

## A career that opened doors

AGENCIES

Australia will bid farewell to Usman Khawaja at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday, with the veteran left-hander confirming that the fifth and final Ashes Test against England will be his last appearance in international cricket.

The 39-year-old will end his career at the same venue and against the same opponents as his Test debut in 2011. Australia already hold an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match contest, with their only defeat coming in Melbourne, where England carved out their first Test victory in Australia in 15 years. But Khawaja's announcement has shifted the focus of the finale to his personal journey.

"I'm very happy that I get to leave on my own terms at the SCG," said an emotional Khawaja, who was seen hugging his kids after the press conference. "It's nostalgic. It's special. As I walk off for the last time, I do so with gratitude and peace, or, as we say, salaam."

Born in Islamabad, Khawaja immigrated to Australia as a child and went on to become the country's first Pakistan-born and first Muslim Test cricketer. At one stage, he was the only Asian first-class player in Australia, a path that he said was shaped by persistent stereotyping.

"I'm a proud Muslim coloured boy from Pakistan who was told that he would never play for the Australian cricket team. Look at me now, and you can do the same," he said, adding that he was subjected to "racial stereotypes" during his career.

This will be Khawaja's 88th Test, having



already scored 6,206 runs at an average of 43.39 with 16 centuries, including a career-best 232 against Sri Lanka last year. He also represented Australia in 40 one-day internationals and nine T20Is.

The current Ashes series proved turbulent for the veteran. He injured his back in the opening Test in Perth and was replaced by Travis Head in the second innings. He missed the Brisbane Test, was initially omitted for Adelaide before being recalled when Steve Smith fell ill, and then made 82 and 40 at number four. In the fourth Test in Melbourne, he scored 29 and 0.

Khawaja said the criticism he received after his injury was particularly confronting. He described being labelled 'lazy' and 'selfish' over his preparation, remarks he said reflected lingering racial stereotyping.

Despite the upheaval, he said that being left out in Adelaide signalled it was time to move on. The fifth Test at Sydney will now serve as the final chapter of a 15-year international career that began, and will end, at the SCG.

## Fizz fastest pacer to 400 T20 wickets

Bangladesh's Mustafizur Rahman became the fastest pacer to reach 400 T20 wickets during a Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. Playing for Rangpur Riders, the left-arm pacer, who began his 315th T20 match on 399 wickets, claimed his 400th scalp by dismissing Sylhet Titans captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz. In the process, he surpassed Pakistan pacer Wahab Riaz, who needed 335 matches to reach the landmark. Mustafizur also became the second-fastest overall to enter the 400-wicket club, with only Afghanistan spin king Rashid Khan getting there quicker in 289 games. The cutter master is now the 11th player to take 400 T20 wickets and the second from Bangladesh after Shakib Al Hasan, who required 353 matches to reach the milestone.

PHOTO: BCB

🔥 Fizz for Bangladesh: 158 wickets in 128 matches

🔥 Fizz in franchise cricket: 244 wickets in 187 matches



## BPL form not enough for T20 World Cup nod?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has reportedly already submitted the preliminary squad for the ICC T20 World Cup to the ICC and according to sources, is expected to make it public today.

As per rumours, the preliminary squad doesn't have many surprises. Jaker Ali, who has been struggling for form for a while, has reportedly been axed while Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and young pacer Ripon Mondol, despite impressing in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), have not been included.

Shanto is the top-scorer in the BPL this season after four games, amassing 203 runs at an average of 67.66 and strike-rate of just over 147. He is also the only batter to have hit a ton this BPL, a 60-ball unbeaten 101 against Sylhet Titans for Rajshahi Warriors.

Shanto's inclusion was pondered, according to BCB sources, but it was decided not to add him as his usual No.3 position is locked up for T20 skipper Litton Das and the management is grooming Parvez Hossain Emon, who is in second position in the BPL run-getter's list, for No.4.

This leaves only the opening slots for Shanto, which are earmarked for Tanzid Hasan Tamim and vice-captain



Saif Hassan.

Even though Shanto has outshone both of them so far in the BPL, with Tanzid making 61 in four innings and Saif managing three single-digit scores till date, the selectors perhaps felt their knocks for the Tigers in T20Is last year are a better indicator of their calibre than BPL performances.

A BCB source also said that the team management was reluctant to name Shanto in the squad only to bench him.

The BCB, however, have till January 20 to make changes to the squad, and if the openers don't start performing in the BPL and Shanto keeps scoring big runs, there remains a slight chance of him making a last-minute comeback, as per sources.

Meanwhile, for Rajshahi pacer Ripon,

who was named the player-of-the-match in both matches he has played so far, the World Cup perhaps comes too fast for his selection as the team management appears to be depending on the tried and tested.

The 22-year-old picked up 4-13 against Noakhali Express, took the game against Rangpur Riders into the Super Over while defending only seven in the 20th over and then bowled a six-run Super Over to set up a tremendous win. However, with a settled pace attack in place, the selectors chose not to add him as a surprise inclusion.

