

25 Battling Murray crashes out as Federer, Nadal fight on



26 Fiery Olivier leads S Africa to series sweep of Pakistan



27 Guardiola in hunt for 'new' Fernandinho



SHARJAH: India's midfielder Ashique Kuruniyan (L) fights for the ball with Bahrain's midfielder Kamil Al Aswad during the 2019 AFC Asian Cup group A football match between India and Bahrain at the Sharjah Stadium in Sharjah yesterday. —AFP

Bahrain dump India out of Asian Cup

UAE cement their place as group winners after draw with Thailand

SHARJAH: India suffered late heart-break yesterday after an injury-time penalty saw the cricket-mad nation lose 1-0 to Bahrain and be denied a historic spot in the Asian Cup knockout stages. Meanwhile hosts and India's Group A rivals United Arab Emirates cemented their place as group winners after a 1-1 draw with Thailand in Al Ain that also saw the Thais progress.

India were moments away from reaching the knockout phase for the first time before Jamal Rashed scored a dramatic penalty to cruelly shatter their dreams and sneak Bahrain through. After the defeat, India's English coach Stephen Constantine announced he would step down after completing his second spell in charge.

India stunned Thailand 4-1 in their opening game for their

first Asian Cup win in more than 50 years but a 2-0 defeat by UAE made for a nervous encounter in Sharjah. Television showed cut-aways of India's substitutes biting their fingernails throughout the match, while Constantine prowled the touchline in dark suit and sunglasses barking instructions to his players.

India were indebted to centre-back Sandesh Jhingjan, who was being compared on Twitter to Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk by their legions of fans watching on TV back home. The giant, bushy-bearded defender was immense, putting out fires all game to keep India's clean sheet intact. But the Blue Tigers began to creak as the game wore on and survived a scare when substitute Mohamed Jasim Marhoon's header rattled the post after 71 minutes.

Victory saw Valverde's side restore their advantage over Atletico Madrid, who had briefly cut the gap to two points after beating Levante earlier in the day. "There is a lot of time left," Valverde said. "It is a good cushion but nothing is done yet."

Real Madrid won too, beating Real Betis, to ensure Spain's big three all prevailed in the same round for only the fourth time this season. Real remain 10 points adrift of Barcelona. Messi, meanwhile, extends his own hefty lead as the division's all-time top scorer, which currently stands at 89 goals, ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo.

Ronaldo, now at Juventus in Italy, owns a better goals-to-game ratio, with his 311 strikes coming in 292 matches. Messi's quadruple century arrived in his 435th. In fact, it was one of Messi's quieter nights in terms of performance and in another team it might have been Suarez or Philippe Coutinho picking up the plaudits.

Suarez assisted Messi, applied a classy finish and was on the end of a scintillating team move for Barca's first.

Coutinho was the provider for that one and delivered a sparkling display to appease those doubting his future at the club. The Brazilian has endured a spell out of Valverde's preferred starting line-up but he converted a penalty against

India were clinging on for dear life by the end, at one point packing all 11 players on their own goal line to defend an indirect free kick.

Veteran striker Sunil Chhetri, who overtook Lionel Messi in international goals during the win over Thailand, flew out to get the crucial block.

Just as it looked like India would hold on for a famous point, Pronay Halder committed a rash foul and Rashed stepped up to smash the ball down the middle to knock India down to the bottom of the group and out of the tournament.

UAE finished with five points, one more than Thailand and Bahrain, who go through as one of the best third-placed teams. It looked like being an easy night for the Emiratis when striker Ali Mabkhout, top-scorer at the 2015 tourna-

ment, netted after just seven minutes in Al Ain.

As the white shirts poured forward, Ismail Al Hammadi's chipped shot came back off the bar and Mabkhout perfectly placed to nod home the rebound. Lightweight Thailand were often outmuscled but were dangerous when they had a sight of goal-as seen when Adisak Kraison forced a smart, low save from Khalid Eisa.

And four minutes before half-time, "Thai Messi" Chanathip Songkrasin's ball into the box caused panic, rebounding off defender Mohamed Ahmad and leaving Thitiphan Puangjan with a tap-in.

The pace slowed after the break and the second half proceeded with barely any serious attempts on goal as both sides looked happy to settle for the draw. —AFP

'Monstrous' Messi scores 400th La Liga goal, sends Barca five points clear

MADRID: Lionel Messi scored his 400th La Liga goal on Sunday, a total his coach Ernesto Valverde called "monstrous", as Barcelona terrorised Eibar to reclaim their five-point cushion at the top of the table. Messi drove the ball into the bottom corner after being teed up by Luis Suarez, who added two goals to his own tally either side of the Argentinian marking another historic record at the Camp Nou.

"It's monstrous," said Valverde, after the 3-0 victory. "It's easy to say but you have to score them one after the other, it's a long-term job. His numbers are stratospheric, incredible. He is from another galaxy."

Levante in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday, and was arguably man of the match here.

He alone supplied three passes in the build-up to Suarez's opener. Arthur Melo started it, playing a one-two with Coutinho and then into the feet of Sergio Busquets. Busquets pinged the ball left to Coutinho, who twice exchanged with Suarez before the Uruguayan, off balance, found the far corner.

Messi's moment came in the 53rd minute and it was Suarez who started it, stealing back possession after a heavy touch from Anaitz Arbilla. He bounced it off Coutinho and found Messi, who touched and rifled in.

Barca were enjoying themselves as Coutinho flicked the ball over one opponent's head and Suarez did the same through another's legs. The third goal was simple, however, Sergi Roberto taking a quick throw and freeing the scuttling Suarez. With the goalkeeper out, he looked up and chipped the ball into the net.

The pressure had been cranked up a notch after Antoine Griezmann's second-half penalty earned Atletico a 1-0 victory over Levante. Griezmann has now scored all of Atletico's last six goals and his latest one proved the difference in a cagey contest at the Wanda Metropolitano. —AFP



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi shoots to score his team's second goal during the Spanish League football match between FC Barcelona and SD Eibar at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Sunday. Lionel Messi scored his 400th goal in La Liga against Eibar. —AFP