



Jude Bellingham opened the floodgates for Gareth Southgate's side as the Three Lions demolished Iran 6-2 in their opening fixture of the 2022 World Cup at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha yesterday. Five different players found the back of the net while Mehdi Taremi's brace provided some solace for Iran.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Tunisia take aim at Danes

REUTERS, Al Rayyan

Denmark go into their opening World Cup game against Tunisia side on Tuesday in the unusual position of being among Europe's dark horses, in with an outside chance of winning the tournament if they can get everything right in Qatar.

The key group game will be against France, but first they will need to ensure that there are no slip-ups in their opener against the Tunisians.

To ensure the best possible start, the Danes will turn to playmaker Christian Eriksen, who suffered a heart attack at Euro 2020 but who has since made a full recovery. "After he came back, it's been unbelievable. The second he stepped into the pitch for the first time in Amsterdam, playing against Holland, he just took control of the match and scored, and since then, he's just been better and better," coach Kasper Hjulmand told Reuters in a recent interview.

However, although Tunisia's last five World Cup finals appearances have all ended in first-round exits, there is a real belief they can end that run in Qatar.

Coach Jalel Kadri hoped his side could get off to a positive start against the Danes and build momentum in a difficult pool that also contains France and Australia.

"Denmark is among the best squads in

INFO ZONE	PLAYERS TO WATCH	HEAD-TO-HEAD
	Christian Eriksen (Denmark) Caps 117 Goals 39	Hannibal Mejbri (Tunisia) Caps 18 Goals 0
		Matches 1 Denmark 1 Tunisia 0

Qatar press slam 'nightmare start'

AFP, Doha

Qatari media laid into a "weak" performance by the national team on Monday after the hosts' much-heralded World Cup debut ended in a tame 2-0 defeat by Ecuador.

Any buzz from the opening ceremony soon fell flat as Qatar shipped two goals in the first half, with thousands of fans leaving Al Bayt Stadium well before the game had finished.

While Qatar's press praised the opening ceremony, which included US actor Morgan Freeman and a severely disabled Qatari man, they were critical of coach Felix Sanchez's team.

It was a grim evening for Qatar's team, the Asian champions who had been preparing for their big moment for years, backed by no-expense-spared facilities and coaching.

"It was always going to be a tall order for Qatar but the manner in which they crumbled against Ecuador would have disappointed the home fans," said the Gulf Times, an English-language daily. "Ecuador -- 44th in the FIFA rankings -- are only six places above Qatar, but last night they showed they are miles ahead of the Asian champions."

The Qatar Tribune praised the "extraordinary" opening ceremony but lambasted a "nightmare start" by the team.

Al Sharq said fans walked out "because they couldn't bear seeing the loss". But it added: "Fans should support the team in the next game against Senegal until the last moment."

WC rights balloon from 0 to Tk 98 crore for BTV

REJAUL KARIM BYRON AND ANISUR RAHMAN

State-run Bangladesh Television bought the rights to cover all 66 2022 FIFA World Cup matches for a whopping Tk 98 crore after a belated move from the government.

BTV acquired the rights from Toma Construction & Co. Ltd after a cabinet committee of economic affairs meeting on November 16 -- only four days before the World Cup began.

Due to the late initiative, the BTV is unlikely to recuperate the public money through advertisements at a time when the government, as part of austerity measures amid the dollar crisis, has been taking steps to curb expenditure.

In the previous edition of the World Cup in Russia in 2018, BTV got the live feed for free from the media rights licensors. The BTV had allotted the licensor the advertisement time and earned a revenue of around Tk 1.5 crore, said a BTV official preferring anonymity.

"Why did the proposal come at the eleventh hour, depriving BTV of sponsors? Now, the money will have to be spent from the government coffers," said a cabinet division source who attended the meeting. Questions were also raised about the amount spent, especially considering the BTV got it for free before, the source added.

Contacted, BTV Director General Sohrab Hossain told The Daily Star on Sunday: "We are going to telecast all matches of Qatar World Cup as we bought it at a cost of Tk 98 crore including VAT and taxes."

He said that they got the official clearance to buy the media rights from Toma on Nov 18. Earlier, the BTV, in line with recommendations from the finance division, wanted to settle the media rights for Tk 54.15 crore, which Toma Constructions rejected, according to documents.

Asked about related subsidies, Hossain said: "It is not a matter of subsidy. It is a big event and we need to entertain the people. We had an opportunity (to earn money by telecasting the World Cup matches) but we could not avail it because of a late decision."

BTV floated a tender for advertisement on November 14, but is yet to get any response, he said.

