

**TEN 1**  
**UEFA Champions League**  
**Man City v Schalke**  
**Live from 2:00am (Wednesday)**

**TEN 2**  
**UEFA Champions League**  
**Juventus v Atletico Madrid**  
**Live from 2:00am (Wednesday)**

**DAY'S EVENT**

**Dhaka Premier League**  
 Time: 9:00am  
 Prime Doleshwar v Prime Bank  
 Venue: BKSP-3, Savar

**Khelaghar SKS v Mohammedan**  
 Venue: SBNS, Dhaka  
 Gazi Group v BKSP  
 Venue: KSOAS, Fatullah

## SHEARER WARNS LIVES COULD BE AT RISK

Former England striker Alan Shearer has warned that players' lives could be at risk unless urgent action is taken to prevent pitch invaders as the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) called for a full inquiry. Aston Villa captain Jack Grealish was punched by a Birmingham fan and Manchester United defender Chris Smalling was confronted on the pitch by an Arsenal supporter in two separate incidents on Sunday. It followed an episode on Friday in which Rangers captain James Tavernier was challenged by a pitch-invading Hibernian fan in his side's stormy Scottish Premiership draw. "It is absolutely disgusting and if we don't stamp it out now, next time it could be a knife," Shearer said in his column in the Sun newspaper. "It's that serious. Where are we at in football when some thug thinks that is what he is going to do?"

--AFP



## U-23 booters in Qatar

SPORTS REPORTER

A 23-member Bangladesh football team left for Qatar for an eight-day training camp yesterday afternoon ahead of the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers, scheduled to be held in Bahrain from March 22 to 26.

Twelve of the 23 squad members were a part of the senior team which had returned home in the early hours of Monday after having inflicted a 1-0 defeat on Cambodia in a FIFA Friendly in Phnom Penh the previous night.

"The most positive thing was all of the players were involved with matches locally. It helped us on the pitch. The players wanted to start with a victory after the gap in international matches. I am really pleased with the team's effort," said coach Jamie Day on his return to Dhaka.

"We can take confidence from winning away from home when we go to Bahrain. Since the conditions in Bahrain and Qatar are similar, it won't be an issue for the players in the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers after the conditioning camp in Qatar," added the coach.

The U-23 team reached Doha last night and are set to take on Bahrain, Palestine and Sri Lanka in Group B fixtures on March 22, 24 and 26 respectively.

# SAFF Women's C'ship from today

ANISUR RAHMAN from Kathmandu



Although the SAFF Men's Football Championship has always been a major attraction for football lovers in South Asia, the women's edition of the tournament is yet to reach that level of excitement. Nevertheless, the 5th SAFF Women's Championship is all set to get underway at the Sahid Rangshala in Biratnagar, Nepal today.

Nepal will take on Bhutan in the Group A opener while Bangladesh will begin their campaign when they square off against Bhutan on March 14.

Even though women's football has been played in the South Asian region for quite some time, there are rational reasons behind its unpopularity. The standard to which most South Asian teams measure themselves to is mostly confined in the region while other Asian countries like Japan, Korea, China and Australia go on to participate in the Women's World Cup regularly.

However, unlike the case in men's football, women's leagues have not been regularly held in South Asia but women's football has gradually taken shape following FIFA's insistence.

Among the South Asian nations, India rank on top followed by Nepal. India clinched all four of the previous SAFF Women's Championship titles, leaving Nepal to finish second in the first three editions.

Bangladesh has however made their presence known to India and Nepal following the discovery of some promising players, who delivered the runners-up trophy of the last edition after some success at age-group tournaments.

The women in red and green now dream of playing back to back finals but hosts Nepal and India will definitely be standing in their way. India is once again the top favourite to win the six-team tournament, especially since they have played 11 international matches since January. India won six out of those 11 outings, which were played in the Hero Gold Cup in Odisha, a three-nation tournament which featured Hong Kong and Indonesia. They then participated in a tournament in Turkey, where they took on Turkmenistan, Romania, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Before those matches abroad, a youthful India side became one of the group champions of the Olympic Qualifiers to advance to the second round for the first time



Bangladesh women's football team players take a break from training in Biratnagar, Nepal yesterday ahead of the SAFF Women's Championship, which kicks off today.

PHOTO: BFF

ever. All these achievements will certainly be a boost to the charges Maymol Rocky, who will look to take their fifth straight SAFF Women's Championship title.

Nepal may not have had as much practice as India but the Himalayan nation could draw inspiration from the Hero Gold Cup, where they outplayed hosts India to reach the final. Nepal beat India 2-1 in the group stages before going on to suffer a 1-3 defeat to eventual champions Myanmar in the final.

