

**12** Mercedes in search of lost speed at Suzuka

**13** Superstar Bolt can inspire young, says Sebastian Coe

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BEIJING: Simona Halep of Romania hits a return shot against Maria Sharapova of Russia during their women's singles match of the China Open tennis tournament at the Diamond Court in Beijing, yesterday. — AP

## Halep dumps Sharapova out of Beijing

### Kyrgios smashes racket, advances to China Open q-finals

BEIJING: Maria Sharapova opened up on the despair she feels in defeat after she was ruthlessly knocked out of the China Open in the third round by Romania's Simona Halep yesterday. The world number two was an emphatic 6-2, 6-2 winner to leave five-time Grand Slam champion Sharapova still searching for her first title since returning from a doping ban in April.

It was the 26-year-old Halep's first victory over the Russian in eight meetings. Sharapova, a former number one now at 104 in the world rankings following her 15-month suspension for taking meldonium, gave an insight into the rollercoaster of emotions in top-level tennis.

"Hard work is not good enough any more, maybe it was—I don't know how many years ago—but that's just not a factor anymore," said the 30-year-old, asked about comments in a book she recently released.

"The reason I say that is there's some incredible moments, very high moments, and there are very low moments. "There have been times where I get off the

court and you think, I don't wish this on my future child.

"The feeling is so tough and disappointing," Halep, the second seed on Beijing's outdoor hard courts, is the first woman into the quarter-finals, where she will play either defending champion Agnieszka Radwanska or Daria Kasatkina of Russia.

With world number one Garbine Muguruza exiting in the first round with a virus, Halep is now favourite. Sharapova said it was the best Halep had played against her—and Halep agreed.

The two met in the first round at the US Open a few weeks ago and Halep said she was delighted to finally

taste victory against Sharapova: "I'm really happy that I could do this.

"It's my first victory against her and I just want to enjoy the moment."



### Halep's first win over Russian in eight meetings

Nick Kyrgios said he wanted to make up for his notorious meltdown in Shanghai last year as he beat Mischa Zverev in the second round in Beijing. A year ago the supremely talented but combustible Kyrgios was suspended for his petulant behaviour at the Shanghai Masters, where he argued with the crowd and appeared to give away points in caving in to the German journeyman.

The enigmatic Australian, seeded eighth in the Chinese

capital, smashed his racquet on the floor in anger, bending the head in half, when he conceded the opening set yesterday. That earned the world number 19 a warning from the umpire and raised the spectre of one year ago.

But the 22-year-old returned for the second set with renewed determination and coasted into the quarter-finals 3-6, 6-2, 6-2. Kyrgios said facing Zverev—older brother of rising star Alexander—a year after Shanghai, and again in China, was the perfect opportunity to show how far he has come. "I just wanted to go out there today and kind of redeem myself a little bit from last year," he said, adding: "I just wanted to prove to myself how much I have improved." During one changeover the Australian appeared so relaxed that he sat back on his chair, arms behind his head, and sang along with a pop hit being played over the stadium loudspeakers.

"Nothing really, just chilling out," Kyrgios said afterwards, asked about his behaviour. He plays the Belgian qualifier Steve Darcis in the last eight. — AFP

### England bank on 'hot' Kane to deliver WCup spot

LONDON: England will look to red-hot Tottenham Hotspur striker Harry Kane to fire them to the World Cup finals when they tackle Slovenia in their penultimate qualifying match today. After a barren August, 24-year-old Kane hit brilliant form in September, scoring 13 goals in eight matches for club and country. Victory over Slovenia at Wembley will give England a place at next year's World Cup in Russia and with Kane scoring goals so freely, his team-mates will take to the field buoyed by an extra measure of belief. "He is hot, isn't he?" goalkeeper Joe Hart said to journalists at England's St George's Park base earlier this week.

"He is scoring just as many goals as the people we have related to as world-class and he has been doing it for many seasons. Harry gets put in that bracket and deserves to be. "He has (Mauricio) Pochettino, one of the hottest managers in the world, who regards him highly and there are reasons for that. "Harry is just brilliant at what he does

and he is just one of the best out there. He keeps scoring goals and you cannot ask for any more than that. Long may it continue in an England shirt."

