



## Deja vu danger hangs over Pakistan

STAR SPORTS DESK

Two-time champions Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates meet today in Dubai for what is effectively a knockout in the Asia Cup 2025.

Both sides have beaten Oman but lost heavily to India, leaving this final Group B fixture as a straight shootout for a place in the Super Four.

For Pakistan, the stakes carry an uncomfortable echo of last year. In the 2024 T20 World Cup, they failed to progress past the group stage after a shocking defeat to hosts USA. Now, once again, defeat to the hosts would mean an early exit, a scenario that would further fuel doubts over their big-match temperament.

They arrive under pressure after a chastening loss to India. While their earlier victory and net run-rate advantage provide a cushion, history is also on their side: Pakistan have won all three previous meetings with the UAE, including two recent encounters in Sharjah.

The UAE, meanwhile, view this as a chance to create history. A win today would secure their first-ever Super Four berth – a milestone moment on home soil.

## NCL T20 mess highlights BCB's lack of foresight

SPORTS REPORTER

Incessant rain has finally forced the postponement of the NCL T20 tournament for an indefinite period, the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) tournament committee confirmed yesterday.

The NCL T20 is the country's second-most important T20 competition, after the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). With the national team still far behind modern T20 standards, the tournament could have been an ideal platform for youngsters to sharpen their skills. However, that opportunity has now been severely hampered due to scheduling complications, largely stemming from BCB's lack of foresight.

Questions have been raised about why the tournament, which carries significant weight for domestic players, was scheduled in September – right in the middle of the rainy season.

"The way the grounds are at the moment due to heavy rain, even in the next seven days, play was impossible," said a player who traveled from Bogura to Rajshahi for matches before the postponement was announced.

"We just practice and go back to our hotel. We were so excited to play the tournament, but since no matches took place, everyone is frustrated. We don't have any control over the weather, so we're just hoping things improve from here," the player added.

If Bangladesh are to develop T20 capabilities, the tournament must be held under the right conditions. Across the world, good sporting tracks and flat surfaces are the norm in T20 cricket. Even if such conditions were ensured, the rainy season in September



was always going to disrupt proceedings.

When the BPL – Bangladesh's premier franchise T20 event – has frequently failed to meet expectations, the NCL T20 had raised hopes among players that it would offer something better.

Last year, the tournament was held in November, with rain not being an issue. That allowed the competition to take place in good spirits, giving younger players a chance to showcase their abilities in a format where Bangladesh has historically lagged.

With the T20 World Cup scheduled for February-March next year, identifying new talents to address gaps in the pipeline and keeping players engaged through regular T20 cricket should have been a clear priority.

Sources revealed that ground conditions

in Bogura and Rajshahi were abysmal due to rain, as the venues suffer from poor drainage systems. Since Bogura's Shaheed Chandu Stadium was set to host cricket again after a long gap, it would have been more prudent to schedule matches there later in the tournament.

Now, the remainder of the tournament will be played in Sylhet. While there was huge fan interest in Bogura, the same hype is unlikely in Sylhet, which already hosts international cricket regularly.

Bangladesh featured in their landmark 200th T20I last night against Afghanistan in the ongoing Asia Cup in Abu Dhabi. However, back home, BCB is yet to properly organise a tournament that is a potential platform for developing future T20 stars.

## What to WATCH

**T SPORTS**  
Asia Cup T20  
UAE vs Pakistan  
Live from 8:30 pm  
**SONY SPORTS 1, 2, 5**  
Champions League

PSG vs Atalanta  
Live from 1:00 am (Thursday)  
Bayern vs Chelsea  
Live from 1:00 am (Thursday)  
Liverpool vs Atletico Madrid  
Live from 1:00 am (Thursday)

## Can Tigresses take inspiration from Miracle at Lord's?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's cricket is gearing up for the ICC Women's World Cup, set to be held in India and Sri Lanka from September 30, and the team received a timely boost of motivation in Dhaka yesterday.

The High Commission of India hosted the Tigresses in a tea party, marking their upcoming participation in the 50-over global extravaganza.

During the event, Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma presented a copy of *Miracle at Lord's* by Srenik Sett to the Bangladesh Cricket Board's women's wing chairman, Nazmul Abedeen Fahim. The book recounts India men's team's sensational journey to the 1983 World Cup triumph, and Verma expressed hope that the Tigresses would draw inspiration from that historic victory.

