

## Joty 'more tensed than excited' as WT20 WC fixtures revealed

STAR SPORTS DESK

Hosts Bangladesh are set to open their ICC Women's Twenty20 World Cup campaign against the runners-up team from the qualifiers on October 3 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur after England take on South Africa in the tournament opener at the same venue.

The International Cricket Council announced the fixtures on Sunday. The event will run from October 3 to 20 in the capital Dhaka and the northeastern city of Sylhet, with warm-up matches starting on September 27.

Bangladesh and the top six teams from the previous edition in South Africa – Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa and the West Indies – qualified automatically for the tournament, with Pakistan joining them as the next best-ranked team.

It will be the ninth edition of the tournament, with Bangladesh previously hosting in 2014. Bangladesh, who will be playing in their sixth T20 World Cup, will be hoping to make their records look a bit better as the hosts boast only one win in the competition so far which also came back when they won against Sri Lanka the last time the country hosted the competition.

"Except for in the 2014 edition, we have not been able to win a game in any other editions of the tournament that we played. So, our first focus will be to win matches," said Bangladesh skipper Nigar Sultana Joty yesterday following the groups and fixture unveiling program of the T20 World Cup, also attended by ICC chief executive Geoff Allardice and India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, in the capital.



**Bangladesh's star opener Liton Das walks back after yet another disappointing showing during their second of the five-match T20I series against Zimbabwe in Chattogram yesterday. The batter, who was dropped once, managed 23 off 25 deliveries but failed to capitalise on his start. [Bottom] Bangladesh wicketkeeper Jaker Ali Anik missed a sitter when he dropped Zimbabwe's Jonathan Campbell on one in the 11th over of the innings. The catch opportunity could've been an easy one for Shoriful Islam who was stationed at square leg but Jaker called for it, almost overran the line of the ball, and finally spilled it. The left-handed batter top-scored for his side with a 24-ball 45.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



## Fahad draws against Chinese Super GM

SPORTS REPORTER

International Master Fahad Rahman played out a draw against Super Grandmaster Yu Yangyi of China on the opening day of Dubai Police Global Chess Challenge, Masters in United Arab Emirates on Saturday, said a press release from Bangladesh Chess Federation.

Fahad, who recently earned his first GM norm in Vietnam, started with white pieces against Yangyi, who has 2728 rating points. Fahad was in good position till 35 moves with Slav defence system but later went on to draw the game after 70 moves.

Fahad was scheduled to play against GM Niemann Hannns Moke of United States in the second round of the tournament.



"More than excitement, there's a sort of tension in me as we will be playing in front of our home crowd. Everyone will want we do better," Joty added.

Ireland, the UAE, Sri Lanka and Scotland are in contention for the remaining two places, with the semifinals of the qualifying tournament being held in the UAE.

Each side will play four group matches at the tournament, with the top two teams from each group progressing to the cut-throat semifinals on 17 and 18 October ahead of the final in Dhaka on 20 October.

In total, there will be 23 matches played across 19 days in Dhaka and Sylhet, with reserve days in place for both semifinals and the final should they be required.

**GROUP A:** Australia, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, Qualifier 1  
**GROUP B:** South Africa, England, West Indies, Bangladesh, Qualifier 2  
**Bangladesh's group fixtures:**  
**October 3:** Bangladesh v Qualifier 2, Mirpur  
**October 5:** Bangladesh v England, Mirpur  
**October 9:** Bangladesh v West Indies, Mirpur  
**October 12:** Bangladesh v South Africa, Mirpur  
**Cities to host:** Dhaka, Sylhet  
**Opening fixture:** England v South Africa on October 3 in Mirpur  
**Final:** On October 20 in Mirpur

## Questions over T20 WC preparations follow Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

After some nery periods, Bangladesh in the end won the second Twenty20 International against Zimbabwe by six wickets thanks to Towhid Hridoy and Mahmudullah Riyad's unbeaten 49-run stand in a rain-interrupted game in Chattogram yesterday.

Despite a 2-0 lead in the series, questions are being raised about the kind of preparation the Tigers are taking ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup by playing Zimbabwe at home.

