What to WATCH

Star Sports 2
Hero Asia Cup Hockey
Japan v Pakistan
Live from 3:00pm
India v Bangladesh
Live from 5:30pm

Star Sports 1
India v Australia
Third T20
Live from 7:30pm
Sony Six
Pakistan v Sri Lanka

First ODI
Live from 5:00pm
Star Sports Select 2
Bundesliga
Stuttgart v Cologne
Live from 12:30am (Saturday)

Sony Ten 2
La Liga
Espanyol v Levante
Live from 1:00am (Saturday)

DAY'S EVENT

Hero Asia Cup Hockey
Japan v Pakistan
Time: 3:00pm
Bangladesh v India
Time: 5:30pm

Venue: Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium
Bangladesh A v Ireland A
Four-day Match, Day-3
Time: 9:30am

Venue: SICS, Sylhet
National Cricket League
5th Round, 4-Day Match, Day-1
Time: 9:30am
Khulna v Barisal

Venue: SKS, Rajshahi
Dhaka v Rangpur
Venue: SANS, Khulna
Dhaka Metro v Sylhet
Venue: ZACS, Chittagong

Rajshahi v Chittagong
Venue: SCS, Bogra
Bangladesh Premier League
Venue: BNS
Sk Jamal v Farashganj
Time: 4:30pm
Abahani v Ctg Abahani
Time: 6:45pm

'Ozil, Sanchez could leave in January'

AFP, *London*

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger conceded on Thursday he may have no option but to sell star players Alexis Sanchez and Mesut Ozil in the January transfer window.

The pair are both out of contract at the end of the season and are yet to agree new deals.

As things stand, they will be able to leave the Emirates Stadium for free, meaning January will be Arsenal's last opportunity to cash in on their two most high-profile players.

"It is possible," Wenger told a press conference ahead of his side's trip to Watford on Saturday. "Once you're in our kind of situation, we have envisaged every solution, yes."

Asked if Arsenal had set a deadline for contract negotiations with the pair to conclude, Wenger replied: "No. Not at the moment."

Chile forward Sanchez, 28, joined Arsenal from Barcelona in July 2014, a year after 28-year-old Germany playmaker Ozil's arrival from Real Madrid.

The signings electrified Arsenal's fan base, but for all their quality, the duo have thus far been unable to end the club's 14-year wait for the Premier League title.

Sanchez has been linked with a number of major clubs, among them Manchester City and PSG.

Ozil, meanwhile, is reported to have attracted interest from Manchester United.

Dutch fans in mourning

AFP, *The Hague*

Dutch football fans are in mourning after the once mighty Oranje failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, plunging the inventors of "total football" into a collective bout of soul-searching.

Not even two goals from retiring legend Arjen Robben against Sweden could save the stuttering Dutch football machine, which now has the dubious distinction of failing to make it to two major football competitions in a row.

After Tuesday's match, Dutch captain and long-time workhorse Robben announced his retirement from the national team -- marking the end of an era which saw him and other top Dutch players such as Wesley Sneijder, Robin van Persie and Rafael van der Vaart threaten to win the sports' greatest prizes.

Yet almost exactly two years ago to the day, Holland got their first nasty surprise when a 3-2 home defeat against a 10-man Czech Republic saw them fail to qualify for Euro 2016.

Tuesday evening the "melancholy atmosphere was complete: the 2018 World Cup in Russia will be without the Netherlands, the number two in 2010 and the number three in 2014", the authoritative daily De Volkskrant said.

"I am dying of shame because of the Dutch 11," wrote columnist Hugo Borst in the Algemeen Dagblad daily tabloid, adding the team has "lost its creativity and daring".

"No other team in the universe is playing as wide and backwards as many times as the Dutch," he said.

"Instead, the ball should be going hard, straight and forward, pure and simple. Playing wide and backwards are done by average footballers lacking self-confidence," said Borst.

Marco van der Heide, a former professional player at SC Cambuur and football commentator, agreed.

"I think our biggest weakness lies at the tactical level," he told AFP.

"There are extreme differences in how we are doing things here and how it's done outside the Netherlands," he said.

"For instance, in the Netherlands we continue to defend by covering opposing players, while most other teams including smaller countries now use the principle of zonal defending.

"This means covering areas, rather than players, which makes a team less prone to leaving gaps in their defence for the opposition to exploit," Van der Heide said.

But old habits die hard, especially if you're from the country credited for coining the term "total football".

Linked to Dutch legend Johan Cruyff, "total football" is the tactical philosophy where any outfield player can take the role of another player, thus allowing players to roam freely in different positions, so long as the overall formation is maintained.

The tactic saw the Dutch reach two World Cup finals in succession in 1974 and 1978.

"As Dutch supporters we have been spoilt by our achievements," said Van der Heide.

"For such a small country the Netherlands has been achieving good results for so long that we thought we had all the knowledge."

As many Dutch coaches have left to take up overseas jobs, so Dutch tactics have also become known to other countries which were paying close attention.

"Meanwhile, we took too little notice about what was going on (outside the Netherlands), what works," Van der Heide added.

"Our way of playing football became too deeply rooted. What was good a decade ago may not necessarily be any good today."

Dutch media on Wednesday called for a "clean sweep" of Dutch football, to forget about Russia and start preparing to qualify for Euro 2020.

"The Oranje must start anew, but with whom? It could still take years," the NRC daily newspaper said.

Referring to Robben's announcement about retiring, the paper said: "Suddenly things turned very dark as Robben dims the lights on his international career."

Van der Heide added: "It's clear that we don't have quality players at the moment.

"But you can compensate for that, for instance by defending well."

Rose, Lamela return to training

AFP, *London*

Danny Rose and Erik Lamela are back in training with the Tottenham Hotspur first-team squad after long injury lay-offs, the Premier League club said Wednesday.

England full-back Rose has been sidelined since late January with a knee injury and Argentine midfielder Lamela has not played for nearly 12 months due to hip problems.

But Spurs revealed on Wednesday that the pair had rejoined their teammates on the training ground as they bid to recapture their fitness.

Spurs tweeted: "Danny Rose and @ErikLamela train with the rest of the team at Hotspur Way today as they continue to progress with their rehabilitation."

Despite his lengthy spell out, Rose created controversy on the eve of the new season with critical comments about Tottenham's pay structure and transfer strategy, although the 27-year-old subsequently apologised.

Lamela, 25, has suffered problems with both hips and was not named in Tottenham's squad for the group stages of the Champions League.

The north London club have started the season brightly despite the absence of Rose and Lamela and are third in the Premier League table, boosted by the prolific goalscoring of Harry Kane.

Swiss open probe against Al-Khelaifi

AFP, *Geneva*

Switzerland has opened a criminal probe targeting Nasser Al-Khelaifi, the president of Paris Saint-Germain, and FIFA's former secretary general Jerome Valcke, over alleged corruption in the sale of World Cup media rights.

"The Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland has opened a criminal proceeding against the former Secretary General of FIFA and against the Chief Executive Officer of the BEIN MEDIA GROUP LLC in connection with the award of World Cup media rights," said the statement on Thursday from Swiss prosecutors, referring to Valcke and Al-Khelaifi.

While Qatari national Al-Khelaifi is the president of the famed French football club PSG, the statement indicates the alleged offences pertain to his role as the head of sports media group BEIN, which operates on five continents.

NASSER AL-KHELAIFI

The investigation was opened in March and is separate from a probe Switzerland launched against Valcke in March of 2016 over alleged criminal mismanagement during his tenure as deputy to FIFA's disgraced former president Sepp Blatter.

The new allegations claim that Valcke "accepted undue advantages from a businessman in the sports rights sector in connection with the award of media rights for certain countries at the FIFA World Cups in 2018, 2022, 2026 and 2030."

The statement from Switzerland's top prosecutor also alleges illegal dealings with "Nasser Al-Khelaifi in connection with the award of media rights for certain countries at the FIFA World Cups in 2026 and 2030".

The 2018 and 2022 World Cup will be played in Russia and Qatar respectively, while the 2026 and 2030 tournaments have not yet been awarded.

Valcke, a French national, was in Switzerland on Wednesday arguing an appeal at the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne, where he was trying to overturn his 10-year ban from football over graft.

Valcke was interviewed by the attorney general's representatives in Geneva on Thursday "as a suspect", the statement said.

While Valcke was being questioned, authorities in France, Greece, Italy and Spain searched "properties" as part of the probe, the Swiss prosecutors said.

Queen Baton Rally Team captain Miss Cary Lee Thompson hands over 21st Commonwealth Games flag to Bangladesh Olympic Association secretary general Syed Shahed Reza in presence of Adamjee Cantonment Public School and Shahid Bir Uttam Lt. Anwar Girls College students during a ceremony at the Jatiya Sangsad on Wednesday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Navas suffers groin injury

AFP, *Madrid*

Real Madrid goalkeeper Keylor Navas suffered a groin injury while on international duty with Costa Rica, the club announced on Wednesday.

The European champions confirmed that Navas had a "swollen adductor muscle in his right groin" in a statement on their website, but did not say how long the 30-year-old would be out of action.

He joins a long Real injury list featuring the likes of Gareth Bale, Karim Benzema, Mateo Kovacic and Marcelo, and could miss both Saturday's La Liga trip to Getafe and Tuesday's crucial Champions League clash against Tottenham Hotspur.

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:

Maradona congratulates Argentina
Argentina's former number 10 Diego Maradona expressed his pride after Argentina's qualification for the 2018 World Cup.

Vidal backtracks over retirement
Arturo Vidal produced a 180-degree turn on Wednesday insisting he was a "warrior" who would "never abandon" Chile, just hours after seemingly announcing his retirement.

Sharapova triumphs in Tianjin opener
Maria Sharapova made an impressive start to the Tianjin Open on Wednesday by beating Romania's Irina-Camelia Begu in straight sets.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE

4 Euro 2020 spots up for grabs

AFP, *Paris*

Four Euro 2020 places will be on offer during UEFA's new Nations League tournament, which starts next year, after European football's governing body announced the schedule on Wednesday.

The four-division format means that one of Europe's 16 lowest-ranked teams is guaranteed to qualify for the Euros.

UEFA first approved the tournament in 2014, and has decided to split the 55 countries into four so-called 'leagues', based on its coefficient rankings.

The event changes European Championship qualifying, with one team from each Nations League division to reach Euro 2020, with the other 20 places going to the top two sides from the 10 groups of the subsequent, traditional qualifiers.

The top division is 12 teams strong and will be split into four groups of three, with the winners playing the Nations League finals in June 2019 to decide an overall winner.

The top three leagues will see four teams relegated, meaning that it could be an advantage for teams to be demoted to a weaker division before the second edition, with possible 2022 World Cup places at stake.

League A includes the likes of world champions Germany, reigning European Championship winners Portugal, France and England.

The Netherlands' 2-0 win in their last 2018 World Cup qualifier against Sweden on Tuesday saw them take the final spot in the top division from Wales, despite failing to reach Russia.

The group matches will be played in September, October and November next year.

The overall Nations League rankings will also be used to decide the seedings for Euro 2020 qualifying.

LEAGUE A: Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, France, England, Switzerland, Italy, Poland, Iceland, Croatia, Netherlands -- one Euro 2020 place on offer

LEAGUE B: Austria, Wales, Russia, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine, Republic of Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, Denmark, Czech Republic, Turkey -- one Euro 2020 place on offer

LEAGUE C: Hungary, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia, Greece, Serbia, Albania, Norway, Montenegro, Israel, Bulgaria, Finland, Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania -- one Euro 2020 place on offer

LEAGUE D: Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Latvia, Faroe Islands, Luxembourg, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Liechtenstein, Malta, Andorra, Kosovo, San Marino, Gibraltar -- one Euro 2020 place on offer