

# What to WATCH

**RTV & NAGORIK TV**  
**Bangamata U-19 Women's Int'l Gold Cup**  
 Laos v Kyrgyzstan  
 Live from 6:00pm

**STAR SPORTS SELECT 1**  
**Indian Premier League**  
 Hyderabad v Punjab  
 Live from 8:30pm

**TEN 2**  
**Serie A**  
 Fiorentina v Sassuolo  
 Live from 1:00am (Tuesday)

## DAY'S EVENT

**Bangamata U-19 Women's Int'l Gold Cup**  
 Laos v Kyrgyzstan  
 Time: 6:00pm  
 Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



Lionel Messi fired Barcelona to La Liga glory with the solitary strike in their 1-0 win over Levante at the Nou camp on Saturday and the players brought out their kids to celebrate a second successive league title. PHOTO: AFP

# In a Liga of their own

REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona underlined their hegemony of Spanish football by clinching the La Liga title with three games to spare after Lionel Messi came off the bench to fire them to a 1-0 win over Levante on Saturday in front of a 91,000-strong Nou Camp crowd. Captain and all-time top scorer Messi hoisted the trophy into the Barcelona sky to signal his side's 26th title overall, their eighth in 11 years, and for the second season in a row, no-one in Spain has come close to competing with the Catalans. Barca's dominance of Spanish soccer has been so pronounced that newspaper Marca recently described their vice-like grip on La Liga as "a dictatorship", adding that "the domestic competition has become Barcelona's comfort zone".

After a stuttering start to the campaign in which Sevilla and Atletico traded places with Ernesto Valverde's side at the top, Barca rose to the summit again in December and rarely looked like being unseated. Their last defeat was in early November, when they were humbled 4-3 at home by Real Betis and questions were raised about their fragile defence, with Messi coming out and publicly urging his team mates to improve at the back. His criticism had the intended impact. After dropping points in five of their opening 12 games, Barca went on a relentless run after the Betis loss, winning

18 of their next 23 matches to get their hands on the trophy. Barca effectively banished Real Madrid from the title race with a 1-0 win in the Clasico in March, inflicting more pain on their biggest rivals, who have endured a harrowing season and sacked two managers before re-appointing Zinedine Zidane. Atletico ran Barca closer but never looked like catching the Catalans, who wrapped their tentacles around the title by beating Diego Simeone's side 2-0 this month with late goals from Messi and Luis Suarez. It was fitting that strikes from Messi and Suarez effectively sewed up the title, as the South American duo have scored a remarkable 55 goals between them, more than 17 teams in the league, including their closest challengers Atletico. "Winning La Liga gives you satisfaction because it tells you over time who is the best over the whole season," said Barca coach Valverde. "La Liga is our daily bread, it consumes you from August to May and we really appreciate what we have achieved because we have had to come through some difficult moments." With their domestic dominance beyond doubt, Barca's main challenge is to put right their recent failures in continental football and add the Champions League. Should they overcome Liverpool in the semis and win Europe's top prize in Madrid on June 1, no-one will be able to dispute they are the best team at home and abroad.

# BHF polls today in changed venue

SPORTS REPORTER

The highly-anticipated election of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) will take place today with the voting centre changed at the last moment, prompting controversy among the councillors. Two panels -- one led by former star player Abdus Sadeque and the other by organiser AKM Moninul Haque Shaeed -- are contesting in the BHF polls with 84 councillors to cast votes to elect 28 members -- five vice-presidents, one general secretary, two joint secretaries, one treasurer and 19 executive members. The voting was originally scheduled to be held at the conference room of the old building of the National Sports Council, but the election commission shifted the venue to Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex in Dhanmondi under the premise of creating a free and fair environment for the councillors. "Yesterday [Saturday], a few councillors expressed their worry over whether they can cast their votes freely as there is an influential candidate from this area [Motijheel]. To ensure fair voting, we have today [Sunday] shifted the venue to Dhanmondi from the National Sports Council. There will be enough security force to make sure the councillors can cast their votes smoothly," BHF election commissioner and NSC sports director Shah Alam Sarder said yesterday. "It is not only a conspiracy for influencing the councillors but also makes them confused," general secretary candidate Shaeed told reporters alleging that a group is busy to win the polls by hatching a conspiracy against the organisers, who love hockey. However, the Sadeque-panel saw no problem with the shift of voting centres.

# City restore slender lead

REUTERS, London

Sergio Aguero was on target as Manchester City restored their one-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a nervous and scrappy 1-0 win over Burnley at Turf Moor on Sunday. Pep Guardiola's side now need to win their final games at home to Leicester City and away to Brighton and Hove Albion to retain the title and deny second-placed Liverpool. City got the breakthrough in the 63rd minute with an uncharacteristically scrappy goal - Aguero's shot was chested out and cleared by Matt Lowton on the goaline but technology ruled the effort had crossed. City struggled to get into their usual rhythm in the first half but came out strongly after the break and Burnley keeper Tom Heaton did well to keep out a fierce blast from Sergio Aguero at the near post. Burnley, however, pushed hard at the end with Guardiola bringing on two defenders as City held firm to claim the three points. **DE GEA COSTS UNITED AGAIN** In the race for top four, another costly error from David de Gea dealt Manchester United's chances of Champions League football a potentially fatal blow as Chelsea consolidated fourth position with a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford. De Gea spilled Antonio Rudiger's long-range effort to allow Marcos Alonso to equalise just before half-time and cancel out Juan Mata's early opener. A point halts a run of seven defeats in nine games for United, but does little for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men's chances of overhauling Chelsea, who remain three points ahead of the Red Devils and with a superior goal difference. Arsenal's defeat by Leicester earlier on

