

What to WATCH

SONY SIX

Australian Open Women's Final

Halep v Wozniacki

Live from 2:30pm

GTV & STAR SPORTS SELECT 2

Tri-Nation ODI Series

Final

Bangladesh v Sri Lanka

Live from 12:00pm

Bundesliga

Dortmund v Freiburg

Live from 8:30pm

Werder Bremen v Hertha Berlin

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

Bundesliga

Bayern Munich v Hoffenheim

Live from 8:30pm

SONY ESPN

FA Cup

Peterborough v Leicester

Live from 6:30pm

Newport v Tottenham

Live from 11:30pm

Liverpool v West Brom

Live from 1:45am (Sunday)

DAY'S EVENT

Tri-Nation ODI Series

Final

Bangladesh v Sri Lanka

Time: 12:00pm

Venue: SBNCS, Dhaka

Independence Cup

Quarterfinal

Brothers Union v Sheikh Jamal

Time: 4:00pm

Venue: BNS, Dhaka

Shankar hot on Siddikur's heels

SPORTS REPORTER

CITY BANK AMERICAN EXPRESS DHAKA OPEN 2018

Siddikur Rahman saw his lead at the top of the inaugural City Bank American Express Dhaka Open trimmed to two strokes at the end of the third round yesterday.

The 33-year-old, who enjoyed a five-stroke lead going into the weekend rounds, still holds the best chance to win the title of the 60,000-dollar tri-sanctioned event after having settled for a two-under-par (70) on Friday.

The two-time Asian Tour winner found the course conditions at Kurmitola Golf Club more difficult compared to the previous rounds. He carded three birdies against one bogey for a 12-under-par (204) total.

"I just can't seem to make any birdies today. I wasn't able to hit it close and my putting wasn't as good as the last two days," said Siddikur, who won his first ADT title in



Siddikur Rahman carded a two-under at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday to take a two-shot lead at the end of the third round of the City Bank American Express Dhaka Open.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bangladesh in 2011, also at the same venue.

"The course seems to be playing tougher by the day so I hope to stay focused tomorrow and try my best to win in front of my home crowd again. All the good memories I have had on this course are what inspired me so far. I hope to ride on that good vibes to put on a good showing tomorrow," Siddikur added.

Conversely, his playing partner, India's Shankar Das, took most of his chances as he scored six birdies against a lone bogey to card a 67. He finished the round in second place.

"I struck my 3-wood really well today and hardly missed anything on the greens. It'll not be easy to dislodge Siddikur on his home turf, but I'll have to make a good start in the final round if I have to exert any pressure on him," said Das.

Shamim Khan of India (70), Malcolm Kokocinski of Sweden (71) and Akbar Hossain of Bangladesh (71) grabbed a share of third place at five-under-par (211).



Roger Federer hits a return against Chung Hyeon during their men's singles semifinals of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. The Swiss superstar was leading 6-1, 5-2 when the South Korean retired hurt with foot blisters.

PHOTO: AFP

Federer eases into final

AFP, Melbourne

AO

Defending champion Roger Federer strolled into the Australian Open final in a bitter-sweet win after Chung Hyeon's retired injured in their semifinal on Friday.

The Swiss star was leading 6-1, 5-2 when the South Korean called it quits with foot blisters and will now face Marin Cilic in Sunday's final.

Chung, the first South Korean man or woman to play in a Grand Slam semifinal, was treated in a medical timeout for the left foot problem two games earlier.

But it came as a big surprise when the 21-year-old walked to the net at 30-30 and trailing 2-5 after 1hr 02mins in the second set to concede defeat.

It put Federer into his seventh Australian final as he chases his sixth Melbourne title and 20th Grand Slam

victory.

Federer leads 2014 US Open champion Cilic 8-1 in their meetings.

The Swiss maestro now has a 30-13 win-loss record in Grand Slam semifinals and has yet to drop a set in this year's Australian Open.

"You couldn't tell until the end," he said of Chung's injury problems. "That's probably why a lot of people are stunned (he retired)."

"I could tell something was wrong before he took the injury timeout, but he has a great composure.

