

## Dhoni keeps fans guessing

AGENCIES

India legend Mahendra Singh Dhoni is looking to win the Indian Premier League (IPL) with Chennai Super Kings for the fifth time.

On Tuesday, skipper Dhoni's tactical nous – at times controversial – again sealed the deal as CSK overcame the fancied Gujarat Titans by 15 runs to book a slot in Sunday's final at the world's biggest stadium in Ahmedabad.

With his finishing skills on the wane, a dodgy knee and his place in the batting order increasingly hard to justify, Dhoni has suggested on several occasions his retirement is imminent.

However, the 41-year-old again kept fans guessing, saying on Tuesday he would take until the auctions for the 2024 IPL in December to make his final decision.

"I will always be there for CSK whether in playing form or sitting somewhere," he said.

"I don't really know. But frankly, it takes a heavy toll."



## 'A' team falter on Day 2

STAR SPORTS DESK

West Indies A took their lead to 31 runs against their Bangladesh counterparts at the second day's close of play in the second four-day match in Sylhet yesterday.

The visitors bundled out Bangladesh A for 237 before ending the day at 268 for six, courtesy of fifties from Kirk McKenzie and Keacy Cartt. McKenzie missed out on a century when he was dismissed for 91 by Saif Hassan, while Cartt had to taste the misfortune of a run out at 68.

Earlier, Bangladesh A, who had lost half their side for 175 at stumps on opening day, managed to add 62 runs to their overnight total, courtesy of a 73-run knock from Shahadat Hossain Dipu.

Pacer Akeem Jordan picked five wickets, while seamer Ander Phillip and off spinner Sinclair scalped two apiece for the Joshua de Silva-led side.

## Jabeur carrying 'entire continent's dream'

AGENCIES

Tunisia's Ons Jabeur is aiming to go all the way in the upcoming French Open and become the first Arab and African woman to win a major tournament. French Open, the year's second grand slam, saw its qualifying round commence on May 22. The main draw is scheduled to run from May 28-June 11.

Jabeur said her "life changed beyond the tennis court, in Tunisia" as she cemented final berths in the latest Wimbledon and US Open.

"I try to be an example that, not just in tennis but in any walk of life, the girls can succeed, they just have to believe," Jabeur told Eurosport yesterday.

The 28-year-old suffered injuries this year but recovered some momentum with a WTA title (Charleston) in April.

"Obviously, the pressure is there but I will use that pressure to make sure I'm ready to realise my dream, to realise the dream of an entire people, an entire continent in fact."



## Pipe dream or a true disruptor?

SAMAMA RAHMAN

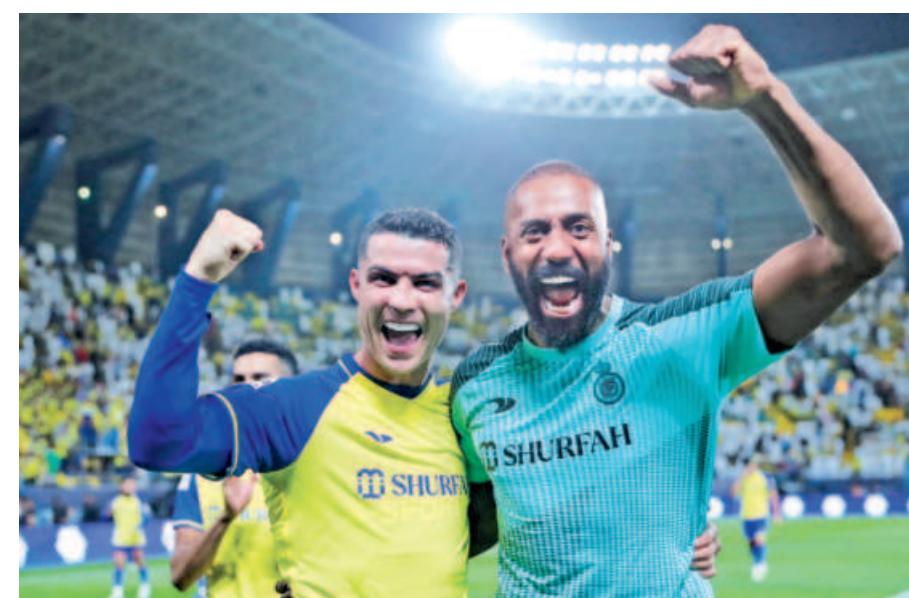
Cristiano Ronaldo's comments on Tuesday that the Saudi Pro League could in time become one of the top five leagues in the world drew plenty of ridicule, but is it so unfathomable that the Middle East could become a centre of world football?

Ronaldo, who joined Al-Nassr in January, said: "The Saudi league is getting better and the next year will be even better. Step-by-step I think this league will be among the top five leagues in the world but they need time, players and infrastructure. But I believe that this country has amazing potential, they have amazing people and the league will be great in my opinion," he added.

Some believe Ronaldo may have been waxing lyrical simply for the sake of his mammoth contract, estimated to be worth more than 200 million euros per year, but perhaps there is something that the globe-trotting superstar noticed which emboldened him to make such a big statement.

Chief among those reasons is the seemingly infinite supply of cash in the Kingdom, which means they can outmatch offers by magnitudes and attract the best talent in the world. The next phase of that chapter seems destined, with reports abounding that Al Hilal will secure the marquee signing of Lionel Messi for a contract that could reach €400 million.

It is a tactic that teams in England's



Premier League, bolstered by deals from the most lucrative broadcasting deal in football, have used for a long time. They have created a brand based on the melting pot of various ethnicities, styles of play and precocious talent.

As it stands now, reports estimate that the average Premier League footballer's annual salary is between €2.5-3 million, easily more than double that of competing leagues such as La Liga in Spain and the Italy's Serie A. Wages in the Premier League have risen at such an astronomic

rate that if the average annual salary in the United Kingdom had kept pace, it would have ballooned to £437,084.

However, casually dumping a hundred or so million into salaries in itself would not be enough, as evidenced by the rise and fall of the Chinese Super League. But with intervention from Saudi's sovereign wealth fund, a structure could take shape that could look to rock the traditional Euro centric identity.

It is something that the Saudis have done recently in the world of golf with

LIV Golf, which has shaken the sport to its core. Although an offer north of \$700 million was turned down by Tiger Woods, LIV Golf has propped itself up as a true contender to the tenured PGA Tour.

But throwing money at the problem can still cure most surface-level problems, such as those to do with marketing and branding. Even a relatively unknown club like Paris Saint-Germain have risen to the ranks of European elites at the cost of the highest wage bill in Europe, paying out €387 million euros per year in salaries.

Currently, 11 of the top 25 wage bills in the world belong to Premier League clubs and Chelsea, who have the sixth-highest outlay, pay just under €189 million in wages per year. Their entire wage bill would not be able to cover what the Saudis are paying for one season of Cristiano Ronaldo.

The only uncertainty is exactly how serious the Saudis themselves are about pouring so much investment into a domestic structure where teams will never be able to compete for the Champions League.

Is their dream of rekindling the Ronaldo-Messi rivalry on their soil just another cog of Vision 2030, a way to market the economic and social reforms that are aimed at opening Saudi Arabia up to the rest of the world using the biggest names in sport? Or is it another example of disruptive innovation, aimed to create a super league in the Middle East?

working with Rajon at the outer nets of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

"Mushfiqur called me a few days ago and asked me to help him in training sessions. Miraz was with him when I showed up. Mushfiqur advised Miraz to speak to me since he wanted to work on the doosra. Miraz is a keen learner. He called me in the next day and asked me to help him with the doosra and I must say he seems eager to learn fast," he said.

Miraz burst onto the international scene with a bang, scalping 19 wickets in his first two Tests. But he has seen his fair share of ups and downs since.

There were instances when Miraz looked predictable, especially abroad, due to a lack of variations, but the 25-year-old continued working and has emerged as a vital member of the team across all formats.

"Miraz has some variations up his sleeve. He bowls one from side on, which tends to move away from the right-hander. He also uses the crease pretty well and bowls the drifter accurately. We have just started on the doosra, but what I noticed is that he has really big fingers, which is an added advantage for spinners. We worked on the grip, sideways movement and planting the foot. He wanted to know whether he could bowl the doosra using his existing bowling action. I feel he can develop this art very quickly," Rajon said.



Islam Rajon.

Rajon, who played the ICC Under-19 World Cup in 2006 alongside Mushfiqur Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal, was regarded as one of the best off-spinners in the country, with his ability to deceive batters using the doosra especially catching the eye.

Miraz, who has developed into a crucial member of the national team's spin department, was eager to learn the 'doosra', which spins in the opposite direction to an off-break, as he looks to add more variations.

Mushfiqur recommended seeking suggestions from his age level teammate, Reazul

the delivery was widely known in the cricketing fraternity," Rajon told The Daily Star.

However, Rajon could not make it to the national team set-up and quit professional cricket following his last Dhaka Premier League season for Abahani in 2013. He then decided to take up the role of a coach and help youngsters master the difficult art of spin bowling.

The likes of Shakib, Mahmudullah Riyad and many others have in the past called on Rajon and faced off against him in nets sessions as part of preparations to tackle off-spinners before international assignments.

Yesterday, a keen-to-learn Miraz was

## Durjoy laments subpar monsoon set-up

SPORTS REPORTER

Chairman of the High-Performance Committee Naimur Rahman Durjoy lamented how Bangladesh's cricketing infrastructure is still lacking in a few aspects, pointing out the issues it brings especially during the rainy season.

The former Bangladesh captain underlined the struggles that players face in the rainy season owing to a lack of indoor facilities to train. Doubled with a jam-packed schedule due to other domestic competitions, the HP program is forced to run its course in that season of unpredictability.

"I still think I haven't been able to do everything from the Bangladeshi perspective because we have a few gaps infrastructure-wise like grounds, indoor, gym. We have to struggle a lot in the rainy season. Similarly, we have to run the HP program during the rainy season," Durjoy told the media at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

"The players remain busy as they have to play the national league, domestic cricket, BPL, and DPL. We can't run those programs during those times, particularly the skill training can't be carried out then. So, we have to do those things during the rainy season which is why we have to make improvements in terms of infrastructure, especially



"How do we measure it? I think success will be around how many players we transition through this [HP] program into the next program above. We want to make sure that Bangladesh cricket is stronger and stronger, because there's more depth of players to choose from – because of this program."

David Hemp, HP head coach

when it comes to indoors, gyms," he added.

Meanwhile, the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium welcomed the arrival of newly appointed HP head coach David Hemp yesterday.

"It is a really important role in terms of the development of players in the Bangladesh cricket community," Hemp told reporters.

"We are trying to help players achieve their goal, which is, in essence, to play for the Bangladesh national side. We provide that platform where players can learn and grow, and step up into that

next group – the A team. From that, they can go into the main national side," added the former Bermudian cricketer.

Hemp's first assignment will see him take charge of HP's new program that will be carried out in three phases across three cities – Dhaka, Bogura, and Rajshahi – starting from June 24. While the SBNCS has adequate indoor facilities and a gym, the venues in Rajshahi and Bogura have rudimentary facilities and if it rains, the training sessions in those venues would have to come to a halt.

## Bangladesh up against Malaysian might

SPORTS REPORTER

Fresh off a 2-0 win over hosts Oman in the first match of AHF Junior Asia Cup, Bangladesh under-21 hockey team are looking forward to putting up an even better show against strong in their Pool B encounter in Salalah today.

Malaysia are considered as Pool B favourites and an 8-1 thrashing of Uzbekistan in their opening match is evidence of their strength.

However, Bangladesh are confident about putting up a good show as the men in red and green set their sights on a last-four berth in quest of securing a place in FIH Junior World Cup.

"Malaysia are a strong side, who play crisp passing to control the match," said head coach Mamunur Rashid, who articulated the strong and weak points of the Malaysia team by analysing their video footages.

"I instructed the boys to play against Malaysia without any fear or pressure because we don't have anything to lose against them, rather we can achieve something big," said Rashid.

Bangladesh had suffered an 8-0 defeat to the same opposition during the 2015 Junior Asia Cup.

## Fahad remains on top

SPORTS REPORTER

International Master Fahad Rahman maintained his solo lead in Hanoi Grandmaster Chess Tournament-2 after beating WGM Vo Thi Kim Phung and drawing against CM Wong Zhenyong Jayden in Vietnam yesterday.

Fahad, who on Tuesday beat two GMs, secured five points from six matches to stay on top of the table.

Fahad played with white pieces in Queen's Indian Dec system against WGM Phung of Vietnam after 62 moves in the fifth round before drawing against Singapore's CM Zhenyong Jayden after 61 moves.

## Pep-City bond tightens

AGENCIES

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola says he wants more than 100 Premier League charges levelled against the club for alleged financial irregularities to be dealt with "as soon as possible".

"Hopefully they are not so busy and the judges can see both sides and decide what is the best because, in the end, I know because in the end I know fairly what we won on the pitch and we don't have any doubts," he said before Brighton fixture yesterday.

City, who are celebrating their third consecutive English top-flight title and are chasing a trophy treble this season, were referred to an independent commission in February over 115 alleged rule breaches between 2009 and 2018.

The Catalan, who has a contract until 2025, stressed he would not walk away from the club "while there are 110 breaches against City".

"I would like to continue here next season independent of the result (of the Champions League final)."

