

## SPORT

What to WATCH

T SPORTS  
T20 World Cup  
Afghanistan vs  
New Zealand  
Live from 11:30 am  
England vs Nepal  
Live from 3:30 pmSri Lanka vs Ireland  
Live from 7:30 pm  
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1 HD  
Brighton vs Crystal Palace  
Live from 8:00 pm  
Liverpool vs Man City  
Live from 10:30 pm

## FAHEEM SCRIPTS FAMILIAR PAKISTAN TALE

Digging their own grave and then emerging from it against the odds by capitalising on a slice of luck, Pakistan on Saturday revisited the pages of their cricketing playbook that has long earned them the tag of an "unpredictable team" as they began their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign in Colombo. The Salman Ali Agha-led side beat the Netherlands by three wickets with just three balls to spare, but only after turning it into a thriller of their own making. Chasing a target of 148, Pakistan looked comfortable even halfway through the innings before suddenly slumping to seven down and finding themselves needing 29 off the final two overs, with momentum on the Dutch side. Faheem Ashraf kick-started the penultimate over by hitting pacer Logan van Beek for a maximum, raising hopes of a late resurgence. But making it look smooth is not the Pakistan way. Faheem was dropped at long-on by Max O'Dowd off the very next ball before smashing two sixes and two fours over the next seven deliveries, eventually taking the 2009 champions over the line with an unbeaten 29 off 11 balls.

PHOTO: AFP

## Too much interference, says Butler after chastening defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Peter Butler's Bangladesh were given a reality check with a crushing 4-0 defeat to India in the final of the SAFF Under-19 Women's Championship at the Pokhara Rangasala in Nepal yesterday.

The five-time champions had gone into the final as overwhelming favourites, having won all three of their round-robin matches with an imposing 18-0 goal difference, including a 2-0 victory over the same opponents. However, in the title decider, Bangladesh were outplayed and punished for a series of defensive and goalkeeping lapses. The deadlock was broken in the 41st minute before the floodgates opened following the break, with the defending champions conceding three more.

India, coached by former Italy international Pamela Conti, neutralised Bangladesh's creativity in the midfield and blocked passing lanes into the attacking third. The holders appeared to lack direction for much of the contest, with Butler visibly frustrated on the touchline.



Bangladesh have dominated women's football in South Asia in recent years, and Butler had previously downplayed the importance of regional silverware, stressing that his main objective was identifying players for the upcoming Women's Asian Cup and Women's U-20 Asian Cup campaigns. However, this heavy defeat – Bangladesh's biggest loss in a SAFF age-level match – could carry serious repercussions, especially with Bangladesh Football Federation women's wing chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron present at the venue.

When contacted after the match, the English coach declined to go into detail, stating only that there was "too much interference," before adding: "Very worrying, I've no control." He did not, however, elaborate whether the interference was from the BFF high-ups or from anyone else.

There, however, was a silver lining for Bangladesh as striker Alpi Akter was named the competition's best player and top scorer, having netted seven goals.

## ICC in talks to revive India-Pakistan clash

AFP, New Delhi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is in talks with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to resolve the boycott of its T20 World Cup match against India on February 15, AFP learnt yesterday.

The fixture was thrown into doubt after Pakistan's government ordered the team not to play the match in Colombo. PCB reached out to ICC after a formal communication from the cricket's world body, a source close to the developments told AFP. The ICC was seeking a resolution through dialogue and not confrontation, the source added.

Bangladesh were replaced by Scotland after their plea to relocate their matches were rejected by ICC. As a protest, Pakistan refused to face co-hosts India in their Group A fixture.

## SKY LEADS INDIA TO OPENING WIN



India captain Suryakumar Yadav raises his bat to celebrate his half-century against USA in their opening Group A match of the T20 World Cup at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. India were in trouble at 77-6 before Suryakumar took them to a competitive 161-9 with an unbeaten 84 off 49 deliveries. Late call-up Mohammad Siraj then picked up three wickets as the defending champions won by 29 runs by restricting USA to 132-8.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'Winning WC will come down to individual moments'

New Zealand open their T20 World Cup campaign today in Chennai against Afghanistan in a tough Group D, also including South Africa, UAE, and Canada. Even though the Black Caps are yet to lift a World Cup in any format, arrive in the tournament on the back of a 4-1 T20I series defeat against hosts India, and with woes of exiting before the Super 8 stage in the tournament's last edition in 2024, writing off New Zealand has never been wise. The squad boasts a mix of established stars and versatile all-rounders, one of whom is experienced all-rounder James Neesham. The 35-year-old, during his recent stint with the Rajshahi Warriors in the Bangladesh Premier League, spoke to *The Daily Star's* Samsul Arefin Khan about New Zealand's chances in the tournament, the team's past World Cup heartbreaks, and the belief that still drives the side forward. The excerpts are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS):** How do you see your side doing in the tournament?