Sunday means Maurizio Sarri's men move two points ahead of the Gunners with two games of the campaign to go. Romelu Lukaku turned provider as United scored from open play for the first time in two minutes short of nine hours. The Belgian's lofted pass picked out the run of Luke Shaw from left-back and his cut-back found Mata to roll into an unguarded net against his former side. Chelsea seemed destined to complete a clean sweep of five defeats away to top six opposition this season. However, they were given a lifeline two minutes before half-time as De Gea's miserable run continued. The Spaniard was at fault in heavy defeats recently at Barcelona and Everton, as well as for City's two goals in midweek. And his loss of confidence was evident as he spilled Rudiger's speculative effort and Alonso reacted quicker than the United defence to turn home the rebound off the inside of the post. That blow appeared to drain United's belief after the break for what Solskjaer had termed a "must-win" for his side. Earlier, ten-man Arsenal suffered a 3-0 defeat at Leicester City in another blow to their hopes of finishing in the top four and qualifying for the Champions League. Goals from Youri Tielemans and a Jamie Vardy double ensured Arsenal suffered a fourth loss in their last five league games. They remain in fifth on 66 points. Unai Emery's side had defender Ainsley Maitland-Niles sent off for a second booking in the 36th minute for a late challenge on James Maddison. He had been cautioned earlier for a foul on Ben Chilwell. "The second yellow card gave us a lot of problems," Emery said. "I don't agree with the first yellow card. It's the seventh minute of the game, but I respect the referee. Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers said referee Michael Oliver had no choice but to send off the 21-year-old.



Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero scored the all-important goal in the reigning champions' Premier League clash with Burnley, restoring their one-point lead over Liverpool at the top of the table yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## SHORT CORNER



Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring the 600th goal of his club career. His powerful left-footed drive earned Italian champions Juventus a 1-1 draw away to Inter Milan in Serie A on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

**Rajshahi crowned champions of Sheikh Kamal U-20 National Football**  
 Rajshahi division won the title of the inaugural Sheikh Kamal Under-20 National Football Tournament, beating Khulna division 3-1 in the final at the Shankar Gabinda Chowdhury Stadium in Natore yesterday. Tarek Aziz gave Khulna a flying start, scoring in the fourth minute, but Rajshahi hit back 16 minutes later with a placing shot from inside the box. Shajib gave Rajshahi the lead in the 34th minute before Shihab wrapped up the victory for Rajshahi with the team's third goal in the 76th minute. Likhon of Rajshahi was adjudged the best player of the tournament while Shajib of the same team got the top-scorer's award for his five goals in their campaign, which includes a hat-trick. Tarafder Ruhul Amin, secretary general of Bangladesh District and Divisional Football Association, Shafiqul Islam Shimul, lawmaker of Natore-2 constituency, Mohammad Shahreaz, deputy commissioner (DC) of Natore and other dignitaries

witnessed the final. **Nadal falls in Barcelona**  
 Rafael Nadal shrugged off any suggestion of a French Open crisis of confidence, insisting he had enjoyed a "positive week" in Barcelona despite a dispiriting semifinal exit at a tournament he has won 11 times. The Spanish great slumped to a 6-4, 6-4 loss to Dominic Thiem on Saturday, just a week after he had been dethroned as Monte Carlo Masters champion by Fabio Fognini, also at the semifinal stage. With just four weeks to go until the start of Roland Garros, where he is the defending champion and an 11-time winner, 32-year-old Nadal says he has finally come to life on his favourite surface. "It's been a very positive week," the 17-time Grand Slam winner said. "I came from a lot of low moments in Monte Carlo. Today was the first day I felt really confident on the clay, it's my best match on the surface this year. My confidence is back thanks to this week. I really believe that I've made improvements. This is a good base to try and achieve my goals for the next couple of weeks." --Afp

# Laos's eyes on the final

SPORTS REPORTER

Laos are at the centre of discussions, especially after storming into the semifinals by flooding their opponents with goals in the Bangamata U-19 Women's International Gold Cup, and the Southeast Asian nation will be favourites against Kyrgyzstan in the first semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today. Laos opened their campaign by inflicting a 5-0 defeat on Mongolia before mauling Tajikistan 6-0 to set up their semifinal against Group B runners-up Kyrgyzstan, who came into the last four on the back of 2-1 win over UAE and a 2-0 defeat o Bangladesh. "We want to show our best in the semifinals even though Laos are one of the best teams in the tournament. We are ready for the match and hope for a good match," Kyrgyzstan coach Nataliia Gaivoronskaia said yesterday. Laos coach Vongmisay Soubouakham was also upbeat about making it to the final. "For each game, we are ready to give hundred percent in the semifinal. Kyrgyzstan are strong but we will do our best to beat them and qualify for the final."

**WIN AVENGERS ENDGAME**

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