What to WATCH

SONY SIX
Sri Lanka v India
2nd Test, Day-2
Live from 10:30am

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
England v South Africa
4th Test, Day-1
Live from 4:00pm

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League
Rahmatganj v Muktijoddha
Time: 5:00pm

Sheikh Russel v Brothers Union
Time: 7:15pm
Venue: BNS

FIRE HITS WORLD CUP VENUE

A fire broke out at the World Cup stadium being built in the Russian city of Samara yesterday, the second such incident in seven weeks to hit venues under construction for the tournament. The stadium in Samara will host six matches in next year's World Cup finals, including a quarter-final. A spokeswoman for the regional government told Reuters that construction debris at the site had caught fire in the morning but said the exact cause of the blaze had yet to be determined. "There was construction debris, wooden planks, old plastic pipes that needed to be thrown out, but they weren't," spokeswoman Anna Sitnik said. "There was more smoke than fire." The stadium did not sustain any damage in the blaze and no workers were injured, she said. Russia will host the World Cup finals from June 14 to July 15 next year in 12 venues spread across 11 cities, including Moscow, St. Petersburg and Sochi. —REUTERS

Win or lose, let's hope they entertain

AL-AMIN *with* ANISUR RAHMAN

The third floor of the BFF House is a restricted area which the Bangladesh U-16 women's team have made their temporary abode for about a year. If you are mistakenly on the foyer of the third floor you will find neatly arranged shoe-racks with multi-coloured, shimmering boots on display. The clean carpet in the lobby suggested that it was most probably there for the girls to perform their prayers.

This only speaks to how neat and tidy the girls are.

But our curiosity was about how these girls have been preparing for the finals of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship, which will be staged in Thailand next month.

The girls actually have hardly spoken to the media since their spectacular triumph in the qualifying phase at home last September, when they beat teams like Chinese Taipei and Iran to top Group C and earn a place in the eight-team finals. They have also been training behind closed doors and the media were only updated with results whenever they toured abroad -- the girls have gone on five tours since January this year including twice to Japan. Their last outing was in July in South Korea, where they played four games against different selections of the home side.

It was not just that they had won their group but it was their free-flowing approach that captured the hearts and minds of fans, who have been starved of quality football at any level in the country. The girls in red and green have scored 26 goals against two in the qualifying campaign, which is something extraordinary considering that these girls started kicking the ball only a few years ago and Bangladesh have had structured women's football for nine years.

The kind of football the girls played last year was more like a freedom of expression. With basics deeply rooted through playing primary school football championships, the girls actually reaped the rewards of playing together for a couple of years under the guidance of the game's local governing body. This is also a unit that maintained continuity, which is exceptional in the context of the country's overall picture of football, where anything and everything is short-term, starting from the age-group level to the national team.

The qualifying success was an achievement in itself. But they will be lined up against the likes of North Korea, Japan and Australia in the finals, where eight teams will be split into two groups. The bridge is too far from qualifying to the finals. North Korea are not only defending champions, they are the best in the world at age level. So are Japan, who won the title a record three times since its introduction in 2006. Australia's youth development system is one of the best in the world.

In that context, the Bangladesh girls stand little chance to be competitive, let alone win a game at the group stage.

But if you look at the determination on these girls' faces and what they have done in the course of one year behind those closed doors or in the friendly games they played, you can probably see the light at the end of the tunnel.

You will be amazed to learn that the training these girls are undergoing is of a level fit for professionals.

"They have gone through the cooper test. In 12 minutes, the average running of the girls is now 2700m to 3000m. Tahura ran 2850 meter in 12 minutes and Sanjida ran 2800 meter in 12 minutes,"coach GolamRabbaniChoton told The Daily Star at the BFF House last week.

The footballer-turned-coach even said that they were trying to play 'total football'.

Mishrat Jahan Mousumi is perfectly balanced as she fires the ball during Bangladesh U-16 Women's team's training session at the BFF astro-turf ground on Tuesday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

"Everyone now knows what to do after winning the ball or losing it. We are trying to implement it as they are our future footballers. It's not possible for an adult to learn it and it has to be started at the age-group level. If the girls can keep playing the way they played against Korea and Japan [in tour games], I believe someday these girls will be able to play total football," added Choton.

Total football is a big thing and it's the most attractive way of playing soccer. The idea is to play attractive, regardless of result. There were three members of the U-16 team sitting beside Choton and when asked about their understanding of total football,they made quite interesting observations.

"Before, our goalkeeper played hurriedly after catching the ball but now we start the play from the defence, then midfield and forward. We also came down when we defend," said striker Krishna Rani.

"Our technical director always tells us to play in between two players and create spaces. We could not understand it before but we are learning it now. Besides, I'm also learning pressing football," midfielder Mishrat Jahan Mousumi observed.

