Star SPORT
DHAKA WEDNESDAY JULY 2, 2025, ASHAR 18, 1432 BS

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
Sri Lanka vs Bangladesh
1st ODI
Live from 3:00 pm
STAR SPORTS 1
England vs India
2nd Test
Live from 4:00 pm
SONY SPORTS 1 AND 2
Wimbledon
Live from 4:00 pm
DAZN WEBSITE AND APP
Club World Cup
Dortmund vs Monterrey
Live from 7:00 am

Tigers start from scratch at Premadasa

PHOTO: SLC

- Almost 10 years since captaining the Under-19 sides of their respective teams, Mehidy Hasan Miraz of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka's Charith Asalanka are set to lead their national sides in a three-match ODI series, beginning at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo today. As fate would have it, that Under-19 game was also at the same venue.
- Bangladesh have never won an ODI series in Sri Lanka.
- Out of 57 ODIs between the two sides, Sri Lanka have won 43, Bangladesh 12, with two no results.
- In Sri Lanka, Bangladesh have won just two of 24 ODIs against the hosts, losing 20, with two no results. The Tigers are winless in 10 matches at the Premadasa Stadium.
- Among current squad members, Najmul Hossain Shanto is the top scorer against Sri Lanka, with 342 runs in five ODIs at an average of 85.50, including two centuries and a fifty.

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head into the first of three ODIs against Sri Lanka in Colombo today, without any of the 'Big Five' who have defined the team for over a decade.

With Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad taking their bows from the 50-over setup -- the latter having retired from international cricket -- the series is a new frontier for the Tigers.

The last time Bangladesh played without any of Mahmudullah, Mushfiqur, Shakib Al Hasan, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Tamim Iqbal in an ODI match was on September 5, incidentally against Sri Lanka.

New captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz finds himself in the hot seat, facing a challenging start. He must navigate a dressing room still uneasy after Najmul Hossain Shanto was abruptly removed from captaincy just before the team's departure for the Test leg of the tour.

There is also the difficult task of attributing roles to certain key players -- even seniors.

With Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah gone, restructuring the middle order is inevitable. Bangladesh also come into this series on the back of six consecutive ODI losses -- hardly ideal for a team seeking to start afresh.

The middle order must now find new stabilisers. Towhid Hridoy, Litton Das, Jaker Ali and possibly Miraz himself will be tasked with keeping things steady. They have often struggled to accelerate during the middle overs, and any reshuffling could determine their fate in this series.

At the top of the order, Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Parvez Hossain Emon are likely to form a new-look opening partnership. Their role will be crucial in offsetting the uncertainty that follows. Mohammad Naim Sheikh, also in the squad, will hope to redeem himself if given the chance -- especially at the R. Premadasa Stadium, the venue where his ODI career took a hit.

Shanto, despite losing the armband, boasts a superb record against Sri Lanka in this format, averaging 85.50 in five ODIs. His contributions could again prove vital in resolving team's recurring batting issues.

Moreover, pace spearhead Taskin Ahmed's return adds firepower to the bowling attack after a period of absence from the T20I and Test sides.

The home side, meanwhile, appear more settled in the 50-over format. Their spin duo, Wanindu Hasaranga and Maheesh Theekshana, have been particularly effective against Bangladesh in recent encounters.

Although the Tigers won their last ODI series against Sri Lanka at home (2–1), their record in Sri Lanka paints a bleak picture.

Bangladesh have played 10 ODIs at the Premadasa -- and lost every one of them. They now head into today's game still searching for a maiden ODI win on Lankan soil.

Bangladesh's decisive Myanmar test today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team players exuded confidence ahead of potentially the most crucial match in the team's history as they face Myanmar for a maiden berth in Women's Asian Cup today.

The women in red and green have never played in the continent's top completion, and in the two previous qualifying campaigns they had lost all five of their matches, conceding 25 goals without scoring any.

But the current Bangladesh team are a different prospect altogether as they have already thrashed 36-place higher Bahrain 7-0 in their opening group fixture.

Now they face the group's top-ranked Myanmar (55) at their own backyard in a fixture which could potentially decide the one team to progress.

The match will get underway at the Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon at 3:30pm Bangladesh time.

This will be a rematch of the 2018 meeting between the two sides in an Olympic Qualifier at the same venue where the hosts had inflicted a 5-0 defeat on a vastly inferior Bangladesh team.

That was the only time these two teams had faced at this level, but Bangladesh have grown from strength to strength in the intervening years, conquering the SAFF region twice and challenging teams beyond South Asia -- teams that are far above them in FIFA rankings.

The hosts, too, have started the campaign with a bang, handing Turkmenistan, the lowest-ranked side in the group, an 8-0 defeat.

Bangladesh coach Peter Butler knows Myanmar will be a different challenge altogether.

"I do believe Myanmar will present a completely different challenge. They're more technically gifted. They'll have a partisan crowd behind them. But we'll be ready for them," the Englishman said after

Sunday's victory.

Butler's charges would definitely want to grab at least one point from this fixture, if not three, which would keep them in the race, especially given that Bangladesh would get to play the last match of the group against Turkmenistan, knowing the equation they would need to achieve to progress.

The players, though, are looking to get all three points.

"We're all focused and are concentrating on the big match tomorrow. The coach will inform us about his game plan in the evening's team meeting. We hope to have a good game and come out with a victory," midfielder Sapna Rani Mondal, who had an impactful outing in the first match, said after yesterday morning's training session.

