



Pakistan face the USA in a Group A clash of the T20 World Cup in Colombo today, two years after the Americans stunned the 2009 champions and knocked them out of the 2024 edition. The USA pushed favourites India hard in their opener in Mumbai before going down by 29 runs, while Pakistan nearly stumbled into another upset against the Netherlands on Saturday. With a Super Eight spot on the line, Pakistan can ill afford any slip-ups.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

## Talks keep Pakistan-India match alive

SPORTS REPORTER

The outcome of the tripartite discussions between Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), International Cricket Council (ICC) and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) in Lahore on Sunday is yet to be officially disclosed, but speculation over it ran amok yesterday, completely overshadowing Pakistan's bid for revenge against the USA in an ICC T20 World Cup match today.

Pakistan were humiliated by the USA in the previous T20 World Cup, losing a group stage match in a Super Over, which led to their first-round elimination.

The Salman Ali Agha-led side, who defeated the Netherlands by three wickets in their opener, will have a chance to avenge the previous defeat today in Colombo.

However, the build up towards this match was lukewarm at best as the cricket world's focus was directed towards the outcome of the discussions and the fate of the India-Pakistan match.

Since the Pakistan government announced its team won't face India in their scheduled group stage match in Colombo on February 15, the ICC has, both formally and reportedly through unofficial communications, approached PCB to convince its government to change its stance.

On Sunday, ICC's deputy chairman Imran Khawaja had a meeting in Lahore with PCB officials and BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul, who was invited by the PCB chairman

Mohsin Naqvi.

ESPNcricinfo has claimed that the discussions have increased the likelihood of the India-Pakistan game going ahead as scheduled.

According to India's NDTV, Naqvi, who is also the Interior minister of Pakistan, would meet with the country's Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif within the next 24-48 hours to discuss the developments before issuing a formal statement.

Several online reports have claimed that during the discussions, PCB placed some conditions before ICC, however, the details of those conditions are yet to be confirmed.

ESPNcricinfo claimed that PCB demanded no bans on BCB for their non-participation in the T20 World Cup after refusing to travel to India under security concerns.

It also said that BCB would have to be paid the revenues it would've received had it participated, and that it also sought an assurance that Bangladesh's status as co-hosts of the 2031 ICC World Cup alongside India won't be affected.

PCB reportedly also asked for a more equitable ICC revenue sharing model, after the current one ends in 2027.

Some other media reports have said that PCB demanded restoration of bilateral series with India and that BCB sought a tri-series involving Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. BCB president, who was supposed to return to Dhaka yesterday, is yet to officially brief the media on the discussions.

## Rajshahi resume title push as WFL returns

SPORTS REPORTER

The seventh edition of the Bangladesh Women's Football League (WFL) resumes today at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium after a 13-day pause for the SAFF Women's U-19 Championship in Nepal, with table-toppers Rajshahi Stars FC aiming to continue their dominant run.

Four other matches are scheduled at the same venue today, with second-placed Farashganj SC taking on Bangladesh Police FC.

Unbeaten in eight matches, Rajshahi have established themselves as the standout side in the II-team league. A victory over Suddopuskorini Jubo SC today would push them closer to the title ahead of their final fixture against Bangladesh Army on Friday, the day after the national election.

The national team-laden side have been prolific in front of goal, scoring 79 times in eight outings. Forward Alpi Akter has led the charge with 25 goals, while strike partner Sauravi Akanda Prity has added 12, making the pair a constant menace



for opposing defences.

Rajshahi will be without the Nepalese duo Bimala BK and Dipa Shahi, who left Dhaka shortly after the eighth round concluded on January 27.

"We will certainly feel the absence of Bimala and Dipa because of their experience. I often used Dipa in different positions depending on the situation during matches," Rajshahi coach Mahmuda Haque Aditi told The Daily Star yesterday at Farz Hotel.

"We do have replacements, but they lack experience. Still, we are confident of sticking to our game plan and maintaining our position at the top," she added.

Aditi also said the team is focused on securing another win today, while acknowledging that Bangladesh Army could present a sterner test than Farashganj, given their balanced squad.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Journalists stand at the top of the media tribune of the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, with a banner saying 'Journalism is not a Crime', after local media decided to boycott the Odommo Bangladesh T20 Cup final between Dhumketu XI and Durbar XI yesterday. The protest and boycott came in the wake of BCB security department issuing a warning letter to a photojournalist over taking pictures of the President's Box during a match on Friday.

## Zimbabwe dominate Oman; Scots spoil Italy's debut

AFP

Zimbabwe returned to the T20 World Cup in emphatic fashion on Monday, strolling to an eight-wicket win over Oman at Colombo's Sinhalese Sports Club while debutants Italy had a bruising introduction to cricket's biggest stage as they suffered a crushing 73-run loss to Scotland at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata.

