

## 'Captaining a WC-winning side would be sweet'

AGENCIES

A day after breaking the record for the fastest to 5000 ODI runs, Pakistan skipper Babar Azam has revealed his next career goal ahead of their fifth and final ODI against New Zealand in Karachi today.

Babar, who will play his 100th ODI on Sunday when Pakistan aim to clean sweep New Zealand to stay atop the ICC Men's ODI Team Rankings, said he wishes to help Pakistan win a World Cup.

"Being the captain of a World Cup-winning side would be sweet," Babar said when he spoke to PCB Digital.

The number one ODI batter will have a chance to achieve his dream when he will be leading the side to the upcoming ODI World Cup in October-November in India. If he succeeds, he will emulate the great Imran Khan, who led Pakistan to their only ODI World Cup in 1992 in England.

When it comes to World Cups, Babar boasts an impressive record. The 28-year-old has led Pakistan to two T20 World Cups -- in 2021 in the UAE and in 2022 in Australia.

Under his captaincy, Pakistan, at their 13th attempt, recorded their first-ever win over arch-rivals India in World Cups in 2021 T20 World Cup. Babar hit an unbeaten fifty to thump Virat Kohli-led India by 10 wickets in Dubai. Babar



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

After having their only warm-up game against Ireland Wolves washed out on Friday, Bangladesh opening batter Rony Talukdar, pacers Shoriful Islam and Hasan Mahmud, and other members of the squad spent yesterday relaxing, or roaming around in Chelmsford. The Tigers will face hosts Ireland in the first of the three-match ODI series, part of the ODI Super League, on Tuesday.

## Chelmsford offers sweet memories

SPORTS REPORTER

The city of Chelmsford in England, the stage for Bangladesh's three-match ODI series against Ireland, holds special significance for the Tigers as it was the venue for the nation's first-ever ICC ODI World Cup match in 1999.

Chelmsford, only a one-and-a-half-hour drive from the bustling city of London, still mesmerises the only member of Bangladesh's maiden World Cup squad that is accompanying the squad on the current tour -- chief selector Minhajul Abedin Nannu.

Although Bangladesh that maiden World Cup match against New Zealand by 116 runs and Nannu was not even part of the playing eleven, the former captain felt the serenity and calm on offer in the city were much the same.

The Bangladesh team are staying at the scenic Down Hall Hotel and Spa this time around, in stark contrast to their stay inside an old fort in 1999.

"I can still remember Biddut (Shahriar Hossain) used to come over to my room as he was scared of ghosts during our stay in 1999. Chelmsford was our base camp for the World Cup and this city still looks the same. It is different from the London. You can feel the calmness of a village. We had a



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BCB chief selector Minhajul Abedin Nannu

practice game against the Essex County cricket team before the opening game and I am eagerly waiting to see the ground again," Nannu told The Daily Star.

The cricketers are yet to practice at the County Cricket ground in Chelmsford, the venue for the ODI series against Ireland, as the visitors have been training at The Leys School ground in Cambridge since their arrival.

Tamim Iqbal and his troops missed out on the only opportunity for a practice game as a scheduled match against Ireland Wolves was abandoned due to rain on Friday. Yesterday, the players spent their day off taking in the sights.

"I think it was disappointing to miss the practice game because

it would have helped us adapt and adjust to the conditions here. However, we still have two more days before the series and I am hopeful we will be able to cope," Nannu added.

The likes of Tamim, Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan were part of the Tigers last visit to Chelmsford, when Bangladesh played a three-day practice match against the county club Essex ahead of a Test series.

The challenge might be different this time around since they will be up against a relatively weaker opponent, but those who have travelled to the scenic city of Chelmsford for the first time in the Bangladesh team will surely hope to make this trip memorable with a positive result.



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Pakistan captain Babar Azam

then led his side to the final of the marquee T20 event in Melbourne the following year.

After Pakistan endured a dismal campaign in the 2019 50-over World Cup in England under the leadership of Sarfaraz Ahmed, Babar was elevated to captaincy, and his numbers took an instant spike as he enjoyed the additional responsibility. In ODIs, he averages over 75 as captain (after 4th ODI against New Zealand) and has seven tons in 25 matches.

All three of his T20I tons also came as skipper of the side. In Tests, the difference was profound with his average going over 50 as captain.

"The first year was a little overwhelming as there were a lot of things to deal with simultaneously as a Pakistan captain," Babar spoke of taking on captaincy.

"But, I learned how to manage that. I also learned a lot from how Saifi bhai [Sarfaraz Ahmed] managed the team. I used to see his demeanour on and off the field and used to ask him questions that helped me.

"The most crucial bit in leading a team is to provide clarity to each and every player and have honest and open communication with the players. This breeds positivity in the team environment and brings everyone together as a team.

"As a captain, you have a kind of a dual responsibility because as a non-captain, you only focus on your field and batting, but now you also have to run a team. I enjoy taking responsibility and it brings the best out of me."



Kylian Mbappe takes a shot in training ahead of Paris Saint-Germain's Ligue 1 clash against Troyes on Sunday night. While Neymar still recovers from injury and Lionel Messi is suspended for two weeks for his unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia, and strongly rumoured for a departure at the end of the season, it appears league leaders PSG have already begun preparing for life without the Argentine, revolving their plans around Mbappe to decide games. Meanwhile, Messi, who apologised for skipping PSG's training the day after their embarrassing 3-1 defeat at home to Lorient, still awaits a decision from PSG, who are yet to make an official statement regarding the entire issue relating to the World Cup winner.

PHOTO: PSG

## SAFF Club C'ship from next year

SPORTS REPORTER

The South Asian Football Federation (SAFF), during an ordinary congress in Dhaka on Saturday, decided to start the long-awaited Club Championship from next year, confirmed the organisation's president Kazi Salahuddin.

Speaking to reporters after the congress, Salahuddin said that the executive committee decided, on principle, to hold the championship from the middle of next year on a home and away basis. The details of the championship, which is supposed to feature top clubs of South Asia, will be chalked out following research and discussions among the member associations, he said.

"I have been working for the last few years for this championship. Once we confirmed the age-group competitions, my dream was to make the club championship happen and everyone gave their consent in today's executive committee meeting," the four-time SAFF president said.

Meanwhile, SAFF's general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal informed that they would wait till May 15 to get an eighth team for the upcoming SAFF Championship, scheduled for June 21 to July 04 in Bengaluru, after having confirmed Kuwait as the seventh team of the biennial tournament.

"Since we have seven members, when we draw three teams in one group and four in another, one group gets a little easier. So, the executive



committee had proposed to have eight teams in the competition. Now that Sri Lanka is not available, we have already confirmed Kuwait as the seventh team. We have invited a few more teams and will wait for a reply till May 15. In case we don't get another team, the championship will take place with seven teams. The draw will be held on May 21 in Bengaluru," Helal said, adding that sponsor Sports Partner International has bought rights for the next four editions of the event.

Meanwhile, the congress elected two vice-presidents -- one from Nepal and one from Maldives -- into two vacant positions and elected Shaji Prabhakaran -- the general secretary of All India Football Federation, as SAFF representative for AFC's executive committee for the next four years.



"Journalists deliver all the news of our sports arena from door to door. Such comments about those journalists are reprehensible. This is not a matter of being off or on the record. People shouldn't even say these things when they are asleep."

Zahid Ahsan Russel, state minister for youth and sports, on BFF president Kazi Salahuddin's disrespectful remarks on journalists.