

What to WATCH

GTV & MAASRANGA
BBPL
 Cumilla v Rangpur
 Live from 1:30pm
 Chattogram v Dhaka
 Live from 6:30pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
 India v West Indies
 Second ODI
 Live from 2:00pm
 Bundesliga
 Monchengladbach v Paderborn

Live from 1:30am (Thursday)
STAR SPORTS SELECT 2
 Bundesliga
 Leverkusen v Hertha Berlin
 Live from 11:30pm

Freiburg v Bayern Munich
 Live from 1:30am (Thursday)
TEN 2
 Serie A
 Sampdoria v Juventus

Live from 11:55pm
 Brescia v Sassuolo
 Live from 1:45am (Thursday)

DAY'S EVENT

Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League
 Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium
 Cumilla v Rangpur

Time: 1:30pm
 Chattogram v Dhaka
 Time: 6:30pm

Federation Cup
 Abahani v Bangladesh Police
 Time: 4:00pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



Real Madrid's Gareth Bale (3rd from L) and Thibaut Courtois (R) were immersed in a training session with their teammates on the eve of their 'El Clasico' encounter in La Liga with Barcelona at Camp Nou today.

PHOTO: AFP

Clasico today amid high security

REUTERS, Barcelona

Real Madrid and Barcelona may find it easier to get themselves psyched up for their rescheduled 'Clasico' La Liga clash today, because both sides will spend the hours before the match cooped up in the same hotel.

To minimise the disruption from Catalan independence protests planned for the afternoon, the police have recommended that the two teams stay in the same hotel in the hours ahead of the match and then make the short journey to the Camp Nou at the same time.

"We have been told to travel together and that's what we will do," said Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane.

"I don't know if that is giving in (to the protesters). It's something different and we just have to follow the rules. We don't need to do any more explaining. The important thing is that the game is going ahead and that's that."

The protest, taking place in several areas around the stadium four hours before kickoff, has been called by Democratic Tsunami, the group who organised disruptive actions in October in response to the jailing of Catalan independence leaders.

Those protests led league organisers to postpone the Barca-Real match planned for Oct. 26, and when Wednesday's demonstration was announced it led to fears that the match might have to be called off again.

But authorities have promised the game will go ahead and Democratic Tsunami, which says 25,000 people will attend the protest, say they do not want to disrupt the match and only wish to call for dialogue between the Spanish and Catalan authorities.

Despite the emphasis on security ahead of the game, Zidane said he is only worried about the match, which is perfectly poised: Champions Barca lead the standings but are locked on 35 points

with second-placed Real.

"We have to put all our energy on the pitch and believe the game will go ahead. We could be talking about what is going to happen outside the match all week, but the reality is we're going to play a game tomorrow," added the French coach.

"We are prepared to play and that's what we want to do. The majority of people just want to see a football match."

Zidane will be without his joint-record signing Eden Hazard as well as veteran defender Marcelo.

HEAD TO HEAD IN LA LIGA

Matches: **178**
 Real Madrid: **72**
 Barcelona: **72**
 Draws: **34**

Will Fed Cup produce new champions?

SPORTS REPORTER



Since the introduction of the Federation Cup in 1980, the season's curtain-raising tournament has produced only six champions, with country's two giants Abahani and Mohammedan SC sharing the most trophies (21) in 29 editions so far.

Nevertheless, except for 11-time champions Abahani and one-time champions Sheikh Russel KC, most other champions have lost their way, with 10-time champions Mohammedan, three-time champions Brothers Union, Muktiyoddha Sangsad and Sheikh Russel KC trying to get back in the right direction over the last few years. Clubs like Bashundhara Kings, Saif SC, newcomers Bangladesh Police and Chhattogram Abahani are up to challenge the traditional powerhouses in 13-team Federation Cup, which will get underway today after a four-and-a-half months' break in football. Holders Abahani will take on Bangladesh Police in the opening match at Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

"As Federation Cup is the season-opener tournament, it is tough to judge opponents. There may be ups and downs for the participating teams because no one knows the strengths and weaknesses of the opponents. However, teams that have taken proper preparation may not face trouble," said Sheikh Russel KC coach Saiful Bari Titu, who has set his sights on the final.

