

## Make or break for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will begin their T20 World Cup campaign against Sri Lanka on Saturday, hoping to recapture form in what is likely the most crucial game for them in the group stage. The match is set to start at 6:30 am (Bangladesh time).

Bangladesh have South Africa, Nepal and Netherlands to tackle after the Sri Lanka fixture. However, failure to win this match will not only leave a dent in mentality going forward but also leave them

with a hurdle too big to cross, given that South Africa – the group's strongest contender for the top spot – have already won their game against Sri Lanka.

Although Bangladesh have had sufficient opportunity to acclimatise with weather conditions, the wickets in question remain a wild card. Winning the toss allows teams with the big advantage of putting the opposition into bat in conditions with unknown variables.

On Wednesday, India skipper Rohit Sharma had asked Ireland to bat in New York and reaped the

rewards as variable bounce was on offer.

Bangladesh went ahead with their preparations on Wednesday, hoping to tweak whatever areas they could muster before the big match against Sri Lanka. The team had been pegged back by a series defeat against co-hosts USA leading up to the World Cup, and their performance against India in the only warm-up game showed the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led team were still lagging behind in mentality necessary to thrive in a global event.

There have been criticisms back home and especially on social media platforms. A video from covering media in the USA showed ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan joking about their chances of making the second round. The pressure, coupled with the pang of not feeling supported, have also impacted Shakib ahead of a joint-record ninth appearance in the competition.

Along with form troubles, Bangladesh are suffering from injury worries. Chief selector Gazi Shraf Hossain Lipu informed that injured pacer Shoriful Islam is still in recovery, with an assessment due on June 9. The speedster injured his bowling hand and is all but certain to miss Bangladesh's World Cup opener.

The importance of the game was also playing into Shoriful's prospects of participating in the World Cup. "We are carrying a pacer in Hasan Mahmud [reserve]. We are interested in getting back Shoriful, but how far we can make it into the tournament is an issue. Our performance is a matter as well since by then we will have played one game, and we can make a decision [based on result] afterwards."

On a positive note, the Tigers are hopeful of Taskin Ahmed's return from injury. "From what we can expect, given the reaction after Taskin bowled today, barring any further injury troubles, he will be able to play against Sri Lanka," Lipu informed further.

"The support staff are trying to get batters back in form. Obviously, the best possible combination will be picked since we are getting Taskin back, which will somewhat make up for the loss of Shoriful," he added.

Bangladesh will be hoping that their batters come into some form in this crucial fixture while Sri Lanka search for form, having been bundled out cheaply in their previous outing.



Bangladesh are yet to register a win against familiar foes Sri Lanka in T20 World Cup. The

Tigers lost both their encounters with the Lankans in the tournament – by 64 runs in Johannesburg in 2007 and by five wickets in Sharjah in 2021.

Bangladesh were bundled out for 83 runs in their 2007 T20 World Cup group encounter against Sri Lanka. This is the second-lowest collection for Bangladesh in the mega event and their lowest-ever in T20s against Sri Lanka.

Shakib Al Hasan, who scored 18 runs and scalped one wicket in that game against Sri Lanka in 2007, is the only survivor from that game 17 years ago.

Bangladesh also do not boast an inspiring head-to-head record against the Lankans in T20s, with the Tigers winning only five and losing 11 of the 16 matches so far.

Sri Lanka skipper Wanindu Hasaranga (106 wickets in 66 matches) needs two more wickets to surpass Lasith Malinga (107 wickets in 84 games) to become his country's highest wicket-taker in T20s.

## T20 WORLD CUP CORNER



### Why hasn't the World Cup fever taken over yet?

NABID YEASIN

Even on the fifth day of the ongoing T20 World Cup [Thursday], it did not seem like the ninth edition of the mega event, being held in the USA and the West Indies, was being able to hook cricket lovers.

And there might be a few reasons for it. This edition of the T20 World Cup is unique for two reasons. First, a total of 20 teams are playing in the main phase, giving the ICC associate nations an exposure like never before. And, the other is that this is the first time that an ICC associate nation – USA – is co-hosting the event.

While there was this higher risk of mismatches, the most scepticism was regarding whether cricket's attempt to tap into the broad and cash-rich market of the USA backfire in the form of the dulllest cricketing event in recent memory.

### Uganda, Nsubuga make history

ICC

Veteran spinner Frank Nsubuga created history in Guyana on Thursday as Uganda registered their first-ever victory at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup with a three-wicket triumph over Papua New Guinea.

In his first T20 World Cup appearance at 43 years of age, Nsubuga collected figures of 2/4 to help bowl out PNG for just 77 and the African nation held their nerve to chase down that total with 10 deliveries remaining.

The four runs conceded by Nsubuga was the fewest by any bowler in the history of the Men's T20 World Cup to have bowled their full allotment of four overs.

### Slow pitches the 'theme of tournament'

AGENCIES

Marcus Stoinis, who smashed a 67 not out and then took three wickets for 19 runs to help Australia open their T20 World Cup campaign with a 39-run win over Oman in Barbados on Thursday, said that slow pitches might just go on to be the theme of the tournament.

The worn Kensington Oval pitch block that will host its fifth match in a week for Australia's clash with England may not necessarily suit either of the two teams' blistering pace attacks, according to Stoinis.

"(The pitch) wasn't a shock. I think from watching the games so far, it seems that's [slow pitches] going to be the theme of the tournament ... it just took some getting used to," Stoinis said after the Oman victory.

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## BANGLADESH SHOW FIGHT but lose to Aussies

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh stood their ground against Australia in their second leg match of the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers, but couldn't avoid a 2-0 defeat against the superior opponents on a 'heavy' field at the Bashundhara Kings Arena in Dhaka yesterday.

The hosts put up stiff resistance throughout the match against the Socceros, who are 160 places ahead of Bangladesh in FIFA rankings, and conceded a defeat which is more respectable compared to their 7-0 thrashing in the first leg in Melbourne.

Bangladesh managed to keep Australia at bay for 28 minutes before Ajdin Hrustic broke the deadlock with a left-footed strike. The second goal came in the 62nd minute with Kusini Yengi heading the ball home.

"I always said the result was not that important to me. The objective was to improve the performance, which we did not do in Melbourne and I think we achieved that objective," said Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera after the match.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

"So [we did] extremely well in defending in the whole game and there were also outstanding work in marking the players, maintaining the defense line and defending the set pieces.

"We could have played more with the ball in the first half, having a couple of combinations but we lacked a bit in confidence," said a happy Cabrera who wants his side take the positives from their valiant fight against 24th ranked side in the world.

Australia coach Graham Arnold, however, expressed his

displeasure with the pitch.

"I am very proud of the players today [Thursday]. Obviously, we don't get to play in these types of conditions... The pitch was poor and it was unacceptable and it's no shock to me that six players from Bangladesh were cramping, their calf muscles and hamstrings. It's not good. I'm being very honest," Arnold said.

However, Cabrera did not agree with Arnold's assessment.

"It wasn't muddy, it was heavy, depends on how you see it. Maybe in the beginning it was

advantageous for us because it was not easy for them [Australia] to move quickly but to me, the pitch was totally playable after the rain of two or three days.

"I understand him [Arnold] because they are used to having top-class facilities. But top-class facilities are not available everywhere in football... I think the pitch we played is very very decent for Asian matches," Cabrera said.

The defeat ends the mathematical chances of Bangladesh qualifying for the next stage of the qualifiers.

Bangladesh are at the bottom of the four-team Group I with one point in five matches, which came from a 1-1 draw at home against Lebanon.

Australia have already sealed qualification as group champions, with five wins in as many matches while Palestine are in second position with seven points. Had Bangladesh managed an upset win over Australia and won their final match against Lebanon and Palestine had lost their last two matches, Bangladesh could've made it to the next phase as group runners up.

## Sports see big jump in budgetary allocation

SPORTS REPORTER

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has received a higher allocation in the national budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

It was allocated Tk 2,212 crore, a 69.8 per cent increase from the Tk 1,303 crore proposed in the original budget of the outgoing fiscal year. The budget was later revised to Tk 1,517 crore.

"A total of 13 projects focused on the construction and development of sports facilities are being implemented in FY2023-24. One of the notable projects is the construction of Upazila Sheikh Russel Mini Stadium," said Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali in his budget speech yesterday.

"I am proposing 20 projects in the upcoming budget for the development of youth and sports. In addition, a talent hunt scheme is ongoing under the supervision of experienced trainers in every division for developing the skill of sportspersons," he added.



Defending champion Iga Swiatek took a big step towards a third successive French Open title by dismantling teary American third seed Coco Gauff 6-2, 6-4 in the semifinal on Thursday to match her longest winning streak on clay. The world number one is just one match away from becoming the first woman to win the tournament in three straight years since Justine Henin in 2007.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## A match that everyone wants to watch: Alcaraz

AFP, Paris

Carlos Alcaraz saw off Stefanos Tsitsipas in straight sets on Tuesday to set up a mouthwatering French Open semifinal clash with incoming world number one Jannik Sinner on Friday.

Alcaraz will be desperate to right the wrongs of last year – when he suffered cramps in a defeat by Novak Djokovic – in his second successive French Open semifinal.

Alcaraz is bidding to become the youngest man in history to win Grand Slam tournaments on hard, grass and clay courts after his Wimbledon triumph and 2022 US Open title.

He will face Sinner Friday for the ninth time, with the pair's head-to-head record level at 4-4.

"It's a really difficult challenge, I'm not going to lie," said Alcaraz of Sinner, who will usurp Djokovic at the top of the rankings next week.

"It's going to be a really good challenge, I'm ready for that challenge. It's the match that everybody wants to watch."



India football legend Sunil Chhetri played his final international game on Thursday, ending an illustrious career spanning two decades. As the India-Kuwait's fixture in FIFA World Cup qualifiers ended in a goalless draw, Chhetri leaves with 94 goals for his country, behind only Cristiano Ronaldo, Iran's retired Ali Daei, and Lionel Messi in the all-time list.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK