

## Rain looms over BLOCKBUSTER CLASH

After a turbulent build-up marked by geopolitical tensions and concerns within the International Cricket Council over potential revenue losses -- following Pakistan's initial threat to boycott their Group A match in solidarity with Bangladesh, who were excluded after refusing to play in India over security concerns -- the much-anticipated India-Pakistan clash is finally set to go ahead. However, the blockbuster encounter in Colombo may face an uncontrollable opponent: the weather. Unlike off-field disputes, this is beyond cricketing diplomacy and the control of all stakeholders.



PHOTO: AFP/BCCI

- The Sri Lanka Department of Meteorology has warned of a low-pressure system forming over the Bay of Bengal, raising a high risk of rain that could disrupt Sunday evening's marquee T20 World Cup match.
- Forecast models predict scattered heavy showers in the afternoon and early evening, potentially delaying the toss or forcing a shortened game under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method. Even if rain eases before play, lingering dampness could still affect tactics and pitch behaviour.
- With no reserve day for this group match, a washout that prevents a minimum five-over contest would see both teams share a point. That scenario

could still send both India and Pakistan -- each on four points from two wins, with Pakistan trailing on net run rate -- through to the Super Eight.

- The flock of fans already in Colombo for the game may take comfort from the facilities at R Premadasa Stadium, whose drainage system and full ground covers are among the region's best, typically making the field playable within about an hour after heavy rain stops.
- On paper, India remain overwhelming favourites, having won seven of their eight meetings. Pakistan's only victory was a 10-wicket win in Dubai in 2021, while their first encounter in 2007 ended in a tie before India prevailed in a bowl-out.



"We'll find out tomorrow (if India and Pakistan players shake hands before or after the game)...I expect the game should be played in the spirit that it has always been played since its inception."

Pakistan captain Salman Ali Agha

"When you play an India-Pakistan game, it is more about the occasion. It is a platform. You can say what you want, like it is just another game. But you know which game you are going to play. And we don't play them often."

India captain Suryakumar Yadav

## BCB boss turns down India-Pakistan match invitation

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul has declined an invitation to attend today's India-Pakistan clash in Colombo, saying it would not feel right to be present while Bangladesh are absent from the ICC T20 World Cup.

"I was supposed to go to Colombo. But then I thought, our national team isn't there, so what would I do if I went?" Bulbul told The Daily Star yesterday.



Aminul is currently in Dhaka after returning from Kuwait, where he attended a meeting of Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

"Even today, they requested me to come by tomorrow morning's flight, but I said no. Since our team isn't playing, me going there just to sit around -- does that make sense?"

The 20-team tournament had been clouded by political tensions after Bangladesh declined to travel to India over security concerns and were replaced by Scotland, prompting Pakistan's initial refusal to play India before reversing their decision following ICC assurances. The breakthrough came after intense negotiations involving ICC deputy chairman Imran Khwaja, Aminul, and Mohsin Naqvi, chairman of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), during talks in Lahore.

The BCB boss said International Cricket Council (ICC) had requested his presence, especially after he played a key role in facilitating Pakistan's participation.

"They were a bit upset [at turning down invitation] -- said you helped organise the India-Pakistan match and did so much. But to me, my team is more important."

## Windies look to seal Super Eight spot

SPORTS REPORTER

Former champions West Indies will be eyeing to seal their place in the Super Eights when they take on Nepal in their Group C match in the ICC T20 World Cup at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai today.

The Caribbean side will come into the match on the back of a comfortable 30-run win over England on Wednesday.

They had earlier won against Scotland by 35 runs and are now at the top of the five-team Group C with four points.

Meanwhile, their opponents have lost both their matches so far, suffering a heartbreaking four-run defeat against England and then getting pummeled by newcomers Italy by 10 wickets.

Nepal have the edge over West Indies in head-to-head count in T20Is, having won two of their three meetings so far.

This is the first time the two sides will faceoff in a T20I in a World Cup.

Meanwhile, before the high-stakes India-Pakistan Group A tie in the evening in Colombo, their group-mates USA and Namibia will face off in the afternoon in Chennai.

After defeats against Pakistan and India, the USA bounced back with a 93-run win over the Netherlands in Chennai on Friday and are third in the group table right now. A defeat today would end the USA's hopes of progressing to the Super Eights. Whereas Namibia, having lost to the Netherlands and India, will be eyeing for their maiden win today.

## Undercooked for Mission Australia?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team have entered the final phase of their home preparation for next month's AFC Women's Asian Cup, with no further international fixtures scheduled before the tournament kicks off on March 1 -- raising fresh concerns over their readiness.

According to a highly placed Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) official, the team will fly to Sydney on February 20 and play a single practice match against a local club, likely on February 27, before beginning their campaign.

Bangladesh are placed in Group B of the 12-team competition and will open their campaign against record nine-time champions China in Sydney on March 3. They will face North Korea at the same venue three days later before concluding the group stage against Uzbekistan in Perth on March 9.

The scaled-down preparation stands in stark contrast to the ambitious roadmap unveiled last August, shortly after the team secured historic qualification for the continental showpiece in June-July.

"Mission Australia", as the campaign was branded following the team's triumphant return from Myanmar, has gradually lost momentum since its announcement.

