

MESSI NO MORTAL

Argentina lift third World Cup



ATIQUE ANAM from Doha

Lionel Messi worked his magic on the Lusail Iconic Stadium pitch to deliver a third World Cup trophy for Argentina as the Albiceleste emerged victorious following a thrilling penalty shootout on Sunday night.

The PSG forward scored one and played a part in another as Argentina got to a comfortable 2-0 lead within the first 36 minutes of the match. The 35-year-old then scored again even as a Kylian Mbappe-inspired France staged a tremendous fightback. And then with Mbappe bagging a hat-trick to force the match into tiebreakers, Messi stepped up and converted the spot kick to guide the Albiceleste to the title, the only one piece of silverware that was missing from his trophy cabinet.

The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner, who expressed his intention of ending his international career after this tournament, couldn't have scripted the end any better for himself as he carried the entire team to ultimate glory with memorable performances throughout the entire tournament.

While Messi is bound to get all the praise for what he did in the tournament, his long-time strike partner Angel di Maria will surely be credited with the spark that got the team into gear so early in the match.

Coming into the side after missing the semi-final against Croatia through injury, Di Maria wreaked havoc in the France defence down the left and earned a spot kick for Messi when he was brought down by Ousmane Dembele inside the box, with barely 19 minutes on the clock.

And Messi stepped up and duly dispatched his effort, sending Hugo Lloris the wrong way.

The two veterans, who had been instrumental in

Argentina's success over the past 15 years – starting from the 2008 Olympic gold to the Copa America title last year, dictated the tempo of the game with seamless sync and intricate passing moves as the defending champions failed to find a footing in front of capacity crowd, largely cheering for Messi's Argentina.

Things got worse for the world champions when Di Maria clinically finished off a move initiated with a flick from Messi and teed up by the tireless Mac Allister down the right.

Didier Deschamps was in need of a total shakeup and he did so by replacing Olivier Giroud and Dembele with Marcus Thuram and Kolo Muani before the end of the half and the changes apparently brought some life into the France side, who had looked rather pedestrian and short of ideas till that stage.

But if the ageless Messi was pulling all the strings for Argentina, France had Mbappe. The 23-year-old sparked Les Bleus to a marauding fightback as Argentina started to lose possession and control of midfield for the first time.

With the clock ticking down, Mbappe fired home a spot-kick in the 80th minute after Muani's galloping run into the box was cut short cynically by Nicolas Otamendi.

The Les Bleus phenomenon was just getting started. In the blink of an eye, he got France on level terms with a brilliant volley even as he lost balance following a one-two with Thuram.

The two-goal burst from Mbappe had Argentina shell-shocked, but they gathered themselves to regenerate attacking moves again. Messi tried to create something out of nothing, having a go at goal from outside the box but Lloris summoned years of

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DESERT FEST

Mbappe shares the limelight

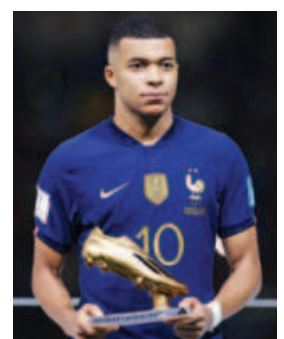


AGENCIES

France striker Kylian Mbappe won the World Cup Golden Boot award after becoming only the second player to score a hat-trick in a World Cup final, but the supersonic 23-year-old did more than just that on Sunday at the Lusail Stadium.

He breathed life into a game that seemed done and dusted till the 80th minute after a Lionel Messi spot-kick and another goal from Angel Di Maria in the second half indicated towards a one-sided affair.

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Power, gas to get costlier

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and ASIFUR RAHMAN

The prices of electricity, gas and diesel are set to increase one by one as the government pulls back the subsidies in keeping with the austerity measures.

Everyone must be prepared to pay the actual cost of producing electricity and procuring gas, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told a discussion arranged by Bangladesh Awami League yesterday at Krishibid Institution in Dhaka.

Given the global economic slowdown, it will not be possible to provide subsidies, she said.

If the subsidy is withdrawn, the electricity price would be 33.9 percent more at Tk 8.30 per kilowatt and the gas price 30.6 percent higher at Tk 11.62 per cubic metre, according to the latest electricity and gas price adjustment announcement of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission.

The regulatory body calculated Tk 17,000 crore as subsidy for electricity and Tk 6,000 crore for gas.

"Under the present circumstances, the subsidy the government has to pay is too much of a burden," Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, told The Daily Star.

The government will first cut the subsidy for electricity. "We are working on it," he said, adding that the industries and the affluent group would be the first to pay the higher electricity.

Hamid cited the example of India and Singapore, where private producers produce electricity and sell directly to the end-users at their cost price.

The price of diesel would also be increased by Tk 4-5 per litre at least. Bangladesh Petroleum Company subsidises diesel and makes profit from petrol and octane.

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Ecstatic Argentina supporters on Dhaka University campus last night. Thousands of football fans watched the World Cup matches on monumental screens on the campus during the last one month.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

By-polls to 5 JS seats on Feb 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

By-polls to the five parliamentary seats, which fell vacant following the resignation of BNP lawmakers, will be held on February 1 next year.

Election Commission Secretary Md Jahangir Alam announced the schedule yesterday after a meeting at the EC office in Dhaka's Agargaon area.

The five constituencies where the by-polls will take place are Thakurgaon-3, Bogra-4, Bogra-6, Chapainawabganj-2, and Brahmanbaria-2.

The EC secretary said aspiring candidates have to submit their nomination papers by January 5. Returning officers will scrutinise the papers on January 8 and January 15 has been set as the last date for withdrawal of candidature.

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