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who is yet to take part in the T20I series as he prioritised playing in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) first to get back into rhythm, had highlighted on Saturday that playing Zimbabwe was not ideal preparations.

"It will be wrong if we consider our performance against Zimbabwe and the USA while think about the World Cup. The World Cup will be played in a different place and the more we can handle pressure, chances of us doing well will be higher," Shakib told reporters in Dhaka on Saturday.

He had added that preparations were better for the T20I World Cup in Australia, when the Tigers played New Zealand and Pakistan in a tri-nation series before heading to the World Cup.

While preparations are being



### SCORES IN BRIEF

**Zimbabwe:** 138 for seven in 20 overs (Campbell 45, Bennet 44 not out; Taskin 2-18, Rishad 2-33)

**Bangladesh:** 142 for four in 18.3 overs (Hridoy 37 not out, Mahmudullah 26 not out; Jongwe 2-35)

**Result:** Bangladesh won by six wickets  
Player of the match: Towhid Hridoy

questioned, the Tigers may not have challenged themselves enough in this series either. They bowled first on both occasions, but bowling in the evening proved much more difficult with the wet ball.

"I don't think we could have bowled any better. Three rain breaks did not help with the wet ball. I almost stopped bowling in my last over because of the wet outfield and ball," Zimbabwe skipper Sikandar Raza said at the post-match presentations yesterday.

Given that the bowling department is one of the stronger points of the Tigers', it might have

proved more useful to challenge the bowlers by bowling second. Yet, having dismantled Zimbabwe top-order in both T20Is so far, the bowlers would be a little disappointed not to bowl out Zimbabwe far more cheaply.

Rishad Hossain, who bagged two wickets for 33 runs, felt there were areas to improve in terms of capitalising on Zimbabwe's top-order failure.

"When four or five wickets go down quickly, if you can take two more from there then instead of 140, they would have been all out for 115-120. This is an area where we can do better," Rishad felt.

Far bigger concern would be the batting in both games. Both openers Liton Das and Tanzid Tamim batted at less than 100 strike-rate while skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto could manage just above 100. The game, if it ended in the 10th over, would have seen Bangladesh lose by three runs as per DLS.

Rishad too was asked about the approach.

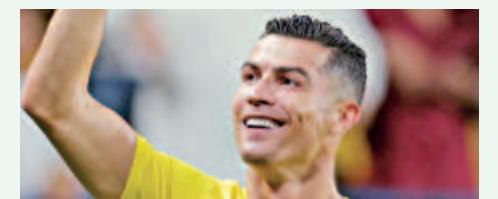
"There was no need to play extra shots and boundary balls come our way. If you can be calculative, then the game will become easier," he defended the approach.

Shakib's warning apart, the little time left before the World Cup means Tigers would have to take better decisions to make the best out of this Zimbabwe series.

## SHORT CORNER

### 'Nothing surprises me about Messi'

Lionel Messi had an MLS-record six goal contributions, Luis Suarez scored three times and Matias Rojas recorded a brace as Inter Miami thumped the New York Red Bulls 6-2 on Saturday in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "Obviously what we have seen today surprises people, because you don't see that in football. But as a teammate and someone who knows him, nothing surprises me about him," said Suarez of Messi's five assists.



### On-fire Ronaldo scores third hattrick in seven games

Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo scored a hattrick to help Al Nassr thump Al Wehda 6-0 in the Saudi Pro League 2023-24 on Saturday, at the Al-Awwal Stadium in Riyadh. It was Ronaldo's third hattrick in seven games. The 39-year-old was too hot to handle for the Al-Wehda players who completed the 66th hat-trick of his illustrious career.

### Swiatek finds Nadal inspiration to win 'crazy' Madrid Open title

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek came through "the most intense and crazy final" she has ever contested to avenge her loss to Aryna Sabalenka in last year's Madrid final with a gruelling three-hour 11-minute victory in the Spanish capital on Saturday.

