



## EPIC MELBOURNE MARATHONS

### Djokovic sets up Alcaraz meet in final



**Carlos Alcaraz survived cramp and a five-hour battle against Alexander Zverev's punishing first serve to reach his first Australian Open final, edging 6-4, 7-6(5), 6-7(3), 6-7(4), 7-5 under the sweltering Melbourne sun at the Rod Laver Arena yesterday. The 22-year-old Spaniard showed grit and precision, setting up a final with Novak Djokovic, who beat reigning two-time champion Jannik Sinner 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 in another marathon semifinal.**

• The five-hour and 27-minute semifinal between Alcaraz and Zverev became the longest semifinal ever played at the tournament and the third-longest match overall.

• Alcaraz (22 years 258 days) is the youngest player in the Open Era to reach the Men's Singles Final at all four Grand Slams, surpassing Jim Courier (22 years 300 days). He is also the youngest to reach four consecutive Men's Singles Finals at Grand Slams,

breaking Jannik Sinner's record (23 years 318 days).

• The 38-year-old Djokovic became the oldest man to reach the Australian Open final in the professional era.

• 18 years after his first Melbourne crown, Djokovic will strive for a record-extending 11th against Alcaraz and the unprecedented 25th Grand Slam title in Sunday's final.

“Physically it was one of the most demanding matches I've played in my short career... I had to put my heart into the match.

Carlos Alcaraz

“It feels surreal to be honest playing over four hours. I was reminiscing in 2012 when I played Rafa (Nadal) in the final, that was six hours almost.

Novak Djokovic

## JAHANARA ALLEGATIONS

### Probe report due today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is set to receive the investigation report into allegations of misconduct in women's cricket raised by former national captain Jahanara Alam on Saturday, a member of the five-member inquiry committee confirmed yesterday.

The committee is chaired by Justice Tariq ul Hakim, former judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

"Tomorrow [Saturday] we will hand over our investigation report officially. I don't think we will be holding a press conference," Barrister Sarwat Siraj Shukla, senior advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and president of Bangladesh Women's Sports Association, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Maybe we will hand over the report to a BCB official with responsibility regarding this matter. We can't divulge the contents of the report at the moment."

BCB had twice deferred the submission of the committee's report. Initially formed as a three-member body, the inquiry was expanded to five members on November 12 last year. On December 2, the board announced that the report was expected by December 20. However, in a subsequent press release on December 21, the BCB said it had formally received Jahanara's complaint and granted the committee an extension until January 31.

BCB officials informed that the report is likely to be handed over to BCB president Aminul Islam. "Their work is finished and the report is expected to be submitted tomorrow [Saturday] or within two-three days," a BCB media committee official informed The Daily Star.

## SAFF U-19 WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

### Priority is identifying talents, not trophy: Butler

SPORTS REPORTER

Reigning champions Bangladesh are all set to begin their title defence of the SAFF Under-19 Women's Championship today against Bhutan in the opening match of the four-team tournament at the Pokhara Sangasal Stadium in Nepal.

Since the inception of SAFF's women's youth level competition in 2018, Bangladesh have been crowned champions in five out of six editions and the girls in red and green will begin the seventh edition as the tournament favourites as well.

The girls only had a day's preparation in Pokhara before facing Bhutan, following their involvement in Bangladesh Women's Football League.

Despite the lack of preparation, the charges of English coach Peter Butler are considered favourites in today's match, having never lost to Bhutan in their previous five meetings in the youth championships, and netting four goals or more in all of those matches.

Butler viewed the championship as a development tournament and prioritised identifying players for the AFC Women's Asian Cup and AFC Women's Under-20 Championship



over bringing home the trophy.

"I haven't come here to win this trophy. It's not my main priority. My main priority is to identify and assess the young girls who have done extremely well, getting to their first Asian Cup Under-20," said Butler at a pre-tournament briefing in Pokhara.

The coach said his main objective was, "to assess them, identify the ones which actually could play a part in that tournament [AFC U-20 Championship] further down the track."

Captain Arpita Biswas is

optimistic of making it to the final and hopes to progress match by match.

"Though we could not get time to get prepared for the championship, our preparation is more or less good because we have been involved with the Women's Football League. Our plus point is that we have a good understanding among ourselves and our target is to win every match and reach the final," said Arpita.

India and Nepal are the other two competing teams. All four sides will face each other once and the top two teams will play the final on February 7.

## Saikat, Sohel to officiate in T20 World Cup

STAR SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh cricket team may have been replaced by Scotland in the upcoming T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, but two Bangladeshi umpires will be part of the umpiring panel for the 20-team tournament, scheduled to begin on February 7.

Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat, the only elite panel umpire from Bangladesh, will be joined by Gazi Sohel in the 24-member umpiring panel to officiate 55 matches in the tournament.

Both umpires were expected to fly for Dubai last night before heading to the match venues in India and Sri Lanka.

