

## Another chance for Tigresses to seal WC berth

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh go into their final game of the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers against Pakistan today knowing that their fate is still in their hands. If Bangladesh win today, they will ensure a second consecutive berth in the ODI World Cup behind already-qualified Pakistan.

The Tigresses' three-wicket loss to Windies on Thursday has complicated the scenario a bit following three straight wins in the ongoing qualifiers. It has also brought West Indies and Scotland into contention – both sides on two wins and much inferior run rate to Bangladesh prior to yesterday.

West Indies take on Thailand in the day-night game today, hoping they get a big-margin win and that Bangladesh lose by a big margin against Pakistan in the day game.

Although the loss against West Indies may dampen spirits, Tigresses do have an edge over Pakistan in terms of past records, having won seven matches and losing four.

They also have a bit of security in regards to net run-rate as they can qualify even if they lose to Pakistan while West Indies and Scotland win their final matches. Scotland, in with an outside chance, were playing Ireland yesterday at the time of filing this report.



Zakir Hasan, Shadman Islam, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, and Najmul Hossain Shanto were busy sharpening their slip-catching skill yesterday during Bangladesh's training session at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. Aside from not fumbling at the slip cordon, the quartet will also have to make runs at the top order when the Tigers take on Zimbabwe in the first of the two-Test series in Sylhet tomorrow.

PHOTO: BCB

## BTV to air Ban-Zim Tests as media rights go unsold

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Television (BTV) has confirmed that it will broadcast the upcoming two-Test series between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe live, following a feed received via the production satellite designated by Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

The announcement came via a BTV press release issued yesterday.

The decision arrives against the backdrop of BCB's ongoing struggle to secure a media rights partner for the series, scheduled to begin in Sylhet on April 20 before the action moves to Chattogram where the second Test will be played, starting on April 28.

Despite issuing an open call for Expression of Interest (EOI) along with financial proposals on March 19, the board received no bids by the April 7 deadline.

With no takers for the rights and time running out, the BCB has turned to the state-run broadcaster to ensure that the series still reaches cricket fans nationwide.

A BCB source, speaking to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, had said the lack of interest stemmed from doubts over the commercial viability of the two-match series. In recent years, Bangladesh's home series had been aired on T Sports and GTV through the Millennium Media Consortium, but that agreement expired after the South Africa series in October last year.

## Tigers look to move away from spin dependency

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons yesterday said that he does not want to smother Zimbabwe with spin, rather he wants to face them on a 'proper wicket' in the first Test in Sylhet starting on Sunday.

The Tigers' think tank often prepare spin traps for opponents in home Tests. But this ploy does not always come through, for instance, in the last home Test series against New Zealand they tried this formula but the Bangladesh batters could not counter Kiwi spinners.

On the back of their most successful campaign in the ICC Test Championship,



Phil Simmons

**I think they are excellent. I have watched the Bangladesh pace attack grow and grow through the years. The amount of players they get to select from, is incredible. There's a lot of people who can bowl fast nowadays. Not just one person. We are prepared for that. We have bowling machines that bowl faster than human beings.**

Zimbabwe's SEAN WILLIAMS praised Bangladesh's pace attack but took a dig at speedster NAHID RANA

where they secured four wins, Bangladesh now wants to carry on with the same momentum in the upcoming two-Test series, which is not part of the cycle, on fair wickets.

"Our plan is to prepare proper wickets and try to play as we want to take the Test team in that direction. We don't necessarily have to prepare a spin track. There's no talk of preparing a spin or seaming track," Simmons told reporters in Sylhet yesterday.

While ace paceman Taskin Ahmed is out injured, Tigers can bank on the pace of Nahid Rana, Tanzim Sakib, Khaled Ahmed and Hasan Mahmud. There was a question over whether a left-arm pacer like Shoriful Islam would have been handy but Simmons was happy with the pacers on offer.

"It is good to have a left-arm pacer nowadays in international cricket, but if

you don't, as long as you have two or three quality right-arm pace bowlers. We are happy with the four quicks we have in the team right now," said Simmons.

"Nahid Rana has the pace that most fast bowlers are dying for. If he is bowling in the right areas, he is definitely going to trouble batters," he added.

The Tigers will have to find replacements for key veteran stars who are coming into the final stage of their careers. Mushfiqur Rahim has appeared in 94 Tests and might be eying a 100th before calling time. The 37-year-old has been preparing well ahead of the first Test according to the head coach.

"[Mushfiqur] is as professional as they come. He thinks he can get the runs that he deserves from the point of view of how much he is working. He wants to do well. He is working on being in good nick. He has had a phenomenal run against Zimbabwe," he said.

Mushfiqur has informed the management he will not be keeping wickets and Mahidul Islam and Jaker Ali are waiting on the wings to show their mettle behind the stumps. Simmons said the team are still in the phase of making that decision and will finalise it a day before the game.

The Tigers would also be on the lookout for solidity at the top, especially the opening pair. The management has three opening options in Zakir Hasan, Shadman Islam and Mahmudul Hasan Joy and any two of them will get the chance to stake their claim on a surface that is likely to reward pacers.

