

NEXT STOP, GARETH SOUTHGATE

London's transport bosses temporarily renamed an underground station in honour of England soccer team manager Gareth Southgate after the team flew home following their run to the last four of the World Cup. England enjoyed their best World Cup performance in 28 years under Southgate's leadership, reaching the semifinals and narrowly missing a spot in the final, losing to Croatia after extra-time. Southgate proved popular with England's fans for helping create a renewed sense of optimism and after the team returned home on Sunday Transport for London (TfL) rebranded Southgate underground station in North London as the "Gareth Southgate" station for 48 hours. "We have to celebrate the achievement, it's important," said Patricia Gomez, 44, who travelled from Morden in south London on her day off on Monday to get a photograph with the new sign. —REUTERS



Croatia players celebrate their runners-up title on an open-top bus at the Zagreb International Airport after their return from the 2018 World Cup in Russia yesterday.

Back to harsh realities

REUTERS, Moscow



It was a dream run that came agonisingly close to being crowned with a World Cup title but for Croatia now comes a return to a harsh soccer reality of sketchy infrastructure and scandals.

With Luka Modric most likely having played his last major international tournament at the age of 32, and several of his teammates, including Ivan Rakitic (30) and the 32-year-old Mario Mandzukic, in the twilight of their careers, Croatia's presence in the World Cup final is an event unlikely to be repeated soon.

Modric was the standout of the team and can still earn the title of world player of the year, breaking the stranglehold of Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi.

Croats took to the streets on Sunday to celebrate their national team despite their 4-2 defeat to France but the nation of 4.5 million knows its soccer future is all but secure.

Croatia almost failed to qualify for the tournament in Russia, needing a 2-0 victory at Ukraine in their last group match to earn second spot that sent them into a playoff against Greece.

It was the start of Zlatko Dalic's term at the helm and the coach managed to guide them to Russia where they displayed some of the finest soccer on show.

Dalic's future, however, is still unclear despite having a contract until 2020.

"I will take a time out, take a breather. I never take decisions overnight," the soft-spoken coach said on Sunday when asked about seeing out his contract.

Dalic, however, knows any long-term decisions are difficult to take in Croatia, which is still engulfed in the biggest soccer scandal the country has seen.

Only last month a Croatian court sentenced former Dinamo Zagreb chief Zdravko Mamic to six-and-a-half years in prison for fraud and corruption.

Croatia's state attorney has also charged Modric with giving false testimony in the case, a major black spot on the player's reputation.

Coupled with the country's limited resources to improve their soccer infrastructure, it was no wonder Dalic called their World Cup run a miracle.

PHOTO: AFP

Flying the flag for the little guys

REUTERS, Moscow



A World Cup of surprises showed once again how small teams are finding a way to compete with the big boys, as was the case at the European Championship two years ago.

It was Iceland and Wales who shook up the established order in 2016, now Belgium and Croatia have shown that smaller nations can dream of footballing success as the gap to the traditional powers continues to narrow.

"Every team is set up so well now and properly prepared that there is not much between anybody," said France coach Didier Deschamps after his team overcame Croatia 4-2 in Sunday's World Cup final.

With a population of just over four million, Croatia punched considerably above their weight

to reach the final, going down gallantly at Moscow's Luzhniki Stadium.

Belgium reached the semi-finals with a golden generation of players despite a relatively modest footballing infrastructure and will have legitimate ambitions of claiming a first major international title at Euro 2020.

At the European Championship two years ago, Wales were surprise semi-finalists and Iceland captured the imagination by beating England to make the last eight.

With just over 300,000 people, Iceland followed that up by becoming the smallest nation to qualify for the World Cup.

On other continents too, there are growing examples of consistent challenges to the established order and particularly from countries whose playing resources are limited by the size of their population size.

"On our bus there is a slogan that says 'We are

a small nation with big dreams'," said Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic after the loss to France.

"That's a good message to all. If you work hard, you can produce good players and get results.

"You have to believe it is possible. Maybe things have to fall into place. But you have to have a dream and ambition and follow them."

It is also essential to have key personnel, like player-of-the-tournament Luka Modric and fellow midfielder Ivan Rakitic, to inspire the rest of the squad.

But teams like Iceland and Japan have shown that tactical discipline and mental fortitude can sometimes trump talent. Japan displayed as much when they almost upset Belgium in the round of 16, leading 2-0 before going down 3-2.

Superpowers like Brazil, Germany, France and Spain will continue to be considered favourites at major tournaments but they will be very wary of the next "little guy" to pose a genuine threat.

Booters to play against Qatar's Division II side

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football team will play a practice match against Al Mesaimeer Sports Club in Qatar on Wednesday as part of their preparation for the upcoming Asian Games and September's SAFF Championship.

The booters were supposed to play two practice matches in Qatar, but they will get to play one match against Al Mesaimeer Club, a second-division team who finished fourth in 2017-18 season with 10 points from 11 matches.

"We have been informed that most of the clubs are outside the country for pre-season preparation and also due to high tempera-

ture [45 to 46 degrees celsius] in Qatar, so setting up practice matches against local sides was a difficult task," informed assistant coach Masud Kaiser Parvez over phone yesterday.

Parvez, however, believes Al Mesaimeer, with Croat coaching staff, will be a competitive side as they are playing in second division with a quest of qualifying for top-tier Qatar Stars League.