For winger Sanjida: "It is too tough to play this type of football. I enjoy when we are attacking but it's really tough when we are defending because I have to do a lot of running backward."

During that animated session with the players and the coach, Choton disclosed a very interesting insight into the team's first visit to Japan in January.

"Before our first game against Saki Academy we were mentally very low, not because we were playing for the first time against a Japanese side but because of the fact that the Thailand U-16 team suffered a 10-0 defeat against the home team the other day. We were worried a bit but boosted the girls mentally and the next day, we beat them 2-1," said Choton.

The victory only reflected the fact that the Bangladesh girls have got skill.

"We are physically not as strong as Japan, Korea and China. They are more skilled and tactically they are superior. We might have lost to South Korea 6-0. But we played our own game and the result did not reflect how well we played," Choton added.

Krishna still fondly recalls one incident from that game when she dribbled past five players before being brought down. Sanjida was very excited about her curling free-kick over the wall in a game during the South Korea tour. Mousumi said that she was very happy to play the role of a destructive midfielder.

And Paul Smalley, the technical and strategic director of the BFF, perhaps summed up the expectation of football fans best -- win or lose the girls should be entertaining next month.

"You used some very good words. Exciting, freedom and expression; I like those words. It's our responsibility together when we offer games and players to the public to portray that kind of identity of playing football. The girls quite honestly really didn't play against competitive teams in the SAFF Championship. Our responsibility is not to lose the freedom, excitement, creativity and expression in the girls but to put it into strong bedrock. The bedrock is that they must be able to compete physically, with a game-understanding tactical perspective and technically. Our challenge is to make sure that we interlink all those things and the emphasis of training has been in those areas. We must maintain and retain that freedom of expression. Total football is a very big description. Let's say that the girls need to enjoy playing the game when they're in possession of the ball because we have a responsibility to entertain," Smalley told The Daily Star at Fars Hotel in the city last week.

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:

Media hail Neymar 'transfer of the century'
Neymar's imminent record-shattering move from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain was hailed as "the signing that changes the history of football" by French and Spanish media.

Madrid edge All-Stars to salvage disappointing tour
Real Madrid ended a frustrating pre-season tour of the U.S. on a winning note as the Champions League winners beat a Major League Soccer All-Stars side 4-2 on penalties after a 1-1 draw in Chicago.

Mkhitaryan, Mata lead United to friendly win
A goal in either half from Henrikh Mkhitaryan and his replacement Juan Mata helped Manchester United to a 2-1 victory over Sampdoria at Dublin's Lansdowne Road.

Sheikh Jamal forward Nurul Absar celebrates his all-important goal against Team BJMC during their Bangladesh Premier League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

SK Jamal, Abahani continue fine form

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Jamal DC kept their winning run in the Bangladesh Premier League intact with a laborious 1-0 win over Team BJMC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

A second-half strike from Nurul Absar was good enough to separate the sides as well as take the three-time champions to the top of the table with two successive victories. The win also helped Sheikh Jamal avert a slip like when Abahani slipped to Farashganj SC on Wednesday.

On a muddy pitch following the heavy downpour, both sides struggled to show their natural performance. Sheikh Jamal were comparatively ahead of Team BJMC in terms of ball procession and it was Sheikh Jamal who launched the first attack in the seventh minute but Nigerian forward Raphael Odoyin was denied by BJMC goalkeeper Shohag Hossain Palash.

BJMC also tried to press on their mighty opponents and exposed Sheikh Jamal's backline when Shariful Islam ran down the left to drive an angular shot but goalkeeper Mitul Hasan thwarted it to keep his side in the match.

The encounter seemed to be an affair of two goalkeepers as BJMC goalkeeper Palash then denied Raphael in a one-on-one situation during the 39th minute. However, Palash could not stop Nurul, who volleyed an Ali Hossain cross home from the six-yard box in the 54th minute.

After conceding, BJMC coach Jakaria Babu made two changes as he sent on Mohammad Robin and Abdullah Parvez upfront. The substitutes proved to have a good impact, which kept Sheikh Jamal defenders on their toes. Shariful once again came close to levelling the margin during the 77th minute but wasted the opportunity.

Despite facing a lot of pressure from their opponents, the Dhanmondi Giants almost doubled the lead seven minutes from time but it was once again goalkeeper Palash who denied Gambian hitman Momodou Bah at the cost of corner.

In the day's second fixture, Chittagong Abahani also kept their current run-of-form rolling to post a second win by handing a 1-0 defeat to Mohammedan SC in a match where two players were sent off.

SK JAMAL (NURUL ABSAR 54')	1 - 0	TEAM BJMC	
MOHAMMEDAN	0 - 1	CTG ABAHANI (SABUJ 68')	

Still smarting from a 0-2 defeat at the hands of Sheikh Jamal in their first match, a rejuvenated Mohammedan were expected to fire on all cylinders against a youthful Chittagong Abahani but they had to leave the field with a second defeat from as many matches.

