

What to WATCH

GTV & STAR SPORTS SELECT 2
 Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
 First Test, Day 4
 Live from 9:30am
STAR SPORTS 2
 ICC U-19 World Cup Final
 Australia v India
 Live from 7:00am

SONY SIX
 Australia v New Zealand
 T20 Tri Series, Match 1
 Live from 2:20pm
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
 Premier League
 Man United v Huddersfield
 Live from 9:00pm

Arsenal v Everton
 Live from 11:30pm
SONY ESPN
 Ligue 1
 Lille v PSG
 Live from 10:00pm

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
 First Test, Day 4
 Time: 9:30am

Venue: ZACS, Chittagong
Independence Cup
 Quarterfinal

Sheikh Russel v Ctg Abahani
 Time: 4:00pm
 Venue: BNS, Dhaka



HERTHA OFFERING FANS A TICKET FOR LIFE

Hertha Berlin are offering one fan the chance to win the "season ticket of a lifetime" in the truest sense of the word. The Bundesliga side are running a competition for one supporter to win a tattoo, but not just any tattoo -- a custom-designed tattoo that will also grant them passage into every single Hertha game for the rest of their lives. The chosen candidate gets more than one ordinary piece of art, because in addition to the blue and white flag, the city limits of Berlin and the silhouette of the Olympic Stadium, there is also tattooed a QR code. And that code is a ticket for all of Berlin's home Bundesliga matches -- the season ticket of your life! To enter, Hertha fans simply need to contact the club and tell them just why they deserve to win a seat for life at the Olympiastadion.

-- AGENCIES



Arambagh players celebrate their 3-0 victory over Abahani in their Independence Cup quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

Arambagh end Abahani's treble bid

SPORTS REPORTER

Federation Cup and Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani's dreams of winning their first treble ground to a halt with a 0-3 defeat against lightweights Arambagh in the third quarterfinal of Walton Independence Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Since the introduction of the professional football league only Sheikh Russel achieved the rare feat of winning a treble. Abahani, who had come close to winning a treble last season as well before losing the Independence Cup final to Chittagong Abahani, wasted another opportunity after yesterday's defeat, meaning they will have to be content with two trophies out of three this season.

League champions Abahani were tipped as favourites against a youthful Arambagh, who were on the back foot in the first half and were busy thwarting attacks from the opposition, but they turned the game around in the second half

by scoring from counter-attacks.

"Football is a game of goals. You have to accept defeat when you don't score but concede goals," Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu said at the end of the match. "Arambagh did not score goals by putting pressure on us; rather we awarded the goals to them from silly mistakes."

"When you want to achieve a feat [e.g. treble], you must perform accordingly, but today [Friday] the boys could not justify their names and could not play their natural game," said a frustrated Rupu.

The first half of the game belonged to Abahani, who could easily have taken the lead, but captain Mamun Mia, wingers Shohel Rana and Rubel Mia squandered some easy scoring opportunities to frustrate a few hundred Abahani fans gathered at the big bowl.

Abahani kept pressing after the break and Rubel floated over the crossbar with only Arambagh goalkeeper Azam Khan to beat in the 55th minute before Arambagh took the lead from a counter-attack in the 62nd minute.

Arif ran down deep from the left flank to dribble past an Abahani defender before cutting it back for Abu Sufian Sufil, who drove a left-footer into the net from the middle of the box.

Abahani were still enjoying better ball possession and got a chance to equalise in the 80th minute, but Nabib Jewaz Jibon saw his close-range header tipped over the crossbar.

Arambagh, though, widened the margin from another counter-attack in the following minute through a chip from Mohammad Jewel, who controlled a left-flank cross from Sufil and sent it over advancing goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel. Shahriar Bappy then ensured the victory with an eye-catching curling drive from outside the box in the 85th minute.

"We have improved day by day," Arambagh coach Maruful Haque said in his post-match reaction. "We have been playing better football in this tournament compared to the premier league. I believe in my boys, who have the ability and today they just executed the plan accordingly."

Barca take the edge

AFP, Madrid



Luis Suarez headed in the only goal as defending champions Barcelona edged Valencia 1-0 in their Copa del Rey semifinal first leg at a half-full Camp Nou on Thursday.

Barcelona, the record 29-time winners of the tournament, are attempting to become the first team to lift the cup four years in a row since Athletic Bilbao in the 1930s.

But they were forced to labour against a Valencia team missing a trio of key players -- Goncalo Guedes, Geoffrey Kondogbia and Ezequiel Garay -- through injury.

Barcelona dominated possession but had to wait until the 67th minute for the breakthrough. Not surprisingly, Lionel Messi was the man who unlocked the Valencia defence before setting up Suarez.

The Argentine danced his way into the penalty area before a deft left-footed chip left three defenders out of position and allowed Suarez to score from the edge of six-yard box with a diving header.