The gesture comes at a crucial time, with Nigar Sultana Joty and company set to depart for Colombo on September 23. This will be only their second appearance at a World Cup, following their debut in 2022 in New Zealand, and they enter the eight-team tournament with modest expectations, much like India did 42 years ago.

Preparation, however, has been less than ideal. The Tigresses have not played any international



**The gesture from High Commission of India comes at a crucial time, with Bangladesh set to depart for Colombo on September 23 ahead of the ICC Women's World Cup.**

match since the World Cup Qualifiers in April. In addition, two women's teams featuring national players suffered defeats to Bangladesh men's U-15 side in recent practice matches.

Still, the encouragement from the High Commission serves as a reminder that, in cricket, upsets are always possible and that even the underdogs can create moments of history.

Apart from the players, officials, and coaching staff, women's umpire Shathira Jakir Jessy – poised to become Bangladesh's first female World Cup umpire – also attended the two-and-a-half-hour programme. The team presented a signed bat, a World Cup jersey, and a crest to the High Commissioner as tokens of appreciation.

"It's a great feeling to be here. Before coming here, we had a luncheon programme hosted by our board president. The Indian High Commission also showcased great hospitality for us. The High Commissioner encouraged our players, and I hope the girls will take inspiration from his words," head coach Sarwar Imran said after the programme.

The event also included several photo sessions with officials of the High Commission of India. One senior official lightened the mood by saying that he expects Bangladesh to win the trophy, adding that he could then claim to have a photograph of the winning team. While far from reality, the remark highlighted the spirit of encouragement and belief that the Tigresses can carry into the tournament.

## Blockbuster night as PSG, Liverpool, Bayern open UCL campaigns

STAR SPORTS DESK

The opening matchday of the Champions League group stage continues on Wednesday with a mouth-watering set of fixtures. Reigning champions PSG begin their title defence, Liverpool face familiar foes in Atletico Madrid, Chelsea revisit old memories in Munich, and last season's finalists Inter travel to Amsterdam for a historic clash with Ajax. Early in the evening, Olympiacos host Pafos, while Slavia Praha take on Bodo/Glimt.

Here's a closer look at the headline fixtures:

### PSG vs Atalanta

The defending champions launch their campaign at home to 2023-24 Europa League winners Atalanta. History favours the holders as only one of the last 30 reigning champions have lost their opening match in the following season (W19 D10), though that lone defeat came against Italian opposition – Liverpool's 2-0 loss at Napoli in 2019-20. PSG forward Khvicha Kvaratskhelia remains doubtful along with Ballon d'Or favourite Ousmane Dembele



due to injuries.

### Liverpool vs Atletico Madrid

Liverpool are among the favourites for the trophy but face a stern test against familiar rivals. Since knocking Liverpool out in 2019-20, Atletico have struggled against English oppositions, winning just one of their last eight encounters (D2 L5). Liverpool, by

contrast, have won their last four Champions League group/league matches against Spanish sides, including a double over Atletico in 2021-22. Atletico will be without striker Julian Alvarez, sidelined with a knock sustained against Villarreal, while Liverpool's marquee signing Alexander Isak will have to wait on the bench for his debut.

### Bayern Munich vs Chelsea

In a repeat of the 2012 Champions League final – won by Chelsea on penalties – Bayern Munich host the Blues at the Allianz Arena. Their most recent meetings came in the 2019-20 round of 16, when Bayern cruised to a 7-1 aggregate win. Chelsea enter the clash as Club World Cup holders but face daunting odds. Since 2003-04, Bayern have recorded the highest win percentage (73%) in the group/league phase of the competition, winning 93 of their 128 matches.

### Ajax vs Inter

Two European heavyweights meet in Amsterdam as Ajax take on last season's runners-up Inter Milan. Though the Dutch side boasts a storied history with very little to show for in recent years, they have never beaten Inter in four previous Champions League meetings (D1 L3). The fixture is steeped in history as it's a repeat of the 1972 European Cup final. Adding another layer of intrigue, coaches John Heitinga (Ajax) and Cristian Chivu (Inter) were former teammates at Ajax from 2001-03.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Eight warm-ups lined up for U-21s before Junior Hockey World Cup

The Bangladesh U-21 national hockey team will play four practice matches against Malaysia this month and four more against Austria and Switzerland next month as part of their preparation for the FIH Men's Hockey Junior World Cup in November in India. Head coach Siegfried Gottlieb Aikman is focusing on building defensive discipline and humility within the team, who have been placed in Pool F alongside Australia, France, and Switzerland.