

Let there be heaps of sporting spirit

The long-awaited quadrennial sports extravaganza is here at last. From the opening ceremony—set to start today at 11:30 pm (Bangladesh time)—to its conclusion on August 11, around 10,000 elite athletes and an estimated 10 million visitors will gather in Paris for the 33rd Summer Olympic Games, marking the first time in 100 years that the City of Light has hosted the world's grandest spectacle. The primary athletics events will take place at the Stade de France, the nation's largest stadium, located on the northern outskirts of Paris. Additionally, there will be 15 Olympic and 11 Paralympic venues scattered throughout the city in existing buildings. In a historic first, the opening ceremony will be held outside the stadium, with the River Seine also hosting the marathon swimming event and the swimming leg of the triathlon, a century after it held events during the first Paris Games in 1900. Swimming had been banned in the Seine from 1923 until recently due to water-quality issues, but Paris organizers assure that the water will be clean enough for Olympic events.



The official mascot is the Olympic Phryge, a traditional hat once worn by French revolutionaries, representing freedom and highlighting important historical figures of the French Republic.



Romanian artistic gymnastics participants pose during women's podium training at Bercy Arena, while Dutch skateboarder Roos Zwetsloot trains at La Concorde 3, in Paris yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

KEY FIXTURES

There are a dizzying number of medal events—329 in total—with 49 and 48 medals reserved for aquatics and athletics, respectively. The first medal is expected in shooting on July 27, and the last in women's basketball on August 11. The following are the fixtures for 14 of the 32 disciplines likely to capture the interest of Bangladesh audiences:

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ARCHERY: July 25 to August 4
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ATHLETICS: August 1-11 (The men's 100m sprint final is slated for August 4, a day after the women's corresponding event lights up Paris.)
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BADMINTON: July 27 to August 5
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BASKETBALL: July 27 to August 11
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BOXING: July 27 to August 10
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FOOTBALL: July 24 to August 10
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HANDBALL: July 25 to August 11
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HOCKEY: July 27 to August 9
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SHOOTING: July 27 to August 5
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SWIMMING: July 27 to August 4
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TABLE TENNIS: July 27 to August 10
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TENNIS: July 27 to August 4
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VOLLEYBALL: July 27 to August 11
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WEIGHTLIFTING: August 7-11.

WORLD RECORDS WAITING TO BE BROKEN

Athletics: All eyes are on Jamaican sprinter Shericka Jackson, who has the potential to break the women's 200 meters world record set 36 years ago by American legend Florence Griffith Joyner.

Swimming: Backstroke queen Kaylee McKeown shattered all three backstroke world records in 2023, but the Aussie will be wary of USA's three-time Olympic medalist Regan Smith, who claimed the 100-meter backstroke record this year.

Weightlifting: Hampton Morris broke the world record in the

clean and jerk in the 61kg weight class by lifting 176 kilograms at a World Cup in Thailand. The 20-year-old American, coached by his father, is primed for further milestones.

Pole Vault: Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis has broken the world record eight times, and Paris might witness the ninth instance.

Climbing: Sam Watson, only 18, made his mark by breaking the speed climbing world record twice in a single tournament this year. The American teenager is poised to set new benchmarks in this newly added Olympic sport.



Shericka Jackson

TRANSCENDING TRADITIONS

The 2024 Olympics will be the first in history to feature an equal number of male and female athletes, with 5,250 men and 5,250 women participating in the same number of sports and events. Paris will showcase 32 sports disciplines, including four non-traditional sports: surfing, climbing, skateboarding, and breaking — a competitive form of breakdancing which originated in New York in the 1970s — with the latter set to make its Olympic debut, while the other three will make a second appearance after the 2020 Tokyo edition.

A litmus test awaits Tigresses

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's side are set to take on informal India in the semifinals of the 2024 T20 Asia Cup in Dambulla today. Despite making the semis with two back-to-back wins over Thailand and Malaysia, concerns over the batting unit are far from being removed with India bowlers expected to provide a steeper challenge. The two teams have met 22 times in the shortest format and India have gone from strength to strength, winning 19 of those games. The gargantuan nature of Bangladesh's task is not only highlighted by Bangladesh's batting inconsistencies but also by the prospect of facing a side that won the Asia Cup seven times and are the defending champions.

