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Pakistan will be looking for a big knock from skipper Babar Azam while Bangladesh will be hoping Mahmudullah Riyad carries his good form and inspires his teammates when the two under-fire teams meet in a World Cup game at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata today.

PHOTO: AFP

- Bangladesh hold a poor head-to-head record against Pakistan in ODIs, with the Tigers getting the better of the 1992 champions only five times in 38 matches. Pakistan won the other 33 matches against Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh, however, registered a historic 62-run win when they first faced Pakistan in the World Cup in 1999. The Tigers came across Pakistan only one other time in the mega event, in 2019, when they suffered a 94-run defeat at Lord's.
- Also, Bangladesh's recent ODI record against Pakistan is impressive. The Tigers have won four of their last six encounters against Pakistan – a run that includes a three-match whitewash in 2015 in Mirpur and a win in the Super Four of the 2018 Asia Cup in Abu Dhabi.
- Among the players of the two sides' current squads, Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan leads the charts for both most runs scored and most wickets in Bangladesh-Pakistan ODIs. In 17 matches against Pakistan, Shakib has scalped 21 wickets and scored 606 runs, including one century and five fifties.
- Pakistan pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi, who recorded his career-best 6/35 the last time they faced Bangladesh in the 2019 World Cup, needs just one more wicket to reach 100 wickets in ODIs.

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Shakib keen to let actions do the talking

MAZHAR UDDIN from Kolkata

"At times you need to keep smiling," Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan concluded yesterday's pre-match press conference, ahead of the Tigers' fixture against Pakistan in Kolkata today, telling it with a smile on his face.

The ace all-rounder's upbeat demeanour, however, was in sharp contrast to what it was when he faced the media after a humiliating 87-run defeat to the Netherlands on Saturday. A reporter even inquired about his altered body language, saying he was more animated than the day before. Shakib jokingly replied, "Has my voice changed?"

While it is hard to guess what was actually going through his mind, Shakib's prompt responses indicate the Tigers are keen on returning to winning ways following their fifth consecutive defeat in the flagship event.

Asked how Bangladesh could bounce back after the shock Dutch loss, Shakib stated that it was time for action to speak louder than words and opposed giving the supporters any false sense of optimism, in contrast to his prior press conferences.

"We discussed it in our team

meetings, and talked about overcoming this situation. But talk is cheap when it's not working. We will do it on the ground so that everyone can see what we are doing," Shakib told reporters.

Although Bangladesh's prospect of a semi-final berth is somehow hanging by a thread, the Tigers still have a lot to play for since a top-seven finish in the

"The whole team talked about what we need to do. Qualifying for the Champions Trophy is important. Apart from the Champions Trophy, finishing higher on the table is a goal. We haven't performed up to expectations. If we can still get some good results, we can be slightly satisfied and then reflect on how we can do better," he said.

So far in the tournament, Bangladesh's primary downfall factor has been their batting. In all the five preceding matches, a serious lack of form from almost all the frontline batters was clearly evident.

Shakib believes that in order for the team to turn the tide in their favour, it is up to each individual to motivate themselves and execute a turnaround.

Similar to Bangladesh, Pakistan's bleak performance in the ongoing showpiece event has Babar Azam and Co's backs against the wall following four defeats on the trot, amounting to two wins in six encounters. Shakib, however, was not willing to rate Pakistan over their current situation.

"I don't want to rate any team at the moment. We want to win this important match and I am sure Pakistan are thinking the same."



World Cup will ensure a spot in the 2025 Champions Trophy.

In order for the Tigers to progress past the group stage against all odds, they must win their three remaining matches while hoping that results of other matches go in their favour. Shakib informed his side are well-aware of Champions Trophy qualification criteria, taking one match at a time to rise up the points table.

Will Pakistan find a home in Kolkata?

SPORTS REPORTER from Kolkata

While the Bangladesh players had counted on 'home' support in Kolkata for their eventual 87-run defeat against the Netherlands, the Tigers may not have much luck on that front when they face Pakistan in their seventh match of the World Cup at the Eden Gardens today.

The relationship between India and Pakistan on diplomatic and political fronts may have remained hostile over the years, but Pakistan cricket team enjoys massive popularity in Kolkata. And despite fans from Pakistan not being able to travel to India in great numbers for this World Cup over visa issues, there will likely be no shortage of support for the former world champion today.

There was enough evidence of that during the Pakistan team's training session yesterday, with hundreds of locals cheering on the Men in Green outside the stadium premises. Few even managed to sneak into the stands and take selfies with stars such as Iftikhar Ahmed, Mohammad Rizwan, and Shaheen Shah Afridi.

