What to WATCH

GTV & MAASRANGA
Bangladesh v South Africa
2nd Test, Day-1
Live from 2:00pm

SONY SIX
Pakistan v Sri Lanka
2nd Test, Day-1
Live from 5:30pm

TEN 1
FIFA World Cup Qualifiers
Italy v Macedonia
Live from 1:00am (Saturday)

TEN 1
FIFA World Cup Qualifiers
Spain v Albania
Live from 1:00am (Saturday)

DAY'S EVENT

BD U-19s v Afghanistan U-19s
5th Youth ODI
Time: 9:30am
Venue: SICS, Sylhet

National Cricket League
Time: 9:30am
Khulna v Rangpur
Venue: SKS, Rajshahi

Dhaka v Barisal
Venue: SANS, Khulna
Dhaka Metro v Chittagong
Venue: ZACS, Chittagong

Rajshahi v Sylhet
Venue: SCS, Bogra

There were wild celebrations in the Syrian camp after they battled back from a goal down against regional heavyweights Australia in their 2018 World Cup qualifying Asia zone playoff first leg at the Hang Jebat Stadium in Malaysia yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Soma puts play-off on a knife-edge

AFP, *Malacca*

Omar al-Soma buried a late penalty as war-torn Syria drew 1-1 with Australia to put their two-legged World Cup play-off on a knife-edge on Thursday.

Australia were within sight of victory after Robbie Kruse's first-half goal, but when Mathew Leckie nudged Soma on 84 minutes the towering forward made no mistake from the spot.

It sets up a nerve-wracking second leg in Sydney on Tuesday, with the eventual winners going into another play-off with a CONCACAF federation team for a spot at Russia 2018.

Syria, playing their 'home' games in Malaysia because of the civil war raging in their country, are pursuing their dream of playing their first World Cup, while Asian champions Australia are trying to reach their fourth in a row.

Both teams made a cagey start in front of a sparse but Syrian-dominated crowd in sultry conditions at the Hang Jebat Stadium, a low-key setting for such an important game.

Mark Milligan's fizzing shot with the outside of his left boot tested Mahmoud al-Youssef on 19 minutes, while Soma provided Syria's chief threat at the other end.

Matthew Leckie blasted over on 29 minutes before Soma twice set up Omar Khribin for opportunities that the in-form Al Hilal striker put wide of the Australian goal.

Five minutes before half-time, Leckie created Australia's opener when he received a ball down the right from Milos Degenek, cut inside and arrowed a shot which went in off the boot of Kruse.

After the break, Tomi Juric was unlucky to see his shot come back off the woodwork -- and even unluckier when, bizarrely, he crashed the rebound off the same post.

But Syria were looking dangerous and Khribin had a shot blocked by Leckie, before Soma headed a good chance over and was then denied an almost certain goal by Degenek's last-ditch lunge.

As the game headed into the final quarter, Ouday Jaffal had a close-range free kick cleared off the line and Khribin's deflected set piece sailed just wide.

Syria should have been level on 78 minutes but Soma's point-blank header was deflected onto the post in a reflex stop by Socceroos 'keeper Mathew Ryan.

The critical moment came with six minutes to go, when Leckie made contact mid-air with Soma and Iranian referee Alireza Faghani pointed to the spot.

In the dying moments, Trent Sainsbury had a close-range header saved and Ryan clawed away a Moayad al-Ajan shot, but they shared the spoils to set up Tuesday's tense decider in Sydney.

Heynckes confirms Bayern return offer

AFP, *Berlin*

Veteran German coach Jupp Heynckes confirmed reports on Thursday that he is considering a return to Bayern Munich following Carlo Ancelotti's dismissal.

"It's not yet done and dusted," the 72-year-old Heynckes told the Rheinische Post, the local paper near his home in Moenchengladbach.

"I need to analyse things. It has been four and a half years since I stopped at Bayern and football has changed."

German media report that Heynckes could return to Bayern until the end of the season with current Hoffenheim coach Julian Nagelsmann tipped to take over for the 2018/19 season.

Heynckes confirmed he has met with Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, president Uli Hoeness and director of sport Hasan Salihamidzic.

"Many things were discussed," added Heynckes.

Ancelotti was sacked last week after poor results and ex-Bayern defender Willy Sagnol is now in temporary charge.

