

Huge support awaits

TIGERS IN OMAN

MAZHAR UDDIN from Muscat



The general cricketing fraternity may not relate the game with Oman but the oil-rich gulf nation is all set to host the qualifying round of the flagship event in the form of ICC T20 World Cup from tomorrow.

The interest of the Bangladesh cricket fans have focused towards the middle-eastern nation as the Tigers have arrived at its capital to play three qualifying matches at the Al Amerat Cricket Ground — located 15 km to the south-east of Muscat, where the first game against Scotland is scheduled on October 17.

From the experience of covering international cricket events around the globe as a journalist, it was a different experience since landing in Oman, especially in the middle of the pandemic, where traveling gets even harder due to health safety measures.

As there is hardly any cricketing interest among the majority of the local population, there was no such evidence of enthusiasm or branding of the mega event, which is going to take place in the country in just two days.

The final moments of preparation to build new roads, that connect the stadium to the highway, was going in full swing since the ground is situated right in the middle of a desert surrounded by rocky hills.

And the temporary stands to accommodate 3000 spectators were almost ready as the sultanate, where the extreme heat just adds to what is already a difficult condition for the Bangladesh team, is all set to create history.

But when it comes to around nearly eight lakh Bangladeshi expats residing in Oman, for them to witness their heroes playing right in front is a great opportunity — one that they barely get in this part of the world where cricket is hardly a topic of interest.

However, disappointment was in the air around the Bangladeshi expats here in Muscat as the limited seating arrangements could well end up depriving many of watching the Tigers live in action.

Mohammad Riyad, a Bangladeshi businessman living in Oman for the past 15 years, expressed his combined enthusiasm and frustration.

"Well, the local Omanis have little interest when it comes to watching cricket matches. But for us, we don't want to miss supporting our Bangladesh team from the ground for the very first time here in Muscat, and that too in a world cup event.

"But the problem is, there are only 3000 seating arrangements for each game at the stadium [Al Amerat] and considering the huge number of Bangladeshis living here in Oman, it's not enough at all," added the Bangladeshi expat.

The lack of seating arrangements was one of the major issues but an even

bigger problem for the Bangladeshi expats was the price of the match tickets, which is on the expensive side, according to many.

"For the past few days, we have been trying to find tickets but unfortunately we're yet to acquire them as there are no ticket booths. You can buy tickets online but then again, it's very hard to get one, considering the limited seats in the ground," said Nurul Haque, another Bangladeshi expat who owns an electronics shop in Muscat.

"The cheapest tickets which cost around 10 Omani Rial [approx. Tk 2200] are unavailable while the price of the available ones cost you around 30 Rial [approx. Tk 6700], which is pretty expensive. But still, we are trying to arrange tickets to watch Bangladesh play in front of our very eyes," added the Bangladeshi expat.

However the situation unfolds, the Tigers can anticipate to get massive support during their stay in Oman for the next seven to eight days.



T20 WORLD CUP BLAST

Scotland packed with 'match-winners'

AFP, Edinburgh

Former England Test star Jonathan Trott says Scotland's batting line-up is full of "match-winners" as they bid to reach the second stage of a T20 World Cup for the first time.

The Scots have fallen at the first hurdle in their three previous appearances, in 2007, 2009 and 2016.

The rejigged format at this year's edition in the United Arab Emirates and Oman gives the Scots, ranked 14th in Twenty20 cricket, a real chance.

Bangladesh are Group B favourites, but the other two teams are Oman and Papua New Guinea, both ranked below Scotland. And they begin their World Cup journey against Bangladesh, the toughest opponent in the group, on Sunday.

"We have some really good players in this Scotland squad, the batting line-up is full of match-winners," the 40-year-old Trott told the Scotsman.

"But T20 matches can ebb and flow so much that it can't be left to one player to perform well. The whole XI has to play well to get good results."



O'Brien desperate to put Ireland on T20 map

AFP, Dublin

Kevin O'Brien -- the architect of one of one-day cricket's greatest upsets -- is hoping to inspire Ireland as they seek finally to make their mark at a T20 World Cup.

Ireland have shown they can mix it with the big boys in the longer format of white-ball cricket, with scalps including England, Pakistan and West Indies in the 50-over World Cup.

But their record in the 20-over game is less impressive -- they boast just three wins in 15 matches over the past five tournaments.

Their most notable victory was against Bangladesh at the 2009 competition in England, a result that helped propel them into the second stage.

But they have crashed out at the first hurdle in every tournament since then, despite wins against Zimbabwe and the United Arab Emirates in 2014.

O'Brien is desperate to put matters right in Ireland's first appearance on the global stage in limited-overs cricket



since 2016.

Irish cricket's most recognisable face and their only Test centurion retired from one-day internationals in June to focus on T20 cricket and the five-day game.

"We've had a lot more success and our big victories have been in the 50-over tournament," the 37-year-old told the Irish Examiner. "But you look back at when we beat Bangladesh in 2009 at Trent Bridge you have still had victories at T20, but lately the ones that stand out are the results we have been on the wrong side of."

'An opportunity to upset the big guys'

AFP, The Hague

The Netherlands open their assault on the T20 World Cup next Monday against Ireland. Both team coach Ryan Campbell and captain Pieter Seelaar have high hopes for the little associate country, known for punching above their own weight and upsetting some big name teams -- just as they did in 2009 when they stunned England at Lord's.

