

BEAR OPENS THIRD DIVISION MATCH

In Russia, a bear called Tim helped open a third division match yesterday. Tim got on his hind legs and offered the match ball to the referee before Angusht's 3-0 victory over Mashuk-KMV. Both teams were lined up and ready to go at the Central'nyj Stadion Mashuk on Saturday, but the 22 players and match officials had to wait for the special guest first. The furry mammal was guided onto the pitch's surrounding running track before handing the match ball to a presumably-petified referee. The stadium announcer joked that Tim will open matches at the 2018 World Cup – just imagine the heart attacks at FIFA HQ – before the furry assistant attempted to warm up the crowd with a few claps.

—AGENCIES



Abahani players celebrate a goal during their 7-1 victory against Police in the opening match of the Khaza Rahmatullah Club Cup hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Flying starts for favourites

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions Abahani and title aspirants Dhaka Mariner Young's Club got off to flying starts in the Khaza Rahmatullah Club Cup hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Abahani thrashed Bangladesh Police Hockey Club 7-1 before Mariner Young's inflicted a massive 8-0 defeat on Victory SC under newly installed floodlights.

It did not seem that the domestic competition returned to the turf after nearly two years when three-time champions Abahani took a second-minute lead through Mohammad Mohsin. However, the lack of physical fitness of the players was apparent as the match progressed, thanks to very short time that the participating teams got for the season's curtain-raising tournament.

Abahani had to sweat to double their lead against promoted Police as Ruman Sarker tapped in from close range in the 24th minute before Taher Ali made it 3-0 at the stroke of half-time.

Abahani applied heavy pressure after the break and added three more goals within seven minutes before Police pulled one goal back in the 55th minute.

The Sky Blues, however, wrapped up the victory in the 60th minute with a strike from Taher.

Abahani coach Mahbub Harun admitted that he did not get all the players together due to exams of BKSP students and had only three days of preparation before the tournament.

Harun, however, believed things will improve as the tournament progresses.

In the day's second match, title contenders Mariner Young's were even more ruthless than the defending champions.

The Premier League champions formed the best team on paper by signing nine national players with former national coach Oliver Kurtz as coach.

Hasan Jubair Niloy struck a brace while Mamunur Rahman Chayan, Moinul Islam Koushik, Hasin Arman, Nayim Uddin, Pushkor Khisha MIMO and Farhad Ahmed Shitul netted one goal apiece.

Meanwhile before the start of the opening match, a minute's silence was observed in memory of former national player and BHF general secretary Khaza Rahmatullah, who passed away last year.

"Today the Club Cup tournament has been named after Rahmatullah. I don't know whether he wanted such a thing but I know that he wanted unity in hockey. I would have been very happy had all the clubs taken part in this tournament," Nadira Rahmatullah, wife of late Rahmatullah, said before being introduced to the players.

"I urge everyone to come under one umbrella by forgetting all conflicts and work for the development of hockey," said Nadira.

GAZPROM F4F EVENT

Rafi follows Rabbi to Russia



SPORTS REPORTER

Budding footballer Golam Rafi Khan has been selected to represent Bangladesh in Gazprom Football for Friendship (F4F) event, which will be held in Moscow from June 8 to 15 ahead of the FIFA World Cup. This is the sixth season of the F4F event and this time the event will feature budding footballers from all 211 FIFA member nations.

12-year-old Rafi from Narayaganj is brother of Golam Rabbi Khan, who had represented Bangladesh in the last edition which was held in Saint Petersburg, on the sidelines of the FIFA Confederations Cup.

Rafi and Rabbi are twins who play football together at the Madanganj Football Academy in Narayaganj. However, while Rabbi played as a striker last year, Rafi will be playing as a defender.

"As Rabbi has already played the football for friendship last year, we did not allow him on open trial where some 200 players took part in five-a-side matches. Rafi was unanimously selected by the coaches' panel in the final match during the four-hour trial," said Bangladesh Football Federation coaches' education coordinator BA Jubair Nipu.

Vidal set to miss Real semifinal

AFP, Berlin

Arturo Vidal is a major doubt for Bayern Munich's Champions League semifinal against Real Madrid after coach Jupp Heynckes revealed on Monday that he needs minor knee surgery.

The Chile international limped out of training on Sunday.

Bayern host holders Real next Wednesday, April 25, in the first leg of their semifinal at the Allianz Arena.

Isco leads Real

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo and Gareth Bale were both rested and Real Madrid hardly broke sweat as they beat Malaga 2-1 on Sunday to climb to third in La Liga.

Isco scored one and set up another at La Rosaleda in a comfortable victory for a much-changed Real side, following Wednesday's last-gasp Champions League win over Juventus.

Diego Rolan grabbed a consolation for Malaga with the last kick of the game but the result was never in doubt.

"Today I can be happy with a job well done," Real coach Zinedine Zidane said.

As well as Bale and Ronaldo, Luka Modric and Raphael Varane were left out, with the all-important Champions League semi-final against Bayern Munich looming next week.

But Isco did his chances of a start in Germany no harm at all by bending in a free-kick that both Ronaldo and Bale would have been proud of, and then generously teeing up Casemiro when he might easily have finished himself.

After scoring his first Real goal in nine appearances against his former club, Isco held his hands up apologetically, and he enjoyed a warm reception from the Malaga fans when substituted in the second half.

"He has always been important, despite what everyone thinks," Zidane said of Isco. "He is important, even if sometimes you think I have something else in my head."

Victory means Los Blancos leapfrog Valencia, who were beaten by Barcelona on Saturday, but remain four points behind Atletico Madrid in second.

Malaga, meanwhile, stay bottom and are all-but doomed, sitting 14 points behind 17th-placed Levante, who had earlier been beaten 3-0 by Atletico.

Fernando Torres stole the show at the Wanda Metropolitan, marking the announcement of his Atletico departure with his 100th La Liga goal off the bench.

Six days after confirming he will be leaving his boyhood club at the end of the season, Torres rolled back the years with a volleyed finish, reminiscent of the 34-year-old in his prime.

"Fernando is an icon here," Atletico coach Diego Simeone said.

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:

Guardiola proves 'Pep's Way' can work in England too

During Pep Guardiola's first season in England there were plenty of pundits wondering if the Spaniard could translate his success in Spain and Germany to the more physical demands of the Premier League without diluting his football philosophy.

Salah targets Champions League over individual glory

Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah says helping the team win the Champions League is more important than any individual award he could receive this season.

Pele confident Neymar can lead Brazil at World Cup

Brazilian legend Pele says he is confident about Brazil's chances at the upcoming World Cup and expects injured star Neymar to be fully fit to lead the side in Russia.

'We must keep building'

AFP, Paris



Paris Saint-Germain coach Unai Emery said the club must continue to strengthen as the French champions try to transform their dominance at home into success in the Champions League.

Angel Di Maria and Giovanni Lo Celso scored twice as PSG secured a fifth Ligue 1 title in six seasons on Sunday with a 7-1 rout of last year's champions Monaco.

Unai Emery's team blew Monaco away in a first-half blitz that saw PSG score four times in 14 minutes at the Parc des Princes with Lo Celso striking either side of goals from Edinson Cavani and Di Maria.

Rony Lopes pulled a goal back for Monaco as he scored for the eighth game in a row, but Di Maria added a fifth before Radamel Falcao turned into his own net and Julian Draxler struck late on as PSG romped to the club's seventh championship.

"Other teams have more titles than us. Monaco, Nantes, Saint-Etienne, Marseille, Lyon...but we must keep on building," Emery, who is likely to be replaced in the summer, told Canal+.

"There is a solid tool for the future, to remain number one in France and become that elsewhere with patience and hard work."

With a fifth successive League Cup already won, PSG completed the second leg of a domestic treble -- they are also through to the French Cup semifinals -- and could yet break their record 96-point haul from the 2015-16 campaign.

While Cavani's second half of the



Paris Saint-Germain players are ecstatic after winning their seventh Ligue 1 title, routing last year's champions Monaco 7-1 at the Parc des Princes on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

PSG also became the first team in Europe's top leagues this season to reach 100 goals on a night they were without the injured Neymar and Kylian Mbappe, the teenager left on the bench after a bout of illness.

Monaco arrived in Paris unbeaten on their last eight league visits to the capital but any prospect of them prolonging PSG's wait for the title quickly eroded.