"I think he is already a great player, but we are talking next level excellence and I think he will achieve that.

"We will see much more of him. Top 10 for sure. The rest we will see."

It was a muted semi-final with the Rod Laver Arena retractable roof closed for rain further improving Federer's chances given his indoor record.

He broke Chung's opening service

and twice more to romp away with the first set in just 33 minutes as the Korean made a flurry of errors.

It got no better in the second set with Federer again breaking in the fourth game before the trainer was called on to the court to treat Chung for his foot blisters.

Chung only lasted a bit more than two games before pulling out to a stunned silence.

"In the second set I felt he was starting to get a bit slower, fighting with a blister," Federer said.

"I've played with blisters in the past a lot, and it hurts a lot, and at one point it is just too much and you can't take it anymore.

"That's when you realise there is no way you can come back and you make things really worse, it is better to stop. That's why this feels bitter-sweet.

"Obviously I'm incredibly happy to be in the finals, but not like this."

ASIAN HANDBALL C'SHIPS BD finish 13th

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh finished 13th in the 18th Asian Handball Championships after beating New Zealand 31-24 in a place-deciding match in Suwon, South Korea yesterday.

Bangladesh, who lost to India, South Korea and United Arab Emirates in all three of their group stage matches before losing to China and Australia in classification matches in their debut appearance in Asia's top competition, led the first half against New Zealand by 16-10 goals.

Neighbouring India finished just ahead of Bangladesh to become 12th in the 14-team championships.

NAT'L BADMINTON C'SHIP Tournament starts in Pabna today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The 35th national Badminton championship, sponsored by Square Food And Beverage Ltd, will get underway today at the Shahid Advocate Aminuddin Stadium's FM Samsul Arefin Gymnasium in Pabna. This is the third time that the Bangladesh Badminton Federation (BBF) has arranged the championship in Pabna, with assistance from the Pabna District Sports Association (DSA).

During a press conference, chaired by Pabna Deputy Commissioner and President of the Pabna DSA Jasim Uddin at the tournament venue, the BBF informed that 290 shuttlers, including 45 female participants, from across the nation will take part.

LGRD ministry secretary and president of the BBF Abdul Malek is likely to inaugurate the tournament, which is being held in memory of former BBF secretary FM Samsul Arefin, on Saturday morning as the chief guest.

Messi lifts Barca

AFP, Barcelona

Lionel Messi scored what proved to be the winner as Barcelona beat Espanyol 2-0 to reach the Copa del Rey semifinals on Thursday in a game that saw Philippe Coutinho make his long-awaited debut.

Luis Suarez scored an early opener in the quarterfinal second leg before Messi's deflected effort gave Barcelona a 2-1 aggregate advantage as the holders overturned a 1-0 deficit from last week's first leg.

Ctg Abahani, Arambagh thru'

SPORTS REPORTER



A stoppage-time strike from substitute Towhidul Alam Sabuj helped holders Chittagong Abahani move into the quarterfinals of the Walton Independence Cup with a 1-1 draw against Arambagh at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The outcome of Group D's last match left all three teams on two points, but the defending champions emerged group champions due to having scored more goals than the others. Arambagh grabbed the second spot from the group, pipping Saif SC due to having conceded less number of cards in the group matches as the two sides could not be separated on goal difference.

Saif SC would have booked their quarterfinal berth had yesterday's match produced an outright result for either team. And it looked like defending champions Chittagong Abahani were on the verge of elimination but they dramatically snatched a late equaliser through Sabuj to progress.

Sabuj, the top scorer among local

players in the just-concluded Bangladesh Premier League, was not considered for the starting eleven due to his absence in training camp owing to the birth of his child. However, coach Jufliker Mahmud Mintu sent him in place of Choumrin Rakhain on 78 minutes after they conceded the lead in the 51st minute. The veteran striker paid off the faith of the coach by scoring the equaliser two minutes into four minutes of added time.

However, it was the youthful Arambagh side who played better and

ARAMBAGH (JEWEL 51)	1 - 1	CTG ABAHANI (SABUJ 90+2)
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created more scoring chances throughout the match. They could have taken the lead in the 16th minute had striker Mohammad Jewel not headed a well-judged cross from Habibur Rahman Shohag wide, with the Chittagong Abahani goal gaping. The same player then hit it straight to opposition goalkeeper Ashrafur Islam Rana two minutes later.

