

# SPORTS



## What to WATCH

**T SPORTS AND GTV**  
ICC World Cup  
India vs Pakistan  
Live from 2:30 pm  
**SONY SPORTS 2**  
European Qualifiers  
Slovenia vs Finland

Live from 10:00 pm  
Denmark vs Kazakhstan  
Live from 12:45 am (Sunday)  
**SONY SPORTS 1**  
Italy vs Malta  
Live from 12:45 am  
(Sunday)



India's talismanic batter Virat Kohli plays a bit of football during a training session while Pakistan's pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi (inset) runs at the Narendra Modi Cricket Stadium in Ahmedabad yesterday ahead of their crucial World Cup clash today.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Cruciani to replace Lemos at Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Argentine coach Diego Cruciani is likely to return as the head coach of Abahani for the 2023-24 season as the club management decided not to renew the contract of Portuguese coach Mario Lemos.

It has also been learnt that the club management has decided to appoint assistant coach Nazrul Islam as the manager in place of Satyjit Das Rupu, who worked as the manager of the club's football team for nearly two decades.

Cruciani had previously coached Abahani in 2007 after serving as the head coach of Bangladesh team from 2005 to 2006. The 61 year-old coach also worked with Saif SC in the 2021-22 season.

Though the club officials kept silent regarding the appointments of the new coach and manager, the club's chief executive officer, Mohammad Humayun Kabir, said that they would inform the developments once the club's chairman approves of the football committee's decisions.

"I can't tell you anything until the club chairman approves the new resolution, which was taken at the meeting of the football committee yesterday [Thursday]," Kabir told The Daily Star on Friday.

When contacted, Lemos said, "Abahani decided not to renew contract with me and informed it last night [Thursday]."

However, an online news portal confirmed the appointment of Cruciani and Nazrul, quoting the club's acting director-in-charge Kazi Nabil Ahmed.

# Pakistan target breaking World Cup jinx AGAINST INDIA

REUTERS, Ahmedabad

Pakistan would be forgiven for feeling like gladiators thrown into the Colosseum when they face an India team egged on by 100,000-plus fans in Saturday's World Cup blockbuster, but skipper Babar Azam sees the match as a chance to end a jinx against their arch-rivals.

Two-time champions India have a perfect 7-0 record against Pakistan in the 50-overs World Cup and are also the top-ranked ODI team, who have won both their games in the tournament so far.

But Pakistan have also won their opening two matches, and Babar is approaching the tournament's most-anticipated clash at the Narendra Modi Stadium, the world's largest cricket venue, with a complete disregard for the past.

"I don't think about the past, I'd rather focus on future," Babar told reporters with a wry smile on his face.

"All records are meant to be broken, and we'll try to break this record tomorrow."

"It boils down to how you perform on the day of the match. We have done pretty well in the first two matches, and I have full belief we'll do well in the next match as well."

Part of how they perform will depend on how his team mates manage to deal with the pressure of the game's fiercest rivalry played out in the den of their cricketing foes.

Babar said his message to his team mates was to see it as an opportunity to perform well and etch their names into the memories of those watching back home.

"India-Pakistan match is a big game,

### INDIA VS PAKISTAN STATS

Although Pakistan still lead head-to-head record against India by 73-56, India have won seven of the last 10 meetings between the two teams in the last 10 years, with Pakistan winning two of those and the other one yielding a no-result.

India hold an all-encompassing edge over their neighbours when it comes

to clashes in the 50-over World Cup. The men in blue have won all seven of their meetings, starting with their first meeting in the showpiece event in 1992.

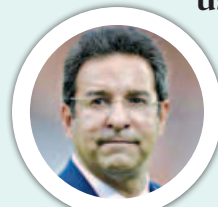
India are the top-ranked side in this format while Pakistan are ranked second.

Both teams have won their first two matches - India against Australia and Afghanistan and Pakistan against

Netherlands and Sri Lanka.

This will be the second match of the World Cup at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad -- the biggest cricket stadium in the world -- with the first being the opening match of the competition which ended in a nine-wicket win for New Zealand against defending champions England.

**"We played seven games and our neighbouring country reminds us every second day about the 7-0. Frankly speaking, I can't single out one reason for the losing streak."**



Pakistan legend Wasim Akram



India's Shubman Gill is "99 percent available to play" against Pakistan in the World Cup blockbuster showdown after the opener recovered from dengue fever, captain Rohit Sharma said on Friday. Gill missed the team's opening two victories but is likely to take the field at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad on Saturday.

a high-intensity contest. I've told my boys it's a great opportunity - give your best, execute your plans and believe in yourself," he said.