Kamil Glik's absence in the heart of the visiting defence was acutely felt as Lo Celso started the move that resulted in the opening goal on 14 minutes, sauntering into the box to tap in a Dani Alves cross.

While Cavani's second half of the

campaign has proved less prolific than the blistering spell that yielded 19 goals before Christmas, the Uruguayan bagged his league-best 25th goal with a powerful header from a Yuri Berchiche cross.

Cavani then released Di Maria with a superb hooked pass from inside his own half and the Argentine raced clear before lifting an exquisite chip over the advancing Danijel Subasic.

Javier Pastore supplied Lo Celso to head in PSG's fourth on 28 minutes and Monaco suffered further misfortune when France international Djibril Sidibe was stretchered off with a leg injury, a worrying sign for Didier Deschamps ahead of the World Cup.

Man City eyeing record books

AFP, London



Champions Manchester City have set their sights on rewriting the record books after clinching the Premier League title.

Pep Guardiola's side were crowned kings of English football on Sunday as their arch rivals Manchester United slumped to a shock 1-0 defeat against struggling West Bromwich Albion.

City are 16 points clear of second placed United, who can only take a maximum of 15 points from their remaining matches.

Given the way they have demolished all challengers in the league, it was apparent months ago that it was only a matter of when rather than if City would take the title.

But sealing the silverware thanks to a slip from old enemies United and their boss Jose Mourinho -- a long-time rival of Guardiola -- was a sweet moment, especially after they lost to their neighbours in the Manchester derby last weekend.

Winning the title with five matches to go makes City the joint earliest champions in the Premier League era -



A new poster of Manchester City players rejoicing was placed at the entrance to the Etihad Stadium yesterday to celebrate their Premier League title win.

PHOTO: AFP

- matching the achievement of the 2000-01 Manchester United team.

That is just one of a welter of statistical feats that have led some to rank City among the Premier League's greatest ever teams.

Whether they deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as Manchester United's 1999 treble winners or the 2004 Arsenal 'Invincibles' is up for debate.

But City, who will stage a title party when they host Swansea on Sunday, have a chance to underline their credentials over their last five matches.

Fuelled by the majestic form of Kevin De Bruyne, David Silva, Sergio Aguero and Raheem Sterling, City set a new Premier League record earlier this season by winning 18 successive matches.

The Premier League's record points tally of 95, set by Chelsea in 2004-05, is within City's reach if they can take nine from their last fixtures.

With 28 league victories so far, City need three more wins to top Chelsea's record of 30 Premier League wins in a season.

United hold the current record Premier League winning margin of 18 points and that could also fall to City.

City have won 14 games on the road this season and have two to go away from home -- winning both of those would beat Chelsea's record of 15.

In his second season in charge, Guardiola has created a sublime team that helped him become the first Spanish coach to win the English top-flight title.

It was a far cry from his trophy-less first season with City and Kompany said Guardiola's tenacious attitude led them to the summit.

"It is one of the first things I noticed within the first month," he said.

"There was a period of adaptation for him coming into the league and for us taking in his methods."

Juve close in on 7th straight title

AFP, Milan



Juventus galloped towards a seventh straight Serie A title with a 3-0 win over Sampdoria on Sunday, pulling six points clear of Napoli whose dwindling championship ambitions were dented by a goalless draw at AC Milan.

The title could be tied up by next Sunday when Juventus and Napoli go head-to-head in a top of the table clash in Turin.

Juventus would have to win on Wednesday at Crotona and Napoli lose at home against Udinese, while the champions would also have to win next Sunday's game for the title to be decided.

Juventus showed they had put their midweek Champions League defeat to Real Madrid behind them as they were greeted with a banner "Proud of You" and applause for captain Gianluigi Buffon who was sent off in Madrid.

Brazilian Douglas Costa was the architect of the victory coming off the bench in place of the injured Miralem Pjanic to set up all three goals.

Costa crossed for Mario Mandzukic who volleyed under the bar just before the break, and dinked another for Benedikt Howedes whose diving header found the mark on the hour mark.

The Brazilian then set-up Sami Khedira for the third with 15 minutes to go, with Buffon denying Duvan Zapata a late consolation goal for Sampdoria.

Juventus now have 84 points from 32 games, six ahead of second-placed Napoli with six games to go.