In their first T20 World Cup since 2022, Zimbabwe skittled Oman for 103 before knocking off the runs with 39 balls to spare.

Brian Bennett was unbeaten on 48 and Brendan Taylor, 40, who played in the first T20 World Cup in 2007, made 31 before retiring hurt.

Zimbabwe's quick bowling twin towers Richard Ngarava and Blessing Muzarabani did the early damage, reducing Oman to 27-5 with none of their top order managing to get into double figures.

A face-saving 42-run stand for the sixth wicket between Sufyan Mehmood and Vinayak Shukla gave Oman its total some respectability.

Ngarava finished with 3-17 and Muzarabani 3-16. Brad Evans provided the perfect first-change foil, hitting a nagging line and length to take 3-18.

In Kolkata, Scotland piled up 207-4 with opener George Munsey top-scoring with 84 and in reply Italy were bowled out for 134 in 16.4 overs.

Off-spinner Michael Leask took 4-17 for Scotland, adding to his batting cameo of an unbeaten 22 off five balls.

A nation better known for its football, Italy are the lowest-ranked side in the 20-team tournament and were making a slice of history here.

Chasing a mammoth 208 for victory, they suffered early blows before a valiant fourth-wicket partnership of 73 between Australia-born brothers Ben and Harry Manenti kept them afloat at Eden Gardens.

But Harry departed for 37 and Ben got out after his 31-ball 52 as the Italian batting collapsed from 113-3.

South Africa-born captain Wayne Madsen could not bat after he dislocated his shoulder while fielding and might miss the rest of the tournament.



South Africa skipper Aiden Markram smashed a 32-ball 59, studded with 12 fours and a six, to power the Proteas to 213-4 in their Group D fixture of the ICC T20 World Cup in Ahmedabad yesterday. Markram and fellow opener Quinton de Kock (22-ball 25) laid the platform with a 70-run stand before David Miller (23-ball 39) and Tristan Stubbs (19-ball 34) applied the finishing touches with brisk cameos, lifting South Africa past the 200 mark.

PHOTO: AFP

## Europe's top leagues set for a dramatic run-in

AGENCIES

Europe's major leagues delivered another weekend of twists, drama and defining moments as the race for titles, European places and survival continues to tighten across the continent, with stars like Erling Haaland, Bernardo Silva, Kylian Mbappe and Harry Kane once again taking center stage.

The Premier League title race is once again alive. Manchester City's stunning late comeback at Anfield, driven by Haaland and Silva, keeps them firmly in Arsenal's slipstream, refusing to let the leaders pull away.

Arsenal remain top, but City's momentum is unmistakable, while Manchester United's revival under Michael Carrick — inspired by Bruno Fernandes — has reshaped the battle for the Champions League spots.

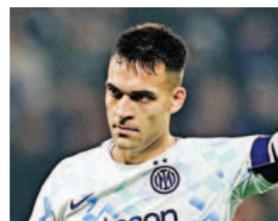
Newcastle, once dreaming of the top five, now face a sobering reality in mid-table, highlighting



how quickly fortunes can change. Germany remains firmly in Bayern Munich's grip. A commanding 5-1 victory, powered by Harry Kane and Luis Diaz, restored their six-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga.

Borussia Dortmund continue to chase, but Bayern's relentless scoring and consistency underline why they remain the benchmark. Hoffenheim, despite defeat, still hold a strong position in the top three, keeping the race for European qualification intense.

The LaLiga title fight is delicately poised. Barcelona cling



to top spot by a single point after Real Madrid's hard-fought win at Valencia, led by Kylian Mbappe. Despite injuries and absences, Madrid's resilience keeps them firmly in contention, while Atletico Madrid's defeat leaves them drifting from the title race and now fighting to secure a Champions League berth. Villarreal and Real Betis sense opportunity as the battle for fourth heats up.

France saw Paris Saint-Germain reclaim the Ligue 1 summit in emphatic fashion. Their 5-0 demolition of Marseille, inspired by Ousmane Dembele, showcased

both their attacking depth and dominance, moving them ahead of Lens. With Marseille slipping and PSG surging, the champions have once again seized control, though the chase for European places remains fiercely competitive.

Italy's Serie A continues to be shaped by Inter Milan's authority. Their emphatic 5-0 victory, led by Lautaro Martinez, Marcus Thuram and Federico Dimarco, extended an unbeaten run and moved them eight points clear of AC Milan, putting one hand on the Scudetto.

Juventus' late comeback draw keeps them clinging to a Champions League spot, but Roma are poised to pounce, while Lazio, Atalanta and others remain tightly packed in a congested European race.

Across Europe, the narratives are clear: dominant leaders tightening their grip, challengers refusing to yield, and clubs in transition redefining their ambitions. With every point carrying weight, the final stretch promises more drama.

