

Simi saves the day for Ireland

SPORTS REPORTER

The bowlers stepped up for the Bangladesh A team as Ireland A were bundled out on 255 during the first day of their one-off Test match where India's Ashish Singh smashed his maiden first-class hundred after an early struggle at the Sylhet International Cricket stadium yesterday.

The home side safely negotiated and ended the day's play on 38 for 1, where the wicket of Zakir Hasan fell cheaply, and are trailing by 217 runs with Shadman Islam (22) and skipper Nazmul Hossain (15) set to resume at the crease on the second day.

Earlier after electing to bat, Ireland were in a spot of bother as they were added on 29 for 3. However coming into bat at number five, right-hander Simi single-handily took charge of the situation and despite receiving no support from the other end, continued to score runs.

Eventually, number ten batsman Andy McBride added a valuable 48 run stand with Simi to help the visitors cross the two hundred run threshold.

Later, after scoring 121 off 159 balls featuring 19 fours and four sixes, Simi was finally dismissed by off-spinner Mahedi Hasan. Meanwhile, McBride registered his second first-class fifty, scoring 57 runs off 62 balls with eight fours.

Bangladesh's fast bowlers Kamruddin Islam, Ebabat Hossain and leg-spinner Jubair Hossain picked up two wickets each while left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam scalped one along with Mahedi's three.

Italy, Swiss seeded

AFP, Paris

Four-time World Cup winners Italy and Switzerland, who won nine of their 10 qualifiers for 2018, will be among the four seeded teams for the play-offs in November.

Croatia and Denmark will also be seeded for the October 12 draw, which places a day after the latest FIFA rankings are set to be released.

Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland cannot face each other as both countries will be unseeded, joining Sweden and Greece.

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.

Rock returns to Australia team bus in India: Finch

A rock shattered a window on the Australian cricket team's bus as they returned to their hotel after the series-winning win over India in the second Twenty20 international, batsman Aaron Finch tweeted.

Pakistan barred from international football

Pakistan has been suspended from international football because of what global soccer body FIFA described as undue third-party interference in the country's football federation (PFF).

US knocked out of WC after Trinidad defeat

The United States failed to qualify for the World Cup for the first time since 1986, crashing to a shock 2-1 defeat against already-eliminated Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad, who was injured for the open-

Messi treble takes Argentina to WC



Argentina superstar Lionel Messi delivered when it mattered by scoring a hat-trick against Ecuador in Quito yesterday to take his beloved country to the World Cup in Russia next year.

AFP, Monterrey

Lionel Messi fired Argentina into the World Cup with a brilliant hat-trick on Tuesday as South American champions Chile suffered a shock elimination.

Messi single-handedly resurrected Argentina's hopes in a 3-1 win over Ecuador in Quito that drew a line under a chaotic campaign that had left the two-time champions in danger of failing to qualify.

The Barcelona superstar scored twice inside the opening 20 minutes to give Argentina the lead after Ecuador had stunned the visitors with an opening goal after Romulo Ibarra after 38 seconds.

Messi then completed his hat-trick – the 44th of his dazzling career – with a sublime chip in the second half to seal the victory.

The Argentinian superstar can now look forward to his fourth appearance at the World Cup at next year's final in Russia, where he will attempt once more to lead his country to an elusive major title.

Since his country's defeat to Germany in the 2014 World Cup final, Messi has twice suffered agony at major tournaments with Argentina, losing the finals of both the 2015 Copa America and the 2016 Copa America Centenario.

Messi, who will turn 31 during next year's World Cup, now has one perhaps final chance to emulate his idol Diego Maradona by lifting the World Cup.

Relieved Argentina manager Jorge Sampaoli – the third coach appointed in 18 months – could hardly bring himself to thank Messi for his hat-trick, nor avoid expressing his gratitude to Messi following Tuesday's win.

"Messi doesn't owe a World Cup to Argentina – football owes a World Cup to Messi," Sampaoli said.

"He's the best player in history. This is a team victory. They played a brilliant match."

Messi later told reporters the prospect of not qualifying had weighed heavily on the squad.

"It would have been crazy for Argentina, for all of us," he said. "Obviously there was that fear, but today we know how to play."

The striker said he expects Argentina to improve now the pressure of qualifying has lifted.

"I think there is going to be a very big change. I think the team will grow much better now," he added.

Argentina had started the day outside the automatic qualifying positions, needing to secure their first win in Quito since 2011 to be certain of claiming at least a playoff place.

It looked as if Argentina's worst fears were set to become a reality after Ibarra's opening goal in the first minute.

