

Tigresses hope to enhance brand of cricket

The final two spots in the upcoming ICC Women's Cricket World Cup in India are up for grabs as six teams – Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, Ireland, Scotland, and West Indies – will fight it out in the Qualifiers to join Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the hosts in the main event later this year.

The two venues selected for the Qualifier are the iconic Gaddafi Stadium Lahore (GSL) and Lahore City Cricket Association (LCCA). The latter will host international women's cricket for the first time.

Each team will face each other once in a round-robin format. At the end of the 15 matches, the top two teams will progress to the Women's Cricket World Cup.

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's cricket team are set to depart for Pakistan on Thursday to feature in the six-team ICC ODI World Cup Qualifiers, scheduled to begin on April 9. Skipper Nigar Sultana Joty remains hopeful that the team can bounce back from recent disappointments in ICC events and strengthen their resolve moving forward with a change in the brand of cricket they play.

The Tigresses secured a place in the last edition of the World Cup after finishing among the top three in the qualifiers. This time, however, only two teams will progress, with formidable opponents like the West Indies and hosts Pakistan in contention.

Following a steady rise in performances against India and Pakistan in 2023, Bangladesh have struggled to maintain consistency. Their historic Asia Cup triumph in 2018 raised expectations, but subsequent ICC events have exposed key shortcomings. When asked whether the team had improved as expected since that victory, Joty was blunt in her response.

"No," she said, offering no sugarcoating. "When we won the Asia Cup, there was a revolution, and we were doing well. But then, due to COVID, we had fewer matches over two years, which was a huge setback. We had momentum after 2018, with increasing media attention and growing inspiration among players. If we had played more tournaments and maintained continuity, our cricket would have progressed further," she explained, stressing the need for more game time to aid development.

In recent years, the Tigresses' approach has become less effective as teams have found ways to increase their scoring rates. Joty acknowledged the need for a shift in playing style to match the pace of modern



Bangladesh players pose for a photograph at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday ahead of today's departure for Pakistan where they will be involved in a six-team qualifying campaign for the remaining two spots in the 2026 ICC Women's World Cup.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

cricket. "Having qualified after playing India and Pakistan under the FTP last time, we stagnated again. It's on us to get out of this situation. At home, we play a certain way, but when we face better surfaces abroad, we struggle. To move forward, individuals need to step out of their comfort zones, adapt to different styles, and play different brands of cricket. In modern cricket, expecting to score 200 and defend it is really difficult on good wickets," she said. Joty also highlighted the influence of new batting coach David Hemp, who has been working to bring clarity to players' roles ahead of major tournaments. Improving batting intent was a focal point in the recently concluded Women's Dhaka Premier League (WDPL), serving as crucial preparation before the World Cup Qualifiers camp that followed the WDPL and continued even during Eid-ul-Fitr. "The new coaching staff emphasises having a clear mindset before a tournament. That's why the squad was finalised early, allowing players to focus on their roles rather than worrying about selection or performing in practice matches," she explained. Recognising the significance of the qualifiers, Joty reiterated the team's commitment, emphasising that ICC events present valuable opportunities, including more frequent international fixtures. "We skipped Eid celebrations with our families to train because we understand how important this tournament is. When a team competes in an ICC event, it garners attention differently. Playing in the ODI World Cup brings additional opportunities from the ICC, and we know how crucial this is for our careers. The last time we played in the ODI World Cup, we got to play more regularly," she added.

'I will not have time, I have to get it right, fast'

REUTERS, Nottingham

Ruben Amorim insisted he will not be given much time to turn things around as Manchester United manager, as his team slumped to another defeat at Nottingham Forest on Tuesday.

Former United forward Anthony Elanga's fine early goal earned Forest a comfortable win at the City Ground, with the visitors slipping to their 13th defeat of the season in the Premier League.

Tuesday's loss takes United to within one of their record of 14 Premier League defeats in the 2023-24 season, leaving them languishing down in 13th in the table as Amorim struggles to instigate any real change.

"In Manchester United, you don't have the time," Amorim said. "I will not have the time. We have to get it right fast."

"In here, the pressure is too big sometimes. We start the game suffering a goal and put Nottingham in the place they want to be – defending with lots of men – then they have really fast players to make transitions."

"Even with that, we controlled the game quite well, especially in the second half. We push forward but again, in the final third, we were not good enough."

Alejandro Garnacho was especially wasteful in attack for United, finishing the match having had six of United's 24 shots at goal, without really testing Forest goalkeeper Matz Sels.

Amorim has defended the young Argentine in the past, and again insisted Garnacho's overall efforts are of the standard required.

"He is making everything," Amorim added. "He's trying. Sometimes you have one day that you are doing the right things, but in the final third, you are not that good, that can happen."

"The most important thing for me is that when he needs to run back, he is running back. Of course we want a player that has one against one. Sometimes he is trying too much."

"I think he wants to help the team to do his best, sometimes he doesn't make the best choice, but you cannot point to any player today."



'Qualifying tournaments are always challenging'

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh women's cricket team's batting coach David Hemp was cautiously optimistic about his side's chances in the forthcoming ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers despite the team's lengthy preparation given the "challenging" nature of the competition.

The Tigresses are set to depart for Lahore, Pakistan today to feature in the six-team tournament comprising hosts Pakistan, West Indies, Ireland, Scotland and Thailand, scheduled on April 9-19.