Nepal also had a more or less good campaign in the Olympic Qualifiers, holding the mighty Myanmar, India and Bangladesh to identical 1-1 draws, courtesy of forwards Niru Thapa and Sabitra Bhandari. The charges of Hari Khadka are now dreaming of their first taste of the championship title.

Therefore, reaching the final will be an uphill task for Bangladesh, who must put Nepal behind to emerge as

Group A champions if they hope to avoid India, the expectant Group B champions, in the semifinals. Bangladesh have never beaten their Indian counterparts but did hold them to a 1-1 draw once in the last edition.

Bangladesh were made to depart from the tournament twice from the semifinal stage as they lost to Nepal in the first and third editions. The women in red and green won seven while losing just as many and drawing one in the 15 matches they have played in the SAFF Women's Championship so far.

However, the main advantage for Bangladesh is that they know each other quite since they have played together for the last two-and-a-half years. They also delivered some scintillating performances at age-level competitions and will surely be hoping to recreate that form to stun India and Nepal.

## Kohli slams inconsistent DRS

AFP, New Delhi

Skipper Virat Kohli has slammed the decision review system (DRS) as "no consistent" after India had a referral turned down by the TV umpire and went on to lose the fourth one-day international to a record Australia chase in Mohali.

Ashton Turner hit an unbeaten 43-ball 84 to lead Australia's 359-run chase on Sunday to level the five-match series at 2-2 on Sunday. The final match is in Delhi on Wednesday.

Turner, on 41, was on the receiving end of a caught behind appeal off Yuzvendra Chahal in the 44th over that was turned down by the on-field umpire but reviewed by the home team.

Although replays suggested a gap between the ball and the bottom edge of the bat, the "snickometer" showed a spike at the moment the ball passed the bat but the third umpire chose not to overturn the onfield call.

Kohli was not pleased with the decision but accepted his team's inadequacies against a superior Australia.

"We were sloppy in the field and should've grabbed our chances. But the DRS call was a bit of surprise for all of us and it's becoming a more of a talking point every game. It's just not consistent at all," said Kohli.



Bangladesh under-23 team pose for a group photo at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday ahead of their departure for Qatar, where they are scheduled to undergo an eight-day conditioning camp.

PHOTO: BFF

# Football fever in Kutupalong

STAR SPORT DESK

Last Saturday, Kutupalong was abuzz with the sound of boot striking leather and the accompanying cheers of an engrossed and sizeable crowd as a Dhaka-based football club squared off in a match against Rohingya FC.

The football team made up of persecuted refugees of Myanmar won the game 3-2 against the Footy HAGS -- a local Dhaka based recreational football club made up of corporate professionals and entrepreneurs. Footy HAGS were on a 'Friendship Tour' of Cox's Bazar.

Rohingya FC players are well versed in the southeast Asian sport of Sepak Takraw (kick volleyball) and brought their expertise into play, especially when employing the long ball.

According to their press release, the game was aimed at building a strong bond and

friendship between aid workers, locals and the refugee community in Ukhiya, currently the largest refugee camp in the world.

The HAGS also distributed football jerseys, footballs and football boots to the members of the Rohingya FC team before the match, along with board games and exercise equipment for the broader community.

"Football is a fantastic way to build bridges between communities and we hope that more events like this can be organised in the future between refugees and the people of Cox's Bazar, and guests like us," said HAGS spokesperson Bickey Russell. He hoped that the small donation of jerseys and balls would help the newly developed team for a few months.

The HAGS tour was sponsored by NDE Sports Facility, Uber, Kormo, Magnito Digital, Occult and Maya, with support from the UN Refugee Agency.



Locals and visitors alike enjoy watching a recreational match between Rohingya FC and Footie HAGS at a field inside the Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukhiya on Saturday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

# 'Get ready to come back!'

AFP, Turin



Juventus's Champions League hopes are hanging on Cristiano Ronaldo pulling off another sensational comeback as the Italians trail 2-0 to defensive specialists Atletico Madrid going into the last 16, second-leg tie in Turin on Tuesday.

"We didn't expect to lose the first leg 2-0, but anything can happen, and we want to give a great response in our home, in front of our fans," Ronaldo told Juventus TV ahead of the game in the Allianz Stadium.

"These are the great nights, the fantastic ones: the Champions League nights," he continued.

"The team is confident of playing a great game and I am too. To the fans I say: think positive, let's believe."

"Get ready to come back!"