"It's a massive stadium, and there would be big crowd. This is a golden opportunity for us to perform in front of such a big crowd."

Pakistan's fortunes could depend on pace spearhead Shaheen Afridi, who has troubled India's top order in recent

encounters between the rivals.

His workload has increased after his new-ball partner Naseem Shah was ruled out of the tournament with a shoulder injury but Babar has faith in Afridi.

"He's our best bowler, a champion bowler," Babar said of the left-arm quick.

"I believe he's a big match bowler, who always gives his best on big occasions."

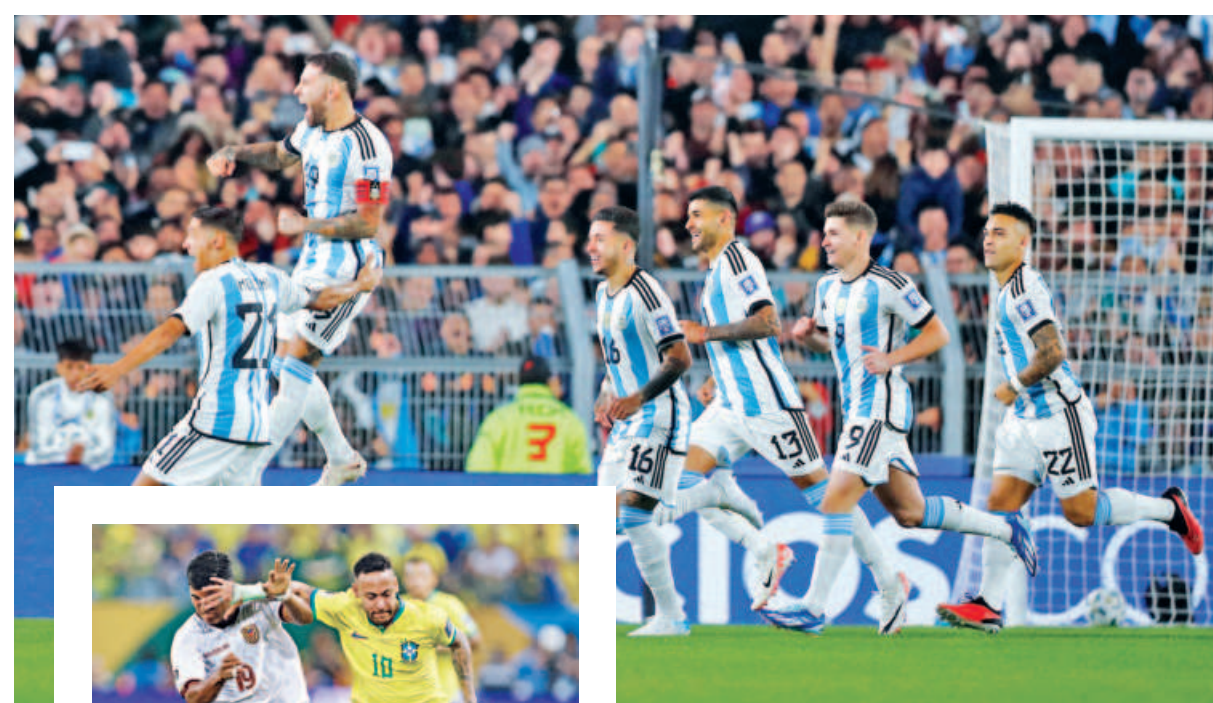
"For us, it does not matter if he does not get wickets in a match or two, it does

not put a question mark against him."

With this year's tournament producing several high-scoring contests, Babar said he had reminded the bowlers of the need to be accurate.

"We are seeing mostly high-scoring matches and there's little margin for error for the bowlers. If you are straying from the stumps line, the margin is less."

"I just told my bowlers to hit the right length and bowl stump-to-stump."



Argentina's Nicolas Otamendi, who captained the Albiceleste as regular skipper Lionel Messi did not start, celebrates with teammates after scoring the decisive goal against Paraguay in their World Cup qualifying fixture in Buenos Aires yesterday. (Inset) Brazil's star forward Neymar, meanwhile, didn't have much luck as the five-time world champions were held to a 1-1 draw by Venezuela in Cuiaba.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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