

Ireland first test for Tigresses

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will begin their ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifier campaign today when Nigar Sultana Joty and Co. take on Ireland on the opening day at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

The Tigresses faced twin blows just ahead of the tournament as experienced pacer Jahanara Alam, who sustained an injury, and batter Fargana Hoque, who tested positive for Covid-19, were ruled out of the flagship event.

Batting has long been Bangladesh's biggest concern, making the absence of Fargana -- the only Bangladeshi to score a thousand runs in T20s -- even more pronounced.

However, skipper Joty was confident of qualifying for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup proper, scheduled to be held next year in South Africa, despite those concerns.

Bangladesh, Ireland, Scotland and the United States were placed in Group A while Papua New Guinea, Zimbabwe, Thailand and hosts UAE will battle it out in Group B.

The top two teams from each group will advance to the play-off stage. The two finalists will then board flights for South Africa.



Captains of the eight participating teams pose for a photograph with the trophy ahead of the Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers, which begin in the United Arab Emirates today. Bangladesh will take on Ireland in one of the four matches on the opening day in Abu Dhabi.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Stepping up for ELUSIVE TITLE

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Having achieved their first target which was to reach the final of the SAFF Women's Championship, Bangladesh players and coaching staff are gearing up for the big game, the final against Nepal on Monday, with an air of optimism in the squad.

Bangladesh had reached the final of the regional competition once before in five attempts -- in 2016 where they eventually lost the final 3-1 against five-time champions India. This time the team guided by Golam Rabbani Choton are much more optimistic regarding the final as they have proven to be class above the rest with four commanding performances.

The 3-0 win against India in the group stages -- the first time the South Asian superpowers lost any match in the history of the competition -- gave the women in red and green a real shot in the arm. That confidence was in ample evidence against Bhutan in the semifinals where Bangladesh romped to an 8-0 win on Friday.

Choton, who has been the coach of this team since the first edition of the competition in 2010, is pleased that the graduation he has been hoping his successful age-level teams would make has finally happened.

"Before coming here [to Kathmandu], we said that we would appear in a new light," the veteran coach said during a pep talk with his charges before a practice session at the Army Headquarter Ground yesterday.

Choton has guided age-level teams to South Asian supremacy on a few occasions



but is yet to crack the code when it comes to the senior level. But given Bangladesh's performances in the tournament so far -- 20 goals scored against none conceded in four matches -- Bangladesh have suddenly become the favourites for the final even against a Nepal side they had never beaten in the competition before.

"We had another target and that was to play good football and be in the final. We have so far achieved both targets successfully. Now that we are in the final, we will give our all for this game," Choton said.

The team was in relaxed mood on Saturday following Friday's victory over Bhutan which was followed by India's defeat against Nepal in the second semifinal.

While strikers such as Sabina Khatun [8

goals] and Sirat Jahan Swapna [4 goals] have hogged most of the limelight, the defence has done a commendable job in helping goalkeeper Rupna Chakma keep a clean sheet thus far. One of the defenders, Masura Parvin, even got on the scoresheet twice while doing her job at the back efficiently.

Masura was optimistic but was willing to give hosts Nepal the respect they deserve.

"I have scored two goals, but I never go for goals. However, I'm very happy with the goals," Masura said. "The target is obviously to win the final, but we have to keep in mind that Nepal are a very strong side and they have beaten India. We will try our best anyway."

The final will kick off at 5:15pm [BST] at the Dasarath Rangasala Stadium in Kathmandu on Monday.

IUB win two medals in Inter-Uni chess

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Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) clinched a silver and a bronze medal in the men's and women's chess events respectively in the Bangabandhu Inter-University Sports Championship.

Amit Bikram Roy, a third semester student of CSE of IUB, won silver in men's chess while Zannatul Mawa Mowri, last semester student of Environmental Science and Management, won bronze in the women's division.

A total of 86 chess players from 33 universities competed in the 4-day event.