The seven-time reigning Italian champions bought Ronaldo last summer from Real Madrid for 100 million euros (\$117 million) to end their Champions League heartbreak going back 23 years.

The 34-year-old's stunning overhead kick for Real in the quarterfinals in Turin last April had dumped Juventus out of the tournament once again.

Expectations are high that he can reproduce his improbable hat-trick which lifted Real Madrid past Wolfsburg in April 2016 with the Spaniards 2-0 down to the Germans after the first leg.

Juventus have come from behind in the elite European competition eight times -- including in the 1996 quarterfinals against Real Madrid on their way to winning the title.



PHOTO: TWITTER

Superstar Cristiano Ronaldo trains at the Juventus Center yesterday ahead of tonight's do-or-die Champions League Round of 16 second leg clash against Atletico Madrid.

They also lifted the European trophy in 1985, but have finished runners-up five times since their last success, including twice in the past four years.

"CR7 is here for that," wrote Italian sports daily Corriere dello Sport, of "a game Cristiano cannot get wrong."

"He wasn't signed to win the Scudetto or to

boost merchandising, Juve are waiting to end years of disappointments."

Ronaldo won five Champions League titles with Manchester United and Real Madrid and has scored a record 121 goals of which 57 have proved decisive.

The top scorer in the Champions League for the last six seasons, he has however scored just once in this year's competition, delivering a performance far below expectations in Madrid.

Since the Madrid game he has not scored in the league and has been overtaken as the top Serie A scorer by Sampdoria's Fabio Quagliarella, who has 20 goals to Ronaldo's 19.

The problem for Juventus is they need to score at least twice against a team that specialises in defence.

Diego Simeone's Atletico -- second in La Liga -- have not conceded a goal for five games.

"Everyone knows that they are a strong team, they defend very well, they don't take a lot of risks and they play on the counter-attack, but we are ready, and we will do everything we can to beat them," said Ronaldo, who has scored 22 goals against Atletico.

"The fine details will make the difference, and we want to win and qualify for the quarterfinals."

Allegri's future at the club he has won 10 trophies with since 2014 will likely hinge on this game. The Juventus coach knows the stakes are high.

"I think expectations have been raised far too much and it has become an obsession," said the 51 year-old.

"Since I arrived, the Champions League has always been an objective, but if people say that it's a failure if Juventus go out, that is not right."

# Zidane makes shock return

AFP, Madrid



Zinedine Zidane has made a sensational return as head coach of Real Madrid after Santiago Solari's sacking was officially confirmed yesterday.

Zidane has been given a contract until June 2022, just nine months after he resigned at the end of last season, having led Madrid to an historic third consecutive Champions League triumph. He also guided Madrid to a league crown at the Bernabeu in 2017.

The Frenchman's replacement, Julen Lopetegui, was sacked in October while Solari lasted just over four months in charge.

Solari's dismissal was expected after three consecutive home defeats -- to Barcelona twice, and Ajax -- deemed Madrid's season all-but over before the middle of March.

But Zidane coming back, with only 11 games left in La Liga and almost nothing to play for, is a surprise, particularly after he left on the incredible high of yet another European triumph.

"Real Madrid's board has decided to terminate Santiago Solari's contract as coach of the first team," read an official statement on Monday.

"Real Madrid appreciates the work done by Santiago Solari and the commitment and loyalty he has always shown to this club."

"The board has also agreed to the appointment of Zinedine Zidane as the new coach of Real Madrid with immediate effect for the remainder of the season and the next three, until June 30, 2022."



The dignitaries officially inaugurate the 3rd Independence Cup Fencing Championship at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Indoor Stadium in Mirpur on Sunday.

PHOTO: STAR

# Independence Cup Fencing starts

SPORTS REPORTER

The Third Independence Cup Fencing Championship got underway at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Indoor Stadium in Mirpur on Sunday.

Professor Emeritus Dr. AK Azad Chowdhury, former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University and ex-chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), attended the inauguration program as chief guest. Naba Bikram Kishore Tripura, chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, was the special guest at the occasion. The program was presided

over by Shoeb Chowdhury, president of Bangladesh Fencing Association (BFA).

Shoeb Chowdhury said that proper initiatives need to be taken to popularise indoor sports in Bangladesh.

Dr. AK Azad Chowdhury said that fencing is one of the oldest sports of the Olympic Games and it is highly popular in western countries. He also appreciated that the BFA introduced this sport in Bangladesh.

A total of 13 teams, including defence forces, clubs and educational institutions are taking part in the five-day meet.