



SAITAMA: Afghanistan's goalkeeper Ovays Azizi (R) punch the ball beside Japanese forward Shinji Okazaki during the first half of the World Cup Asian Group E qualifying match. — AFP

CHINA STAY ALIVE WHILE JORDAN, JAPAN WIN BIG

HONG KONG: A Jiang Ning hat-trick kept China's faint World Cup hopes alive as big guns Australia and Japan blasted towards Russia 2018 with convincing wins yesterday. Jiang, who plays at Hebei China Fortune alongside Ezequiel Lavezzi and Gervinho, powered China to a 4-0 home victory as they chase Group C's second spot in the penultimate round of games.

Australia had little trouble beating Tajikistan 7-0, with Nathan Burns and Tom Rogic both scoring twice, while Leicester City's Shinji Okazaki sparked Japan's 5-0 win over Afghanistan. Lee Jeong-Hyeop spared already-qualified South Korea's blushes with an injury-time winner as the hosts laboured to a 1-0 victory over Lebanon in Ansan.

And former Tottenham Hotspur coach Harry Redknapp's interim stint with Jordan got off to a flying start with an 8-0 win against an outclassed Bangladesh in Amman. Jiang settled any Chinese nerves in Wuhan when he struck in just the third minute, before the lead was quickly doubled by Yang Xu in the 12th.

Jiang's goals in the 84th minute and injury time added gloss for China, who nevertheless look out of the running for the next round ahead of Tuesday's Group C finale against unbeaten Qatar. Eight group winners and the four best-performing second-placed teams will reach the third round of World Cup qualifying, and seal a spot at the 2019 Asian Cup into the bargain.

In Adelaide, Queens Park Rangers midfielder Massimo Luongo set Australia on their way to what was the Asian champions' biggest win under coach Ange Postecoglou. Luongo struck with just two minutes on the clock before Australian skipper Mile Jedinak of Crystal Palace added a penalty to put the hosts 2-0 up.

Another penalty by substitute Mark

Milligan and second-half doubles from Burns and Rogic completed a comfortable outing for Australia, who now go into a top-of-the-table clash with Redknapp's Jordan. "These games can become difficult, we knew they would sit off (in defense) but having such a quick start and scoring the goal it was just a matter of time before they capitulated," Postecoglou said.

Redknapp went one better than his Australian opposite number as Jordan put

eight past Bangladesh, propelled by a first-half hat-trick from Hamza Al Dardour. Meanwhile Japan needed Okazaki, one of the men behind Leicester's inspirational English Premier League season, to shake them out of their torpor after a sluggish start in Saitama. Okazaki handed Japan a barely deserved lead two minutes before half-time before Hiroshi Kiyotake, Maya Yoshida and Mu Kanazaki joined him on the scoresheet, along with an Afghan own goal. — AFP

TERROR THREATS DOESN'T FAZE GERMANY: MUELLER

BERLIN: Thomas Mueller says the Germany squad remains unfazed by the threat of terrorism ahead of tomorrow's high-profile friendly against England in Berlin in the wake of the Brussels attacks. The world champions host Roy Hodgson's Three Lions tomorrow with a crowd of around 72,000 expected at Berlin's Olympic Stadium before the Germans play Italy four days later in Munich. Security will be tight for both games in the wake of Tuesday's bomb attacks on Brussels' airport and metro system which killed 31 people. "What is happening here in Europe at the moment is unusual," said Mueller. "We feel that we are well protected, but of course anything can always happen."

"However, we are convinced the security forces are doing a good job." Germany were affected by the terror attacks last November in Paris having had to spend the night in the Stade de France after their 2-0 defeat to the French. Then four days later, their home friendly against the Netherlands in Hanover was called off on police advice amidst fears of an attack.

Germany will be without captain and Manchester United star Bastian Schweinsteiger against both England and Italy after again tearing the medial ligament in his right knee having suffered the same injury in January. The 31-year-old faces a race against time to be fit for the European championships, which start on June 10. "It's bitter news for him and also for us," added Mueller. "I hope, that he will be fit as soon as possible. "Basti still has time before the European championships and it will be important to have our captain on board." Schweinsteiger's midfield partner Toni Kroos of Real Madrid is backing his captain to get himself fit for France. "It's bitter for Basti, but it's not his first injury and I think we can compensate without him and he has often already made a comeback," said Kroos. Regardless of who plays against England and Italy, the world champions are looking forward to testing themselves against two contenders for the Euro 2016 title. "These games against England and Italy will be a good test for us and we're looking forward to them," said Mueller. — AFP

ENGLAND WINGER JOHNSON JAILED FOR UNDER-AGE SEX OFFENCES

LONDON: Former England footballer Adam Johnson was sentenced to six years in prison at Bradford Crown Court yesterday after being found guilty of sexual activity with a 15-year-old fan. Johnson, once a winger with Sunderland and Manchester City, was found guilty following an incident in his Range Rover car in County Durham, north-east England, last year.

The 28-year-old had also pleaded guilty to another count of sexual activity with a child and one count of grooming a child. Judge Jonathan Rose, passing sentence, said the victim who cannot be named for legal reasons had been a Sunderland fan who would wait after matches to take pictures of her "favorite player", Johnson, who had known her age.

"That was known to you-to put it another way she had only just turned 15 when you began grooming her, because as you were to admit you found her sexually attractive," said the judge. Judge Rose said that the offences happened "at a time when you were engaged in frequent sexual intercourse with multiple partners".

"You made a deliberate decision to engage in sexual activity with this young girl, no doubt in the expectation that you would get away with it." Johnson was found guilty on March 2 before being granted bail ahead of yesterday's sentencing. He was sacked by struggling Premier League side Sunderland last month as the north-east club terminated his £60,000 (\$84,675, 75,909 Euros) per week contract and Judge Rose said: "Your future as a professional footballer must be in doubt."

'Dark places'

He told Johnson he had "every opportunity" to enter guilty pleas to the charges he eventually admitted and that by not doing so his victim had been subjected to a year of being called a liar, including chants by fans. "She speaks of entering many dark places in that year and said she had suffered bullying and stress and had underachieved at school as a result of the case," the judge said.

Judge Rose also ordered Johnson to pay £50,000 of the prosecution's £67,132 costs. Dr Philip Hopley, a consultant psychiatrist giving evidence for the defence, had previously told the court: "This is a man who, at the age of 28, is socially and psychologically immature." He added that he had found no evidence in Johnson of an attraction to pre-pubescent children or "sexual perversion".

Earlier yesterday, Johnson's sister did not accompany him into court but stressed she was still "100 percent behind him". In a Facebook post, Faye Johnson said she had stayed away from court because "Adam has always been my hero, my brother and my best friend, I just don't want him to see the pain in my eyes!" But Gerry Wareham, the chief prosecutor for England's north-east region, insisted any sympathy regarding a football career cut short was misplaced. "Adam Johnson exploited a young star-struck fan, actively grooming her over a number of months in single-minded pursuit of his own sexual gratification," Wareham said in a statement. "We should all be clear that there is only one victim in this case, the fifteen-year-old girl he sexually assaulted."

The fall-out from the case saw Sunderland chief executive Margaret Byrne resign on March 8. Byrne said she had made "a serious mistake" in being party to the decision to let Johnson play on for the club for nearly a year despite knowing he had admitted to kissing a 15-year-old girl. — AFP



BRADFORD: Former England footballer Adam Johnson arrives at Bradford Crown. — AP