**James Neesham (JN):** We have a strong team. Obviously, anything can happen in a world tournament. We will be looking at that first game against Afghanistan. We will try to take each game as it comes. Hopefully, we can make it to that next stage.

**DS:** Do you think seasoned spinners like Mitchell Santner and Ish Sodhi will help you do well in the tournament being held in the subcontinent?

**JN:** I think every team has good spinners; Afghanistan obviously have good spinners, and South Africa have a couple of spin options as well. Spin will likely be the theme of the tournament, especially for games in Chennai. Hopefully, we can perform well with spin and, more importantly, play spin well to get a few wins.

**DS:** How do you see your team's



growth since the last T20 World Cup?

**JN:** Obviously, we were a little bit underdone going into the 2024 tournament. But this can happen. We

had a five-game series against India, which I thought was very good for us to get ready.

**DS:** How do you see the chances of winning your first World Cup this time?

**JN:** Our chances are as good as anyone's. It is hard to win world tournaments, and there are probably seven or eight teams that have a legitimate chance to win the trophy. It will come down to individual moments; hopefully, we can get on the right side of those moments, go through to the knockouts, and then anything can happen.

**DS:** Does the 2019 ODI World Cup final defeat to England still hurt?

**JN:** It was obviously tough at the time, but it was seven years ago now. I am pretty much over it and just looking forward to the tournament coming up; hopefully, we can go one step better in this T20 World Cup.

## THE ABSENT ROAR

RAMIN TALUKDER

On a bright evening at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday, Scotland took the field against the West Indies to begin their campaign in the ICC T20 World Cup – a stage that was originally meant for Bangladesh, not the Scots.

The gallery looked bare, there was no sea of green, no red and green flags rippling in the stands, no thunderous chants of "Bangladesh, Bangladesh" that accompany the Tigers everywhere they play.

At the same hour, a few hundred kilometres away at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, Bangladesh's legendary band Miles stepped onto the stage as a different sort of spectacle commenced – one not born out of joy, but of repair.

After deciding not to take part in the T20 World Cup, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) knew it would leave behind a vacuum – a mix of disappointment, resentment and heartbreak among fans.

To fill that emptiness, a tournament – Odommo Bangladesh T20 Cup – was hastily assembled, a three-team event featuring national team players and up-and-coming cricketers.

The idea was simple – matches



during the day, crowds returning to the stands, songs rising into the evening air. Reality, however, had other plans.

The Mirpur stadium is known for its thunderous roar. It thrives on chants, on collective breath, on the restless pulse of packed galleries. Silence here is unsettling.

Yesterday, in a stadium built for 25,000 voices, silence became the dominant presence. Empty rows of seats waited like abandoned promises. A scattering of spectators, a few journalists, the players on the field – that was all.

The lights were flawless, the arrangements immaculate. Yet the stadium felt hollow as meaning comes from the heart – and the heart was still longing for the World Cup.

Into this quiet, Miles took stage. Since the 1990s, the band has slipped

into the bloodstream of the city, carrying the sound of a generation across cassettes, CDs, radios and, eventually, screens. Their popularity has never needed proving. What unfolded in Mirpur, therefore, was not a rejection of Miles. It was something more unsettling – a moment when popularity and attendance parted ways. Haste played a major role in creating



this gap. The tournament was put together at short notice. There was little time for promotion, limited scope for planning. It failed to create anticipation. Looming over everything was the lingering pain of missing the World Cup. Unable to set that aside, people could not give themselves over to another celebration.

The emptiness was not confined to a single night. The five-day tournament had begun on Thursday and on earlier



Opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy struck 59 off 51 balls to help Durbar XI beat Duronto XI by seven wickets in the last league match to qualify for the final of the Odommo Bangladesh T20 Cup at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur on Saturday. Chasing 146, Joy and Habibur Rahman Sohan (39 off 17 balls) put up 61 runs within the powerplay, setting up an easy win for Durbar. Earlier, Khaled Ahmed finished with 4-23 to bowl Duronto out for 145 in 19.5 overs. Durbar will now take on Dhumketu XI in the final of the three-team tournament at the same venue on Monday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED