Star SPORT
DHAKA SUNDAY OCTOBER 19, 2025, KARTIK 3, 1432 BS

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
ICC Women's World Cup
India vs England
Live from 3:30 pm
STAR SPORTS 1
Australia vs India
1st ODI
Live from 9:30 pm
STAR SPORTS SELECT HD1
Premier League
Tottenham vs Aston Villa
Live from 7:00 pm
Liverpool vs Man Utd
Live from 9:30 pm

ECHOES OF A LOST ROAR

RAMIN TALUKDER

As the sunlight dimmed and a thin mist drifted beneath the floodlights, the Mirpur evening yesterday felt strangely hollow. It was Bangladesh's first of three ODIs against the West Indies, yet the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on a weekend stood like a forgotten relic.

Rows of empty seats glowed under the lights, as if waiting for voices that never came. The ground, where once thousands roared at every wicket and every run, now echoed only with the wind.

Outside, the old vibrancy had faded too. Flag sellers sat hunched on dusty pavements. Delwar, who has sold flags here for twelve years, smiled faintly. "Brother, before ten in the morning everything used to be sold out. Now it's evening, and I've thirty left. People don't come anymore, and neither does that excitement. What's the point of waving a flag when no one believes the team can win?"

A few feet away, a young ticket scalper tried selling 300-taka tickets for 500. No one even looked. He dropped his price to 350, pleading for a little profit. Still, no takers. Even the tea stalls around the ground, once alive with heated debates over dropped catches or missed yorkers, now stand in dull silence.

Not too long ago, this gallery was once the heartbeat of the nation's cricketing dream. When the ICC granted Test status in 2000, it was said to be the passion of the fans that swayed them. Those fans have seemingly drifted away, along with their drums and whistles.

Jubair Rashid, a corporate employee from Dhaka, sat quietly in the stands. "A friend gave me free tickets," he said. "I called a few old cricket-loving friends, but no one wanted to come. They said, 'What's the point? To watch us lose again?' That's when I realised -- cricket's no longer a festival. Even the habit's gone." His eyes carried a faint sadness, like the last flicker of a once bright flame.

Inside the ground, the Bangladesh team looked drained of spark, and the crowd, thin as it was, watched without hope. The sting of the recent whitewash against Afghanistan still lingered.

"The team feels like the night sky," a spectator murmured. "The stars have gone out, and only darkness remains."

Yet, amid the gloom, a few voices still carried light-heartedness. Saiful from Dhanmondi sat beside his wife, smiling. "We thought about going to Diya Bari," he said, "but decided to come here instead. Earlier, when someone got out, everyone went silent. Now people laugh instead."

In another corner, a fifth-grader named Nasif from Mirpur Cantonment School watched intently. "Bangladesh are playing, that's why I came," he said, holding a flag nearly his size. His father, Shafiq, added, "We came out of love for the country. If we don't show up, how will they feel encouraged? This money could go elsewhere -- but you can't buy this feeling."

As Bangladesh struggled with the bat, the mood sank again. Boundaries were rare; silence hung heavy. "Never thought I'd see Bangladesh cricket like this," sighed one fan.

With the team lacking the flair that once entertained regardless of results, and the Mirpur wicket producing low-scoring games, fans are drifting away, leaving the stadium eerily quiet.

When the floodlights took over from the fading sun, a few latecomers trickled in, perhaps chasing a memory more than a match. Beneath the stands, a tea seller sighed, "When the team plays badly, even tea doesn't sell," while his little brother sat nearby, waving a small flag absentmindedly.

Perhaps this silence is only a breath before renewal. Under the lights, a lone flag swayed gently in the breeze, as if whispering to the night, "It's the darkest before dawn."

KOHLI, ROHIT take spotlight in Perth

AGENCIES

All eyes in Perth are on Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma as India prepare to face Australia in the opening one-day international on Sunday, marking the duo's first national outing since lifting the Champions Trophy in March.

For India, the three-match series is not just about a new beginning under captain Shubman Gill -- it's also a poignant chapter in the careers of two modern greats who may be playing their final ODI series in Australia.

Gill, 26, admitted the moment carried special weight as he steps into the leadership role once held by his childhood heroes. "Definitely very exciting — big shoes for me to fill carrying over the legacy Virat and Rohit left for us," he said.

"When I was a kid, I used to idolise them. The hunger and consistency they showed inspired me. It's a big honour to lead such legends."

Gill, who already captains in T20Is and Tests, will lead India in ODIs for the first time. Averaging close to 60 with the bat, he believes open communication is key to his leadership style. "I wouldn't shy away from seeking their advice," he said. "I want every player to feel secure in their role."

Australian skipper Mitch Marsh acknowledged the emotional pull surrounding the Indian stars. "A lot of people are going to come and watch them. If it's their last time on Australian soil, I hope they enjoy it," he said, before adding with a grin, "just not too much good cricket from them."

With the 60,000-seat Perth Stadium nearing a sell-out despite rain in the forecast, the match promises both nostalgia and the start of a new era in Indian cricket.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Debutant Mahidul Islam Ankon endured a tough introduction to ODIs on a gloomy day in Mirpur in the series opener against the West Indies yesterday. The right-hander walked in after Bangladesh lost their top three on a wicket that lived up to its ominous look -- unusually dark and treacherous, unforgiving for batters. Ankon battled hard for a 75-ball 46, striking three boundaries, before falling to Roston Chase in the 46th over while attempting an ambitious slog sweep.

Another series of PYRRHIC FORMULAS?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

"We have to target playing 50 overs," Bangladesh skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz made an urgent call after a series of batting debacles in the Afghanistan series. Coming to Mirpur in the West Indies ODIs just a few days later, the batting approach and the pitch on offer have, however, proven to be a suicidal attempt that kills future prospects of batting in a format which underwent significant changes, leaving the Tigers unaware.

The shift in batting modus operandi was evident from the 2023 ODI World Cup in India, where teams targeted scores of 400. It became sort of a norm. Batting debacles aside, Bangladesh had found a template of success in their ODI schemes this decade, targeting a score of 250, a defendable one in Mirpur surface. But the catalyst for upping the batting tempo had never come along, even after subpar results in major multinational events.

When it comes to being ready for the new batting realities in preparation for the 2027 ODI World Cup, Bangladesh are once again falling for short-term results, immediate needs to get the monkey off the back in the West Indies series.

The wicket served at Mirpur wore a dark foreboding. The black soil used helped with bounce, but the scores that could be attained in such spinning surfaces do not match modern ODI expectations. In terms of results, the monkey may be off the back in such surfaces, but it will do nothing to help boost ODI mentality needed for the 2027 World Cup.

Miraz's statement regarding batting 50 overs seems fathomable. After all, Tigers have managed to bat out fifty overs only once this year in nine ODIs. In the last three-match series against Afghanistan, twice they were bowled out in less than 30 overs. If batters' confidence was an issue, it is not likely that it would improve on such Mirpur tracks.

Yet, the batting effort was once again disastrous. The wicket being of somewhat quizzical nature, the two openers, Saif Hassan and Soumya Sarkar, departed even before getting a feel of the wicket.

Struggling batter Najmul Hossain Shanto and Towhid Hridoy stitched together a 71-run stand but took 120 deliveries to get there. Hridoy reached a fifty but took 90 deliveries for his 51. When both batters departed, the middle-order crisis was once again pronounced.

Mahidul Ankon's debut ODI innings of 46 certainly helped keep the innings together, but at the other end, no acceleration came. Miraz himself contributed 17 off 27 deliveries. His batting remains an important factor when taking on Afghanistan mystery spinners, but when the likes of Rashid Khan or Mujeeb Ur Rahman are not in the opponent dugout, the batting template being used in the middle-order remains archaic.

In the 40th over, Bangladesh reached 140 for four with Miraz and Ankon still at the crease. Yet, Tigers managed to fall into the same trap of trying to survive in the death overs with wickets in hand. No impetus or intent was shown, and only 67 were added to the score after the 40-over mark. On top of that, they were bowled out without playing the full quota of fifty overs, an approach neither here nor there.

Rishad Hossain's 13-ball 26 was like water in the desert, but having reached 207 all out, in a format which itself needs to be modernized, Bangladesh's batting template was archaic. It would follow a trend of pyrrhic victories from the past if West Indies struggled on this Mirpur track, but in Bangladesh cricket's context, a series on such a wicket and with such an approach adds very little to a dismal batting template.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH
207 all out in 49.4 overs (Shanto 32, Hridoy 51, Ankon 46; Seales 3-48)

WEST INDIES
133 all out in 39 overs (King 44; Rishad 6-35, Mustafiz 2-16)

RESULT
Bangladesh won by 74 runs.

PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH
Rishad Hossain.