

## Buoyant India face desperate Pakistan IN BLOCKBUSTER CLASH



The newest chapter of cricket's fiercest rivalry will be written today at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium when a buoyant India take on a struggling Pakistan in a high stakes Group A match of the ICC Champions Trophy.

Tournament favourites India are riding the high of a comfortable six-wicket win over Bangladesh courtesy of a sublime century from Shubman Gill. Meanwhile, hosts Pakistan began the campaign with a 60-run defeat in Karachi and find themselves on the brink of elimination. On paper, the match seems lopsided, with India clearly the favourites. Recent history also does not bode a positive sign for the Pakistanis as out of the last eight completed ODIs between the sides, Pakistan have won only one. But that one victory had come in the 2017 Champions Trophy final, when Pakistan began the match as underdogs but ended as champions. The architect of that victory, Fakhar Zaman, is out of the tournament after sustaining an injury in the first game. So, Pakistan would hope that a new hero would emerge in today's match while India would be backing its heavyweight side to crush the Pakistanis and knock them out of the competition. No matter which side comes out on top, billions of people around the world will not miss this contest for the world.

**"We play every match to win and this is no different for us and this is how we prepare for any match that we play. So that's how we are going to prepare for this one as well."**

India vice captain Shubman Gill

**"Pakistan is nowhere near to India's league. India have dominated them right throughout in recent times, and this time, Pakistan look even weaker, but that hasn't done anything to take the shine off the battle."**

Former India cricketer Sanjay Manjrekar



**"It's a 'final' for Pakistan. India are undoubtedly favourites. In my opinion, if Pakistan manage to beat India, it will be an upset because our cricket has gone down and is at an all-time low."**

Former Pakistani cricketer Basit Ali.

**"I want Pakistan to win because it will be fun in the tournament. I hope Pakistan makes a comeback; it will be good for the tournament."**

Former India cricketer Atul Wassan.

## Abahani, Kings keep up the chase

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani and Bashundhara Kings kept up the chase of league leaders Mohammedan with comfortable victories in their Bangladesh Premier League fixtures on Saturday.

Abahani notched their biggest victory of the season with a 6-1 thrashing of Young Men's Fakirerpul Club at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla.

Sayed Hossain Sayem had given Fakirerpul, who are in eighth position with nine points, a surprise 15th-minute lead. However, Abahani skipper Mohammad Ridoy hit back in the 40th minute to draw parity.

Following the lemon break, the Sky Blues, who are playing the season with an all-local squad, turned up the heat with Enamul Gazi scoring in the 54th and 60th minutes. Mohammad Ibrahim, Jafar Iqbal and Mirajul Islam then put three more past the Fakirerpul keeper to ensure Abahani's seventh win in 10 matches, taking them to 23 points - four behind Mohammedan.

Away at the Rofique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh, Bashundhara Kings eased to a 2-0 win against basement club Chittagong Abahani, with Faysal Ahmed Fahim's 20th-minute strike and Miguel Figueira's spot-kick on the half-hour mark proving sufficient.

The win took the defending champions to third position with 20 points from 10 matches, seven behind Mohammedan while the port city outfit remained in 10th position with three points.

The domestic season will go into a month and a half's break due to the national team's international assignment, and will return in the second week of April.



**Bangladeshi defenders try to catch a Nepalese raider during the first match of a five-match Test series at the Outer Stadium in Paltan yesterday. The hosts won the match comfortably by 53-29 points, after having led by 28-11 points in the first half. Bangladesh captain Mizanur Rahman was adjudged the player of the match.**

PHOTO: BKF



**Organisers and sponsors pose for a group photograph during the opening day of the two-day EBL 33rd Amateur Golf Championship at the Bhatiary Golf and Country Club in Chattogram on Friday. Brigadier General Rezaul Karim, station commander of Chattogram Cantonment and VP of BGCC formally inaugurated the championship where Mufakkharul Islam Khasru, Director of EBL was present as special guest.**

PHOTO: COURTESY

## Changes in Tigers' XI for NZ clash?

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Islamabad

Ahead of the crucial ICC Champions Trophy contest against New Zealand on Monday, the Bangladeshi contingent in Islamabad heaved a sigh of relief yesterday as the experienced campaigner Mahmudullah completed his first net session since sustaining a calf injury in Dubai.

The injury, which occurred during Bangladesh's first practice session after reaching Dubai, had ruled Mahmudullah out of their opening Group A match against India in Dubai which they lost by six wickets.

But the 39-year-old returned to training in Bangladesh's first practice session in Pakistan at the picturesque Islamabad Club Cricket Oval yesterday.

Teams usually take a rest day after travelling to a new destination to recover from jet lag. But that was not the case for the Tigers as after landing in Islamabad in the early hours of Saturday, the team took the field the same day, considering the importance of the next game which is virtually a 'do-or-die' contest for them.

Most cricketers had high intensity practice sessions covering all three aspects - batting, bowling and fielding - and it seemed like they were more serious about their batting and catching, which let them down against India in their tournament opener.

Mahmudullah attending yesterday's net session was a big boost for the side but it



were the standout performers for the Tigers after they were left tottering at 35-5 against India. Hridoy hit a sensational hundred, braving painful cramps, while Jaker hit a

dodged but crucial half-century.

According to some sources and judging by the way the training session went, Bangladesh are seemingly planning to drop opener Soumya Sarkar, who was out for a duck against India, to accommodate Mahmudullah in the New Zealand match.

Soumya was the last batter to bat at the nets yesterday while skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mehedi Hasan Miraz had long batting sessions during Bangladesh's three-and-a-half hour long practice session.

It was also learnt that Shanto or Miraz may open the innings with Tanzid Tamim if Mahmudullah gets back in the side for Monday's match.

"It depends on the physio's report. He practiced today [Saturday], he hadn't done so for a while, he took part in almost all the drills. The physios have not informed anything yet, they will most probably do it after practice," selector Abdur Razzak told Bangladeshi reporters in Islamabad yesterday.

Razzak was also asked about Mushfiqur Rahim's poor form, as the wicketkeeper-batter, who was dismissed for a duck against India, has only one fifty in his last 13 ODI innings.

But the selector claimed he was not worried about any batters' form in the team. "Why would Mushfiqur's form be a concern? He just had one bad match. It could've happened to anyone... I don't think any individual's performance is too concerning," he concluded.

## Tigers in familiar territory

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Islamabad

Bangladesh touring Pakistan for their men's team fixtures has become a very familiar occurrence over the last few years, especially after they came here for the first time in 2020 after a 12-year hiatus to play a bilateral series. Since then, they travelled to Pakistan for the 2023 Asia Cup and the 2024 Test Championship matches.

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**Wicketkeeper-batter Liton Das** fills out his transfer token for a registration form to participate in the upcoming Dhaka Premier League. Liton, who was not included in Bangladesh's Champions Trophy squad, took the form from the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday and is expected to sign for a club today. Meanwhile, star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan got signed by Legends of Rupganj. Shakib, who has not set foot in Bangladesh since the fall of the Awami League government, had his token filled out by the club.

PHOTO: STAR