

World awaits NEW QUEENS OF CRICKET

Both India and South Africa stand on the cusp of history, eyeing their first-ever ICC Women's World Cup title as they face off in the all-important final at the Dr DY Patil Sports Academy in Navi Mumbai today. While South Africa bounced back from the embarrassment of being bowled out for 69 and 97 earlier in the tournament, India defied the odds in a record run chase to deny reigning champions Australia in a thrilling semifinal.

South Africa will take confidence from the fact that they have beaten India in each of their last three World Cup encounters, including a three-wicket win earlier in this edition. India, on the other hand, have won the other three of the six matches played between the two sides in the competition's history.

India, however, boast a strong

overall WODI record against South Africa -- winning 20 and losing 13 of the 34 matches played, with one game ending in no result.

This is the first ODI World Cup final that features neither Australia nor England.

India are set to play their third ODI World Cup final, after appearances in 2005 and 2017. No team has played three finals without lifting the trophy.

South Africa have smashed 31 sixes in this World Cup -- the most by any team.

South Africa skipper Laura Wolvaardt is just 40 runs away from surpassing Australia's Alyssa Healy's record for most runs in a single World Cup edition. Healy scored 509 runs in 2022, while Wolvaardt has 470 so far in this edition.



With the whole crowd behind India, it will be a great opportunity.... But at the same time, I think it puts a lot of pressure on them. I think it sort of plays in our favour.

South Africa captain LAURA WOLVAARDT

Women's cricket moved ahead and we saw many girls on the ground. So I am sure that if we win this final, we will see many more changes and we will see more cricket, not only on the international level but also on the domestic level.

India captain HARMANPREET KAUR

Shanto remains Test captain

SPORTS REPORTER

Najmul Hossain Shanto will continue as the captain of the Bangladesh Test team until the conclusion of the 2025-2027 ICC World Test Championship cycle, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced on Saturday.

The announcement also ended recent speculations regarding the Test captaincy. The southpaw batter had announced he was stepping down at the end of the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka in June after being stripped of ODI captaincy without prior notice.

Shanto, who first took over the Test captaincy in 2023, has so far led Bangladesh in 14 Test matches, winning four, losing nine and drawing one.

BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul said the decision reflects the board's confidence in the 27-year-old batter's leadership and his vision for Bangladesh's red-ball cricket.

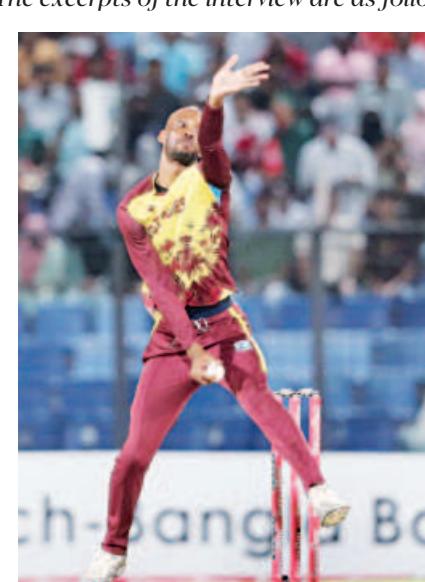
"Shanto has shown composure, commitment, and a deep understanding of Test cricket. Under his leadership, we have seen growth and belief in the team. The board feels that continuity in leadership will serve us well as we move forward in this new Test Championship cycle."

Expressing his appreciation, Shanto said: "I feel truly honoured to continue leading the Bangladesh Test team, and I am very grateful to the Board for the faith and trust they have shown in my captaincy."

'We tend to block all outside noise'

West Indies cricket hasn't enjoyed much success in recent times. Alongside their on-field struggles across all three formats, they also face numerous problems, including financial issues, reform in the board, and players' welfare issues. Roston Chase, who is a familiar face across all three formats for the Caribbean side and also their Test skipper, recently talked to The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan on the recent and upcoming events, including the two-tier system in Test cricket and the T20 World Cup.

The excerpts of the interview are as follows:



cricket. How do you see that system? Do you think teams like West Indies and Bangladesh will be hugely affected by it?

RC: I don't have many thoughts about the two-tier system. It's not something that has been put in place; it's just ideas that people have been throwing around. If it's supposed to happen, it will happen.

DS: The T20 World Cup is coming up in the next couple of months in India and Sri Lanka. How do you see your side, given it's been a while since West Indies last won the World Cup?

RC: I think we have a good, well-balanced group of guys -- a good core group, especially from the guys that played in the last T20 World Cup [in 2024]. I think there will be some familiar faces.

DS: A lot of things are happening in West Indies cricket regarding financial issues and on-field struggles. How do you actually see all these things?

RC: We just tend to block all the outside noise. We don't really listen to social media and stuff like that. We just come as a team, sit down, come up with ideas about how we can win games and how we can consistently perform.

'Better to play my brand of attacking cricket'

Soumya Sarkar has a flair that sets him apart from most Bangladeshi batters -- something he showcased in the recent ODI series against the West Indies, where he struck a blistering 91 in the third ODI on a difficult Mirpur wicket. The 32-year-old spoke to The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi about his career, maintaining belief through ups and downs, and his approach to batting. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): In Mirpur, during the third ODI against the West Indies, you batted aggressively on a tough wicket. What was your secret?

Soumya Sarkar (SS): Not really a secret, but there have been gradual changes in my game. Against Afghanistan or the West Indies, I couldn't make some innings bigger, but the process was the same. The wicket was tough (against West Indies) -- in the first match, I got out early, and in the second, I tried to stick around after early wickets fell, thinking I could cover later, but the pitch didn't allow that. Realising I could get out anytime, I felt it was better to play my brand of attacking cricket in the last game.

DS: Was there any special emphasis on footwork?

SS: No. Everyone's footwork is different. I never tried to change mine. Some have big movements, some small. I just wanted to bring changes to my work ethic, practice, among other things.

DS: Have you tried anything different? Players often talk about "process,"

but it's different for everyone. What process brought you runs?

SS: Runs only give you confidence, nothing else. Sometimes you don't score even on good batting wickets because you're low on confidence, your footwork isn't right, or you're not connecting well. Runs bring positivity, which helps a lot.

DS: Do you follow the same process in ODIs and domestic cricket? How do you judge success and failure?

SS: Scoring runs gives confidence for the next game, but every innings is a new beginning. The next day, you face the first ball again, so you have to start fresh. A consistent routine increases your chances of success.

DS: You've been in and out of the national side. Even after scoring in ODIs against the West Indies, you were dropped for the T20Is. How hard is it to stay confident?

DS: Do you regret not becoming a full-time all-rounder?

SS: It's the same for everyone. Whether



senior or junior, when you return to the team, you have to readjust to the setup and international cricket. If you start well, it becomes easier; if not, you can overthink. Players must fix things themselves and adapt.

DS: Do the first 10 deliveries determine how you'll perform?

SS: Not exactly. It's your routine and discipline that determine your chances of success. That's how confidence grows.

DS: Earlier, you wanted to contribute as an all-rounder. What led you to focus on opening again?

SS: I've always been confident as an opener. I still bowl, but I don't get regular chances. Usually, I get the ball in tough situations when the main bowlers couldn't do much. If I had bowled regularly, it might've been different.

DS: Do you regret not becoming a full-time all-rounder?

SS: Not really. I'm established as a batter.

Earlier, it was tough to be a third seamer -- when I debuted, the team usually played one pacer and more spinners. Now we play three seamers, but back then it was different.

DS: Despite doing well in the third ODI, you weren't in the T20I side. Thoughts?

SS: Not really. If I get the call again, I'll go and play.

DS: You once said your batch hasn't become seniors even after 10 years. Do you still think so? and , do you feel your responsibility has increased now?

SS: I've played for 10 years, but during that time, players like Tamim [Iqbal] bhai and Shakib [Al Hasan] bhai were there, so our names didn't come forward. When they left, juniors came in, so there's no senior or junior now. If they had retired earlier, maybe we'd have been the seniors. But since we were in and out while they were still playing, that's why I said it. And yes, obviously, everyone in a team of 11 has responsibilities -- I always feel that as a player.



Real Madrid forward Kylian Mbappe, who scored 31 goals in his debut LaLiga season, was presented with his first-ever European Golden Boot award on Friday for 2024-25 in front of his teammates at the Santiago Bernabeu. Mbappe secured 62 points, finishing ahead of Sporting CP's Viktor Gyokeres (58.5) and Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (58).



CHESS WORLD CUP Neer earns draw, Fahad beaten

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's International Masters Manon Reza Neer and Fahad Rahman began their campaigns at the World Chess Cup 2025, which started on Saturday in Goa, with contrasting fortunes. Neer earned an impressive draw against a much higher-rated opponent, while Fahad suffered defeat in his opening game.

Playing with the white pieces, Neer held Norway's Grandmaster Aryan Tari (rating 2631) to a draw, despite having a rating of 2369. Neer will play the second game on Sunday with the black pieces. If that game also ends in a draw, the match will move to rapid games, and if still undecided, blitz tiebreakers will follow. The winner of the match will qualify for the second round.

In contrast, Fahad faced a tough opponent in Ukraine's Grandmaster Vasyl Ivanchuk, who is rated around 200 points higher than him (Ivanchuk 2616, Fahad 2416). He will now play with the black pieces on Sunday and must win to stay alive in the tournament.

Naim, Mahfijul put Mymensingh in strong position

SPORTS REPORTER

Openers Mohammad Naim and Mahfijul Islam Robin struck centuries to put Mymensingh Division in a strong position against Rangpur Division on the opening day of the second round of the National Cricket League's (NCL) longer version in Cox's Bazar on Saturday.

Electing to bat, Mymensingh enjoyed a flying start as Naim and Mahfijul added 220 runs for the opening wicket. Naim made 111 off 163 balls with nine fours and two sixes to register his fourth first-class hundred, while Mahfijul struck his maiden ton, scoring 127 off 228 balls with 14 boundaries. Their efforts guided Mymensingh to a solid 281 for two at the stumps.

At the other Cox's Bazar venue, Chattogram Division also dominated with the bat against Barishal Division. Opener Sadikur Rahman hit a career-best 122 off 174 balls, while former national skipper Monimul Haque remained unbeaten on 84, as Chattogram reached 260 for four at the close of play.

In Mirpur, Rajshahi Division's spinners took charge, bundling out Khulna Division for just 121. Nihaduzzaman and Meherob Hasan grabbed three wickets each, while Mrittunjoy Chowdhury top-scored with 23. Rajshahi ended the day on 87 for three, trailing by 34 runs, with all three wickets taken by Mehidy Hasan Miraz.

In Sylhet, only 43.1 overs were possible due to rain and bad light, as Dhaka Division reached 120 for five. Mahidul Islam Ankon remained not out on 36 for Dhaka while Sylhet pacers Ebadot Hossain (3-49) and Khaled Ahmed (2-25) shared the wickets.



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PHOTO: REUTERS