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## Ancelotti's tactical acumen does the trick

AGENCIES

Real Madrid claimed a record-extending 36th LaLiga title on Saturday after Girona's 4-2 thrashing of local rivals Barcelona left Carlo Ancelotti's side with an unassailable lead in the standings.

With four games left, Real Madrid moved to 87 points on top of the standings after their second-string players earned a 3-0 over relegation-threatened Cadiz earlier on Saturday, 13 ahead of Girona in second and 14 clear of third-placed Barcelona.

Xavi Hernandez's side were the only one left who could prevent their bitter rivals Real lifting the title, but their faint hopes were extinguished in Girona as they fell to their second league defeat in three matches.

Last summer, things didn't look great in Madrid; Karim Benzema, a stalwart of Ancelotti's side, announced rather suddenly that he planned on leaving the club. Meanwhile, his presumptive long-term replacement, Kylian Mbappe, elected to stay at Paris Saint-Germain for at least one more season.

Even at a glance the squad looked imbalanced, without a reliable central striker, and too many centre-midfielders, while expensive veterans Toni Kroos and Luka Modric were ageing and past their best.

And to make things worse, Madrid

were playing catch up. Barcelona won the title in 2023, and were never really pushed by Los Blancos. If this was the campaign to hunt down the Blaugrana, the pieces didn't seem to be in place to pull it off.

Fast-forward a year and things look remarkably different; Real have won La Liga after opening up a double digit lead at the top. It all amounts to one of Ancelotti's finest jobs in management, the synthesis and application of a squad rife with talent but lacking in clarity. A Madrid side that shouldn't really work has become one of the best in Europe.

Real Madrid now can turn their attention to a LaLiga-Champions League double as they get ready to host Bayern Munich in the semifinal return leg on Wednesday after snatching a 2-2 draw in Germany last week.

"It's obviously a contained joy, because the most important game of the season (Bayern) is also very close, but we have to be happy," Ancelotti told Movistar Plus+ on Saturday, before knowing the Barca result.

"Those games (Cadiz) are difficult to prepare for, because you have Wednesday on your mind. But so far it's been spectacular, our team was steady, with hardly any mistakes. The advantage we have is well deserved."

The LaLiga title crowned a remarkable domestic campaign



despite major knee injuries sustained by keeper Thibaut Courtois and defenders Eder Militao and David Alaba early in the season, in addition to a big hole left up-front due to Benzema's departure to Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad.

To overcome such obstacles, 64-year-old Ancelotti had to prove once again that he is much more than just a manager who knows how to bring out the best in his players, both

the young and experienced.

His tactical nous was instrumental in fixing Real's problems, including improvising midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni as a centre-back alongside Antonio Rudiger and changing the system to deploy Jude Bellingham as an attacking midfielder, with freedom to get forward and support Vinicius Jr and Rodrygo up front.

Bellingham scored 15 goals in his first 16 games and he, Vinicius, and

Rodrygo have netted 41 of Real's 74 league goals.

At the back, German international Rudiger had arguably enjoyed the best season of his career at age 31, leading a rock-solid Real Madrid defence which conceded only 22 goals in 34 league games, way ahead of LaLiga's second-best Athletic Bilbao with 33.

"A big part (of Real success) was achieved when we started to defend better, with a collective commitment,"

Ancelotti said.

"The effort put by the players up front was great, but the injuries early in the season helped us to realise that it wasn't about individuals but putting on a collective effort, and we did great."

Ancelotti two years ago became the first manager to capture titles in each of Europe's top five leagues and he has now added another trophy to cement his legacy as one of the most successful coaches in history.

So far, Real Madrid have scored the most goals (74) and conceded the fewest (22) in the league.

After winning the club's 36th LaLiga title, Nacho, the Real captain, and Luka Modric equalled Marcelo and Benzema as the players with the most trophies in the club's history. They now have a total of 25 titles with Los Blancos.

In his debut season, English midfielder Jude Bellingham stood out with his performance as he remains second on the top-scorers' list in LaLiga with 18 strikes in 26 matches.

Despite suffering over 30 injuries to crucial players, Carlo Ancelotti's side lost only one match in the league.