Despite his age, Heynckes says he feels "fit" enough to coach Bayern, who led to the Champions League, Bundesliga and German Cup treble in 2013 -- the only German club to ever achieve the feat.

"Bayern is pulling Jupp Heynckes out of retirement," wrote Sport Bild.

The club has not confirmed the report.

With the team in disarray currently, the Bayern hierachy want an authoritative character who knows the club intimately, Bild said.

Bayern are third in the Bundesliga, five points behind leaders Borussia Dortmund.

A stinging 3-0 defeat to Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League led the club to sack Ancelotti last week.

Two German coaches believed to be in the running to manage Bayern -- Nagelsmann and former Dortmund manager Thomas Tuchel -- have no prior experience with the club.

Heynckes coached Bayern over three periods -- from 1987 to 1991, briefly in 2009 and then between 2011 and 2013.

We will fight till the end: Harun

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will fight till the final whistle regardless of opposition when the eight-nation Asia Cup hockey tournament gets underway at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium in the capital from October 11.

That was the statement made by head coach Mahbub Harun during the national hockey team's jersey unveiling programme at the Bangladesh Olympic Association Auditorium yesterday.

Bangladesh have been drawn in Pool A alongside Pakistan, India and Japan and will begin their campaign against Pakistan in one of the opening day's three matches.

"We have to face three Asian giants in the group stage and I told the boys one thing: you must not give up the match before the final whistle. And I believe the boys will offer some great challenges to their mighty opponents on their home ground," said Harun, whose team have played six practice matches against a Gansu province team of China in their two months of preparation.

"We are ready for the tournament. The past 20 days we have mostly worked on the game plan and strategy and tried to motivate the players mentally as we want to improve our position from where we are at the moment," said the former national hockey player.

Captain Rasel Mahmud Jimmy echoed his coach's sentiments and stressed the importance of mental fitness over physical fitness.

"We had earlier played against big teams with the aim of not conceding many goals. But the scenario has changed since we beat China in the Hockey World League in 2013. However, we have still a problem with our mentality because we start the game with a mental weakness. We have to overcome this," said Jimmy, who is all set to play his fifth Asia Cup.

"If we can put up better performances from the first match against Pakistan, I believe the players will be able to overcome this mental weakness," said Jimmy, who believes if they capitalise on the penalty corners then there may be an upset in the group matches.

"In the past month we rectified the mistakes we made on the China tour and tried to convert penalty corners in training. At the same time, we have also worked on defending ourselves as well as hitting on the counter," said Jimmy.

Bangladesh Hockey Federation president and Air chief Marshal Abu Esrar urged the players to keep up team spirit and self-confidence while BHF general secretary Abdus Sadeque expects the boys in red and green to turn into a formidable side on their home turf.

Big blow before the get-go

SPORTS REPORTER

Before even a single fixture of the Hero Asia Cup hockey tournament took the ground, hosts Bangladesh suffered a huge blow as midfielder Sarwar Hossain was ruled out by the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF).

Not only did the AHF punish Sarwar but also the whole Bangladesh team as they will be made to play the first three matches with 17 players instead of 18.

Sarwar was kept in the 18-member squad which was declared on October 29, with an aim of playing him in the place-deciding matches after three group-stage matches, despite the midfielder facing a three-match international suspension following his offense in the Hockey World League Round-2 in Dhaka this March.

"Sarwar was initially suspended for three matches for his offense in Hockey World League Round-2 in Dhaka but the disciplinary committee of FIH revived it and increased the punishment to five matches considering the depth of his offense which is a level-3 offense.

"FIH let BHF know it in April through mail but unfortunately, I was not informed about the punishment by the BHF officials and so we included Sarwar in the final squad and the AHF informed us of it again yesterday [Wednesday]," said BHF general secretary Abdus Sadeque.

Coach Mahbub Harun added that they will call up a midfielder from the stand-by players as a replacement for Sarwar, who was not in his original plan for the first three stage matches.

Ahead of the Asia Cup hockey tournament, starting on October 11, the jersey of the Bangladesh hockey team was unveiled at the Bangladesh Olympic Association Auditorium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

JHA demands security plan

SPORTS REPORTER

The Japan Hockey Association (JHA) has asked the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) to outline the security measures they will have in place for the Japanese team's protection during the Asia Cup hockey tournament in Bangladesh.

