

LUKAKU'S RECORD IN DOUBT

After drawing level with a couple of poacher's goals against Mexico on Saturday, Romelu Lukaku took 72 minutes of Tuesday night's friendly against Japan to move clear as Belgium's all-time record goalscorer. Lukaku notched the 31st goal of his international career -- on his 65th appearance -- when he nodded home Nacer Chadli's far-post cross from approximately 30 centimetres out. That strike moved Lukaku one ahead of both Bernard Voorhoof and Paul van Himst in the standings, who both amassed 30 goals during their respective stints with the Red Devils. It also proved to be the only goal of the night in Brugge as Roberto Martinez's promising side extended their unbeaten run to 16 games. However, the record is not official yet, at least according to FIFA. The game's governing body had nullified an international friendly between Belgium and Luxembourg in which Lukaku netted a hat-trick because the Red Devils made seven substitutions -- one more than the permitted six. It also meant Adnan Januzaj's debut for his country was not recognised by FIFA.

—AGENCIES



# Australia, Denmark seal spots in Russia

## Jedinak, Eriksen hattricks boot out Honduras, Ireland

AFP, Sydney



Captain Mile Jedinak fired a second-half hat-trick as Australia swept into next year's World Cup in Russia with a 3-1 aggregate playoff victory over Honduras in Sydney on Wednesday.

The Aston Villa midfielder's free kick went in off Henry Figueroa on 54 minutes, and he then buried two penalties in the space of 13 minutes before Honduras scrambled a late consolation through Alberth Elis.

The final whistle heralded a massive roar from the 77,000 home crowd at the Sydney Olympic stadium as the Socceroos claimed the penultimate World Cup qualifying spot, following last week's 0-0 first-leg draw.

It will be Australia's fourth consecutive World Cup and fifth overall, and comes in the 22nd game of a mammoth, 29-month qualifying campaign criss-crossing Asia, the Middle East and Central America.

"It's overwhelming to be honest. When you are coaching your own nation to burden of responsibility is even greater," said Australia coach Ange Postecoglou.

"I'm delighted for everyone -- the players,

the staff and the organisation. We did it the hard way and it's a credit to every one of them," he added.

**SUBLIME ERIKSEN POWERS DANES** Christian Eriksen's magnificent hat-trick inspired Denmark to a 5-1 demolition of the Republic of Ireland in Tuesday's second leg of their play-off in Dublin to clinch a spot at next year's World Cup.

Following Saturday's stalemate in Copenhagen, Ireland got their home leg off to the perfect start when Shane Duffy headed them into the lead after only six minutes, but Denmark struck twice before the break and three more in the second half to seal their place in Russia.

"It is an incredible feeling. We have been fighting for so long to get to the World Cup. We are very much looking forward to it," said Eriksen. "It is not often I score any hat-trick so of course it is incredible."

"We're really disappointed. We were well beaten in the end," said Ireland coach Martin O'Neill.

"The two goals we conceded within a couple of minutes knocked us. We had to chase the game and Denmark took advantage. They deserved to go through."



Australia's hat-trick hero Mile Jedinak is swamped by teammates after scoring his third and final goal in the second leg of their play-off against Honduras yesterday, a result that booked the Socceroos' ticket to Russia.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Sheikh Russel march on

SPORTS REPORTER



Sheikh Russel KC extended their unbeaten run in the Bangladesh Premier League to seven matches after a single-goal win against Muktiyoddha Sangsad at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Defender Uttam Kumar Banik headed the winner in the 69th minute to steer Sheikh Russel to fifth position of the 12-team table with 19 points from 12 outings, 10 less than leaders Chittagong Abahani. Muktiyoddha Sangsad, on the other hand, remained second from bottom with only seven points from the same number of matches.

Both clubs started the game with their new-signing foreign recruits, but they could hardly impress on the rain-soaked slippery pitch where the ball was all but confined in the midfield.

Sheikh Russel however enjoyed better ball possession but they could not expose the Muktiyoddha Sangsad

defence, instead it was the freedom fighters' side who found a nice opportunity to take the lead in the 41st minute when Monir Alam put a defence-splitting through pass for Lionel William, who failed to control the ball with the goalkeeper to beat.