In the following minute, Chittagong Abahani's Jafar Iqbal saw

his header come off the post while Arambagh captain Abu Sufian Shufil could not put the ball in the open net on the half-hour mark.

Jewel made amends for his earlier mistake with an eye-catching placing shot six minutes into the second half after being fed through by Shohag inside the box. The young striker placed it at the far post as goalkeeper Rana had come out of his blocks.

Jewel could have doubled the lead in the 74th minute but he drove off target with the goalkeeper to beat before Chittagong Abahani coach sent three experienced players – Rony, Mamunul and Sabuj – for the equaliser. Sabuj side-volleyed a cross from defender Sushanta Tripura from the edge of the box past goalkeeper Azam Khan to rescue his side from early exit.

The first quarterfinal will be between Sheikh Jamal and Brothers Union today while Farshaganj will square off against their Old Dhaka rivals Rahmatganj MFS tomorrow.

Abahani will take on Arambagh in the third quarterfinal on February 2 while Chittagong Abahani will play against Sheikh Russel in the fourth quarterfinal the following day.

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:

Emery wants PSG fans to show Neymar 'affection'

Paris Saint-Germain coach Unai Emery has called on fans to show Neymar more "affection", despite the Brazilian's excellent form since joining the Ligue 1 leaders.

Mourinho signs MU contract extension

Jose Mourinho has signed a contract extension at Manchester United that will keep him at Old Trafford until at least 2020, the Premier League club announced.

Top spot at stake in title decider

AFP, Melbourne

AO

Simona Halep and Caroline Wozniacki will each be trying to end a Grand Slam jinx when they lock horns in an Australian Open final Saturday between the world's two best players.

Both Halep and Wozniacki are in their third major final -- their first in Australia -- and both saved match points in earlier rounds to get there.

Defeat for Romanian world number one Halep would see her knocked off the top ranking by the Dane, currently number two.

Wozniacki, 27, has long carried the unwanted moniker of best player never to win a major, having reached the US Open final in 2009 and 2014, and first becoming number one in 2010.

She is in her 43rd Grand Slam appearance and with a win will regain the number one spot six years after last holding the position -- the longest gap between stints at the top since computerised rankings were introduced in 1975.

"I always believed in myself. I had a tough period where I had a few injuries," said the 27-year-old after reaching another major final with a 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) win over unseeded Elise Mertens.

Wozniacki slid down the rankings to 19th at the end of 2016, and even had to dismiss rumours of retirement in Melbourne a year ago.

"That was kind of hard and tough men-

tally. But once I got past that, I knew that if I can stay healthy and I work hard, my game is good enough for it," she said.

Her hard work was rewarded with a renaissance in 2017, reaching eight finals -- winning in Tokyo and at the season-ending WTA Finals, where she banished another hoodoo by registering a first career win over Venus Williams.

She continued her sparkling form at the start of this year and has 10 wins and only one defeat, to Julia Goerges in the warm-up Auckland final.

Halep is in her 31st Grand Slam tournament after defeating former champion Angelique Kerber 6-3, 4-6, 9-7 in a thrilling semi-final. She made her only previous Grand Slam final appearances at Roland Garros in 2014 and 2017.

The Romanian has only beaten Wozniacki twice in their six previous matches, the most recent meeting ending in a 6-0, 6-2 battering by the Dane at the 2017 WTA Finals in Singapore.

"The way she's playing, she's not missing," said Halep of Wozniacki. "She's running very well. So she's a strong opponent. I played many times. I won against her few times.

"It's going to be a different match. Emotions are there. Pressures are there for both of us. We'll see what is going to happen."

"I think it's exciting because we're both playing for the number one ranking. I think it's a cool storyline," said Wozniacki.



The Australian Open title and the world number one ranking will be at stake today when second-ranked Caroline Wozniacki (R) takes on top-ranked Simona Halep (L) in the final today.

PHOTO: AFP