A press release from the International Cricket Council disclosed the full list of umpires for the month-long tournament.

Kumar Dharmasena and Wayne Knights will be the on-field umpires for the opening match between Pakistan and the Netherlands at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground on February 7. The appointments for the Super Eight and knockout stages will be confirmed in due course.

Elsewhere on the opening day, Nitin Menon and Sam Nogański will be in the middle for the Group C clash between Scotland and the West Indies. India and USA match on the same day will be officiated by Paul Reiffel and Rod Tucker.



Bangladesh players celebrate after their thumping 90-run victory over Scotland in their Super Six match of the ongoing ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers in Nepal yesterday. Having already sealed a spot in the Women's T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in June-July in England and Wales, the Nigar Sultana Joty-led side extended their winning run to four matches in the qualifiers, registering their third-biggest victory in terms of runs. The Tigresses will play their final qualifier match against the Netherlands tomorrow, hoping to clinch the qualifier title.

PHOTO: ICC

## Ex-SL international to play for USA

REUTERS

Former Sri Lanka international Shehan Jayasuriya is set to debut for the United States in next month's Twenty20 World Cup, after the US named him in their 15-member squad for the global championship on Friday.

All-rounder Jayasuriya, 34, played 12 ODIs and 18 T20Is for Sri Lanka, and represented the country in the 2016 edition of the T20 World Cup, before announcing his retirement from all forms of cricket in the South-Asian nation in 2021.

The left-handed batter and right-arm spinner later relocated to the U.S. with his family and has since played in several franchise-based T20 leagues, including the Major League Cricket in the US.

## BCB plans domestic tourney after WC miss

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is looking to organise a domestic tournament after Bangladesh missed out on the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup, with a probable start date of February 5 under discussion.

The move follows talks between government officials and the board, a BCB official told The Daily Star.

Cricket came to a standstill after Bangladesh were replaced by Scotland in the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, slated to begin on February 7. There were no noticeable cricket activities in Mirpur following the developments. BCB officials initially suggested that the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) schedule may be brought forward, but talks have now begun on an alternative tournament.

On Thursday, Youth and Sports Ministry secretary Mahbub Ul-Alam attended an event and addressed the media. During his interaction, he was asked whether players would be compensated after Bangladesh missed out on the World Cup due to security issues.

"We are certainly working on this matter [compensation]. While security is

"While security is our primary concern, we have discussed the financial aspects and are planning to organise an alternative tournament within the country... and within the timeframe of the World Cup. The tournament will include the players selected for the T20 squad, as well as other prominent cricketers in the country."

Mahbub Ul-Alam  
Secretary of Youth and Sports Ministry

our primary concern, we have discussed the financial aspects and are planning to organise an alternative tournament within the country," Mahbub said, adding that the event will feature T20 squad members and other prominent players, "within the timeframe of the World Cup."

A BCB director informed The Daily

Star that "everything will be finalised" by February 1.

The tournament is expected to feature three teams, with matches likely to be held in Mirpur. "The tournament will likely take place before the BCL, with a probable date of February 5. It might go ahead after government talks with the BCB," an official said.

With national elections approaching, the BCL schedule is still awaiting affirmation and has been deferred for the time being, but the alternative tournament may go ahead following security clearances. BCB sources said that while the board are arranging the tournament, it is being organised outside the tournament committee department.

Meanwhile, national team players have been called for a fitness test on February 1.

"We will arrange all aspects relevant to fitness tests. Beep tests can also be held in Mirpur," a BCB official said.

Bangladesh's next international commitments are at home -- a three-match ODI series against Pakistan on March 12, 14, and 16, followed by a two-match Test series in May, scheduled around the Pakistan Super League.

## What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 1, 2, 5  
Australian Open Women's singles final  
Live from 2:30 pm  
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1  
Pakistan vs Australia 2nd T20I

ICC U-19 WC Bangladesh vs Zimbabwe  
Live from 1:30 pm  
T SPORTS  
Pakistan vs Australia 3rd T20I  
Live from 10:00 pm

Live from 5:30 pm  
STAR SPORTS SELECT HD2  
South Africa vs West Indies  
3rd T20I  
Live from 10:00 pm

## REAL FACE MOURINHO'S BENFICA AGAIN

After delivering a thrilling finish to the Champions League league stage, Real Madrid and Benfica are set to lock horns once again after being drawn together in the playoff stage in Nyon, Switzerland, yesterday. A dramatic 98th-minute strike from Benfica goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin in their 4-2 win over Real Madrid sealed the final playoff spot for the Portuguese club, managed by former Real Madrid boss Jose Mourinho. The goal also pushed Alvaro Arbeloa's Real Madrid out of the top eight, denying them direct qualification to the last 16. The playoff matchups are as follows:

## KNOCKOUT PHASE PLAYOFF DRAW



\*\* Ties to be played on 17/18 & 24/25 February 2026