There was an incident outside the stadium where two die-hard fans of Virat Kohli and Babar Azam engaged in a fight over who is the best batter. Interestingly both of them are Indian nationals.

Even during the 2016 T20 World Cup game between Bangladesh and Pakistan in Kolkata, the local support for the Pakistan team outnumbered that for the Tigers.

It takes around 45 minutes to reach Kolkata from Dhaka by air and almost all the aviation companies have seen a surge in ticket sales on this route as hundreds of Bangladeshis made it to the capital of West Bengal to witness the Tigers in action.

But the humiliating defeat to the Netherlands has seemingly dampened the eagerness of the Bangladesh fans as hardly any enthusiasm was witnessed among the Bangladeshi fans ahead of the Pakistan game.

While Bangladesh will have to improve their game a few notches to overcome Pakistan on the pitch to add some respectability to their campaign, they will also have to win against the Pakistan fans.

Sk Jamal, Abahani, Police into last 8

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club kicked off their Independence Cup campaign with a convincing 4-0 win over Brothers Union in their Group A match yesterday and in the process secured a spot in the final eight and eliminated Brothers from the competition.

At the Bashundhara Kings arena, Sheikh Jamal's Brazilian forward Higor Rodrigues Leite struck twice before the break while Colombian forward Bladimir Diaz and Sazzad Hossain netted one goal apiece in the one-way encounter.

This was Brothers' second successive defeat as they had lost to the other group member Bangladesh Police FC by 2-0.

Sheikh Jamal and Police will meet each other on Thursday to decide the group champion.

Meanwhile, Abahani Limited rode on goals from new-signing Stuart Cornilius and Brazilian Jonathon Fernandes to complete a hard-fought 2-0 win over Rahmatganj MFS and confirm their quarterfinal berth in Group B.

Sheikh Russel KC defeated Bangladesh Air Force 1-0 in the other Group B match.



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Fazalhaq Farooqi marked his return to the Afghanistan side with his career-best ODI figures of four for 34 in 10 overs, including a maiden, to help the Afghans dismiss Sri Lanka for just 241 in 49.3 overs in a World Cup match in Pune on Monday. Left-arm quick Farooqi took wickets throughout the innings, having been recalled in place of teenage leg-spinner Noor Ahmad who had taken three wickets in the win against Pakistan last time out.

PHOTO: AFP

'High-quality' Shami, Bumrah HUNTING IN PAIRS

AFP, Lucknow

Cricket-crazy Indian fans have long enjoyed opposition fast bowling attacks that hunt in pairs – Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thomson, Wasim Akram with Waqar Younis, and most recently Stuart Broad and James Anderson.

But the cricketing powerhouse has now found its own deadly duo in Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah, the men who rattled England's batting at Lucknow's Ekana Stadium in the World Cup on Sunday.

The hosts extended their unbeaten run to six games in the tournament with a 100-run win over the defending champions to all but book their place in the semifinals.

Bumrah started the demolition job with wickets on successive deliveries in his third over to send back Dawid Malan, who inside-edged a delivery onto his stumps, and Joe Root, out for lbw for a first-ball duck.

Shami soon joined forces as he bowled Ben Stokes for naught and then had Jonny Bairstow chop a length ball onto his wickets to also be on a hat-trick and raise the noise at a nearly-packed 50,000-seater stadium.

"No other bowling pair can come close to these two. They are the best at the moment," former India batter Sanjay Manjrekar said on Star Sports. "The four wickets taken by Shami and Bumrah in the first powerplay never allowed England to comeback into the game."

Veteran commentator Harsha Bhogle said "it is high-

quality bowling from Bumrah and Shami", while former England captain Michael Vaughan lauded India's attack as "high class".

Shami kept up the charge in his comeback spell, sending back Moeen Ali to see England slip to 81-6 in their chase of 230. Shami took one more and Bumrah completed the England rout with his trademark yorker that rattled the stumps of number 11 Mark Wood to trigger celebrations.

"In a game where we were placed defending a small target, the conditions were not easy, the dew was out there, the wicket got flatter," India bowling coach Paras Mambrey told reporters.

"Wickets, especially in the powerplay, were important but simply the way they bowled and came back picked up those wickets laid the foundation for us. From there the other bowlers could build on. A fabulous spell from both of them."

Bumrah, a yorker specialist with an unorthodox slingshot action, was sidelined for almost a year with a back injury before he returned in August and has now bagged 14 wickets six World Cup matches.

Shami was kept out for India's first four matches in a "horses for courses" policy but has come back with match figures of 5-54 against New Zealand and 4-22 in two World Cup outings after an injury to all-rounder Hardik Pandya gave him a route back into the starting eleven.