The Black and Whites played comparatively better than their first match but could not find the target despite creating a few chances; rather they conceded the lead in the 68th minute. Chittagong Abahani striker Towhidul Alam Sabuz made no mistake as he sent a rebounder home from inside the box after Mohammedan goalkeeper Mamun Khan poorly cleared a drive from Sohel Rana.

Sharapova pulls out

AFP, *San Francisco*

Five-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova withdrew from the WTA Bank of the West Classic just before her scheduled second-round match Wednesday with a left arm injury, tournament officials announced.

"We're sad to announce that @mariasharapova has withdrawn after doctor's advice regarding her left arm," a post on the tournament's Twitter feed said.

'222m euro not much for Neymar'

AFP, *Dublin*

Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho said Wednesday he does not believe the record-shattering 222 million euro ($260 million) transfer fee Paris St Germain are willing to pay for Neymar is expensive.

But the Reds boss, speaking after his side beat Sampdoria 2-1 in Dublin in a pre-season friendly, is concerned how the staggering figure will affect future transfers.

Mourinho shelled out 105.2 million euros ($111 million) last summer to re-sign their former midfielder Paul Pogba from Juventus.

"When we signed Paul Pogba, I said he was not expensive," Mourinho said.

"Expensive are the ones that get to a certain level without a certain quality. I don't think £200 million for Neymar is expensive.

"Expensive is the fact there will now be more players at £100m, more players at £50m, more players at £60m -- that's the problem.

"Neymar is one of the best players in the world, so commercially that is very strong but the problem is not Neymar -- the problem is the consequences."

Bolt seeks one last magic

AFP, *London*

Usain Bolt is confident he can produce one more magical Midas touch when he seeks to defend his 100m title at the IAAF World Championships.

In eight individual finals at the past four worlds (as well as in four 4x100m relay finals, Bolt has only suffered one hiccup: when he false started in the 100m final in Daegu in 2011.

Eleven world titles to go along with eight Olympic golds: Bolt has the experience of dealing with multi-round big-event racing.

Neymar free to join PSG

AFP, *Barcelona*

Neymar is now free to complete his world record transfer to Paris Saint-Germain after Barcelona confirmed on Thursday his 222 million euro ($260 million) buyout clause had been received by the Catalan club.

"On Thursday afternoon Neymar Jr's legal representatives visited in person the club's offices and made the payment of 222 million euros in the player's name with regards to the unilateral termination of the contract that united both parties," Barca said in a statement.

The move had been held up by the Spanish league's refusal to accept the cheque presented by Neymar's lawyers at their Madrid headquarters earlier on Thursday.

La Liga president Javier Tebas said he wouldn't accept PSG's money as he believes the deal will violate UEFA's financial fair play rules.

And Barca added that they will aid UEFA in any future enquiry into whether the French side fall foul of regulations that don't allow clubs to lose more than 30 million euros over three years.

"The Club will pass on to UEFA the details of the above operation so that they can determine the disciplinary responsibilities that may arise from this case," continued the Barca statement.

However, UEFA insisted the move doesn't automatically break FFP rules as PSG have time to balance their books.

"The transfer of Neymar to PSG will have an effect on the club's finances over several years but the impact of such an operation cannot be judged in advance, notably as PSG could well sell several players for a significant amount," UEFA said in a statement to AFP.

The player is now due to arrive in Paris on Friday, according to airport sources in the French capital, to complete the deal.

And Neymar could be presented at PSG's Ligue 1 opener at home to Amiens on Saturday.

Eng-SA 4th Test starts today

AFP, *Manchester*

South Africa captain Faf du Plessis wants his batsmen to raise their game as they look to finish their lengthy tour of England with a flourish in the fourth Test on Friday at Old Trafford.

The Proteas head into the match with only a share of the spoils available to them after a thumping 239-run defeat in the third Test at The Oval left then 2-1 down with just one to play.

A tour that started back in mid-May has already seen South Africa lose one-day international and Twenty20 series to England, with the Proteas suffering a disappointing first-round exit in the Champions Trophy as well during their time in England.

But victory at Old Trafford would at least ensure South Africa maintain a proud away Test record.

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CHITTAGONG Aug 9 (10-5) Hotel Well Park
DHAKA Aug 10 (10-5) Lake Shore Hotel
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e-GP System enhancement & maintenance

Due to enhancement and maintenance work, the e-GP System (www.eprocure.gov.bd) of Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) will not be available from 7:00pm of August 10, 2017, Thursday to 9am of Sunday, August 13, 2017. Service may also be interrupted from time to time during13-15 August, 2017. The users are requested to take note of this unavoidable interruption.

Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU)
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