

## I-League: Aizawl FC beat Gokulam Kerala FC

KOZHIKODE, DEC 31 /-/ Defending champions Aizawl FC defeated top division newcomers Gokulam Kerala FC 2-0 in an I-League encounter here on Sunday. An own goal by Gokulam defender Daniel Addo (45th minute) put Aizawl in the lead right at the stroke of half-time. Andrei Ionescu doubled the lead for the visitors with a fine strike in the 52nd minute. The defending champions have now jumped two spots to the fifth position on the I-League ladder with 10 points from five matches. They are right behind Mohun Bagan who also have 10 points. But the Kolkata giants sit a rung above the defending champions due to a superior goal difference. Gokulam slipped to the ninth position, just above bottom-placed Churchill Brothers. The I-League debutants are on four points from six matches, a tally similar to eighth-placed Chennai City FC. Gokulam however, trail their fellow southerners due to an inferior goal difference.



## New Zealand wary of Chris Gayle revival, West Indies seek it badly

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, DEC 31 /-/ New Zealand were on Sunday wary of Chris Gayle coming into form in the second Twenty20 as they prepare a series sweep against the West Indies. The home side has already tucked away victories in the two Tests, three one-dayers and the first of three Twenty20 international matches. New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said "It would be great" to pull off a series sweep in the Twenty20 in Mount Maunganui on Monday, but the Gayle factor was lurking in the background. The West Indies talisman was in devastating form in December when he smashed a record 18 sixes in an unbeaten innings of 146 off balls in his maiden T20 debut. He has followed it up with a record 12 in his second T20 and four in his third. He played and 12 in the first Twenty20. "He's a fantastic player, probably the best T20 record in the game and can take the game away at any time," Williamson said on his return to the New Zealand squad after sitting out the last three games. "If he gets away on you in 10 overs or so he can change a game and that's what's scary about. We know in this format the West Indies T20 side are one of the best sides in the world and we know that at any time they can turn it on." Williamson said New Zealand could only focus on building on their performances, with an unbeaten run in six games so far against the West Indies. In the first T20, they unearthed two new stars in rookie Glenn Phillips and Seth Rance. Phillips, in only his fourth international, scored a half-century with the bat and pulled off two stunning catches behind the stumps, including one to turn and run nearly 30 metres to dismiss Gayle. Debutant Rance, Seamer Rance removed Chadwick Walton with his next delivery and finished with the impressive figures of three for 30 from his four overs as New Zealand cruised to a 47-run victory.

## EPL: Mohamed Salah inspires Liverpool to win, Chelsea crush Stoke City

LONDON, DEC 31 /-/ Liverpool celebrated Virgil van Dijk's arrival at Anfield by coming from behind to beat Leicester City 2-1 thanks to Mohamed Salah's brace, while Danny Drinkwater scored his first Chelsea goal in a 5-0 rout of Stoke City. Van Dijk, signed from Southampton for a world record fee for a defender of 75 million (\$100 million), isn't able to play for Liverpool until January, but the flaws the Dutch centre-back will be asked to fix were on display as Leicester took a third-minute lead at Anfield on Saturday. With Van Dijk watching from the stands, Liverpool defender Joel Matip carelessly conceded possession and Riyad Mahrez set up Jamie Vardy to slot past goalkeeper Loris Karius, selected in place of the dropped Simon Mignolet, for his 10th goal of the season. Liverpool couldn't find a first-half equaliser despite having 12 shots, but they were level seven minutes after the interval. Egypt winger Salah took Sadio Mane's brilliant pass and showed good footwork before drilling past keeper Schmeichel for his 22nd club goal of an incredible debut season following his move from Roma. Salah wasn't finished yet and he won it for Liverpool in the 76th minute, turning away from Leicester defender Harry Maguire and firing in at the Kop end. Liverpool, unbeaten in 12 league games, remain

fourth and now hold a four-point advantage over fifth-placed Tottenham Hotspur in the race to qualify for the Champions League. At Stamford Bridge, Chelsea climbed into second place above Manchester United, who host Southampton later on Saturday. Antonio Conte's side made the perfect start when German defender Antonio Rudiger rose above three Stoke defenders to head home from Willian's free-kick in the third minute. Eden Hazard was rested on the Chelsea bench, but his replacement Drinkwater did a passable impression of the brilliant Belgian, the midfielder bagging his first goal for the Blues with a blistering strike from the edge of the area in the ninth minute. Stoke boss Mark Hughes's decision to field a severely weakened team in the midst of the hectic festive fixture list was backfiring badly. The visitors were three down by the 22nd minute when Pedro finished off Willian's pass to put Chelsea on course for a fourth win in their last five league games. Willian got on the scoresheet himself in the 73rd minute, stroking home a penalty awarded for a foul on the Brazilian, before wing-back Davide Zappacosta grabbed his first Premier League goal with two minutes remaining. Carlos Carvalho had an immediate impact at Swansea City as his new club climbed off the bottom of the table with a dramatic 2-1 win at

Waford. Carvalho was the surprise choice to replace the sacked Paul Clement just days after he'd been dismissed by second-tier Sheffield Wednesday. The Portuguese coach's first game got off to a bad start when Andre Carrillo nodded home in the 11th minute. But Carvalho was heard lambasting his players at half-time and they responded to his words with four minutes when left Ghana striker Jordan Ayew equalised. In a remarkable finale, Luciano Narsingh won it for Swansea in the 90th minute with a close-range finish. Swansea are two points from safety after their first win in five games. Ryan Fraser's last-gasp goal clinched Bournemouth's first win in nine matches as the struggling hosts beat Everton 2-1 at Dean Court to move out of the relegation zone. Fraser side-footed Bournemouth ahead in the 33rd minute, only for Idrissa Gueye to equalise for Everton in the 57th minute. Everton boss Sam Allardyce was unbeaten in seven games in all competitions since replacing Ronald Koeman, but Fraser ended that run with his 88th-minute strike. Newcastle United are only one point above the bottom three after a four-0 draw at home to Brighton and Hove Albion left them with just one win in 12 games. Huddersfield Town and Burnley shared a goalless draw at the John Smith's Stadium.

## Paulo Dybala scores brace as Juventus, Napoli pull clear in Serie A

MILAN, DEC 31 /-/ Paulo Dybala scored a brace as champions Juventus won 3-1 at Verona to keep pace with Napoli as Serie A's leading duo pulled clear of pursuing Inter Milan. Roma and Lazio on Saturday, Napoli won 1-0 at Crotone on Friday to secure the victory after the hosts hit back through former Juventus player Martin Caceres on 59 minutes. Dybala pulled the hosts to giants level to 72 minutes and five minutes later sealed the win - both goals in the singles draw at the stadium. "We all thought the campaign."

an extraordinary 2017, play impressive football." Third-placed Inter are seven points off the top as they were held to a goalless draw by Lazio as San Siro, as Roma, in fourth, drew 1-1 against Sassuolo in the capital. Inter's draw saw them end a run of three straight defeats in all competitions, but after a storming start to the season Luciano Spalletti's side have taken just two points in four games. Despite being dangerous in the first half, with Ivan Perisic denied by a stunning Thomas

Strakosha save and a Borja Valero header hitting the post, Inter could not find a way past fifth-placed Lazio. "When you lose two or three games and go out of the Coppa Italia, it's natural that those who wish you ill or hope that you'll go back to old ways of previous years will come out of the woodwork," said Spalletti. "I'm not an optimist as such, but I know that if you're pessimistic, then you won't get the result. I try to give my players confidence in themselves. We have 41 points and I'd be more than happy to notch up 41 in the second half of the season too." Roma's Lorenzo Pellegrini scored against his old club Sassuolo just after the half-hour only for Simone Missiroli to level it out in the 78th minute. Stadium Olympic. AC Milan remain in 11th - 23 points behind Napoli - despite a 1-1 draw at Fiorentina secured thanks to a Hakon Calhanoglu equaliser.

