of-the-series: Ravindra Jadeja.

Kohli may miss start of IPL

AFP, Dharamsala

India's firebrand skipper Virat Kohli may miss the start of the lucrative Indian Premier League T20 tournament as he races against time to recover from a shoulder injury.

Kohli, the captain of the Royal Challengers Bangalore team, hurt his right shoulder while diving to stop a boundary during the drawn third Test against Australia in Ranchi.

He sat out the fourth and final Test in Dharamsala which India won by eight wickets to seal the series 2-1 on Tuesday.

"It's still a few weeks to go before I can be 100 percent on the field," Kohli, who managed only 46 runs in the series, told the post-match press conference.

Iran dent China hopes

Japan thrash Thailand

AFP, Tehran



Iran's Mehdi Taremi dealt China's World Cup hopes a major blow on Tuesday, as Australia grabbed a crucial win over UAE to stay in the hunt for an automatic spot at Russia 2018.

Japan ended Thailand's campaign with a 4-0 victory in Saitama, and South Korea squeezed past Syria 1-0 to get back on track after last week's upset to China.

Marcello Lippi's team had raised Chinese hopes with their 1-0 win over the Koreans, but Taremi's goal straight after half-time consigned them to defeat by the same scoreline.

While Iran, Asia's top-ranked team, maintain their four-point cushion from South Korea at the top of Group A, China are second from bottom with only three games to go.

In Sydney, Australia badly needed a win against UAE and after a game featuring 42 fouls they ran out 2-0 victors thanks to goals from Jackson Irvine and Mathew Leckie.

It allowed the Socceroos to keep pace with Japan and Saudi Arabia in Group B as they hunt for the top-two finish which will give them an automatic berth in Russia.

But the result spelled doom for UAE's under-fire coach Mahdi Ali, who announced his resignation from the 2019 Asian Cup hosts following five years at the helm.

Japan had little trouble in their four-goal stroll in Saitama, which featured a 50th international strike for Leicester City forward Shinji Okazaki.

Shinji Kagawa gave the hosts the lead in their Asian Group B qualifier with a sharp finish after eight minutes, before Okazaki thundered home a diving header to bring up his half-century in swashbuckling style.

Okazaki's landmark goal, on his 108th Japan appearance, came on 19 minutes in Saitama and effectively killed the contest.

Yuya Kubo and Maya Yoshida added further goals for the Blue Samurai after the break and Eiji Kawashima saved a late penalty from Adisak Kraisorn to deny Thailand a consolation.



Japan forward Shinji Kagawa is ecstatic after his goal against Thailand during their 2018 World Cup qualifier in Saitama yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



India players pose with the Border-Gavaskar trophy after winning the fourth and final Test against Australia in Dharamsala yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Kiwis in command

AFP, Hamilton



Colin de Grandhomme fired with bat and ball to back up Kane Williamson's 176 as New Zealand tightened the screws on South

Africa in the series deciding final Test in Hamilton on Tuesday.

At stumps on day four, South Africa were 80 for five in their second innings, still 95 runs short of making New Zealand bat again.

Faf du Plessis and Quinton de Kock were both 15 not out.

De Grandhomme, whose lower order 57 helped push New Zealand to 489, a lead of 175, struck in the sixth over of South Africa's reply with the wicket of Dean Elgar for five. He rounded off his day with a smart catch

to dismiss Hashim Amla.

The Zimbabwe-born de Grandhomme was not required for the first Test when Elgar scored 140 and 89 but in four innings since he has removed the opener for scores of nine, 17, five and five.

The loss of Elgar should have signalled to South Africa it was time to dig in but instead wickets fell at regular intervals.

Theinusz de Bruyn was run out for 12 in a bizarre mid-pitch collision after an Amla drive to mid off.

De Bruyn was keeping an eye on the fielder and veered into Amla, leaving the batsmen sprawled on the ground as Williamson threw to BJ Watling to complete the dismissal.

Amla, on eight then, progressed to 19 when he edged a ball from Jeetan Patel which rebounded off Watling's

glove to the sole slip de Grandhomme.

Patel also bowled JP Duminy (13) and Matt Henry had Temba Bavuma caught behind for one to leave South Africa 59 for five before du Plessis and de Kock survived 12 overs to stumps.

Should New Zealand level the series it will be a remarkable turnaround from the eight-wicket, three-day hiding suffered in the second Test, and achieved without injured strike bowlers Trent Boult and Tim Southee as well as senior batsman Ross Taylor.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 314

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 489

(Latham 50, Raval 88, Williamson 176, Santner 41, de Grandhomme 57; Morkel 4-100, Rabada 4-122, Maharaj 2-118)

SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings 80

for 5 (Amla 19, du Plessis 15 not out, de Kock 15 not out; Patel 2-22)