## Bangladesh off to a flying start in AHF Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bangladesh made a flying start in the AHF Cup with a 5-1 win against Kazakhstan in their Pool B opener in Jakarta, Indonesia yesterday.

The charges of Mamun Ur Rashid, however, had to work hard initially to break the Kazakhstan challenge.

Four-time champions Bangladesh took the lead through a penalty corner converted by Ashraful Islam in the 24th minute but the Central Asian side hit back on the half-hour mark, soon after resumption of the match following heavy downpour.

The Bangladesh coach made some tactical changes in the third quarter and his players grabbed control of the midfield instead of trying to use wing-play for the attacks, unlike in the first two quarters.

The men in red and green scored three goals in the third quarter with Naim Uddin restoring the lead from a rebound home before Rokibul Hasan made it 3-1 from open play and Shohanur Rahman Sabuj converted a penalty corner.

In the fourth quarter, Bangladesh kept their dominance with lion's share of possession and earned three penalty corners. However, it was Ashraful's second goal – from a penalty stroke in the penultimate minute – that wrapped up the victory.

## 'FIFA very careful with calendar, player welfare'

REUTERS

FIFA President Gianni Infantino said player health and welfare remains a key consideration for the global governing body amid concerns about expanding tournaments in an already crowded calendar.

Players' union FIFPRO, Spain's LaLiga and the European leagues' group filed a joint complaint to European Union antitrust regulators earlier in October, accusing FIFA of "calendar abuse".

Critics argue FIFA's revamped quadrennial 32-team Club World Cup and other expanded tournaments will increase the number of matches each season and leave players with little time off between campaigns.

Infantino told CNN that the Club World Cup's impact on player welfare would be limited.

"It is a competition which takes place once every four years. The winner plays seven games – which is like one game and a half, almost, more a year – so it doesn't have a big impact," he added.

"What happens in world soccer is that there are many games for very few teams, very few players. Those who reach maybe the final stages of all competitions, which again is very rare ... So all in all, it balances itself out quite a bit.

"But we're very careful about the calendar and about the health of the players. I mean, we want to do everything for the players to be in the best conditions to perform in the best way. That's what many players tell me as well, what you want is to play rather than to train, right?"

Infantino also said the FIFA taskforce led by former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger was analysing the impact of Club World Cup on player welfare.



## Barca look to ratchet up pressure on Real

AGENCIES

Barcelona will be aiming to open up a seven-point lead at the top of LaLiga table when they welcome Europe-chasing Celta Vigo on Saturday.

Hansi Flick's side sit four points clear of second-placed Real Madrid at the summit heading into the next gameweek, while Celta are seventh, five points behind sixth-placed Real Betis in the battle for Europe.

Barcelona have a record of 22 wins, four draws, and five defeats from their 31 league matches this season, with a total of 70 points.

The Catalan outfit have an incredible 84 league goals this term, and a victory over Celta in this contest would see them put more pressure on a struggling Real. The 15-time Champions League winners were dumped out of the competition after losing 5-1 on aggregate to Arsenal last week in the quarters and will be missing suspended Kylian Mbappe for their Sunday's game against Athletic, a team that have lost just once in their last 22 league games and beat Real 2-1 in December.

Barcelona will be looking to



exact some measure of revenge when they host Celta after the reverse fixture ended 2-2. Barca were up 2-0 before Marc Casado was sent off, and the 10 men conceded two late goals to draw 2-2.

And unlike Real, Barcelona are still in the hunt for a treble in Flick's first season, with Real

and Barca set to meet in a much-anticipated Clasico clash in the Copa del Rey final later this month in Seville.

"I am really satisfied with the team and the performances this season," Flick said.

"We're still in three competitions. We're in the Champions League semifinal. This is a huge success and we can be happy for that."

Barcelona were down in the dumps on Tuesday after losing for the first time in 2025 in a 3-1 Champions League quarterfinal second-leg defeat at Borussia Dortmund, and it was up to coach Flick to offer his players some perspective.

Having thrashed last year's finalists 4-0 in the first leg, Barca qualified for the semifinals with a 5-3 aggregate win and will play Inter Milan in the last four.

"The team has a lot of merit. There is still a long way to go and we are not at the end," Flick said.

"In the dressing room there was no euphoria either. I reminded them that we are in the semifinals. Then it changed a little, and they were happier."



Manchester United centre-back Harry Maguire celebrates after scoring the winner deep into stoppage-time of extra-time in the second-leg of their Europa League quarterfinal at home against Lyon yesterday. United, who were staring at defeat and crashing out of the competition against a 10-man Lyon, staged an incredible comeback, thanks to a couple of goals in the 120th and 121st minutes, scored by substitute Kobbie Mainoo and Maguire, respectively. The goals gave United a 5-4 victory on the night and a 7-6 aggregate win, taking Ruben Amorim's side to the semifinals of the competition where they will face Athletic Bilbao.

PHOTO: AFP