## A legend: When Mushtaq Ali told Pakistan's Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto 'India is my home'

INDORE, DEC 31 /-/ Mushtaq Ali's stories are stuff of legends in this part of the world and when his son Gulrez Ali digs into the treasure trove, one can't help listening with rapt attention. Twelve years after he passed away at the age of 90, Mushtaq Ali, who was the first Indian to record a Test hundred away from home and remembered for his explosive batting at a time when it was not in vogue, remains a legendary figure in this part of the world. Taking a walk down memory lane, Gulrez recalls with pride how his famous father rejected former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's offer of Pakistani citizenship just after partition in 1948. In fact, Mushtaq was offered Pakistani citizenship twice by the erstwhile Pakistan premier. "My father once told me that he was invited by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, if my memory serves me right, around 1947-48 to go to Pakistan and become a citizen and he refused," Gulrez recollected during a chat with PTI. "The second proposal was I think a month or two later with Indira Gandhi in Shimla in the 70s. He politely refused on both occasions, telling Bhutto that 'India is my home. I love everything and I will live here all my life'," Gulrez said during a freewheeling chat. As a tribute to the former Pakistan PM, he recalled how Mushtaq Ali was buried in a coffin with 'Zulfi' to Gulrez's son Abbas Ali. Like Gulrez and his grandfather, Abbas Ali also represented Madhya Pradesh with distinction in the domestic circuit and also toured Pakistan with India A side in 1998. Having retired from first-class cricket two years ago, Abbas is currently the fielding coach of the senior state team and is readying the players for the upcoming Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament. Having lived for decades in the house built by his grandfather in 1926, Gulrez now stays a contented man with his family in an other home. The family had long given up hope on getting back the ancestral house where Mushtaq was born in 1914. Mushtaq had wished to live the last years of his life in the house where he was born and turn it into a museum. But, Gulrez claimed that after the demolition of the ancestral house in 1990s when Digvijay Singh

was the CM of Madhya Pradesh, it ran into legal hurdles. The property, now in a dilapidated state in the heart of the city, was given to Mushtaq Ali's father, who was serving as superintendent of police at the time, by the British. "We had then all the necessary clearance to move to that house, where the son-in-law of a justice was staying and they assured us that they would hand over the keys once they find another house. Before I could go again, the house ran into litigation," Gulrez said. Entangled in legal wrangling, Mushtaq Ali told his son "this was not the way I wanted my home". Mushtaq's wish of approaching Digvijay Singh to allot the house in his family's name suffered another jolt because of a change of guard at the state government. "And we had stopped pursuing after he passed away in 2005. After he was gone, there was little hope of gaining hold of the bungalow. We abandoned our plans of returning to that house because we didn't want to get into the litigation." He is not sure if the dispute is still on. "The flamboyant Mushtaq Ali, who played 11 Tests between 1934 and 1952, was the first Indian to score a Test century overseas 112 at Old Trafford in England. He was Virji Merchant to the mark during an opening partnership of 203. Asked about his father's legacy, Gulrez seemed content despite the state of affairs. He is a big India player over the years. Barring leg spinner Narendra Hirwani and off-break bowler Rajesh Chauhan, none could make an impact at that level and he also toured Former BCCI secretary Sanjay Jagdale has his hopes pinned on Avesh Khan, one of the pacers selected to accompany the Indian team to South Africa next summer to make it big. "There was a big gap after Mushtaq Ali last played in 1952. From 1952 to 1985 there was nobody from Madhya Pradesh playing for India. Then things changed with Hirwani coming in, then there was Rajesh Chauhan, Amir Khurshid and J P Yadav for a brief while and recently Namit Kulkarni and many youngsters coming up last year one of them being Avesh Khan. This year MP is likely to reach all the knockouts," Jagdale, a former MP, said. "I am sure there will be a academy named after him, said (PTI)



## Romelu Lukaku injured in Manchester United's goalless draw with Southampton

MANCHESTER, DEC 31 /-/ Jose Mourinho's recent frustrations continued at Old Trafford as he lost Romelu Lukaku to a worrying head injury in Manchester United's goalless draw with Southampton on Sunday. Paul Pogba had a late effort ruled out for offside and a third successive league draw over the holiday period has effectively ended United's hopes of competing for the Premier League title in the New Year. City could extend their advantage over United - who are third - to 17 points if they beat Crystal Palace on Sunday. Adding to his concerns, Mourinho now faces an anxious wait to discover the extent of his star striker's injury. Lukaku, whom Mourinho had admitted in the build-up to the game is desperately in need of a rest, lasted just eight minutes before being stretched off.