"I think no team can be earmarked as the strongest side in the Federation Cup and the title race will be wide open. There may be some upsets in the tournament. I watched the performance of Bangladesh Police and they are a good side too, but I still don't have any idea about other participating sides," said Chattagram Abahani coach Maruful Haque, who guided the port city side to a runners-up finish in Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup in Chattogram in October.

Both Maruful and Titu believe that there is possibility to see new champions in Federation Cup as teams like Bashundhara Kings, Saif SC and Bangladesh Police have formed strong squads in transfer window.

"There are some five to six teams who have the ability to win the Federation Cup and out of those, Bashundhara Kings, Saif SC, Bangladesh Police are new teams who haven't won the Federation Cup before," said Haque.

Sheikh Jamal coach Shafiqul Islam Manik said it would not be a surprise if the Federation Cup produces a new champion.

"No doubt, top four clubs - Abahani, Bashundhara Kings, Saif SC and Sheikh Russel KC -- are the major contenders for the title but clubs like Mohammedan SC, Sheikh Jamal DC and Chattogram Abahani will strongly be in the race too," said Manik, who wants to get his side out of the group-stage and then go match by match to ensure final berth.

Whoever emerges champions, the foreign players are likely to play a key role, with support from local players.

Apart from proven foreign campaigners like Daniel Colindres, Bakhtyir Duishobekov, Raphael Odoyin, Dainer Andres Cordoba, Solomon King, Landing Darboe, Sunday Chizoba, Kervens Belfort, Ballo Famoussa, Yusuke Kato, Souleymane Diabate and Ismail Bangoura, there are some 36 foreign players from among 66 players who are new to the Bangladesh football scene.

"I think the foreign players will make the difference," said Titu.

Maruful said, "The standard of football will improve with the presence of quality foreign players. I can say our three new players are better compared to the last season."

Whether there will be a new champion or a former one winning again will be known on January 4 after 22 matches including seven knock-out games.



Shamsul Alam passes away

STAR SPORT DESK

AMM Shamsul Alam, a prominent sportsman and organiser of pre-independent Bangladesh, passed away at a hospital in Florida, USA on December 16. He was 80.

Alam left behind his wife, a daughter, three brothers and a host of well-wishers to mourn his death.

A Dhaka University Blu, Alam was captain of the erstwhile East Pakistan basketball team from 1958 to 1967. He acted as secretary of basketball in East Pakistan Sports Federation and as joint secretary general of Pakistan Basketball Federation.

11TH NATIONAL ARCHERY

Sana first in qualifying

SPORTS REPORTER

SA Games' triple gold-medallist archer Ruman Sana became first in qualification round of men's recurve individual event on the opening day of Teer 11th National Archery Championships at shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium in Tongi yesterday.

Sana of Bangladesh Ansar scored 657 out of 720 points to finish top among 86 archers while Pardip Chakma of BKSP, Ram Krishna Saha of Bangladesh Air Force finished second and third with scores of 656 and 652 points respectively.

BKSP became first among 19 teams in qualification round of recurve team event by scoring 1946 points while Dhaka Army Archery Club and Bangladesh Air Force finished second and third with 1898 and 1869 points respectively.

Zaha rescues Crystal Palace

AFP, London



Wilfried Zaha's equaliser lifted Crystal Palace up to ninth in the Premier League table as they shared the points in a 1-1 draw at home to Brighton on Monday.

Neal Maupay fired the visitors into a 54th-minute lead but Palace star Zaha drew the Eagles level against the Seagulls with a fine solo effort 15 minutes from time at Selhurst Park.

Palace have now moved above London rivals Arsenal in the table and Zaha was proud of the way his side stayed in the game against Brighton.

Brighton remained in 13th, five points above the relegation zone, and manager Graham Potter was pleased by the south

coast side's latest display.

For Palace, Christian Benteke made his first start since August while Jeffrey Schlupp's hip injury meant Jairo Riedewald came in at left-back and Scott Dann also came in.

Martin Montoya and Yves Bissouma came in for Brighton, with Dale Stephens suspended, and Steven Alzate dropped to the bench.

Following a goalless first half, Brighton went ahead in the 54th minute when Maupay, controlled a cross from Leandro Trossard and let fly with his left foot from the edge of the box.

Palace rallied and were back on level terms in the 75th minute when Zaha, collecting the ball on the left, turned Montoya inside out and then unleashed a powerful shot past helpless Brighton goalkeeper Mat Ryan.



Crystal Palace striker Wilfried Zaha celebrates after his 76th minute goal against Brighton in the English Premier League at Selhurst Park on Monday. Thanks to his late strike, the match ended in a draw.

PHOTO: AFP

SHORT CORNER

Labuschagne called up

In-form Australian batsman Marnus Labuschagne will make his one-day international debut in India, as part of a radically overhauled 14-man squad for a three-match tour next month.

Labuschagne has averaged 58.05 since earning his first Test cap last year, scoring centuries in his last three matches, and the 25-year-old has also excelled for Queensland in one-dayers.

While coaching staff would normally be cautious about pitching an uncapped player into difficult Indian conditions, chief selector Trevor Hohns was confident Labuschagne was ready for the challenge.

The series begins in Mumbai on January 14.

Kiwis call up Jamieson

Uncapped paceman Kyle Jamieson was drafted into the New Zealand Test squad Tuesday after injury sidelined Lockie Ferguson for the rest of the Test series

against Australia.

The Black Caps had high hopes that Ferguson's lightning pace would make an impression on his Test debut in Perth, but he pulled up with a calf strain on the opening day as his side slumped to a 296-run loss.

Coach Gary Stead said it was a bitter blow for Ferguson, who will be out for four to six weeks.

-- AFP

Faf wants AB back

South African captain Faf du Plessis said on Monday that talks had begun aimed at getting star batsman AB de Villiers back into international cricket ahead of the T20 World Cup in Australia in October next year.

"Those conversations have been happening two or three months ago," said Du Plessis, who was responding to a comment by new South African head coach Mark Boucher that he would welcome having De Villiers in his team.

-- AFP

Niaz helps Police to debut chess title

SPORTS REPORTER



Debutants Bangladesh Police emerged unbeaten champions in the Walton Refrigerator Premier Chess League after beating Janata Bank Officer Welfare Society by 3.5-5 points in the final and 11th round at the National Sports Council Auditorium yesterday.

Bangladesh Police, who played the 2nd Division Chess League this year and entered top-flight chess after buying out the E-Soft Arena Chess Club, formed the second-best side with three GMs, one IM and one FM. They maintained an all-win record till the end to deny last edition's champions Saif SC, who had fielded six GMs.

In the final round, Police easily beat Janata Bank, with their two Georgian GMs -- Baadur Jobava and GM Mchedlishvili Mikheli -- along with IM Fahad Rahman winning their respective boards. GM Niaz Murshed, however, dropped points against

FM Syed Mahfuzur Rahman.

Niaz played the key role behind forming the Police team like he had previously helped Mohammedan SC to the title thrice (2011 to 2013) and Sheikh Russel Memorial SC (2015), Saif SC (2016) and Bengal Chess Club (2017) once each in the last eight years.

"Beating holders Saif SC was the turning point," Murshed told reporters after confirming the prestigious maiden title.

"Our target was to win the league which was really tough this time. I could not play well because of asthma problem while Fahad had to play tough matches. Our players could not get rest during the championship but we are now happy to become champions," said Murshed, who hoped Bangladesh Police will continue in chess league.

"Bangladesh Police is an institution and they have resource to run a chess club. I believe Bangladesh Police will continue its presence in chess league and it will help the chess players," opined Murshed.

A new career for chess champion

REUTERS, London

Chess grandmaster Magnus Carlsen's knack for complex strategy has helped steer him into the upper echelons of an unlikely competition -- fantasy football.

The Norwegian stands third on the Premier League's official fantasy football competition (FPL), only being knocked off top spot on Monday after Crystal Palace's 1-1 draw against Brighton and Hove Albion.

The 29-year-old reigning world chess champion tweaked his Twitter profile to include his FPL achievement.

"World Chess Champion. The highest ranked chess player in the world," reads his bio on the social media site.