Forward Shaheda Akter Ripa said: "We are all ready for a competitive match tomorrow. Our target will be to win so that we can qualify."

While Myanmar will be favourites on paper, Bangladesh's dominant display against a physically stronger Bahrain side showed they are no pushovers.

A similar performance against Myanmar could well script another memorable chapter in Bangladesh women's football.

Rankings often lie, just ask WOMEN'S TEAM

KHALID HOSSAIN

If FIFA rankings were the only yardstick to measure footballing pedigree, Bangladesh's 7–0 demolition of Bahrain in the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026 Qualifiers would be filed under "upset." However, Sunday's result felt more like a long-overdue statement than a shock.

Much of the local media reaction leaned into that disparity, painting the result as a massive upset.

But here's the catch: the scoreline flattered Bahrain more than it exaggerated Bangladesh's brilliance. It was a polished performance -- fast, fluid, and familiar -- from a side whose fans have come to expect this brand of football, especially after two successive SAFF titles.

This is a team that have recently held Jordan (75th ranked) and Indonesia (95) away from home. This is a team that have won back-to-back SAFF titles, beating Nepal (100) on their home turf both times. And this is a team that, despite the popular narratives, went toe-to-toe with India (70) in tense, physical, high-stakes matches -- and emerged as the better side when it mattered.

Yet they are ranked 128th. Why?

The answer, as frustrating as it is familiar, lies in the calendar -- or rather, the absence of one.

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Ten months of being idle while the rest of the continent moved forward. Ten months where Bangladesh Football Federation failed to build on the biggest achievement in the team's history.

Olympic qualifiers were missed. No high-profile friendlies. The reason? "Budget issues", according to the federation.

In a ranking system that rewards frequency as much as results, the stagnation was predictable. While neighbours like India and Nepal stayed active on the international stage, Bangladesh slipped into obscurity on paper. Not in spirit, not in talent, but in numbers.

But numbers don't always tell the truth.

Ask coach Peter Butler. The Englishman who had guide the team in their SAFF Championship title defence last year, believes that Indonesia, despite being ranked lower, were a tougher test than Jordan. Ask the players, who have shown time and again that they don't need to be ranked higher to outperform the names above them.

And ask anyone who watched them against Bahrain (92).

Myanmar will be a different kind of challenge, though. Ranked 55th, experienced in five Asian Cups, with players honing their skills in elite AFC club competitions -- they represent the next tier that Bangladesh are trying to reach.

But if anything, today's match will offer another chance to highlight the same point: that Bangladesh have outgrown their ranking. The numbers just haven't caught up yet.

PHOTO: REUTERS

World number one Jannik Sinner eased effortlessly into the second round at Wimbledon, as neither the stifling heat nor fellow Italian Luca Nardi could knock him out of his comfort zone in a 6-4, 6-3, 6-0 victory on Tuesday. Returning to the Grand Slam stage for the first time since his epic French Open final defeat by Carlos Alcaraz, the three-time major winner had a much less testing workout against world number 95 Nardi.

Kalidou Koulibaly celebrates scoring a header during Saudi Pro League outfit Al-Hilal's stunning 4-3 win over Premier League giants Manchester City in a round of 16 Club World Cup game in Orlando on Monday. City took the lead in the game, but still were the ones to get ousted from the tournament as Al-Hilal set up a quarterfinal against Brazil's Fluminense, who shocked Champions League finalist Inter Milan in the other game of the day.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Stokes relishing Pant battle

AFP, *Birmingham*

England captain Ben Stokes said Tuesday he "absolutely loves" watching Rishabh Pant play cricket even when he's on the receiving end of the India star's outrageous stroke-play.

Pant became only the second wicketkeeper in Test history to score hundreds in both innings of a match against England at Headingley, although his heroics were unable to prevent a five-wicket defeat last week that left the hosts 1-0 up in a five-match contest.

Pant went on to produce an array of extraordinary strokes, including over-the-shoulder ramp shots off fast bowlers.

Stokes, well capable of aggressive batting himself, expects more fireworks from Pant, even if he hopes to limit the Indian's runs after scores of 134 and 118.

"Even though he's my opposition, I absolutely love watching Rishabh play cricket," said Stokes during a press conference on the eve of the second Test at Edgbaston starting Wednesday.

"Credit to him, two hundreds in the game, (but) we know we're going to get our chances with the way Rishabh plays. On a different day, it could have looked a little bit different if one of those had gone straight to hand.

"He's a very dangerous player. We know what he brings to the Indian team, but I really enjoy watching Rishabh play cricket."

A relatively youthful India team, with new captain Shubman Gill leading from the front with a century, were competitive for much of the time at Headingley in a match England won after pulling off the tenth-highest chase in Test history by scoring 371.

But batting collapses of 7-41, after they had been 430-3, and 6-31, from 333-4, proved costly for India in Leeds.

No cricket team faces such intense scrutiny as India, who have now lost seven of their 11 Tests under coach Gautam Gambhir, given the mass enthusiasm for the sport in the world's most populous nation.

"I think it's pretty clear that there's always pressure on the shoulders of international sportsmen," said Stokes. "But playing for India, especially in cricket, there's probably a bit more of it than any other nation. But we don't take anything for granted from last week."