

What to WATCH

GTV & MAASRANGA
Bangladesh Premier League
Ctg Vikings v Khulna Titans
Live from 1:00pm
Rajshahi Kings v Comilla Victorians
Live from 6:00pm

TEN 2
FIFA World Cup Qualifiers
Switzerland v Northern Ireland
Live from 11:00pm
Greece v Croatia
Live from 1:45am (Monday)

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League
Ctg Vikings v Khulna Titans
Time: 1:00pm

Rajshahi Kings v Comilla Victorians
Time: 6:00pm
Venue: SBNS, Dhaka

HAMILTON HELD AT GUNPOINT

Lewis Hamilton has shockingly revealed his team were "held up at gunpoint" in Brazil. The recently-crowned world champion wrote on Twitter: "Some of my team were held up at gunpoint last night leaving the circuit here in Brazil. Gun shots fired, gun held at one's head. This is so upsetting to hear. Please say a prayer for my guys who are here as professionals today even if shaken." Hamilton, a Mercedes driver, then added: "This happens every single year here. F1 and the teams need to do more, there's no excuse!" The Brazilian grand prix is being held in Sao Paulo this weekend with qualifying taking place yesterday. Local reports claimed the same assailants also attacked a car with members of the FIA inside. But they were in an armoured vehicle and managed to escape, despite the robbers' car crashing into them. Mercedes released a statement following Hamilton's incident: "One minibus was robbed at gunpoint. Valuables were stolen but everybody is safe and uninjured which is the main thing."



—AGENCIES



Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon despondently walks off the pitch after his side's 1-0 loss to Sweden in their World Cup play-off first leg in Stockholm left his chances of making it to a sixth World Cup in jeopardy.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Injury fears cloud Nadal-Federer clash

AFP, London

Nitto Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer can set up a dream climax to the 2017 season at the ATP World Tour Finals, but organisers are sweating on the Spaniard's fitness and a new crop are itching to spoil the party.

The two all-time greats get star billing in London after each won two Grand Slams and locked down the top two rankings spots as Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray had injury-plagued seasons to forget.

The eight-man field at the O2 Arena has an unbalanced look about it but 20-year-old Alexander Zverev leads a hungry chasing pack, desperate to stake a claim to membership of the game's elite.

World number one Nadal, who won the French Open and US Open this year, admitted on Friday that he is not training at 100 percent ahead of his tournament opener against Belgium's David Goffin on Sunday, although he said he is likely to be fit enough to play.

"I hope. And if I didn't believe I can be ready, for me, I wouldn't be here," said the Spaniard, who will also do battle with Dominic Thiem and Grigor Dimitrov in the 'Pete Sampras' group.

"I'm working every day, practising well

and just trying to be ready for the action."

The 31-year-old, forced to pull out of the Paris Masters last week with a knee injury, is painfully aware that the ATP Finals is the one major piece of silverware missing from his trophy cabinet and he wants to put that right.

"Being here is an important thing but for me the most important thing is everything that happened to me this year, the tournaments, competing almost every week with a very competitive level of tennis, being healthy until Paris," he said.

Federer, chasing his seventh Tour Finals title, is happy to be back at the end-of-season showpiece after missing out last year during a long layoff.

"Last year I couldn't be here so it's nice to be here again because this year I had to start further back in the rankings," said the Swiss, who astonished the tennis world by winning the Australian Open after months away from the sport.

Federer, at the age of 36, said he felt fresh after a season that exceeded his expectations.

"This year I ended up playing much less than I thought I would. Because of the great start to the season I didn't have to push it that much to be honest, which was great," he said.

'We will still qualify'

Ventura insists after loss to Sweden

AFP, Stockholm

Italy coach Gian Piero Ventura insisted Saturday that the four-time champions will still make the 2018 World Cup finals despite a 1-0 loss to Sweden in the first leg of their play-off.

Substitute Jakob Johansson grabbed the only goal of a scrappy game in the 61st minute with a low strike that found the corner with the aid of a big deflection to leave Italy in danger of missing the World Cup for the first time in 60 years.