Thursday's tight affair was dramatically different to the last time these two teams met at the same stage two years ago -- Barcelona won 8-1 on aggregate following a 7-0 win in the first leg.

"We have a small advantage but there's

still 90 minutes to play and it'll be a long 90 minutes as Valencia are a very strong when they play at home," said Suarez who has now scored 13 times in the last 11 games.

It was another Messi show for Barcelona, with the Argentine running things and getting the vital assist, but manager Ernesto Valverde warned after the match that they must lower their expectations from his side's crown jewel.

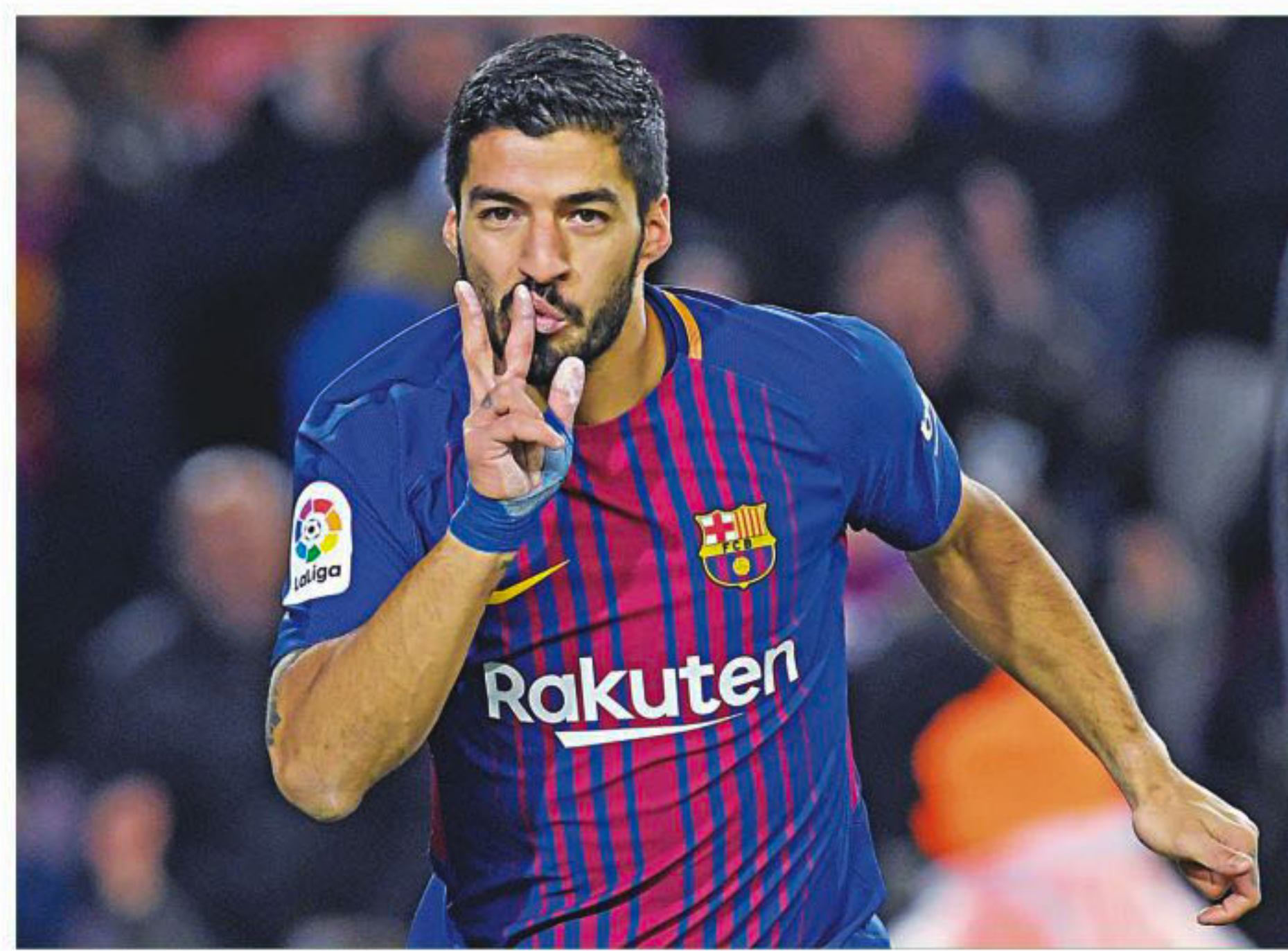
Speaking about Messi post-match, Valverde told reporters: "When Messi plays the ball, everybody expects many things from him. Sometimes it's too much because we have to let Messi breathe a bit."

"It's true he is an awesome player as we have said many, many times. It's a spectacle watching him every day."

Barca will take a slender lead to the Mestalla and Valverde added: "I wouldn't say the score is not that bad because I think the score is good because we won the match."