Sheikh Russel came close to taking the lead eight minutes into the second half

SK RUSSEL (UTTAM 69)	1 - 0	MUKTIJODDHA
ARAMBAGH (KINGSLEY 35, SUFIL 48)	2 - 1	RAHMATGANJ (CEESAY 26)

but Egyptian forward Zaki Sharan, availing a through-pass from Raju, darted into the box to drive a low shot only to be denied by goalkeeper Masudur Rahman.

The 2012-13 champions finally broke the deadlock in the 69th minute when Uttam rose high inside the box to nod in Raju's lob into the upper net. Muktiyoddha Sangsad found a great opportunity to equalise when Sheikh

Russel goalkeeper Masudur griped a back-pass as referee allowed an indirect free-kick from inside the box.

However, Saikat Mahmud drove miles off target after a teammate had chipped the ball on to his feet in the 81st minute.

Meanwhile, a youthful Arambagh KS came from a goal down to beat Rahmatganj MFS 2-1 in the day's second match. Dawda Ceasay put Rahmatganj ahead in the 26th minute, converting a spot kick before Kingsley Chukwudi levelled the margin for Arambagh with a placing shot in the 35th minute.

Abu Sufian Sufil, a striker of Bangladesh U-19 team, scored the winning goal three minutes into the second half as Arambagh exacted revenge for their 4-2 defeat against the same opposition in their first meeting.

Despite their third win in 12 matches, Arambagh remained at ninth position with 10 points while Rahmatganj, having one point more than Arambagh stayed at eighth position.

## Bulbul elected SAHF president

SPORTS REPORTER

Nurul Fazal Bulbul was elected president of the South Asian Handball Federation (SAHF) and the Arbitration Commission of the International Handball Federation recently.

Currently also president of the Bangladesh Handball Federation, the SAHF elected him unanimously

Bulbul was also elected the Arbitration Commission of International Handball Federation in the 4th AGM of the Federation in Antilla recently.

## Roxy set to replace Afusi

SPORTS REPORTER



Mahabub Hossain Roxy is all set to take over Sheikh Jamal DC as the head coach following the departure of Joseph Afusi, who allegedly left the club on Tuesday without informing the officials.

"I had a meeting with [president of Sheikh Jamal DC Manzur] Kader bhai today and he expressed his desire to appoint me in place of Afusi. I have also no problem to join Sheikh Jamal if the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), which is my current employer, gives permission," said Roxy, who is an assistant coach of the national team as well as the head coach of the under-19 team.

"Roxy will guide Sheikh Jamal till the end

of this season. We are also expecting a no-objection certificate from the BFF as other BFF coaches are also working with other clubs," said Sheikh Jamal's football committee chairman Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chunnun.

Under the guidance of AFC A licensed coach Roxy, the national under-19 team put up spirited shows in the SAFF U-18 Championship and AFC U-19 Championship Qualifiers. The former national midfielder had coached Victoria SC in the Bangladesh Championship League last season. The 47-year old, however, never coached any clubs in the Bangladesh Premier League even though he had guided Badda Jagarani KC twice in the now-defunct Dhaka Premier Division League.

## Federer fights past Zverev

AFP, London

Roger Federer held young pretender Alexander Zverev at bay in a gripping contest Tuesday to reach the last four of the ATP Finals and stay on course for a seventh end-of-season crown.

The world number two saw off a spirited challenge from the much-hyped German 7-6 (8/6), 5-7, 6-1 in front of a boisterous pro-Federer crowd to become the first man through to the last four at the O2 Arena.

"It was a good battle and I always enjoy myself at this beautiful arena," said Federer, who has now reached the semifinals 14 times.

"I have so much fun playing in London and I have been so successful here. Thank you for making it such a special night.

"I'm happy and relieved that I can play freely against (Marin) Cilic, instead of it being a nailbiter. It's been a tough group so to be through in two matches is great."



Swiss maestro Roger Federer celebrates after a gripping 7-6 (8/6), 5-7, 6-1 win against German youngster Alexander Zverev.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Germany's Lars Stindl celebrates his dramatic last-minute equaliser against France during their international friendly in Cologne on Tuesday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Stindl denies France Spain held by Russia

AFP, Paris



Lars Stindl scored a last-gasp equaliser as world champions Germany played out an entertaining 2-2 draw with France

Cologne on Tuesday, while Spain were held by Russia in a 3-3 friendly thriller.