There is a gaping hole in the rumoured squad in terms of batting options, with the management looking at all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin to fill the gap at No.7 left vacant by Jaker's exclusion while also making an impact with his death-over bowling skills in Kolkata, where the Tigers will play three of their four group matches.

Despite the wafer-thin middle-order and no genuine batter as a back-up, the management is reluctant to add a new face. "This team has been groomed for the last one year. Given it is a World Cup, when you introduce someone new, it is difficult to manage in terms of team combinations. Apart from [Mahidul Islam] Ankon and Shanto, there are not too many options either [for inclusions]," an official informed.

## Tigers' 2026 home fixtures

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) revealed its full home fixtures for the year for the first time, doing so for the 2026 season on Friday.

Pakistan ODI series

1st ODI: March 12

2nd ODI: March 14

3rd ODI: March 16

3rd ODI: June 11

1st T20I: June 15

2nd T20I: June 18

3rd T20I: June 20

New Zealand ODI & T20I series

1st ODI: April 17

2nd ODI: April 20

3rd ODI: April 23

1st T20I: April 27

2nd T20I: April 29

3rd T20I: May 2

Pakistan Test series (WTC)

1st Test: May 8-12

2nd Test: May 16-20

Australia ODI & T20I series

1st ODI: June 5

2nd ODI: June 8

India ODI & T20I series

1st ODI: September 1

2nd ODI: September 3

3rd ODI: September 6

1st T20I: September 9

2nd T20I: September 12

3rd T20I: September 13

West Indies Tests (WTC)

3-day warm-up: October 22-24

1st Test: October 28-1

November

2nd Test: November 5-9



“It allows all related parties to plan their programmes accordingly. By knowing the international schedule, local cricket can be scheduled to prepare players for upcoming international matches. It also helps manage logistical issues. However, there is still a little possibility of changes if an absolute necessity arises.

BCB cricket operations chairman  
Nazmul Abedeen Fahim

## Bangladesh name U-19 WC squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Pacer Al Fahad returned to the fold as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Friday announced a 15-member squad for the upcoming ICC Under-19 World Cup, to be held in Zimbabwe and Namibia from January 15.

Fahad, who missed the recent ACC U-19 Asia Cup in the UAE due to injury, is the only change from the Asia Cup squad, replacing fellow pacer Md Sobuj, who has been named among the seven standbys.

Azizul Hakim Tamim will lead the Junior Tigers in the global event, with Zawad Abrar appointed vice-captain.

**Bangladesh squad:** Azizul Hakim Tamim (c), Zawad Abrar (vc), Samiun Basir Ratul, Sheikh Parvez Jibon, Rizan Hossan, Shaharia Al Amin, Shadin Islam, Md Abdullah, Farid Hasan Faysal, Kalam Siddiki Aleen, Rifat Beg, Saad Islam Razin, Al Fahad, Shahriar Ahmed and Iqbal Hossain Emon.

## Sudan seek more than a win

AGENCIES

When Sudan face Senegal in the Africa Cup of Nations last-16 clash on Saturday, the team will be carrying a hope that goes far beyond football – that a win might bring a moment of calm, or even a path toward peace, in a country devastated by war.

Coach Kwesi Appiah said on Friday that Sudan are clinging to the belief that success on the pitch can help ease the suffering at home, where fighting has raged since April 2023 between the Sudanese army and a paramilitary group that evolved from the Janjaweed militia once mobilised to suppress unrest in Darfur.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and pushed large parts of the country into famine. Yet Sudan's players have continued to compete in exile, reaching the knockout stage of the Africa Cup of Nations for only the second time since their lone triumph in 1970.

Asked about the impact of the war on his squad, Appiah struggled to contain his emotions.

"Most of the time I try to run away from these questions because the emotions are terrible," he said. "It is not something that we want to talk about, but we are hoping that if we win, it will let



the war calm down or even cease."

The Ghanaian-born coach recalled a moment from a recent World Cup qualifier that showed football's power.

"There was a game we won when the armies put their guns down, and everyone was celebrating. Football can change things in this world," he said.

Sudan have not been able to play a home match for the past three years, with much of their football infrastructure damaged by the fighting. The country's top two clubs have relocated to Rwanda, competing as guests in the local league, while Khartoum's Al Hilal have also reached the group stage of this season's Champions League.

Captain Bakht Khamis said the toll of exile has been immense, yet he stressed that the players have remained united in their purpose.

"It's very hard on us to live away from our families, from our homes.

Everything we are doing on the pitch is an attempt to make things better for our people," Khamis said.

As Sudan prepare to meet heavily favoured Senegal in Tangier, the match represents not just a chance to extend their Cup of Nations run, but a rare opportunity to offer their nation a moment of hope in the midst of turmoil.



Border Guard Bangladesh players catch a Bangladesh Navy raider during the first semifinal of the of National Kabaddi Championship (men's event) at the Shaheed Captain M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium in Dhaka on Friday. BGB edged Navy 40-37 in a keenly contested affair to set up Saturday's final against Bangladesh Army, who beat Bangladesh Air Force 33-30 in the other semifinal. Meanwhile, the women's final, also scheduled for today, will be between Bangladesh Police and Bangladesh Ansar &VDP.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED