

FIFA World Cup 2018 kicks off, hosts Russia thrash Saudi Arabia 5-0 in opener



MOSCOW, Jun 14

The World Cup kicks off in Russia Thursday as the host nation take on Saudi Arabia in front of 80,000 people in Moscow after President Vladimir Putin officially declares the tournament open.

Russia is spending more than \$13 billion (11 billion euros) on hosting football's showpiece, the most important event in the country since the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics.

The buildup has been dogged by controversy and

diplomatic scandals and has shone a light on the challenges facing Putin's Russia.

On the day of the curtainraiser, Russia freed the main opposition figure to Putin, Alexei Navalny, from jail after he served a 30-day sentence for organising an illegal protest.

The completely refurbished Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow hosts the opening match, against the two lowest-ranked sides in the tournament.

Excitement has been steadily building in Moscow, with thousands of

Saudi fans in green and white arriving in the city for the match.

British pop star Robbie Williams performed at the opening ceremony at the Luzhniki.

The World Cup favourites enter the fray this weekend.

Brazil and their superstar Neymar are seeking a sixth global crown while Germany, who won their fourth World Cup in Brazil four years ago, will be determined to draw level with the Brazilians when the final is played in Moscow on July

15. France boast possibly the most talented squad while Lionel Messi is desperate to make amends for Argentina's defeat in the 2014 final.

The money lavished on the tournament will boost Putin's already sky-high prestige at home by giving many of the 11 host cities their first facelifts in generations.

Cities such as Saransk were sleepy outposts with decaying buildings until the World Cup reconstruction put them firmly in the 21st century.

The tournament also offers Putin a chance to project Russia as a global player that is accepted and respected even while being at odds with the United States.

He is attempting to do so despite Russia being hit by international sanctions following its invasion of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014.

Moscow's military backing of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria and alleged meddling in the 2016 US election on President Donald Trump's behalf only deepened its worst rift with the West since the Cold War.

Putin hopes the most-

watched event on the planet provides Russia with the "soft power" needed to capture a sceptical world's hearts and minds.

Russian authorities have gone to great lengths to ensure nothing soils the country's image.

The bloody beating English fans took from nearly 200 Russian thugs at Euro 2016 in France has influenced preparations as much as any diplomatic dispute.

Neo-Nazi hooligans who organise mass fights in forests and chant racist slurs at players have been a feature of Russian stadiums for years. The anti-discrimination network Fare said Russia's football federation was making matters worse by punishing those who reacted to racist abuse "while ignoring the perpetrators".

Security services have either locked up or restricted the movement of hundreds to make sure they do nothing to tarnish Russia's image.

The preparations of 2010 winners Spain are in tatters after coach Julen Lopetegui was sacked just two days before their opening game on Friday against Portugal. He had angered his federation by taking the job of Real Madrid manager.

Neymar, the world's most expensive player, has recovered from a broken bone in his foot in time.

Egypt's coach said prolific striker Mohamed Salah is "almost 100 percent" to play in their opening match against Uruguay on Friday after having intensive treatment on the shoulder injury he suffered playing for Liverpool against Real Madrid in the Champions League final.

The opening match saw Yury Gazinski (12'), Denis Cheryshev (43', 90+1'), Artem Dzyuba (71') and Aleksandr Golovin (90+4') scored to help Russia thrash Saudi Arabia 4-0 in the opening match of the tournament.

AFP

School Yoga team leave Imphal



By Our Sports Reporter

IMPHAL, Jun 14 : A 22 member school yoga team who will participate in the National Yoga Olympia 2018 were flagged off today by Directorate of Education (S) from its office at Lamphelpat. The Yoga Olympia is being organised by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) from June 18 to 20 at New Delhi in connection with the International Yoga Day.

The team include, A Luwang Meitei, U Luwangba, S Ras and S Dhananjay in the upper primary boys team while Ch Chitrani, M Pushparani, W Jotika and Tapashree Meisnam are in the girls team.

Y Roshan, M Malemnganba, A Naresh and M Bishorjit are in the boys team of senior secondary category while Y Bala, Devika Rani Manoharmayum, P Kamla and Bidyaluxmi Huirem are in the girls team.

The team led by M Modhusudon Singh and B Surjamukhi as manager cum coach; and S Girimohan and L Sushila as assistant manager cum coaches were flagged off after a blessing ceremony held at the office of Directorate of Education (S).

U-14 AITA Super Series

Bushan sets up summit clash with Bhicky, N Charmie to face Shruti in girls singles final

By Our Sports Reporter

IMPHAL, Jun 14 : Bushan Haobam will be meeting Sagolssem Bhicky in the boys singles final of the ongoing U-14 AITA Super Series organised jointly by Manipur Tennis Association and Imphal District Tennis Association under the aegis of All India Tennis Association at IDTA Deco Turf Lamphelpat while Nongmeikapam Charmie will take on Shurti Ahlawat in the girls singles' final.

Bushan today defeated Arya Bhattacharya 8-2 in the quarter finals before he outlasted Wyatt Obrien 9-1 in the semis. Wyatt entered semis with a 8-5 win over Lalhruaizel JH in the quarter final. On the other hand, Sagolssem Bhicky had a 8-3 win over Tamoghna Das in the quarterfinal before entering into semifinals to meet Anargha Ganguly in the semifinal. Bhicky then notched up a 9-3 win



against Anargha Ganguly and set up final clash with Haobam Bhushan.

Anrga Ganguly sealed a narrow 8-6 win over Aryan Shah in the quarter final before he faced Bhicky in the semis.

Girls Singles
Local girl Nongmeikapam Charmie overpowered Durganshi with a 9-2 win to set up final date with Shruti Ahlawat who beat Lakshmi Arunkumar 9-3 in the semi-

Khosla in the second round clash before defeating Arya Bhattacharya and Tamoghna Das 4-2,4-0 in the semis. Manan Nath and Rushil Khosla secure a 5-3, 4-2 win against Heishnam Shankar and Neeraj Thokchom in the first round.

Ganguly and Obrien beat the pair of Aryan Shah and Ashwin Manikandan 5-3, 4-2 in the semis after beating Lalhruaizel JH and Paras Lukram 4-2, 4-1 in the second round.

The pair of Shah and Manikandan beat Sudhanshu Barkataka and Antariksh Tamuly 4-2, 4-1 in the quarter final match to move into semis.

Paras and Lalhruaizel secured a 4-0, 4-1 win the first round before they conceded to Ganguly and Obrien.

Corrigendum

Please refer to the news item which appeared under the headline, 'H Bushan, S Bhicky reach boys' singles quarter finals' in the Jun 14 issue of this paper. The first paragraph should be read as "State lads, Bushan Haobam and Sagolssem Bhicky beat their rivals to seal their quarter final berths in the U-14 AITA Super Series.... the tournament." and not as published.

The inadvertent error is highly regretted.

Editor.

Meiraba enters main draw second round



By Our Sports Reporter

IMPHAL, Jun 14 : Top seeded U-17 shuttler, Meiraba Luwang cruised into the second round of the main draw today with a 2-1 sets win over Subham Prajapati in the first round of the All India Senior Ranking Badminton Tournament currently

underway in Bengaluru under the aegis of Badminton Association of India.

Meiraba Luwang today lost the first set to Subham Prajapati of Madhya Pradesh (seeded 6) before coming back in the last two sets and secured a 14-21, 21-12, 21-14 win in the first round.

In the qualifying rounds, Meiraba outlasted Nitish SP 15-6, 15-6 in the first round while he secured a 15-13, 15-6 win over Jayraj Singh of Madhya Pradesh in the second round.

In the third round, Meiraba sealed a 2-1 (15-12, 13-15, 15-5) win while he beat Abhishek Borote of Maharashtra 15-4, 15-13 in the last round to cruise into the final round.

Stuttgart Open

Prajnesh misses clash with Federer after losing in 2nd round

NEW DELHI, Jun 14

Prajnesh Gunneswaran missed out on a clash with the legendary Roger Federer after losing his second round at the ATP Mercedes Cup to Argentina's Guido Pella in Stuttgart on Thursday.

Prajnesh, who qualified into the tournament and stunned world number 23 Denis Shapovalov in the opening round, lost 6-7(4) 4-6 to the world number 75.

The Indian left-hander, playing his maiden ATP World Tour event, saved four of the five break points but could convert none of the two chances he got in the one hour and 29-minute contest.

"I played ok but not as good as I needed to. He was very solid and got me to make more errors than I should have. I needed to be a bit more clinical in putting away the shorter balls. I did not do that well enough and it made it difficult for me to win," the 169th-ranked Prajnesh told PTI from Stuttgart.

When asked about the missed chance to play against the 20-time Grand Slam champion, he was not very disappointed. He picked up 32 ranking points, including 12 from qualifying, and earned euro 11,210 for his effort.

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