



GOLD COAST: Jockeys ride horses on Surfers Paradise Beach, prior to the 2020 Magic Millions official draw at Surfers Paradise Foreshore.

**Football: Liverpool sink West Ham to go 19 points clear**

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp insisted Liverpool are not motivated by making history after the runaway leaders took another step towards the Premier League title with a 2-0 win at West Ham. Klopp's side have turned the title race into a procession and they moved 19 points clear at the top with their 23rd victory from 24 league games this season.

Mohamed Salah opened the scoring with a first half penalty at the London Stadium and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain wrapped up Liverpool's 15th successive league win after the interval. Second placed Manchester City are now so far behind Liverpool that the question is not if but when the Reds clinch their first English league title since 1990. The Reds have won 31 of their past 32 league fixtures, only dropping points in a 1-1 draw at Manchester United in October. With 14 games left, Liverpool's incredible run has given historic overtones to their impending title coronation. But Klopp is only concerned about getting Liverpool over the finish line, with any landmarks set on the way merely the icing on the cake. "In a season you have to dig in, you don't breathe pretty much, then after 38 games you come out of the water and see how you did," Klopp said. "I'm not too much concerned about records. We had a record at Dortmund and Bayern beat it the next season. "I don't want to be boring. We just don't feel like that." The European and World champions are now 41 games unbeaten in the league - just eight away from the 49-match English top-flight record set by Arsenal's 'Invincibles' across 2003 and 2004. Matching that Arsenal team's achievement in going an entire league season without defeat is within Liverpool's reach, as is Manchester City's Premier League record of 100 points.

**'PROPER HISTORY':** Liverpool's latest success on a chilly night in east London will be just a footnote when the full story of their likely title triumph is written, but they still managed to record another small piece of history. They have now beaten all 19 of the other teams in the league at least once this season -- the first time the club have achieved that feat in the top-flight. Told of the milestone, Klopp maintained his only motivation was to get the best from his team in each match, but he did stop to briefly salute the achievement. —AFP

**Djokovic powers past Federer into Australian Open final**

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic shattered the hopes of ailing rival Roger Federer on Thursday to sweep into a record eighth Australian Open final and move closer to his 17th Grand Slam crown.

In the 50th instalment of one of sport's greatest rivalries, the Serb shrugged off a tentative start to reinforce his recent dominance, showing no mercy to the Swiss maestro in a 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 6-3 win. He will play either fifth seed Dominic Thiem or seventh-ranked German Alexander Zverev in Sunday's final, but it will take a monumental effort to prize another title from the 32-year-old.

Of the seven Melbourne finals Djokovic has made, he has won them all. If any extra motivation was needed, winning on Sunday will see the Serb reclaim the number one ranking after Rafael Nadal was sent packing in the last eight. "Respect to Roger for coming out tonight when he was obviously hurt and not even close to his best in terms of movement," said defending champion Djokovic, who is into his 26th Grand Slam final. "He started well at the beginning and I was pretty nervous. It was very important for me to win that first set. Mentally I relaxed after that." It was the fourth time Djokovic had beaten Federer at the semi-final stage in Melbourne after doing the same in 2008, 2011 and 2016. Federer, the 2018 champion, came into the match carrying a groin injury that he picked up in his five-set, come-from-behind quarter-final win against Tenny's Sandgren. He was seen around Melbourne Park before the match with tape on his upper right leg and there were even rumours that he might pull out.



But that is not in the 38-year-old's nature - he has only ever given up four walkovers in his long career - and the show was on. **POWER AND FINESSE:** Djokovic was clear favourite after beating the third seed in every Grand Slam meeting since Wimbledon 2012, but in their 50th career clash it was Federer who initially set Rod Laver Arena alight. The opening game, on Federer's serve, lasted six minutes in an indication of what might be in store. Then against the odds the 38-year-old, the oldest man in a Grand Slam semi since Jimmy Connors in 1991, broke Djokovic on his first service game with an unbelievable backhand passing shot.

The edge didn't last long with the Serb immediately hitting back to even it up. But the power and finesse of the Federer game was troubling Djokovic, who was on the back foot and was broken once more to go 4-1 behind. Federer had three break points to make it 5-1, but Djokovic dug deep to fend them off as he clawed back, breaking once more as the Swiss was serving for the set. It went to a tiebreaker which the second seed dominated to pull off a remarkable turnaround in a set that Federer threw away. Federer took a medical time at the end of it, apparently for a back issue, and he wasn't moving as freely in the second set. But he clung on until he fluffed an easy shot at the net to hand Djokovic set point at 4-5 and the Serb cracked a top-quality crosscourt volley to go two sets to one in front. —AFP

**Coronavirus: Pakistani athletes stuck in China due to 'flight issues'**

Pakistani athletes in China have to stay a little longer as airlines have stopped operations due to coronavirus outbreak in the country, private news paper reported Thursday.

"They will have to stay for a few more days as there is no flight operation from Nanjing to Islamabad during the next few days," a senior official of the Athletics Federation of Pakistan (AFP) told the publication. Read more: Terrified Pakistani students in China 'being kept in one room', no help from embassy

"I am in constant contact with the travel agent and probably the flights will reopen their operations by February 4 and our athletes will return by the first available flight," the official said. Airlines have suspended services to China while, the World Health Organization, which initially downplayed the severity of a disease that has now killed 170 nationwide, warned all governments to be "on alert" as it weighed whether to declare a global health emergency. National athletes including Arshad Nadeem, Olympian Mehboob Ali, Mohammad Naeem, Uzair-ur-Rehman and Samiullah are in Nanjing for training purposes. "They had to undergo training there until the end of



next month but are returning due to outbreak of coronavirus in China," the official told the newspaper. The training tour had been arranged through the collaboration of Pakistan's embassy in China. The federation has asked the embassy to send the athletes back due to fear of flu-like virus which is causing havoc in China. "We are in contact with our athletes. They are safe. The place where they are staying is quite safe and hopefully they will return safely," the official said. Because of the virus, several international events China was going to host were either postponed or moved to other countries. Asian and Oceania boxing qualifiers for 2020 Tokyo Olympics, in which Pakistani fighters were also set to feature, were scheduled to be hosted by Wuhan in the first and second week of next month were moved to Jordan. The qualifiers will now be held from March 3-14 in Amman, Jordan's capital. —The Business Report



LONDON: Mohamed Salah (left) kicks the ball during the English Premier League football match.

**Kenin breaks Australian hearts, topples Barty to reach final**

MELBOURNE: Sofia Kenin sent world number one Ash Barty spinning out of the Melbourne Park semi-finals 7-6(6) 7-5 on Thursday to reach her maiden Grand Slam final, crushing Australian hopes of a first home-grown champion in 42 years.

American 21-year-old Kenin, seeded 14th at the year's first Grand Slam, had a breakthrough 2019 season when she won all three of her singles titles to reach a career-high ranking of 12, the United States' number two behind Serena Williams. But Barty, 23, came into Thursday's match with a 4-1 record against her and had the American pinned on the back foot with a combination of big forehands and backhand slices. Barty was bidding to become the first local woman to progress to an Australian Open final since Wendy Turnbull in 1980 and looked the more likely winner but Kenin hung tough, saving set points in both frames. "She's such a tough

player, she's playing really amazing and I knew I really needed to find a way to win," Kenin said. "This really wasn't an easy one. I'm just so speechless. "I can't believe this, I have dreamt about this moment since I was five-years-old. I've worked so hard to get here. "I needed to fight out there. There's a reason why she's world number one."

Kenin showed her frustration at times, throwing her racquet on court, but managed to save three break points to hold for 3-3 in the opening set and eventually force a tiebreaker. Despite temperatures soaring to 38 degrees Celsius (100F), the American kept her cool to win four straight points in the tiebreaker, saved two set points and converted her first to stun the crowd into silence. But the fans soon found their voice again, belting out chants of "Let's go Barty, let's go," as the home favourite broke Kenin early in the second set to go up 2-1. —Reuters



**Quick Read**

**Kobe wife heartbreaking note on death of husband, daughter**

The Business Report

NEW YORK: Kobe Bryant's wife Vanessa has broken silence on the tragic death of the NBA star and their daughter Gianna in a heartbreaking statement she posted on her Instagram page. Vanessa, 37, shared her first statement on social media after the helicopter crash which killed legendary Kobe, 41, their 13-year-old daughter



Gianna and seven other people in Calabasas, California on Sunday. In a lengthy note shared alongside a sweet family photo, Vanessa said: "My girls and I want to thank the millions of people who've shown support and love during this horrific time. Thank you for all the prayers. We definitely need them." She continued: "We are completely devastated by the sudden loss of my adoring husband, Kobe — the amazing father of our children; and my beautiful, sweet Gianna — a loving, thoughtful, and wonderful daughter, and amazing sister to Natalia, Bianca, and Capri. —AFP

**Football team from virus-hit China city arrive in Spain**

MADRID: Chinese football team Wuhan Zall were allowed to enter Spain on Wednesday for a training camp near Malaga, despite fears of spreading the coronavirus. The virus broke out in December in Wuhan in central China and has already killed 132 people and infected 5,974 in the country's mainland. Yet Wuhan Zall, who play in the Chinese Super League, have been given permission to land in southern Spain, where they have organised a training camp in the town of Sotogrande. Regional health authorities have said none of the group are sick and given they have not been in Wuhan since January 2, the maximum period for monitoring has passed. "The Wuhan Zall Chinese first division team arrived this morning at Malaga airport from Istanbul and Shanghai, without showing any symptoms related to the virus," said the Andalusian health authority in an official statement. As a precaution, doctors were sent to Malaga airport "to greet the players" and "be available to the squad," the health authority added. —AFP



**Sarfraz Ahmed seeks redemption in PSL 2020**

KARACHI: Former captain Sarfraz Ahmed has aimed to make his comeback in the national team by performing well in the upcoming Pakistan Super League (PSL) 2020 which is to begin next month. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had removed the 32-year-old from his role as the Test and ODI captain in October last year and also dropped him from the squad for the limited overs series against Australia. However, Sarfraz has assured that he would do his best to give a strong performance in the PSL 2020 to make his return to the national squad. "Whenever a player is dropped from the team, he intends to perform well in domestic tournaments. I will also try my best to do well in PSL and make a comeback to the national team," he said. —The Business Report



**Cowan-Dickie back home for family reasons, Dunn eyes debut**

LONDON: Hooker Luke Cowan-Dickie has left England's training camp in Portugal for family reasons, assistant coach John Mitchell has said, with Tom Dunn likely to make his debut in Sunday's Six Nations opener against France. Saracens' Jack Singleton is set to travel to Paris as backup for Bath hooker Dunn. "Family comes first, and we respect that," Mitchell told BBC 5 Live. "We don't know (if he will be available)... Luke will make that decision." Jamie George had started in the position in England's last match, a 32-12 defeat by South Africa in the Rugby World Cup final in November. "We've got Jack, Tom, and Jamie. Tom has really impressed us. He's a hardworking player who gains a lot of respect for the way he goes about his work," Mitchell added. —Reuters