"We bring a really well-balanced side. I believe our greatest strength is our adaptability. We have players who can bat 1-9, which will also provide us with six or seven bowling options at any given time," Campbell added.

"We all know that full members have massive cash and assets at their disposal. But we never look at it that way, we just see it as an opportunity to upset the big guys."

"We've been a top member in associate cricket for as long as I can remember. We want to take it to the next level and get the respect from the full members," said skipper Seelaar.

A lot at stake for Namibia

AFP, Johannesburg

Namibian cricket coach Pierre de Bruyn doesn't buy the narrative that his underdog team have nothing to lose at the T20 World Cup.

De Bruyn said his players were determined to upset the odds by finishing in the top two in their first-round group in order to qualify for the Super 12 phase.

"The impact for Namibian cricket would be massive. It means automatic qualification for next year's T20 World Cup and the financial benefit that comes with it," he said.

"The stakes are high for us. We've got a huge amount to lose, probably more than any other team. We're talking about finances, so many other things."

Laporta hails Pedri deal

REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona president Joan Laporta said it was the happiest day of his second term in office when midfielder Pedri signed a new deal on Friday.

The 18-year-old Pedri's new contract runs through 2026 and has a 1 billion euro (\$1.16 billion) buy-out clause - the highest in the club's history.

The teenager was a key player for Barca as they won the Copa del Rey last season and starred for Spain in their run to the Euro 2020 semi-finals.

"I'd say it's the happiest day since I've taken up the presidency," Laporta told a news conference.

"I was very happy too, of course, when we won the Copa last season but this is an historic day and one of those that makes being Barca president worthwhile.

"The clause is 1 billion euros, as it says in the contract, but Pedri is worth much more than that."

The Catalan also hit back at criticism from predecessor Josep Maria Bartomeu, who earlier on Friday told several Spanish media outlets that his handling of the club had been "serious and responsible", not dire as the current board have said.

"I won't distract myself by answering questions about a desperate person who's now realising the magnitude of the disaster he's responsible for," he said.



Aich's 86 in vain

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite a battling 86 from Aich Mollah, the visiting Bangladesh Under-19 suffered a heavy 42-run defeat against their Sri Lankan counterparts in their first of five Youth ODIs in Dambulla yesterday.

Chasing a modest 228 for nine, a batting collapse saw the young Tigers bundled out for 186 in 46.2 overs.

Bangladesh got off to a decent start in their chase, but the fall of openers Mahfijul Islam and Iftikher Hossain in successive overs saw them reduced to 31 for two after 10.3 overs.

Sri Lanka's Shevon Daniel then removed Prantik Nawrose Nabil and SM Meherob in the same over, leaving Bangladesh reeling at 35 for four after 14 overs.

After that, Ariful Islam and Aich started rebuilding, stitching together a 70-run fifth-wicket stand. However, Ariful was run-out in the 31st over after a 67-ball 38.

Aich, who struck nine boundaries during his 93-ball knock, did not receive much assistance from others as Bangladesh kept losing wickets at regular intervals. Aich was the last man to depart as Bangladesh started their tour of Sri Lanka with a crushing defeat.

Earlier, following a stuttering start, an 88-ball 67 from Pawan Pathiraja and contributions from Sadisha Rajapaksa (28 off 58), Raveen de Silva (29 off 47) and an unbeaten 15-ball 25 cameo at the death from Yasiru Rodrigo saw the hosts post a modest total.

Shakib to join Tigers today

SPORTS REPORTER FROM MUSCAT



Following defeats in both official warm-up matches against Sri Lanka and Ireland, Bangladesh spent time at the gym and at their hotel premises in Muscat yesterday after arriving from Dubai on Thursday night.

The Tigers will take part in a training session at the Al Amerat Cricket Stadium in Muscat at 5:00pm ahead of their first qualifier against Scotland tomorrow.

Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan will join the team in Muscat today as well after completing

his duties in the Indian Premier League for Kolkata Knight Riders.

Shakib was yet to join the team as KKR reached the final of the IPL, which was taking place against Chennai Super Kings when this report was filed yesterday night.

Selector Habibul Bashar, who is accompanying the Tigers in Muscat, said that Shakib will travel from Dubai to Muscat by road to avoid quarantine and join up with the team. It takes four hours to travel to Muscat from Dubai by road.

"Shakib will travel by road since there might be a risk if he comes by air. He was in a bio-secure bubble during the IPL. He will directly

come from one bubble to another so there is no need to quarantine," Bashar told the media yesterday.

"He might take the bus after completing the game at night or maybe in the morning. He is expected to join the team tomorrow (Saturday). Both the ICC and his franchise are looking into the matter."

However, it is still uncertain whether the 34 year old will join the final training session.

"We are still not sure whether Shakib will join the training session in the afternoon. But he has been playing in games. I don't think there will be an issue for him," he added.



Shakib Al Hasan, who will join the Bangladesh team today ahead of the T20 World Cup, was expensive while playing for Kolkata Knight Riders in yesterday's Indian Premier League final against Chennai Super Kings. The left-arm spinner remained wicketless, giving away 33 runs in the three overs he bowled.

PHOTO: TWITTER