After the militant attack in July last year where a few Japanese citizens lost their lives, Japan's government warned their nationals about visiting Bangladesh and later withdrew their team from the Boys U-18 Asia Cup hockey tournament, which was being held here in September, 2016, on security grounds.

This time though, Japan are ready to visit and take part in the tournament However, Japan's foreign ministry called the JHA and asked for an explanation of the security arrangements and in turn, the JHA asked BHF.

"The foreign affair ministry want us to visit them to explain this matter tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Therefore, we urgently need the information on your arrangements for a safe tournament," stated a JHA email on Wednesday.

After admitting that there was a query from the JHA, BHF general secretary Abdus Sadeque said that they had talked to the concerned department of police and will send the required documents by today.

Abahani, MSC post wins

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani posted a massive ten-wicket victory against Rupali Bank KP and Mohammedan secured a 13-run win against Khelaghar SKS in the Dhaka Premier Division Women's Cricket League at BKSP yesterday.

Sharmin Sultana hit an unbeaten 63 and Sharmin Akter scored 52 as Abahani scored 121 in 39 overs without loss in reply to Rupali Bank's 120 all out. Player-of-the-match Abahani's Jahanara Alam claimed three wickets for eight runs.

In the other game, Player-of-the-match Fargana Hoque scored 86 as Mohammedan scored 188 for 7 in 50 overs. In reply, Khelaghar finished their 50-over quota at 175 for nine.

McIlroy recalls Keane snub

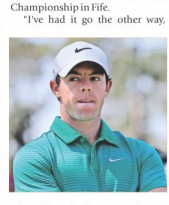
AGENCIES, *London*

Rory McIlroy, the golfing world's number six, recalled an incident from his childhood when he met the infamously hot-tempered Ireland footballer Roy Keane and spoke about the impact the moment had on him.

McIlroy had approached Keane for an autograph but perhaps in one of his 'moods', the former Manchester United skipper turned down his request. McIlroy added that it was a moment which made him decide that he would never leave any of his fans hanging when they reached out to him for an autograph.

"I went and asked him [Keane] for his autograph at the Portmarnock Links Hotel and he said 'no'. I'm sure he's alright, but it sort of stuck with me ever since," said McIlroy, speaking before the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship in Fife.

"I've had it go the other way, where I've asked someone for an autograph as a kid and they didn't give it to me and I've never liked them since. So if a kid asks me for an autograph, I always try to do it."



The Northern Irishman and four-time Major winner made a young fan's day at last week's British Masters by handing over his golf ball -- typical of his warm behaviour towards younger fans in general.

The former world number one, who plays his first round at the Old Course in St Andrews on Thursday, said he goes through between six and nine balls per round.

"Every time I need a new one I look for a young kid in the crowd between holes to give it to them," the 28-year-old said.

"I was surprised how that little moment last week became so big. But it just shows what such a small thing to me can mean to a kid, and that kid might be inspired to go and play."

Asked whether he would oblige if Keane ever asked him for his autograph, McIlroy said: "Only if he gives me his..."

Good start by Siddikur

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman got off to a good start at the Yeangder Tournament Players Championship in Taipei, finishing the first round with a score of two-under-par (70), three shots off the pace.

Siddikur was heading for a faultless round at the Linkou International Golf and Country Club after carding three birdies over the first 12 holes, but a bogey on the 17th saw his score slide just a little bit.

Joint-leaders Peradol Panyathanasedh of Thailand and Johannes Veermna of the United States are at five-under-par (67) in the US$500,000 event.

Nine other players are tied with Siddikur for 12th place, including Jazz Janewattananond, who finished ahead of Siddikur in the Bashundhara Open in Bangladesh in February.

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:

Pattinson ruled out of Ashes

Injury-prone James Pattinson has been ruled out of the Ashes series with England after aggravating a lower back stress fracture, dealing Australia's fast bowling stocks a blow.

Rabada main second Test threat

Having failed to take advantage of favourable first Test conditions, the Bangladesh batsmen have a chance to make amends against the least experienced bowling line-up South Africa have fielded in many years.

Barca offer to mediate

FC Barcelona are a symbol of resistance for Catalan people and the club has always maintained their support for the right to vote in the independence referendum.

Stoichkov backs Catalans

Former Barcelona favourite Hristo Stoichkov backed the independence referendum in Catalonia and denounced the violence that marred the banned vote.