"Winning a match is really difficult and we did. Valencia didn't score, so we have to think that 0-0 is good for us at Mestalla but we won't go there looking to draw the match. We will go for trying to win it."

In Wednesday's first semifinal, Leganes, who stunned mighty Real Madrid in the quarterfinals, battled back from a goal down to draw 1-1 with Sevilla in the opening leg.



Barcelona striker Luis Suarez made the difference in their Copa del Rey first leg against Valencia on Thursday, ghosting into space at the far post and heading home a Lionel Messi cross brilliantly past two defenders.

PHOTO: AFP

Abahani fly in 3 foreigners

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani flew in three foreign footballers for trial in a bid to strengthening their squad for the AFC Cup, which will start in March.

Of the three foreigners, Brazilian-born Vietnamese attacking midfielder Rodrigo Moto and Iranian forward Milad Behgardom arrived on Thursday while Japanese midfielder Seiya Kojima arrived a few days ago. All three watched yesterday's Independence Cup quarterfinal between Abahani and Arambagh at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Each of the participating teams in the AFC Cup are eligible to play three foreign players from outside Asia and one player from Asia, apart from the local players. Abahani already have four foreign players -- Nigerians Sunday Chizoba and Emeka Darlington, Ghanaian Samad Yussif and Gambian Landing Darboe -- all of whom played for the club in the Federation Cup and the Bangladesh Premier League. The Sky Blues are now looking to fulfilling the Asian quota by roping in one player before sending the final squad list to the AFC by February 6.

"I came here yesterday for the first time. I'm happy to be here. Abahani are a very good team. I will try my best to get into the main team," said Rodrigo.

"Our legend Nasser Hejazi coached here, so I have learnt that the standard of football in Bangladesh is good and I came here to get a chance to play for Abahani," said Behgardom.

"I have been here for only 3-4 days, so I can't say anything about the club yet. The weather is nice and I will try my best to get the opportunity to play the AFC Cup," said Kojima during the interval of yesterday's match.

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:

French referee handed ban for kicking out at player

Referee Tony Chapron was handed a six-month ban for kicking out at a Nantes player in a Ligue 1 game last month.



Zidane defends lack of transfers

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane defended the club's decision not to sign anyone in January, saying he has "blind trust" in his squad.



This is only the beginning: Neymar

Neymar insists his PSG career is just getting started as the French league leaders prepare for a crucial stretch of matches that will likely define their season.



Top-four battle heats up

AFP, London



The intensifying battle for Champions League places takes centre stage in the Premier League this weekend as Liverpool host Tottenham, while Manchester United and Chelsea seek to recover from damaging defeats.

Just five points now separate United

in second from Spurs in fifth, with the riches and prestige of a place in the Champions League for next season fuelling a record £430 million splurge in the January transfer window.

Arsenal sit a distant sixth, six points behind their north London rivals, provoking an uncharacteristically busy window of comings and goings at the Emirates.

Despite holding their own in this season's Champions League and

domestically, Liverpool and Spurs are not even in the top 10 for net spend on transfers in the Premier League this season.

However, the steady progress achieved by both clubs under Jurgen Klopp and Mauricio Pochettino will be threatened if they miss out on next season's Champions League, making Sunday's clash at Anfield all the more vital.

A dominant 2-0 victory over Manchester United on Wednesday underlined Spurs' return to form and a win at Anfield would move them ahead of their hosts in the table.

A forward line partnering new recruits Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Henrikh Mkhitaryan with Mesut Ozil, who has signed a new long-term deal, means the pessimism of a damaging 3-1 defeat at Swansea on Tuesday was quickly forgotten.

However, with Spurs and City to follow Everton's visit to the Emirates, Arsene Wenger will need to former Dortmund duo to quickly re-establish their partnership to keep in touch with the other challengers.

The Gunners could also quickly come to rue their winter clearout as Theo Walcott returns to the Emirates fresh from scoring twice to secure Everton's first win of 2018 against Leicester on Wednesday.



Having spent three seasons together at Borussia Dortmund, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (R) and Henrikh Mkhitaryan train for the first time after being reunited at Arsenal yesterday ahead of their match against Everton today.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Siddikur misses cut in Malaysia

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh ace Siddikur Rahman made a tame exit from the CIMB Championship in Malaysia after a poor second round saw him miss the cut by six strokes.

After having made a decent start which saw him finish the first round with a one-under-par, the 33-year-old -- who won the title of the inaugural City Bank American Express Dhaka Open last week -- played a four-over-par (76) at the Saujana Golf and Country Club yesterday.

The two-time Asian Tour winner exchanged six bogeys for two birdies yesterday as he took his overall tally to three-over-par (147), with 81 players moving in to the weekend rounds at below three-under-par.

Phachara Khongwatmai of Thailand and Nicolo Bertasio of Italy jointly took the clubhouse lead at 11-under-par (133).

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