But it was not long before Messi stamped his authority on the game, having his team back into the contest with a composed opening goal.

The equaliser came in the 12th minute when Messi doted forward and quickly released Angel Di Maria down the left.

The Paris Saint-Germain attacker duly returned the favour as Messi raced into the penalty area to poke home a low finish past Maximo Bianguera.

CONMEBOL STANDINGS

TEAM	M	W	D	L	GF/GA	PTS
Brazil	18	12	5	1	41/11	41
Uruguay	18	9	4	5	32/20	31
Argentina	18	7	4	7	19/16	28
Colombia	18	7	5	6	21/19	27
Peru	18	7	5	6	27/26	26
Chile	18	8	2	8	26/27	26

*SOP/PLAY-OFF

CONMEBOL STANDINGS

Portugal, France qualify

Robben retires after Netherlands bow out

AFP, Paris

Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal and Antoine Griezmann's France booked spots at the 2018 World Cup on Tuesday while the Netherlands crashed out.

Portugal beat Switzerland 2-0 in Lisbon thanks to a Jahan Djourou own goal and an Andre Silva strike.

France needed goals from Griezmann and Olivier Giroud in a hard-fought 2-1 win over Belarus at the Stade de France.

After a stuttering campaign, France's achievement in beating Bulgaria and Belarus in their final two qualifiers means they avoid the playoffs having had to go through that route for the last two finals.

"We have had a difficult route and tonight wasn't easy either but we've achieved our aim," coach Didier Deschamps said.

"We are happy, even if qualifying is logical given the quality of the players I have."

The Dutch World Cup finalists in South Africa 2010 and semi-finalists four years later avoided the inevitable as they failed to achieve the unlikely 7-0 scoreline over Sweden they needed to salvage a wretched qualifying effort.

Arjen Robben scored twice in a 2-0 win over the Swedes in Amsterdam and said afterwards he was retiring from international football.

"I will always remember the 2010 World Cup and 2014. Those are my best memories. During those three competitions we formed a real team," the 33-year-old Robben said.

In Lisbon, Portugal navigated a potentially fraught final fixture with Switzerland, who become one of the eight European nations who must fight through the playoffs for a spot in the World Cup.

The others are Italy, Denmark, Croatia, Northern Ireland, Greece and the Republic of Ireland.

The Swiss can consider themselves unlucky after winning all nine previous qualifiers but must now overcome a two-legged play-off in November to earn a fourth straight World Cup appearance.

Portugal, who was injured for the open-

he scored.

It was proof for the doomsayers that this team was a lost cause. Argentinians had suffered too much during a lacklustre qualification series and this was the last straw.

But Messi burst through the gloom to equalize and then soon scored again to give Argentina the lead.

"2-1 was not enough. We couldn't be calm," said Lautaro Gonzalez, 35, celebrating after being put through an emotional wringer by his national team.

Beside him, a disbelieving Maximiliano Lacau proclaimed himself a devotee of "Saint Messi. Thank God we have him."

Prized, though, was the restored messi completed his hat-trick in the second half. It was time for Argentinians at home to believe again.

Pablo Ramos, 34, could hardly take it in. The team is still a misfit

mess going to the World Cup, he said, "so it's all suffering."

Even music yielded to Messi when Irish rockers U2 delayed their concert by almost two hours to allow fans in the La Plata stadium near Buenos Aires time to watch the match on giant screens. When they then came on stage, they kicked off a giant party.

With seemingly everyone crowded around every available TV set, the streets of Buenos Aires were so empty it seemed like a curse.

People wore the Argentine shirt in the build-up, but not many. The Argentine public had grown tired of believing in vain.

A night seemed a little too fanciful to ever be granted by a series of underwhelming performances by the national side.

Only a win would do in Quito, where Argentina hadn't won since 2001. The nation held its breath.

Nobody here, or anywhere else, wanted to contemplate the

unthinkable but very real prospect of Argentina losing.

That would mean next year's World Cup in Russia would go ahead without Messi, arguably the world's greatest player.

"It's complicated. I want the team to be at the World Cup in Russia, but only a miracle can save them. I'm going to pray for them," said Maria Cordoba, a 64-year-old optician.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man, and now Argentina will bask in the fact that the "Messiah" will lead them to the World Cup finals.

The main concern of most Argentinians is the economy and the loss of purchasing power, but the turnover of the national team has relegated even that into the background.

The nation yearns for a return to the glory days of 1978 and 1986 when Argentina won the World Cup.

Nobody here, or anywhere else, wanted to contemplate the

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আপনার আয়কর রিটার্ন জমা দিয়েছেন তো?

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