The Bangladesh team have been in Qatar for a two-week training camp under the guidance of English coach Jamie Day, who took charge last month and has been trying to get the right combination ahead of the Asian Games and the SAFF Championship.

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:

Clashes, vandalism, deaths mar celebrations

Dozens of youths shattered windows at a popular store on the Champs Elysees avenue while hundreds of thousands of celebrated France's World Cup victory.



Chandimal, Hathurusingha banned

The ICC banned Sri Lanka skipper Dinesh Chandimal, coach Chandika Hathurusingha and manager Asanka Gurusinha and Chandimal for refusing to take to the field during the second Test against West Indies last month.



Tigers drop to ninth

Bangladesh had moved above the West Indies in the ICC Test rankings to attain their highest position in the ICC Test Rankings since gaining Full Member status.



A team one-dayers begin today

After losing the three-match four-day series 1-0, the Bangladesh A team will look to turn the tables when they take on the Sri Lanka A team in the first of a three-match one-day series at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.



Triumphant Tigresses return

SPORTS REPORTER



A collective approach from all the Bangladesh national women's cricket team members is the reason behind their recent success, allowing the Tigresses to start believing in their strengths.

The women's team no longer relies on one or two individual's to perform as almost all of the players now know the specific roles they have to play, a fact which has worked out well since their Asia Cup triumph in June.

The Tigresses continued to brim with self confidence, which helped them secure a spot for the upcoming ICC Women's World T20 in West Indies by becoming the undefeated champions of the tournament's qualifiers.

Salma Khatun and her troops returned home yesterday and were welcomed by another warm reception at the airport after their successful campaign in the three match T20I series against Ireland, which they won 2-1, followed by a qualifier win in the Netherlands.

The Tigresses also reached quite a few individual milestones as leg-spinner Fahima Khatun became the first Bangladeshi woman to pick up a hat-trick in T20Is against the UAE in another qualifier.

The 25-year-old remained the joint-third highest wicket-taker in the qualification tournament alongside Panna Ghosh with nine scalps while fellow leg-spinner Rumana Ahmed bagged ten wickets at a miserly economy of three runs per over to grab second place, just behind Ireland's Lucy O' Reilly who picked up eleven wickets.

According to Fahima, the women's team is benefitted by having two leg-spinners in the squad as opposed to the men's team, who are still in search of even a single leg-spinner.

"Actually the men's team is definitely missing a leg-spinner in the side while on the other hand we are lucky to have two leg-spinners, both of whom are performing well and getting success. And not only as a woman, I became the first Bangladeshi to pick up a hat-trick in T20Is," a jubilant Fahima told reporters

at the Hazrat Shahjalal International airport yesterday.

Fahima, who idolises Australian spin legend Shane Warne, also informed that working with the coaches during her lean patch helped her gain confidence.

On the other hand experienced pacer Panna, who became the second Bangladeshi after Jahanara Alam to pick up a five-wicket haul in T20Is, was happier to merely contribute rather than achieve any personal milestone.

"I never bowl to pick five wickets or even taking wickets rather I focus more on my line and length. If I am able to do so, the opposition batters will look to charge and give the wicket and if we are able to continue that, we will be successful," said Panna.

The 28-year old also added that batting, which has been the Tigresses' biggest area of concern, has improved significantly. The likes of Shamima Sultana, Ayasha Rahman, Nigar Sultana and Fargana Haque have performed better than ever during the recent past and are surely another reason behind the team's success.



Juventus's marquee signing Cristiano Ronaldo gives the thumbs up to cheering fans upon his arrival at the Juventus medical center at the Allianz Stadium in Turin yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Training boosts hockey team

SPORTS REPORTER

Having undergone a four-day commando training, Bangladesh's national hockey team yesterday returned to preparation camp at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium ahead of next month's Asian Games, with the hope of being a more disciplined side.

With the advice of Malaysian coach Gobinathan Krishnamurti, the hockey players were sent for a commando training at the Bangladesh Air Force so that they could build confidence, courage and fitness.

Assistant coaches Mohammad Ashiquzzaman and Moududur Rahman Shuvo accompanied the players during the four-day training in Gazipur – the training emphasising on fitness, mental toughness, discipline and cooperation among the teammates.

"The training has been designed to tackle anything in any situation and give last efforts to overcome odds instead of giving up. Besides, there was another feature to help each other in the team. For instance, if anyone fails to wake up on time, everyone will be responsible, thus everyone has to come forward for each other," explained Ashiquzzaman, a former national player.

Ronaldo greets Juve fans

AFP, Rome

Juventus fans gave Cristiano Ronaldo a rousing welcome on Monday as the club prepared to unveil the superstar summer signing they hope will bring the Champions League trophy back to Turin.

Hundreds of fans gathered outside the Allianz Stadium in Turin from early morning singing "Ronaldo, bring us the Champions (League)" as the European competition's most lethal striker of all time made a brief appearance ahead of his medical Monday.

The 33-year-old emerged from the club's medical centre to sign autographs and shake hands amid raucous chants of his name before shooting back inside for further tests.



The Bangladesh women's cricket team were feted for their excellent showing at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday after their return from the Netherlands, where they won the World T20 qualifying tournament.

PHOTO: BCB