His injury came from an innocuous challenge with Wesley Hoedt, but one in which the Southampton defender clashed heads with the United man, striking the back of his skull. The Belgian striker needed a full five minutes in the field of treatment before being carried off the field and replaced by Marcus Rashford, although his afternoon had already started in disappointing fashion. Lukaku was on the end of a perfect Juan Mata cross after three minutes but could not head his effort over from six yards. As United struggled to adjust to Lukaku's departure, Southampton looked far more threatening. Sofiane Boufal pulled the ball back from the by-line and James Ward-Prowse fired from the edge of the penalty area, but David de Gea, Hoedt then mis-timed his header from a Ward-Prowse corner, glancing across goal from six yards out when it looked easier to head on target. Southampton had dropped out of form goalkeeper Fraser Forster, handing Alex McCarthy his debut for the club, and he proved solid cover as United ended the half in slightly stronger form. A Mata strike was well saved by McCarthy's leg before Ashley Young cross and Southampton skipper Maya Yoshida escaped a strong penalty appeal after he appeared to handle in blocking Jesse Lingard.

The situation might have become even more dire for United early in the second half when the excellent Ward-Prowse crossed from the right and Shane Long darted into the area ahead of Nemanja Matic, only to be denied by a magnificent De Gea save with his right boot. There were audible groans from the Old Trafford crowd after a mis-hit cross by Henrikh Mkhitaryan sailed over the Southampton goal just after the hour. However, those groans turned to cheers a few moments later with the sight of Anthony Martial warming up, and he replaced the Armenian just after the hour mark. Martial injected some much-needed pace, and confidence, into the United attack but De Gea's goal was the one still under the greatest threat, a point underlined when Dusan Tadic headed over a Boufal cross from a promising position after 71 minutes.

## New techniques behind India's badminton success: Tian Houwei

NEW DELHI, DEC 31 /-/ Indian badminton is experiencing a golden period and the reason behind the spiralling success is the change in coaching. "Indian players earlier had no technique. But now things have changed. The young players are coming up with different techniques, they are taking badminton one step ahead," Tian, a former World No. 6, told PTI. The 25-year-old from China, who had clinched the silver medal at the All England Championship last year, believes focus on fitness also helped a turn around in the fortunes of the sport. "A lot of new players are emerging from India who are playing very well. I've seen them practice more, win more trophies and they get down to play they pay attention to their fitness," he said. "They practice more, win more trophies and they get down to play they pay attention to their fitness." Asked about the decline of China's dominance in world badminton, Tian said it is just a phase. "It is very normal. Like in India there is cricket, which is the most popular game. The players who practice more, win more trophies and then India is dominant in cricket," said the 2014 All India champion. "It's the same in badminton, players from other countries are practicing more and winning more trophies. They are coming up with better games. (PTI)

## Indian youngsters' chance to shine at big stage

PUNE, DEC 31 /-/ Indian youngsters, led by Yuki Bhambri, will look to exploit the familiar home conditions and start the new season on a high even as Wimbledon finalist and world number six Martin Clinic will start as favourite at the inaugural Tata Open Maharashtra, beginning here tomorrow. It will be easier said than done for the home players because there can't be drastic progress in their progress in night but Bhambri and

Ramkumar Ramanathan did enjoy stupendous success against top players in 2017, raising hopes of a strong show here. Only these two Indians are featuring in the singles draw at the event, which moved out of Chennai due to financial issues. Much more is expected from the doubles draw, which will have four Indian pairs competing. Bhambri has enjoyed an unbeaten run on tennis courts at Balewadi Sports Complex since October 2015. The 25-year-old

has won 10 matches here on the trot, pocketing two Challenger titles but the level of opponents will be completely different at the ATP 250 event, which will have five top-50 players. The Delhi player could not have asked for an easier draw as he opens his 2018 campaign against local boy Arjun Kadhe, who has returned to professional circuit only this year after completing a graduation in India's number one tennis players but he is still without a regular

coach, who would travel with him on Tour. Nevertheless, Bhambri on his own has managed to break the top-100 barrier and will carry home hopes, respectively, of the tough draw. Going by recent form and fitness, he is expected to reach at quarter-finals and may have to face World No. 81 Pierre-Hugues Herbert of France after getting past Kadhe.

Ramkumar who shocked World No. 4 Dominic Thiem at Antalya Open, has been drawn against Spain's Carballes Baena, the World No. 108, in his opening round. The gritty Chennai player will run into Carballes if he crosses the first round. "It's a tough draw. I am aggressive and has a fearless inside-out forehand, makes his presence felt at the moment of the toughest draw. Mere doing well on the Challenger circuit will not take him to Grand Slams. He has shown a great need to take it to the main draw (PTI)