

Bangladesh ready for ‘MEMORABLE ACHIEVEMENT’

ANISUR RAHMAN FROM BENGALURU

It was raining heavily at the KFA football Stadium but Bangladesh team kept their focus in training yesterday, on the eve of their Bhutan fixture in Bengaluru.

With head coach Javier Cabrera instructing from the center of the artificial turf, the booters tried to execute game plans before they went for set-piece drills.

After a one-hour training, Bangladesh players and coaching staff left field with smile on their faces.

It remains to be seen whether they would be able to keep those smiles intact as Bangladesh are on the verge of qualifying for the semifinals of SAFF Championship for the first time in 14 years.



Bangladesh v Bhutan	Overall	In SAFF Championship
	Matches: 13	Matches: 6
	Bangladesh won: 10	Bangladesh won: 5
	Bhutan won: 1	Bhutan won: 0
	Draw: 2	Draw: 1

However, the equation may become complex if Maldives beat Lebanon in today's first match and Bangladesh go on to win against Bhutan. In that case, three teams will have equal six points, bringing head-to-head, goal difference and goals scored into play.

Despite a superior head-to-head

record against Bhutan, they are "not going to be an easy opponent," said Anisur Rahman Zico, reflecting on their lone defeat during 2016 Asian Cup Pre-qualifiers.

"We were so close to get out the group stage in last two editions of SAFF Championship but we could not

do it (progress). It will be a memorable achievement if we can repeat our Maldives display," said Zico, who was also part of 2021 SAFF Championship in Male -- where Bangladesh needed a victory over Nepal but they threw away a lead to play out a 1-1 draw.

Defender Tapu Barman also echoed similar sentiment.

"If Maldives lose to Lebanon in first match, we need a draw to qualify for the semifinals. The most important thing is that we are not going to lose the motivation we gained from the Maldives match," said the central defender.

Cabrera said "there is very positive atmosphere in the camp.

"We have a good mix of young and experienced players. Many of our players have experience of 2021 SAFF Championship. We depend on ourselves rather thinking of what happened in 2021 or before."

Center-back Tariq Raihan Kazi is set to miss the match against Bhutan and Cabrera is likely to field two changes in the squad that beat Maldives 3-1.

Tamim upbeat as WC fixtures revealed

SPORTS REPORTER

The International Cricket Council (ICC) yesterday revealed the much-awaited fixtures of the upcoming ODI World Cup in India, set to begin from October 5.

Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal said that their experience and familiarity to the conditions make him "very confident" of the makeup of the team ahead of the showpiece event.

"This is the ultimate event. Nothing compares to a one-day World Cup because this is the most challenging white-ball format which continuously tests your game awareness and temperament. The tournament's structure gives you no scope to relax. Every team is tough and there are no easy games," said Tamim.

With Afghanistan as their first challenger in the World Cup, the Tigers will be looking to find any mental edge they can manage in the upcoming series at home on starting from July 5.

The wicket at the picturesque Dharamsala may lend help to Tigers' pace unit against Afghanistan although England at the same venue on October 10 will be a formidable challenge. The venue, however, is familiar to the Tigers as they played there during the 2016 T20 World Cup. Their third game comes against New Zealand on traditionally slow Chennai wickets which could be an added benefit as a subcontinent side.



BANGLADESH FIXTURES AT WORLD CUP

- October 7 –vs Afghanistan, Dharamsala
- October 10 –vs England, Dharamsala
- October 14 –vs New Zealand, Chennai
- October 19 –vs India, Pune
- October 24 –vs South Africa, Mumbai
- October 28 –vs Qualifier 1, Kolkata
- October 31 –vs Pakistan, Kolkata
- November 06 –vs Qualifier 2, Delhi
- November 12 –vs Australia, Pune
- **November 15 -Semifinal 1, Mumbai
- **November 16-Semifinal 2, Kolkata
- **November 19-Final, Ahmedabad

Bangladesh would play England at Dharamsala and traverse multiple Indian cities before returning to play in Pune in their last round of fixtures.

"Playing in India is always very enjoyable. The electric atmosphere, great stadiums and the very knowledgeable cricket fans make the experience fulfilling. We have always received excellent support whenever we played there," Tamim told the ICC.

"I am very confident with the side we will take to the World Cup. There is a nice blend of experience and talent, and the conditions will be familiar."

Ahead of the marquee event, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram and Hyderabad will host warm-up matches from 29 September to 3 October.

Bangladesh's best performances in World Cups have not seen them win more than three matches. If the Tigers want to take a bigger step in attaining their dreams, starting from the Afghanistan series, the plans leading up to the event will be crucial.

Stokes ‘deeply sorry’ after report exposes discrimination

AFP, London

England captain Ben Stokes said Tuesday he is "deeply sorry" to learn of the scale of discrimination in the sport after a damning report revealed "widespread" racism, sexism and classism in the game.

His comments followed the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC), set up by the England and Wales Cricket Board, publishing its much-anticipated report, Holding Up a Mirror to Cricket.

The commission makes 44 recommendations, including that the board makes an "unqualified public apology" for its failings.

Stokes reacted to the publication of the report on the eve of the second Ashes Test against Australia, which starts at Lord's on Wednesday.

"To the people involved in the game who have been made to feel unwelcome or unaccepted in the past, I am deeply sorry to hear of your experiences," he said.

"Cricket is a game that needs to celebrate diversity on all fronts because without diversity this game would not be where it is at today."

