

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

SONY ESPN
Euro Qualifiers
Greece v Finland
Live from 1:45am (Tuesday)

National Cricket League
Four-day match, Day Three
Rajshahi v Rangpur

SONY SIX
Euro Qualifiers
Ireland v Denmark
Live from 1:45am (Tuesday)

Venue: SKS, Rajshahi
Khulna v Dhaka Division
Venue: SANS, Khulna

TEN 1
Euro Qualifiers
Italy v Armenia
Live from 1:45am (Tuesday)

TEN 2
International Friendly

Montenegro v Belarus
Live from 11:00pm
Euro Qualifiers
Spain v Romania
Live from 1:45am (Tuesday)

Croatia seal Euro 2020 spot

AFP, Zagreb



World Cup runners-up Croatia rounded off a rebuilding mission by booking their place at Euro 2020 with a 3-1 win over Slovakia on Saturday but they are unlikely to sneak under the radar again at next year's finals.

Croatia secured top spot in Group E, a section also including Hungary, Wales and Azerbaijan, with five wins and two draws from their eight qualifiers.

Coach Zlatko Dalic, who masterminded the run to last year's World Cup final, has gradually reconstructed a squad that lost Mario Mandzukic, Danijel Subasic and Vedran Corluka to retirement in the wake of the 4-2 loss to France in Russia.

The "Vatreni" -- Croatian for "Fiery Ones" -- needed only a point in Rijeka on Saturday to ensure a spot at the 24-team

event, which kicks off in Rome on June 12. After a shocking start for home fans when Robert Bozenik scored in the 32th minute, Croatia's qualification was never in doubt once Nikola Vlasic drilled home the leveller in the second half.

Bruno Petkovic headed the hosts in front and Ivan Perisic sealed the three points with a thumping finish with 16 minutes left.

But the path through qualifying, preceded by a poor showing in the Nations League, where Croatia finished last in their group behind Spain and England, was far from plain sailing.

Thumped 6-0 by Spain in their first competitive outing since the World Cup, Dalic spoke of the need for "fresh blood" to rejuvenate his side.

Incorporating the likes of Petkovic, Josip Brekalo and Vlasic, Croatia began their qualifying bid with a difficult 2-1 victory against Azerbaijan at home in March.



Croatia forward Bruno Petkovic (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring during a 3-1 win over Slovakia in a Euro 2020 Qualifier match in Rijeka on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

'I alone will call an end'

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema has told French Football Federation president Noel Le Graet he and he alone will decide when the time to end his international retirement has come.

After Real coach Zinedine Zidane called for Benzema's four-year France exile, caused by his alleged part in an attempt to blackmail Mathieu Valbuena, to end this week, Le Graet told French radio Benzema's adventure with the French team was finished.

"Noel, I thought you didn't interfere with the decisions of the France coach," said Benzema on Twitter.

"Please understand that I and I alone will call an end to my international career."

Benzema, who is of Algerian origin, added that Le Graet should "let me play for one of the countries for which I'm eligible" if he thinks the 31-year-old is done.

Benzema has not played for France since 2015, when he was placed under formal investigation over the blackmail attempt.

Coach Didier Deschamps has maintained Benzema's omission is in the best interests of the French squad, who won last year's World Cup without him.

"He has always wanted to play for France," Zidane said this week.

"He is the best and I think he should definitely have a place in the national team. Football-wise, there is no debate."



KARIM BENZEMA

BKSP dominate youth archery

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishthan (BKSP) finished top of the table with eight gold, six silver and six bronze medals on the medal-deciding final day of the Teer 3rd National Youth Archery Championship at the Shaheed Ahsanullah Master Stadium in Tongi yesterday.

The sports institute won gold medals in recurve youngster boys', recurve cadet boys', recurve cadet girls', recurve junior boys', compound cadet boys', compound cadet girls', recurve junior boys' team and recurve cadet boys' team events.

Tirondal Sangsad finished second on the medals table with two gold, three silver and four bronze medals. Dhaka Army Archery Club and Bangladesh Ansar won the other two gold medals.

Hopeful swimmers leave for Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER

13th SOUTH ASIAN GAMES 2019 KATHMANDU, NEPAL 10-18 December, 2019

In a bid to cope with high altitude and getting used to 25-metre pool in host country, national swimmers left for Nepal yesterday for final preparation for the upcoming South Asian (SA) Games, some 16 days before the start of swimming events of the 13th regional multi-sports extravaganza.

In the last edition of the games in 2016, Bangladesh bagged a total of four gold medals, and two of those came from swimming. Both were won by Mahfuz Shila, but she has not been included in the Bangladesh contingent. However, the Bangladesh Swimming Federation (BSF) is dreaming big of beating the last edition's medals tally -- 17 medals (two gold and 15 bronze) this time around.

"Though we had initial plan of sending the squad to China for training, we later decided to send the swimmers to Nepal in a bid to acclimatising with high altitude and getting used to with the 25-metre pool as our swimmers are used to swimming in 50-metres pool," BSF general secretary BM Saif said on the eve of the departure of the team, which comprises 13 male and eight female swimmers.



Swimmers and officials pose for a photograph with Bangladesh Swimming Federation President and Bangladesh Navy chief Admiral Aurangzeb Chowdhury prior to their departure for Nepal yesterday.

PHOTO: BSF

British-born-Bangladeshi female swimmer Junaya Ahmed is supposed to join the squad on November 29 in Kathmandu straight from England.

Japanese coach Yorikazu Tamayama is

accompanying the swimmers.

"We are hoping to produce better results compared to the previous edition as the swimmers have been training for the last nine months. We can't assure gold medals

but there is good possibility of winning gold in male breaststroke event," Saif said, adding that Ariful Islam, who underwent a 13-month training in Spain under Olympic Games scholarship, will compete in that event.

Saif is also pinning hopes on Junaya, who will compete in nine events while Bangladesh will take part in over 30 events of the discipline.

BSF, in association with Bangladesh Olympic Association, arranged training for the swimmers in Nepal by renting a private 25-metre pool along with gym and steam bath facilities.

"The federation is banking on me because I was in Spain for more than one year under an Olympic scholarship and I will try to repay the faith of the federation," Ariful said before the team's departure.

"I think I have good chance in 50m and 100m breaststroke events. If winning gold is not possible, I can bag silver medals but I will certainly win at least a medal," Ariful said, adding that he has bettered his timing from 1.70 minutes to 1.30 minutes in 100m breaststroke event after training in Spain.

Romana Akter said, "I bagged a bronze medal in 100m breaststroke in the last edition of SA Games, but this time I have gained much experience and I hope to produce better result than the last time."

SHORT CORNER

Shakib drops off Test rankings too

Having disappeared from the International Cricket Council's (ICC's) ODI and T20I all-rounders' rankings last week, Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's name was absent from the Test all-rounders' rankings published yesterday.

Shakib was banned for two years by the ICC on October 29 for not reporting corrupt approaches by a bookmaker in 2018.

The Test rankings are refreshed after every Test match, and after the end of the first Test between India and Bangladesh ended on Saturday, the former Bangladesh captain's name was not included in the fresh rankings.

Before his ban, Shakib occupied the first, second and third positions in the ODI, T20I and Test rankings respectively.

Bangladesh batsman Mushfiqur Rahim, meanwhile, moved up five places to number 30 in the Test batsmen's charts after his innings of 43 and 64 in the first Test. Bangladesh pacer Abu Jayed picked up four wickets against India and advanced 18 places to move to 62nd place after just his sixth Test.

--SPORTS REPORTER

Pattinson banned

Australia fast bowler James Pattinson was suspended yesterday for player abuse, ruling him out of the first Test against Pakistan this week with skipper Tim Paine saying he had let down the team.

The paceman was found guilty of breaching Cricket Australia's code of conduct during Victoria's Sheffield Shield game against Queensland last week.

Given it was his third breach in the past 18 months, the incident triggered a one-match suspension.



Thiem joins Tsitsipas

AFP, London

Dominic Thiem beat defending champion Alexander Zverev on Saturday to join Roger Federer's conqueror Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final of the ATP Finals in London.

The Austrian fifth seed saw off the big-serving German 7-5, 6-3 after Greece's Tsitsipas, making his debut at the tournament, had earlier beaten Federer 6-3, 6-4.

Thiem is playing in his fourth ATP Finals but during his first three trips to the season finale, he won only three matches and never advanced out of the group stage at the O2 Arena.

PANASONIC OPEN

Siddikur 8th, Zamal 30th

SPORTS REPORTER



Siddikur Rahman finished tied for eighth while his compatriot Zamal Hossain Mollah finished a distant 30th in the Panasonic Open India, which concluded at the Classic Golf and Country Club in Gurgaon yesterday.

Siddikur was in with a chance of claiming a rare Asian Tour title after finishing the second round of the three-round-event just two strokes behind the leaders.

However, as is often the case with the 34-year-old golfer, last-round blues hit Siddikur again as he started the round in the worst possible way. The two-time Asian Tour winner played three bogeys in the front nine to slip out of contention. However, three birdies at the back nine helped Siddikur finish at a respectable eighth position with a score of eight-under-par (208), earning himself a paycheque of 8667 US dollars.

17-year-old Kim Joohyung of Korea won his maiden title with a score of 13-under-par (203) after India's Shiv Kapur blew a one-stroke lead on the final hole with a double-bogey.

Zaman, meanwhile, finished joint 30th with a score of four-under-par (212) following a two-under-in the final round. The two-time PGTI winner started the day brilliantly, firing four birdies in the first five holes but two bogeys in the back nine compromised his chances of a top-10 finish.