

What to WATCH

CHANEL 9 & DSPORT

Nidahas Trophy

Sri Lanka v India

Live from 7:30pm

TEN 1

UEFA Champions League

Liverpool v Porto

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Premier League

Time: 9:00am

Gazi Group v Mohammedan

Venue: SBNS

Prime Doleshwar v Prime Bank

Venue: BKSP-3

Abahani v Agrani Bank

Venue: KSOAS

Live from 1:45am (Wednesday)

TEN 2

UEFA Champions League

PSG v Real Madrid

Live from 1:45am (Wednesday)

NBA STAR KOBE BRYANT WINS OSCAR

Retired basketball superstar Kobe Bryant -- once the toast of Los Angeles Lakers -- is now a Hollywood A-lister with an Oscar. Yes, you read that correctly. Nearly two years after leaving the NBA, the 39-year-old Bryant won the Academy Award for best animated short on Sunday for "Dear Basketball," a collaboration with artist Glen Keane and legendary composer John Williams. "Thank you, Academy, for this amazing honour. Thank you, John Williams, for a wonderful piece of music," Bryant said. In a sardonic reference to an attack by Fox News presenter Laura Ingraham against basketballers expressing their political opinions, he said he thought NBA stars were "really supposed to shut up and dribble." "I'm glad we do a little bit more than that," he added. Awards prediction website Gold Derby had Bryant as the odds-on favourite to win the Oscar for best animated short.

--AFP



# Oman the target as hockey team eye title

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh national hockey team will leave for Oman tonight to take part in the Asian Games Qualifiers with the aim of retaining the title of the eight-team tournament beginning in Muscat on March 8.

Bangladesh and the hosts are tipped as favourites for the title, with five out of the eight teams slated to qualify for the Jakarta Asian Games later this year.

Securing a place in the Asian Games is expected to be an easy task for Bangladesh, so the men in green and red are more focused on defending the title.

Oman, however, are expected to give quite a bit of challenge as they have had good preparation in build-up for the tournament, having hosted two tournaments including a four-nation tournament last month which featured Asian giants Pakistan. Furthermore, the Arab nation drew attention with their attacking approach during the Asia Cup in Dhaka last year even though they had to be satisfied with an eighth-place finish, two places behind Bangladesh.

On the other hand, Bangladesh have taken nearly two months' preparation without playing any practice match. They are supposed to play one warm-up match tomorrow against Kazakhstan, a

team which previously both won and lost against Bangladesh during the 1993 Asia Cup.

"I believe the group-stage matches will be comparatively easier for us and we will be able to find out our weaknesses before going into the semifinals and final," captain Rasel Mahmud Jimmy said during the jersey unveiling programme at the Falcon Hall in the capital yesterday.

"We don't have any pressure to defend the title; rather it is our responsibility to strengthen our position in the tournament. If we can put our best and carry out the plan against the opponents, whom we know very well, it will be easy for us to ensure victory in every match," said Jimmy, who however admitted that they are mentally behind Oman, who beat Bangladesh a few times in recent past.

"Our target is the final and also to play good hockey with Oman against whom we did not play well in a few matches. Now we have to prove that we are better than them," said Jimmy.

Coach Mahbub Harun, too, kept his eyes on the title and injected fresh blood into the squad, dropping experienced players like Pushkor Khisha Mimo, Imran Hasan Pinto and Kamruzzaman Rana.

"We have brought some changes in the build-up game and we are trying to attack through the flanks. I think the



Hockey captain, federation high-ups and sponsors pose together to unveil Bangladesh team jerseys at the Falcon Hall in the capital yesterday.

boys have also understood it and implementing the strategy nicely. Now our concentration will be to score from penalty corners in the tournament," said long-serving coach.

First Security Islami Bank has come

forward to sponsor the team by providing Tk 25 lakh while Biman Bangladesh Airlines gave discount on all air tickets. All these information were revealed at the press briefing where Bangladesh Hockey Federation's president Air chief

Marshal Abu Esrar, general secretary Abdus Sadeque, First Security Islami Bank's managing director Syed Wasque Ali and Biman Bangladesh's Airlines' managing director and CEO A M Mosaddique Ahmed were also present.

PHOTO: STAR

WOMEN'S TT LEAGUE

## Winning start for Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Holders Abahani made a winning start in Women's Table Tennis League with a straight 3-0 win over Quantum Foundation at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium in Paltan yesterday.

After winning the first round, Abahani also posted a 3-1 win over Dhaka Women's Club in the second round in which Indian national player Ayhika Mukherjee beat Tania 3-0, Mou beat Tusi 3-1 before Abahani's Soma lost 1-3 to India's Kritika Roy. Anika then wrapped up the victory for Abahani after beating Tusi 3-0 in the fourth match.

In the day's other matches, Dhaka Women's Club beat Pori Table Tennis Club 3-1, JBL TT Sports Club beat Alam TT Club 3-0, Biman Bangladesh Airlines beat Dhaka Youngs Club 3-1.

In the Premier Division League, leaders Pallolic Group finished the first-phase on top with hundred per cent record. Pallolic beat Bangladesh Boys and Wari Club, in straight 3-0 rubber to secure 20 points from 10 matches.

# In awe of his idol no more

AFP, Paris



Saint-Germain to a famous victory over the Portuguese star and Real Madrid on Tuesday.

Mbappe was outshone by Ronaldo in the sides' Champions League last 16, first leg last month, with the world player of the year scoring twice as Madrid won 3-1 at the Santiago Bernabeu.

The teenager has since seen Neymar succumb to a foot injury, meaning PSG will have to settle for just the second most expensive player on the planet in their attack for the Parc des Princes rematch.

While the Brazilian recovers from an operation in his home country, the expectation on Mbappe becomes greater. But there is no evidence that he will wilt under the added pressure. After all, he took his 180 million-euro (\$215 million) price tag in his stride when he moved to Paris from Monaco last August.

There is an intelligence beyond his years that is immediately apparent when Mbappe speaks to the media, as well as when he plays.

"The little guy is clever and that, for me, is the sign of a bloke who can go far," Thierry Henry, to whom he has

been compared, told Canal+ last year.

That was just as Mbappe's career was taking off, but everything has happened very quickly for him in the last 12 months.

Mbappe has won a Ligue 1 title and been to a Champions League semi-final with Monaco. He has reached 10 caps for France and turned down a move to Real.

"There were a lot of rumours about my transfer and it is true that I spoke to Real, but that is in the past now," he told Spanish sports daily Marca in December about his decision to join PSG instead.

Despite the draw of playing for Zinedine Zidane, and alongside Ronaldo, Mbappe -- from the Paris suburbs -- preferred to join his local team.

"It is like a kid from Madrid having the choice between playing for Real and wearing the colours of another team," he said.

Mbappe was also said to be concerned about not being a regular in the Real team, with the 'BBC' of Gareth Bale, Karim Benzema and Ronaldo seemingly immovable.

His transfer to Paris certainly does not seem to be harming his development, although he must have thought long and hard before turning down Real.

He had already been courted by the Spanish club, being shown around their training ground on Zidane's initiative in 2012 having

just turned 14.

He wanted to stay in French football, then, and so chose Monaco. Nevertheless, having once plastered his bedroom wall with posters of Ronaldo, he could not miss the chance to grab a selfie with his hero.

But Mbappe, scorer of 16 goals for PSG this season, is no longer in awe of the five-time Ballon d'Or winner.

"He was one of my idols as a child and it was nice to meet him when I visited Valdebebas. I loved him when I was little but that is finished," he said.

Mbappe has already scored 10 Champions League goals, becoming the youngest player to reach the landmark by doing so before his 19th birthday.

Now 33, 'CR7' reached 100 Champions League goals for Real when he scored twice against PSG last month -- he has now reached double figures in the competition in seven straight seasons.

Ronaldo made his professional debut in a Champions League qualifier for Sporting Lisbon in August 2002, aged 17. Yet, he took 30 games to score his first goal in the competition, for Manchester United against Roma in 2007.

Ronaldo is the undisputed master, but the speed of Mbappe's rise has been frightening. Helping PSG eliminate his former hero from his favourite competition would just about top the lot.



Paris Saint Germain starlet Kylian Mbappe (L) will be aiming to upstage his idol, Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo, during their Champions League encounter in Paris tonight.

PHOTOS: AFP



# Pep can't imagine title runaway

REUTERS, Manchester



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said he never imagined his team would run away with the Premier League title as they are doing this season.

City are 18 points clear of second-placed Liverpool after beating Chelsea 1-0 at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

Asked whether he felt such a season of dominance could be possible,

Guardiola said: "Before? No way. No way, no. Who could believe it? I think if you ask the players, the players (couldn't believe it) neither," he said.

"In terms of not just the results but the way we played, today was another demonstration. We showed the same desire as at Stamford Bridge. That is what pleases me the most.

"To have the distance, 25 to Chelsea, 33 to Arsenal. Tottenham, Liverpool and United, they have had good results and kept a good pace. We are so far so good... I think it is a consequence of

the way we play. The way we play today is a bit similar to what we have done (this season)," he said.

With nine games remaining, City who are on 78 points, have a chance to become the first team to break the 100-points barrier in the history of the English top flight. Guardiola said, though, that his focus was not on records but on securing silverware.

"We are not going to play for the records. Records are always a consequence of what you have done but they are not the main thing."

## Police probe Astori death

AGENCIES, Rome

Italian authorities have confirmed that they have opened manslaughter proceedings into the death of Fiorentina captain Davide Astori.

The 31-year-old Italy international centre-back died on the night of Saturday into Sunday, on the eve of his team's Serie A trip to Udinese, which was subsequently postponed.

Police are now set to investigate the death, the cause of which is currently unknown, it has been confirmed.

"We have opened criminal proceedings over the hypothesis of manslaughter," Antonio de Nicolò, Udine chief prosecutor, told Radio Rai.

"For now, it's been brought against unknown persons. We've arranged an autopsy, which will be performed soon."

Under Italian law, the only way an autopsy could take place on Astori in order to discover the cause of death was to open such a case.

## Liverpool feared again

AFP, Liverpool



Mohamed Salah has scored more goals, Sadio Mane may have more explosive pace, but Roberto Firmino is the glue that knits together a devastating Liverpool front three that is fast making the five-time European champions feared on the continent once more.

Liverpool go into Tuesday's Champions League last 16, second leg at home to Porto with the job already done having inflicted the Portuguese giants' worst-ever home European defeat in a 5-0 rout three weeks ago.

All of Liverpool's free-scoring forward trio were on target that night, as they have been for most of the season.

Their combined tally now stands at 68, with Firmino's 22 already by a distance his best return for a single campaign since joining from Hoffenheim in 2015.

However, the Brazilian is much more than a striker who just scores goals. His pass for Mane to seal a 2-0 win over Newcastle on Saturday was also his 13th assist of the season.

"Mo Salah, world class, but not every day. Sadio Mane, world class, but not every day. Roberto Firmino, world class, pretty much every day," Klopp told newspaper the Mail on Sunday recently.

It isn't surprising to hear the highest of praise from his German coach as Firmino is the embodiment of what Klopp wants from his side.

His seemingly tireless energy reserves press and pull defenders out of their com-

fort zone to make the spaces for Mane and Salah to shine, and yet he still maintains a calm head when needed in front of goal himself.

"Yes, you've got Salah and Mane, but Firmino's hold-up play and work off the ball makes him one of the best attacking players in the Premier League," former Liverpool captain Jamie Carragher told Sky Sports. "He's a top player."

From a slow start at Anfield, Klopp has cultivated Firmino into the player he is now. His technical ability as a former attacking midfielder allied to his athleticism has produced a fluidity in Liverpool's front three that is proving almost impossible to stop.

"With Mane you have the pace and directness, with Firmino you have the touch and hold-up play and securing the ball, and then you have Salah that gives you a bit of both and delivers goals," Liverpool great Steven Gerrard said to BT Sport.

"The blend is superb. There's no greed in the team, there's nobody who is selfish. They all pass the ball to each other."

Even better could come for Firmino at the end of the season with Brazil coach Tite a fan of his flexibility.

The 26-year-old has largely had to play a supporting role to Neymar, Gabriel Jesus and former Liverpool team-mate Philippe Coutinho during Tite's short but successful reign in charge.

Firmino was practically unknown by fans in Brazil when he was first called into the national team in 2014 having left his native land for Hoffenheim when he was just 18, and still lacks some of the star power of his colleagues.

## 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:

### FA chief under fire

The chief executive of England's Football Association, Martin Glenn, faced criticism after saying the Star of David was "something we don't want" in football.

### Henry ready to step in

Arsenal great Thierry Henry has said he would not "back down from a challenge" if a vacancy arose to succeed Arsene Wenger as manager of the Gunners.

### 'We'd have won with Messi'

Atletico Madrid's Argentine coach Diego Simeone said that had Lionel Messi been a Atletico player, his side would have won the league match against Barca.