He added: "Everyone has a different story to tell. I am Ben Stokes, born in New Zealand, a state-educated pupil who dropped out of school at 16 with one GCSE (qualification) in PE. I need help with the spelling and grammar in this speech and I am currently sitting here as the England men's Test captain."

The ICEC was established in 2021 in the wake of a racism scandal centred around the treatment of Pakistan-born bowler Azeem Rafiq at English county cricket club Yorkshire.

Of the more than 4,000 individuals interviewed for the ICEC report, 50 percent described experiencing discrimination in the previous five years, with the figures substantially higher for people from ethnically diverse communities.

Ashes rivals to stick to their guns in Lord's Test

AFP, London

England and Australia have vowed to remain loyal to their contrasting tactical approaches, setting up the prospect of another thrilling Ashes clash in the second Test at Lord's starting today.

Australia, bidding for a first Ashes series win in England in 22 years, went 1-0 up in a five-match campaign with a dramatic two-wicket win in the first Test at Edgbaston last week.

England were in sight of victory when they had their arch-rivals eight down and needing 54 more runs to win, only to be undone by an unbroken partnership between Australia captain Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon.

Poor fielding, with several chances missed, did not help England's cause either.

Attention, however, soon turned to their aggressive 'Bazball' approach, even though this was only their third defeat in 14 Tests since captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum joined forces last year.

Several former England internationals, including Geoffrey Boycott, suggested Stokes's side had been too gung-ho in Birmingham, notably in declaring on the first day at 393.8.

Australia, however, are the World Test champions and there is no guarantee a more orthodox approach would have had led to greater success -- after all it was while playing in such a traditional style that England won just one out of 17 Tests before Stokes

succeeded Joe Root as red ball skipper.

It may grate to hear England seamer Ollie Robinson say Australia will have to "change their approach to keep up with how we're going to play" following a Test his side lost.

But as Mike Brearley, a former England captain, once wrote, "you cannot expect a tortoise to jump like a gazelle" and it may be asking too much of the current side to deviate radically



from a policy that has served them well.

Ollie Pope, Stokes's vice-captain, said there was more to the team's tactics than met the eye.

"I know sometimes it can look like it's just moments of madness but all the decisions that are made are well thought out with a vision of the end goal," Pope insisted at Lord's on Tuesday.

The bigger issue for England arguably lies in team selection.

Off-spinner Mooen Ali, tempted out

of red-ball retirement at Edgbaston, unsurprisingly suffered a finger injury on a bowling hand not used to lengthy spells.

England have called up teenage leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed as cover. They could also rely on Root's part-time off-spin as a way of getting express quick Mark Wood back into the side.

Australia too must decide whether to recall Mitchell Starc after the left-arm



quick was left out at Edgbaston, where England went after Scott Boland -- the normally miserly seamer -- conceded runs at a rate of 5.65 per over.

Australia will hope star batsmen Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith, who managed just 35 runs between them at Edgbaston, return to form.

The Ashes holders have no such qualms over Lyon, with the off-spinner set to appear in his 100th consecutive Test after an eight-wicket haul that left him just five shy of 500 at this level.

Sri Lanka into Super Six as group winners

AFP, BULAWAYO

Sri Lanka defeated Scotland by 82 runs Tuesday to advance to the Super Six stage of the Cricket World Cup qualifiers with maximum points, while Ireland secured a consolation win over the United Arab Emirates.

Opener Pathum Nissanka made 75 and Charith Asalanka scored 63 as Sri Lanka were bowled out for 245 in Bulawayo, with Scotland spinners Chris Greaves (4-32) and Mark Watt (3-52) combining for seven wickets.

Scotland slid to 73-5 in reply and were eventually dismissed for just 163 after two run outs in the same over sealed their fate despite an enterprising 56 not out from Greaves.

Sri Lanka, the 1996 champions, go through as winners of Group B and will start on four points in the next round ahead of matches against the Netherlands, Zimbabwe and the West Indies.

Scotland carry over two points following Sunday's win over Oman, the third team to qualify from the section.

The next phase of the tournament

begins Thursday when hosts Zimbabwe play Oman. The top two finishers in the Super Six will qualify for the World Cup in India in October and November.

Paul Stirling clubbed 162 off 134 balls as Ireland romped to a 138-run victory over the UAE in the other group game between two eliminated nations.

Stirling's knock comprised 15 fours and eight sixes but arrived too late for an Ireland side who lost their first three matches in Zimbabwe.

Captain Andy Balbirnie added 66 and Harry Tector struck a breezy 57 to lift Ireland to a total of 349-4 after they were put in to bat.

UAE skipper Muhammad Waseem made 45 before he was bizarrely run out after wandering out of the crease having been hit on the gloves.

His wicket triggered a collapse that spelled the end of the UAE's hopes despite resistance from Basil Hameed (39) and Sanchit Sharma (44) as they were all out for 211.

Ireland and the UAE head into the play-offs for seventh to 10th place with the United States and Nepal.



Top-tier footballers are on a much-deserved breather following a long and thrilling season with the FIFA World Cup played for the first time in its midway. While Cristiano Ronaldo is on a "vacation mood" with his family and former clubmate Diego Dalot, on the other hand, Lionel Messi took part in two farewell matches of compatriots in Argentina and could soon likely meet Enzo Fernandez, Paulo Dybala, and Sergio Agüero in Miami. Elsewhere, Andre Onana and Zambou Anguissa are enjoying their holidays in Cameroon and fellow African star Mohamed Salah has been doing the same in his homeland, Egypt.

PHOTO: COLLECTED