France and Germany are among the favourites for next year's World Cup in Russia, and Stindl's injury-time effort extended Joachim Loew's side's unbeaten run to 21 matches.

"We conceded the goal from nothing to make it 2-1, but we also showed the morale to come back from behind," said stand-in Germany captain Sami Khedira.

In the two teams' first clash since the French won 2-0 in the Euro 2016 semifinals, Didier Deschamps' men scored a brilliantly-worked opening goal in the 33rd minute, as Anthony Martial danced between two defenders and squared for Alexandre Lacazette to tap into an empty net.

The hosts equalised before the hour mark, though, as Mesut Ozil led a rapid counter-attack and played in forward Timo Werner to slide a finish through the legs of the onrushing Steve Mandanda

But the visitors still looked threatening going forward and retook the lead with

19 minutes to play.

This time it was teenage sensation Kylian Mbappe who was the creator, playing a pin-point through ball that Arsenal striker Lacazette latched onto before confidently finishing past Paris Saint-Germain second-choice goalkeeper Kevin Trapp.

But Germany kept probing and snatched a draw as substitutes Stindl and Mario Goetze combined for the former's fourth international goal.

Meanwhile Spain were denied a seventh consecutive victory as Fedor Smolov grabbed World Cup hosts Russia a thrilling 3-3 draw in Saint Petersburg, despite a rare international brace for Sergio Ramos.

"Russia showed a high level of play tonight as their players all looked extremely motivated," coach Lopetegui said. "Russia haven't played any competitive games and their players worked flat out in every single friendly match. But we also played well tonight."

In another high-profile friendly, a young England held Neymar's Brazil to a 0-0 draw at Wembley, having also played out a stalemate with Germany on Saturday.

Tite's men produced a tame performance in a game of few clear opportunities, as home goalkeeper Joe Hart only had to make three saves.

## Italy to sack Ventura

AGENCIES, Milan

Giampiero Ventura's reign as Italy coach is all set to end as Italian media outlets yesterday reported that the 69-year-old was a confirmation away from being sacked.

A meeting was consequently lined up for the afternoon, with a decision seemingly made on the 69-year-old.

Additionally, there was this possibility that FIGC president Carlo Tavecchio will also leave his position --whether voluntarily or involuntarily is yet to be confirmed.

It comes after the Azzurri failed to qualify for a World Cup for the first time in 60 years, courtesy of a 1-0 aggregate defeat to Sweden in the playoffs.

As such, Italy will begin, in earnest, their push for a new national team manager and, more importantly, a new federation president who will pick Ventura's successor. Among the names being floated at the moment are former Azzurri manager Antonio Conte, his successor at Juventus Max Allegri, Carlo Ancelotti, Gian Piero Gasperini, and Roberto Mancini.

Of those names, Ancelotti appears to be the favoured candidate. Despite his sacking at the Bayern Munich, the Italian has one of the most impressive

## Peruvian fans ramp up dirty tricks

AGENCIES, Lima

With Australia's qualification yesterday, 31 of the 32 teams that will make up next year's World Cup have been decided, leaving the final spot between either Peru or New Zealand, who will have the second leg of their play-off match today.

With the high stakes in mind, Peruvian football fans have taken matters into their own hands, doing everything in their power to disrupt the All Whites' build-up.

After several low key (yet highly suspicious) attempts at making life harder for Anthony Hudson's visiting team --including a delayed flight from Wellington, and inexplicably long bus trips to the JW Marriot hotel in Miraflores and the Estadio Nacional -- a series of "prolonged fireworks" woke up players in the early hours of Wednesday morning.

NZME football commentator Jason Pine tweeted at 2.51am local time: "Massive explosion of fireworks in the sky directly above the All Whites' team hotel."

"It was prolonged and loud enough to wake me up and I'm 300 metres away from them [the team hotel]," he added.

## 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:

### Global media paid bribes, FIFA trial hears

The first witness in the FIFA trial painted a damning picture of corruption in South American soccer on Tuesday, saying millions of dollars in bribes were paid for TV rights to major tournaments.

### Aguero collapses at halftime as Argentina lose to Nigeria

Argentina striker Sergio Aguero collapsed in the dressing room at halftime before they lost 4-2 to fellow World Cup qualifiers Nigeria after taking a two-goal lead in a friendly in Krasnodar on Tuesday.