Since Kane returned to the international fold at the end of last season following a spate of injuries, his goals have helped to keep Gareth Southgate's England side on course for qualification. His 93rd-minute equaliser prevented England from falling to a first defeat against Scotland since 1999 in June's 2-2 draw in Glasgow and he netted twice as Southgate's men won 4-0 away to Malta last month. Kane and Liverpool midfielder Jordan Henderson have shared the captaincy between them in England's last four games and the wearer of the armband on Thursday will give a clue as to Southgate's long-term thinking on the matter.

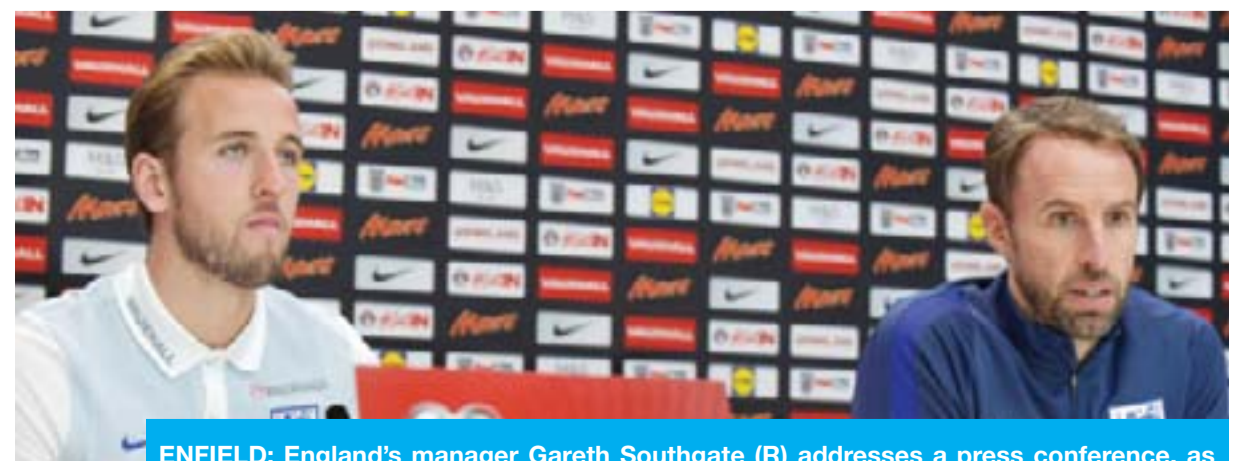
#### SLOVENIA 'NOT AFRAID'

Kane's Spurs team-mate Dele Alli is unavailable due to suspension after being given a one-match ban by FIFA for flashing his middle finger during England's 2-1 win over Slovakia last month. Manchester United centre-back Phil Jones and Manchester City midfielder Fabian Delph have both withdrawn from the squad, joining Spurs left-back Danny Rose, Liverpool's Adam Lallana and Leicester City striker Jamie Vardy on the sidelines.

Drafted into the squad to take Delph's place, 21-year-old Spurs midfielder Harry Winks will hope to get his first taste of senior international football. Five points clear of Slovakia at the top of UEFA qualifying Group F, England

need just two points from Thursday's game and Sunday's trip to Lithuania to reach the World Cup for the sixth time in succession. But having been held to a 0-0 draw in the reverse fixture against Slovenia a year ago, they know that completing the job at the first time of asking will be no foregone conclusion. Third in the group, Srecko Katanec's Slovenia trail Slovakia by a slender point and are above Scotland on goal difference in a knife-edge battle for a play-off berth. While Slovenia captain Bostjan Cesar is

conscious of the threat posed by Kane and his team-mates, he says his team will approach the game with no sense of inferiority. "I saw Kane is in great form, but England have several other quality players too," said Cesar, whose side complete their qualifying campaign at home to Scotland on Sunday. "We respect England, but we are not afraid of them. Last time we played them at home and it was easier. Now we have to be focused for the whole match, otherwise we could be punished." — AFP



ENFIELD: England's manager Gareth Southgate (R) addresses a press conference, as England's Harry Kane looks on at the Tottenham Hotspur Training Ground in Enfield. — AFP