Benzema to miss Madrid derby

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid will be without striker Karim Benzema for the Madrid derby clash with rivals Atletico Madrid, coach Carlo Ancelotti confirmed on Saturday.

The French forward has missed the team's last two games with a thigh injury and was hoping to be fit, but did not train with the team on Saturday.

"Benzema will not make the game," Ancelotti told a news conference ahead of Sunday's derby at the Wanda Metropolitano.

'Need to do basics right in pressure situations'

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Bangladesh pacer Hasan Mahmud mentioned that it would be important for the pacers to not be fazed in crunch situations during the T20 World Cup in Australia next month.

"I think we panic whenever we are in pressure situations and forget to implement our skills," Mahmud told the media following a training session in Mirpur on Saturday.

With the conditions in Australia expected to be seam friendly, Hasan, who is one of the five seamers in the Tigers' 15-member World Cup squad, is expected to play a crucial role in the marquee event.

Bangladesh pacers often lost their rhythm in pressure situations lately, especially in the shortest format of the game. It was also evident during the Asia Cup, in which the Tigers were unable to secure a single win.

According to Mahmud, doing the basics right could help the pacers keep their composure even under pressure.

"I think we need to remain consistent and keep doing the basics right. Also, we need to execute

[our plan] in any situation of the game. We need to learn this," Mahmud added.

The 22-year-old pacer was impressive with the ball during the Zimbabwe tour in July-August. However, an ankle injury saw the youngster miss the Asia Cup.

Mahmud, who had to deal with injuries right from the start of his career, is still waiting to start bowling in the nets. According to Bangladesh team physio Bayjedul Islam, the seamer is expected to bowl in full flow before the start of the World Cup.



MGH Monsoon Cup Golf concludes

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The three-day MGH Monsoon Cup Golf Tournament concluded at the Savar Golf Club yesterday.

A total of 367 golfers from home and abroad participated in the event. Mahbulul Haque won the men's title while Shaila Parvin won the ladies' title.

Chief of Army Staff, General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, and group managing director of MGH Group, Anis Ahmed, were present at the concluding ceremony.

Other high officials of Bangladesh Army and Savar Golf Club as well as golfers from around the country were present at the event.



Jack Grealish scored inside the first minute and Erling Haaland netted his 11th Premier League goal of the season as Manchester City eased to a 3-0 victory over 10-man Wolverhampton Wanderers at Molineux on Saturday. Phil Foden added a third in the second half. Haaland scored his 14th goal in all competitions and the Norwegian striker became the first player in Premier League history to net in his first four away games.

PHOTO: AFP

'Veteran' Hales looking forward to England opportunity

REUTERS

Batsman Alex Hales said he has matured during his three-year absence from England's squad, adding that he is "really looking forward" to aiding his country in their Twenty20 World Cup campaign in Australia.

Hales, 33, was called up to the T20 World Cup squad this month as a replacement for Jonny Bairstow.

In 2019, Hales was withdrawn from the preliminary squad for the 50-overs World Cup after the Guardian newspaper reported he was serving a three-week ban for recreational drug use.

"I think I have changed. I've definitely matured. I'm comfortably into my 30s now and turning into a veteran," Hales told reporters ahead of England's T20 series in Pakistan.

"At the end of the day, it was my fault,

wasn't it? ... You have to look yourself in the mirror and try to improve as a person and learn from your mistakes."

Hales, who has played in the T20 Big Bash League in Australia, said he was hoping to put his experience to good use during the T20 World Cup.

"I did think that the chance would not come again. It was disappointing not to be in the team for three years," Hales added.

"I felt like I'd been playing the best cricket of my career over those three years as well, so to get this chance again is something I'm really proud of and something I'm really looking forward to, especially the World Cup in Australia, somewhere I've got a lot of experience.

"I feel like I can help push this team forward."

England begin their T20 World Cup campaign against Afghanistan on Oct. 22 in Perth.