Speaking to the media on August 27,

BFF women's wing chairman Mahfuz Akter Kiron had outlined plans for "six international matches and a training camp in Japan", adding that the team would either play "two matches against New Zealand" or face "other countries such as Malaysia, Singapore or Hong Kong en route to Australia".

In reality, only four international matches have been arranged since qualification. Bangladesh suffered two heavy away defeats to Thailand -- 3-0 and



5-1 -- during the October FIFA window, before losing 1-0 to Malaysia and 2-1 to Azerbaijan at home in early December.

The proposed three-week training camp in Japan in December was also scrapped, replaced by a domestic camp at the Korean EPZ in Chattogram.

Preparation has further been fragmented by club commitments. Most of the national team players spent months competing in the Bhutan Women's League, a competition

publicly criticised by head coach Peter Butler for its lack of intensity and competitiveness.

Over the past month and a half, the players have featured in the domestic Women's Football League on the artificial turf at Kamalapur. The competition frequently produced lopsided, high-scoring matches -- often in double digits -- echoing concerns previously raised about the standard of football in Bhutan.

Following the conclusion of the league, forward Ritu Porna Chakma declined to comment on the team's preparation gaps or the potential impact of prolonged exposure to artificial turf ahead of a major international tournament.

Bangladesh will head to Australia having lost all four international matches since qualifying for the Asian Cup, with just one practice game scheduled before taking on some of Asia's most formidable sides.

In contrast, neighbours India recently completed a three-week tour of Turkey, playing six matches against local clubs, while Group B opponents Uzbekistan played two international friendlies against Vietnam. Against that backdrop, questions over Bangladesh's match readiness, preparation standards and overall competitive edge are bound to cast a shadow over their historic campaign.

## Women's 'A' edge SL in tense opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's 'A' team secured a narrow four-run win over Sri Lanka 'A' in their opening Group B match of the ACC Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars 2026 in Bangkok yesterday.

After electing to bat, Bangladesh made a brisk start as openers Ishma Tanjim (30) and Shamima Sultana (17) added 48 before a run-out ended the stand on the penultimate ball of the powerplay at the Terdthai Cricket Ground.

Sarmin Sultana struck 29 off 25 balls, but Bangladesh collapsed from 104 for four in the 17th over, losing their last six wickets to be bowled out for 115 in 19.5 overs. Sri Lanka's Sachini Nisansala claimed 4-14, while Malsha Shehani took two wickets.

In reply, Sri Lanka lost five wickets for 65 runs in 13 overs. Ama Kanchana (23) and Sachini Nisansala (20) then put together a crucial 30-run stand for the sixth wicket to bring their side back into contention.

However, the Bangladeshi bowlers held their nerve in the decisive overs, with left-arm spinner Sanjida Akter Meghla leading the charge. She grabbed two quick wickets and finished with figures of 3-20. Skipper Fahima Khatun and Lata Mondol chipped in with two wickets apiece as Bangladesh restricted Sri Lanka to 111 for nine.

Earlier in the day, Thailand beat Malaysia by 99 runs. Bangladesh face Thailand next on Monday, when Sri Lanka take on Malaysia.

## England snap 17-year European jinx

AGENCIES

England finally buried a long-standing European hoodoo as they clinched a five-wicket victory over Scotland on Saturday, marking their first-ever win against a European side in T20 World Cup history -- a breakthrough that ended a 17-year wait.

For all their pedigree as two-time champions (2010 and 2021), England had previously stumbled every time they faced European opposition at the tournament. The drought began with defeat to the Netherlands at Lord's in 2009, followed by another loss to the Dutch in 2014, a defeat to Ireland in 2022, and most recently to Scotland in 2024. Their 2010 match against Ireland was washed out.

That frustrating sequence finally came to an end thanks largely to a composed knock from Tom Banton, who guided England home with an unbeaten 63 off 41 while chasing 153.

Captain Harry Brook was full of praise for the right-hander, who had been dismissed for two in both of England's earlier Group C games.

"He was awesome. It was a brilliant innings," Brook said. "He's obviously matured as a player... the way he's chased that down there



PHOTO: AFP

single-handedly, with a couple of cameos from [Jacob] Bethell and Sam [Curran]. He played it beautifully."

England had slumped to 13-2 early in the chase and were still crawling at 54-2 after eight overs before Banton shifted gears, launching spinner Mark Watt for three towering sixes in a ninth over that cost 22 runs and effectively released the pressure.

Brook highlighted Banton's growing adaptability as a key trait. "Everyone in the world knows he's got a very good reverse sweep, so he's had to adapt his game a little... because they try to stop him from hitting that shot," he said.

"He's a powerful player. He's got long levers. He can hit the ball out of any ground, and he's shown that tonight."

Brook also felt Banton is settling into the number four role, calling it "the ideal position for him going forward".

The win was vital after England's earlier loss to the West Indies, and now victory over debutants Italy on Monday at Eden Gardens will secure their place in the Super Eight -- with a long-standing European curse finally lifted.



South Africa all-rounder Marco Jansen (3L) celebrates with teammates after dismissing New Zealand opener Tim Seifert during their Group D fixture of the T20 World Cup at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad yesterday. The left-arter took four wickets for 40 runs -- his best figures in T20Is -- as the Black Caps were restricted to 175/7.