The women's team will face Thailand in their tournament opener on April 10 before they face the other four teams in the competition. The top two sides in the round-robin tournament will join six other teams in the main event in India later this year.

Ahead of the tournament, the women's team had a training camp in Mirpur which began on March 22 and ran till yesterday, with the girls sacrificing celebrating Eid with their families to prepare for the tournament.

"The last 10 days have been very good. Some of the meetings we had and the feedback the players have been given, they have been very honest. They have



been told where they are at the moment and what they need to do to be successful in Pakistan," Hemp told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Overall, the coaching staff is pleased with the preparation. We want to qualify for the World Cup and that's why it's a very important tournament. Any team would want to play in a major competition and Bangladesh is also no different."

"There are six very good teams going to it and only two will qualify. So, it's not going to be an easy tournament. Qualifying tournaments like these are

always challenging," he added.

Hemp is working with the women's team only for the qualifiers and afterwards will join High Performance Unit as their head coach.

Presumably Hemp's experience as the head coach of the Pakistan women's team from 2020 to 2022 prompted the board to bring him in ahead of the qualifiers.

However, the 54-year-old former Bermudian batter, said they would have to assess the conditions as a team after landing in Pakistan and highlighted the importance of all the players stepping up in their roles to attain success.

"About the wickets, we have to wait before we get there. We actually have to gain the understanding of the situation... Obviously, I was the head coach of the Pakistan team so I do know some of the players. I have come in contact with them before."

"I think there are some good young talents coming through [in Bangladesh] but also you got some very good and experienced players. In major tournaments, you need everybody to stand up and manage their particular roles within the team. I'm looking forward to the tournament and see what this group of players can actually achieve."

'Positive' Ponting making an impact on Punjab batting

REUTERS, Bengaluru

Punjab Kings batsmen Nehal Wadhwa and Prabhsimran Singh said new coach Ricky Ponting had already made a big impact with his positive approach after the team continued their winning start to the new Indian Premier League season.

Punjab appointed the Australian on a four-year contract in September, and the former Delhi Capitals coach has guided his new team to two straight victories.

"He's one of the best coaches I've ever worked with," said Wadhwa, who was inserted by Ponting as an impact player.

"He talks positive, and when a coach gives you such positive remarks, that automatically boosts your confidence."

Prabhsimran said Ponting and his staff had already instilled a winning mentality in the Punjab ranks.

"They're legends," he added. "Whenever they speak, it's always positive. There's no such thing as 'if' (in their thinking)."

"They ask us to go with just one mindset, and that is of winning. They have asked us to back our game."



New Zealand batter Mitchell Hay bludgeons one through the mid-off region during the second ODI against Pakistan at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. The middle-order batter's unbeaten 99 off 78 deliveries helped the Kiwis to an 84-run victory and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. It was only the second time in ODI cricket that a New Zealand batter was stranded unbeaten on 99.

PHOTO: AFP

ARMINIA BIELEFELD'S stunning turnaround

REUTERS

Arminia Bielefeld captain Mael Corboz said his team's recent struggles have hardened their self-belief after the third-tier side beat holders Bayer Leverkusen 2-1 on Tuesday to reach their first German Cup final following a relegation battle last season.

Bielefeld have sent four Bundesliga teams spinning out of the competition in consecutive rounds to become the fourth third-tier side to reach the final.

Visitors Leverkusen led in the 17th minute through Jonathan Tah but Marius Woerl equalised three minutes later and Maximilian Grosser scored the winner on the stroke of halftime.

"Every round was surreal. I could not really believe it," American midfielder

Corboz told reporters after his side had earlier eliminated Union Berlin, Freiburg and Werder Bremen.

Arminia flirted with relegation from 3. Liga last season, finishing six points above the drop zone.

They are fourth in the current campaign, six points behind leaders Dynamo Dresden.

"It was the worst case scenario to concede under the first 20 minutes but we have been through so much this year and last year. In a relegation battle in the third division and one year later we are in the DFB Pokal final," said Corboz.

Bielefeld will face the winner of Wednesday's semi-final between VfB Stuttgart and RB Leipzig in the final at Berlin's Olympiastadion on May 24.

"The fans had been saying we are going to Berlin since January," added Corboz.



Real Madrid defender Antonio Rudiger celebrates scoring their fourth goal with forward Arda Gular during their semifinal second leg of Copa del Rey against Real Sociedad at the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday. A pulsating second leg ending 4-4 after extra time following a 115th minute header from Rudiger saw Los blancos secure a 5-4 aggregate victory, setting up a final clash against either Barcelona or Atletico Madrid.

PHOTO: REUTERS

LaLiga lowers Barca's wage cap

REUTERS, Madrid

LaLiga lowered Barcelona's wage cap on Wednesday after it said the club's recently revised accounts do not match the end-of-year figures from its previous auditor which included a 100 million euros (\$108.15 million) transaction.

The previous accounts included proceeds from the sale of VIP seats in the renovated Camp Nou which allowed Barca to comply with LaLiga's Financial Fair Play rules and extend the registration of players Dani Olmo and Pau Victor.

LaLiga said in a statement it will file a complaint against Barcelona's previous auditors who approved the club's accounts as the new auditors disagreed with the criteria used to include the transaction.

According to LaLiga, new auditors Crowe Spain concluded that the 100 million euros should not be fully accounted for in this season's finances because the asset – new VIP seats – does not yet exist and cannot yet be considered as income for the club.