Asked why they did not get the rights for free like last time, the BTV DG said: "This time, FIFA bindings allowed only the buyers to telecast World Cup matches live. We communicated with

different companies, but they said they couldn't provide media rights for free to anyone this time."

FIFA distributed the media rights to different licensors in the middle of last year.

Viacom18 India won all the media rights -- TV, video, mobile and internet -- for the South Asian territory comprising India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan.

Hossain said that they sent a letter to the information and broadcasting ministry in February this year expressing their desire to telecast the World Cup matches, adding that

they did not have enough money or logistics to participate in the international bidding.

BTV bought the terrestrial TV rights for Bangladesh from Toma Construction after it changed three hands from Viacom18 India. Selim Raihan, executive director of SANEM, said people mostly in rural areas depend on BTV to watch World Cup football which is very popular in the country.

"But the question is why the BTV has to pay money when it had covered the last World Cup for free. Besides, why the initiative came so late when the authority knew well in advance about it. It was not a wise decision," said Raihan.

He further added: "Had the government planned in advance, BTV could have bought the rights at a lower price and earned considerable revenue."



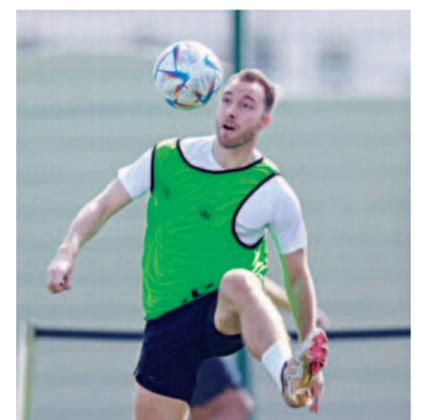
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Europe. We know they have high quality in every department," he said on Monday.

"But we will give our all. We have our strengths, but we also know our weaknesses. We are aware we will be compared to past Tunisia squads."

"In terms of performance, we feel good, we are calm and happy with the results we have achieved. We are representing all Arab nations and we deserve to be here," he said.



All eyes on Mbappe as holders take on Soccerroos

REUTERS, Doha

World Cup holders France will need Kylian Mbappe at his best in Qatar following the loss of Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema to injury, coach Didier Deschamps said on Monday.

France begin their defence against Australia on Tuesday as they look to move on from a troubled build-up which saw several players pull out injured such as key midfielders Ngolo Kante and Paul Pogba, forward Christopher Nkunku and centre back Presnel Kimpembe.

The Real Madrid striker succumbed to a

INFO ZONE	FRANCE VS AUSTRALIA
	PLAYERS TO WATCH
	Kylian Mbappe Garang Kuol
	Caps 59 Caps 1
	Goals 28 Goals 0
	HEAD-TO-HEAD
	Matches 5
	France 3
	Australia 1
	Draw 1

left thigh injury, although he played no part in France's 2018 triumph in Russia when Mbappe burst onto the world stage.

The Paris Saint-Germain striker was just 19 but scored four goals during that World Cup, including one in the 4-2 final win over Croatia.

"He is still a young player, just a bit less than four years ago, but he already did very important things four years ago," Deschamps told reporters in Doha. "Since then he has become more mature



With a spate of injuries throwing a spanner into defending champions France's World Cup plans, the reigning champions will look to hedge their bets on a certain Kylian Mbappe, hoping that the electric forward can come up with the goods and ensure that Les Blues do not allow any thoughts of the 'curse of champions' in their mind.

and there is now even more recognition for him around the world.

"He doesn't have any more responsibility within the squad than he did before, but he has always had the ability to make the difference and we will need that. He has the ability to be decisive at any moment, unlike many other players."

Mbappe, who turns 24 next month, will lead a French attack in which Olivier Giroud is now expected to start in the absence of Benzema.

If four years ago in Russia Mbappe was still a teenager, he is now an established world-class talent and one of the best-paid athletes on the planet after turning down Real Madrid and agreeing a highly lucrative new contract to stay in Paris earlier this year.

Yet his last major tournament was disappointing, with Mbappe failing to score at Euro 2020 and missing the crucial penalty as France lost to Switzerland in a shoot-out in the last 16.

However, France captain Hugo Lloris insisted: "It is hard to say just how good he can be. He seems focused but also relaxed and he is eager to play well and help the team."

He added that injury setbacks were not going to disrupt their flow. "We still believe in our chances, in our squad. The last-minute withdrawals, especially Karim's, did not help. But I want to think that the team will move on. On that level, the first game is always extremely important and as defending champions, the expectations are even higher for us."