In fact, if the last home series against India which the visitors swept 5-0 in Sylhet is anything to go by, Bangladesh would have to bring out their A-game to grind out a positive result.



Only skipper Nigar Sultana Joty and openers Dilara Akter and Murshida Khatun could make some decent contributions in that series, but even they averaged below 20 in that five-match series. Bangladesh put on 191 for two in the last game against Malaysia, their second-highest score in the format. It came as a sweet relief when Murshida put on a show with a career-best 59-ball 80 while Joty struck a quickfire

62. Plenty of dropped catches from Malaysian players, however, had aided the Tigresses, who would need more vigilance in their batting plan to cause an upset today.

The Tigresses, however, could take heart from the recent performances of Joty and Murshida. Joty averaged 48 in her last five innings while Murshida's willow has smiled in this Asia Cup with back-to-back fifties that ensured two crucial wins. India's Deepti Sharma is the highest wicket-taker in the tournament so far and Bangladesh would look to both Joty and Murshida to thwart the off-spinner.

Going up against India, who have remained unbeaten so far and cruised to the semifinal after being group champions, Bangladesh will most certainly face a litmus test as the Tigresses lost their only encounter against a top opponent — their opener against Sri Lanka.

However, Joty sounded optimistic ahead of the crucial semifinal, trying to take inspiration from their triumphant 2018 Asia Cup campaign in which they beat India to lift the trophy for the first time.

"All of us will be looking forward to making it into the final. The last time we played and won the final in 2018, it sort of revolutionised women's cricket in our country," Joty said.

Nayeem, Mushfiqu star on Day 1 of practice game

SPORTS REPORTER

Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan and pacer Khaled Ahmed starred with the ball while veteran batter Mushfiquur Rahim hit a half-century in the opening day of the two-day practice match between BCB Green and BCB Red at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram on Thursday.

Nayeem claimed 4-40 while Khaled finished with 3-30 as BCB Green dismissed



BCB Red for a mere 131 in 45.2 overs in their first innings.

Mushfiquur was the top scorer for BCB Red with 50 off 84 balls but he eventually fell to a Khaled delivery after completing his fifty, with his side reduced to 101-9.

Shafiquur Islam, who came to bat at number 10, then hit a brisk 30 off 38 balls with three sixes and a four, providing some late entertainment.

In reply, BCB Green's Mominul Haque made an unbeaten 47 while Naim Sheikh scored 34 as they finished the day on 146-4, with a slight 15-run lead over their opponents.

Pacer Shafiquur was the most successful bowler for BCB Green with two scalps while Nahid Rana and Miraz took one wicket each.

SHORT CORNER



Bangladesh archer Sagor Islam finished 45th out of 64 participants in the ranking round of the men's individual event of the Paris Olympics 2024 after scoring 652 yesterday. Olympic gold medalist Kim Woo-jin of South Korea topped the ranking round, scoring 686. "I actually started well today [Thursday] but due to the weather condition, I made a mistake with an arrow. Overall, I'm satisfied with today's performance," Sagor, whose career best score is 671, said after yesterday's event.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Afghan cyclist sisters defy Taliban to fulfil Olympic dream

The Hashimi siblings are the first cyclists - male or female - to represent Afghanistan at the Games. The Taliban government does not recognise the female athletes — the Hashimi sisters and sprinter Kimia Yousofi. Although the Hashimis are the first cyclists to represent their country, they are not the first Afghan women cyclists to compete in the Games. That distinction goes to Masomah Ali Zada who raced in the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 as a member of the Olympic refugee team.

Sri Lanka suffer injury blows ahead of India T20Is

Sri Lanka's fast bowlers Dushmantha Chameera and Nuwan Thushara will miss their home T20I series against India due to illness and injury. Thushara has been ruled out of the T20I series against India after sustaining a fractured thumb on his left hand during a fielding session on Wednesday while SLC confirmed that Chameera is recovering from bronchitis and respiratory infection.

*Read full stories on The Daily Star website



Lim Si-hyeon delivered an emphatic statement yesterday that she is the woman to beat at the Paris Olympics as the 21-year-old shot a world and Olympic record 694 in women's individual ranking round at the stunning Esplanade des Invalides venue, breaking the previous mark of 692 held by compatriot and 2020 Olympic champion Sang Chae-young.

PHOTO: AFP