"I feel so strongly that we will qualify because we saw the players in the dressing room and they were angry," said Ventura who now must turn the tie around in the do-or-die second leg in Milan on Monday. "They know they can do better. It was a physical match which surprised us but we are going to do better."

The last time Italy failed to reach the World Cup was for the 1958 tournament in Sweden, but Ventura's side were already under pressure going into the tie after a disappointing end to their Group G campaign that featured a 3-0 loss in Spain and a 1-1 home draw with Macedonia.

Italy have to beat Sweden by two goals in the return leg on Monday in Milan to avoid what the head of the federation Carlo Tavecchio has dubbed the 'Apocalypse'.

Gazzetta dello Sport described their display in Sweden as 'poor and confused' and Tuttosport said 'enough of excuses, now we have to avoid a

historic embarrassment'.

"There are still 90 minutes left to play," aded Ventura. "It was a tough, physical match that could have gone a different way if we scored first."

"The performance of the referee was good overall, but I think that he allowed the match to

be physical at the expense of technique... He probably didn't have complete control of the match."

Captain and goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, who will be hoping to make what will certainly be his final World Cup next year, preached patience to his troops and asked them not to panic.

"We need to be as clear-headed as possible to go to the World Cup," said Buffon. "We know we've lost, but we have another 90 minutes to overcome this complicated situation. The first rule is not to cry over it," he told TMW radio.

"I expect a full San Siro to carry this team through, I don't want to think it's the game of life, but I'm convinced that with the help of the public we will do it. We must be confident Monday, otherwise we have already lost."

Italy suffered a blow when key midfielder Marco Verratti was handed a booking that ruled him out of Monday's second leg for a lunging tackle on Marcus Berg.

A scrappy game was never likely to be decided by a moment of brilliance, and it was a lucky break that gave Janne Andersson's men the lead just after the hour mark.

Johansson latched onto Toivonen's header from an Emil Kraft long throw to fire a shot that wrong-footed Buffon after spinning off Daniele de Rossi.

"It's fantastic, I put my goal down to instinct. Great timing for my first international goal," Johansson said.

Italy looked scared: Pirlo

REUTERS, Milan

Former playmaker Andrea Pirlo joined the criticism after Italy's 1-0 defeat to Sweden on Friday left the four-times champions on the brink of missing out on the World Cup finals for the first time in 60 years.

"Italy looked like a scared team that was playing for a 0-0 draw. In Europe, that is not enough," Pirlo told Sky Sport Italia.

The 38-year-old also had little sympathy for Ventura's complaints about the referee.

"It's a red herring," he said. "Playing in Europe is not like in Italy, where you get a free kick for even the slightest contact. In these matches you need to be above all that and give 100 per cent; it's in these matches that you see the real players."

"San Siro will make its presence felt [in the return leg] but I've never seen a goal scored from the stands," he said.

Championship league ends

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Championship League came to an end yesterday, with runners-up NoFeL Sporting drawing the last match of tournament against T&T Club of Motijheel at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur.

Ariful Islam scored twice for NoFeL Sporting, who had earlier confirmed their promotion to the Bangladesh Premier League next season. Sabbir Hossain scored both goals for T&T Club, who finished fifth with 25 points. NoFeL Sporting ended their campaign on 32 points while champions Bashundhara Kings collected 35.

Kawran Bazar Pragati Sangha, with only nine points from their 18 matches, were relegated.

NoFeL Sporting's Ariful topped the goalscorers' chart with 12 goals followed by Bashundhara Kings' veteran forward Rokonzaman Kanchan on 11.

The champions and runners-up teams were handed trophies after the end of the match.

Blatter denies Solo abuse

AFP, Lausanne

The former head of world football Sepp Blatter said Saturday that claims by US women's goalkeeper Hope Solo that he had grabbed her backside were "absurd".

"Sepp Blatter grabbed my ass, it was a few years ago at the Ballon d'Or ceremony," 36-year-old Solo claimed.

However Blatter, 81, told AFP the accusations were "absurd and ridiculous".

Solo said that sexual harassment at the hands of male officials was a common problem in women's football.

"I have seen this all of my career and I would like to see more athletes speak about their experiences," said Solo.

India rule Junior Int'l Tennis

SPORTS REPORTER



Rishabh Sharda of India cruised to the boys' singles title in the Islami Bank 31st Bangladesh International Junior Tennis Championships, which concluded at the Ramna National Tennis Complex yesterday.

The youngster had a rather comfortable victory over his compatriot Karan Srivastava, taking the tie in two sets (6-0, 6-1).

On the other hand, India's Riddhi Sharma failed to follow the footsteps of her compatriot as she lost the girls' singles final against Wanyi Zhang of China in straight sets (6-3, 6-0).

The Indians however grabbed the other two titles on offer. The Kevin Patel and Aaryan Zaver pair beat the Aman Patel and Jaishvin Sidana pair (6-1, 6-1) in the boys' doubles final while the Banerjee and Rachapudi pair beat the Ramesh Sharma and Saik pair (7-6, 6-2) to take the girls' doubles crown.

9th Apex Cup golf held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

The 9th Apex Cup Golf Tournament concluded at the Savar Golf Club yesterday.

Major Tanvir emerged overall champion while brigadier general Jahangir Kabir (ret'd) won the title in the veteran group. Engineer Abdur Razzak was champion in the super senior group while Shahin Mahabuba won the ladies' title.

Over three hundred golfers took part in the four-day event.



Winners of the Islami Bank 31st Bangladesh International Junior Tennis Championships pose for a photograph with the organisers and sponsors at the Ramna National Tennis Complex yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



Alexander Zverev takes a selfie with the other seven superstars, including Rafael Nadal (R) and Roger Federer (L), who make up the top eight in world tennis and will be facing off in the ATP World Tour Finals in London from today.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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:

Draw delight for Tasmanian rivals

Peru failed to break down a resolute New Zealand defence in a 0-0 draw in Wellington, while Australia edged closer to a place in the 2018 World Cup finals after grinding out a hard-fought 0-0 draw with Honduras.



England hold Germany in friendly

England debutants Jordan Pickford and Ruben Loftus-Cheek caught the eye as Gareth Southgate's injury-ravaged side played out a 0-0 draw with world champions Germany. Everton goalkeeper Pickford, 23, made a number of smart saves, while 21-year-old Chelsea midfielder Loftus-Cheek produced an assured display in the number 10 shirt.



Aguero unlocks stubborn Russia

AFP, Moscow



A late goal from Sergio Aguero unlocked a stubborn Russian defence as Argentina showed their intent ahead of next year's World Cup with a 1-0 win over the tournament hosts here Saturday.

The goal by the Manchester City forward set the South Americans on their way to a well-deserved win at Moscow's renovated 81,000-capacity Luzhniki stadium which will host next year's final.

Argentina, orchestrated by Lionel Messi, seized the initiative early on but their first meaningful chance came in the 21st minute when Angel Di Maria received Messi's pass in the area but Russian 'keeper Igor Akinfeev parried his low shot for a corner.

Three minutes later Aguero forced Akinfeev into a diving save to deny his attempt from just outside the box.

Akinfeev was the hero of the first half as he produced another impressive save after Aguero's powerful shot from just nine yards out.

After the interval Argentina continued to dominate possession and kept Russia's defence under constant pressure but failed to find the net before the 86th minute.

Aguero broke the deadlock when he headed in a rebound from his own blocked shot after a sharp break down the right wing and low cross from Cristian Pavon.

Saturday's encounter was only the second meeting between the teams in the post-Soviet era, after a 3-2 Argentina win in 2009.

The Russians have played just three competitive matches since being dumped out of Euro 2016 in the group phase, when they also failed to make the knockout stage at June's Confederations Cup on home soil.

Russia are unbeaten in their last five friendlies -- scoring 12 goals in the process.

Russia follow the Argentina game by taking on Spain on Tuesday in Saint Petersburg, before welcoming Brazil to Moscow in March.

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