



## All-round Windies first team into Super Eights

The West Indies produced a comprehensive all-round display at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday, hammering Nepal by nine wickets with 28 balls to spare to become the first team to secure a Super Eight spot in the ongoing T20 World Cup. Led by Jason Holder's 4/27, the Windies restricted Nepal to 133/8 before skipper Shai Hope's unbeaten 61 off 44 balls and Shimron Hetmyer's 46 not out from 32 deliveries guided them home in just 15.2 overs.

- » West Indies have hit form in the tournament, winning all three of their group-stage matches so far. They beat Scotland and England comfortably before yesterday's convincing victory. They will face Italy in their final group game in Kolkata on Thursday.
- » The 92-run second-wicket stand between Shai Hope and Shimron Hetmyer is West Indies' second-highest partnership for the wicket in T20 World Cups -- just behind the 95-run stand between Devon Smith and Shivnarine Chanderpaul against Bangladesh in Johannesburg in 2007.
- » This is only the second time West Indies have won by a margin of nine wickets in a T20 World Cup match, with the first instance coming against the USA in 2024.
- » The result also means that Nepal, who provided England a scare in their first group game but eventually lost the contest by just four runs, are eliminated. They also suffered a 10-wicket thumping to Italy, and will play their final game against Scotland on Tuesday.

## Pressure mounts as Australia meet Sri Lanka

AGENCIES

There are three matches in Monday's fixtures, but all eyes turn to Pallekele when Australia meet Sri Lanka in what feels like a defining clash of Group B.

For Australia, the equation is brutally simple after their shock loss to Zimbabwe: win or risk sliding toward an early exit. Their campaign has already been shaken by injuries and disruption, and the defeat exposed a bowling unit still searching for rhythm and control.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, look calm and confident despite losing Wanindu Hasaranga, arriving with real momentum after beating Ireland and Oman in their first two group games.

Pallekele is traditionally Sri Lanka's highest-scoring T20 venue, so expect a tactical balance between spin and pace -- and a contest decided by who handles pressure better. A Sri Lankan win would virtually secure their progression; an Australian victory keeps the group wide open.

Earlier in the day's first match, Afghanistan face UAE knowing their World Cup hopes are hanging by a thread. After two painful defeats -- including a dramatic double Super Over loss -- they must reset mentally and treat this like a knockout game.

UAE, buoyed by their recent win over Canada, believe they can make things interesting, but their qualification route remains narrow and dependent on results elsewhere.

The second fixture brings a fresh subplot as England meet T20 World Cup debutants Italy in Kolkata. England, boosted by a key win over Scotland, know victory will seal their Super Eights place. Italy arrive full of belief after an emphatic 10-wicket win over Nepal, driven by the Mosca brothers, and will try to turn sporting rivalry into a cricketing surprise.



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday named four squads for the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) one-dayers tournament, set to begin later this month. Speedster Taskin Ahmed, who was amongst the players who had individual training sessions at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday, has been rested from the tournament as part of his workload management.

## 'A World Cup is a World Cup'

Bangladesh cricketers have been enjoying a rare extended time off after the Odommo Bangladesh T20 Cup, which ended on February 9. While the pangs of missing out on the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka is still raw, most of the players are using this break to spend time with family. One of them, the 24-year-old speedster Shoriful Islam, talked to The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi about the ongoing World Cup and how he is spending time away from cricket during an exclusive interview. The excerpts are as follows.

**DS:** Have you been watching the ICC T20 World Cup?

**SI:** Truth be told, I haven't really been watching the ongoing World Cup. I have seen about one or two matches. Since we have not gone to the World Cup, I have not been watching the matches all that much. We have gotten an extended break after a while following the Odommo T20 Cup. So, that's why I have been focusing on spending time with family in my village.

**DS:** The Odommo T20 Cup was arranged to somewhat make up for the lack of cricket due to not playing in the World Cup. How was the tournament itself?

**SI:** As cricketers, we put in the same effort during the games. But the vibe of a World Cup and some bilateral series or a tournament is completely different. A World Cup is a World Cup, every player prepares for the whole year to play the World Cup. So, it would be a mistake to compare it to some other tournament.

**DS:** You were one of the 15 cricketers who



got picked in Bangladesh's World Cup squad. After Bangladesh were removed from the tournament, what did you feel?

**SI:** We can't regret about something that is not in our fate. What's done is done. Whatever comes next, I will focus on that and try to achieve something good.

**DS:** Not getting to play a World Cup was understandably a blow for all cricketers.

But has any positive come out of it?

**SI:** The best outcome for me was that I have been able to spend time with my family. I have returned home, been playing a lot with my boy and am around my parents.

The break feels great since we were playing continuously. At times things become dull or the body gets fatigued. Since there are no games, I have a lot of time for the family. As you know, we don't get a lot of family time, so in that regard, it has been refreshing.

**DS:** The BCL one-dayers tournament is coming up. What are your plans for that?

**SI:** We have been playing only T20s for a while now. We will be playing one-dayers now, so, definitely, we need to prepare for that. Everyone has been preparing individually, including me. We are also going to play an ODI series against Pakistan after that which is likely to happen around Eid-ul-Fitr [from March 12-16].



## USA stay alive

REUTERS

The United States kept their hopes of reaching the Twenty20 World Cup's Super 8 stage alive as they ended their Group A campaign with two straight wins, after beating Namibia by 31 runs on Sunday.

Captain Monank Patel and Sanjay Krishnamurthi led with half-centuries as the Americans chose to bat and posted 199-4 in Chennai. Namibia fell well short as Shadley van Schalkwyk (2-27) and Saurabh Netravalkar (1-27) restricted their flow of runs.

Patel, who scored 52 off 30 balls, got USA off to a fast start and combined with Krishnamurthi for an 87-run partnership for the fourth wicket to get his team to their highest total in the campaign.

Krishnamurthi hit six sixes and four boundaries in his unbeaten knock of 68 from 33 balls, his first half-century in T20 internationals.

Namibia started well with Louren Steenkamp (58) guiding them to 97-1 in 10 overs, but struggled after Steenkamp got caught at point in the 13th over, ending their innings at 168-6 to lose their third straight game.

## Ridoy, Mou headline first Inter-University TT Fest

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) is set to launch the first-ever Inter-University Table Tennis Fest today at the Shaheed Taj Uddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium, with around 30 public and private universities competing in the two-day event.

Nearly 200 paddlers, including 39 women, have registered for the tournament. The competition features two events -- women's singles and the men's team event. The federation opted to stage only a singles competition for women due to the shortage of female participants, while retaining the men's team format in line with international practice in inter-university competitions.

The presence of several national ranking players in both categories has added a competitive edge to the inaugural tournament. National champion and country's top-ranked player Muhtasin Ahmed Ridoy, national runner-up and women's number two Sadia Rahman Mou, and ninth-ranked Samantha Hossen Tushi will lead Dhaka University.

Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB) will field national runner-up and men's number two Ramhim Lian Bawm as well as former ranked player Reefat Mahmud Sabbir. Northern University will feature fourth-ranked Imrul Kayes Imon.

Daffodil International University will rely on ninth-ranked Mufradul Khair Hamza Shajib, 17th-

ranked Promit Khisa Chakma and 20th-ranked Barkat Ali Sazin in the men's section, while ninth-ranked Nourin Sultana Mahi will compete in the women's singles.

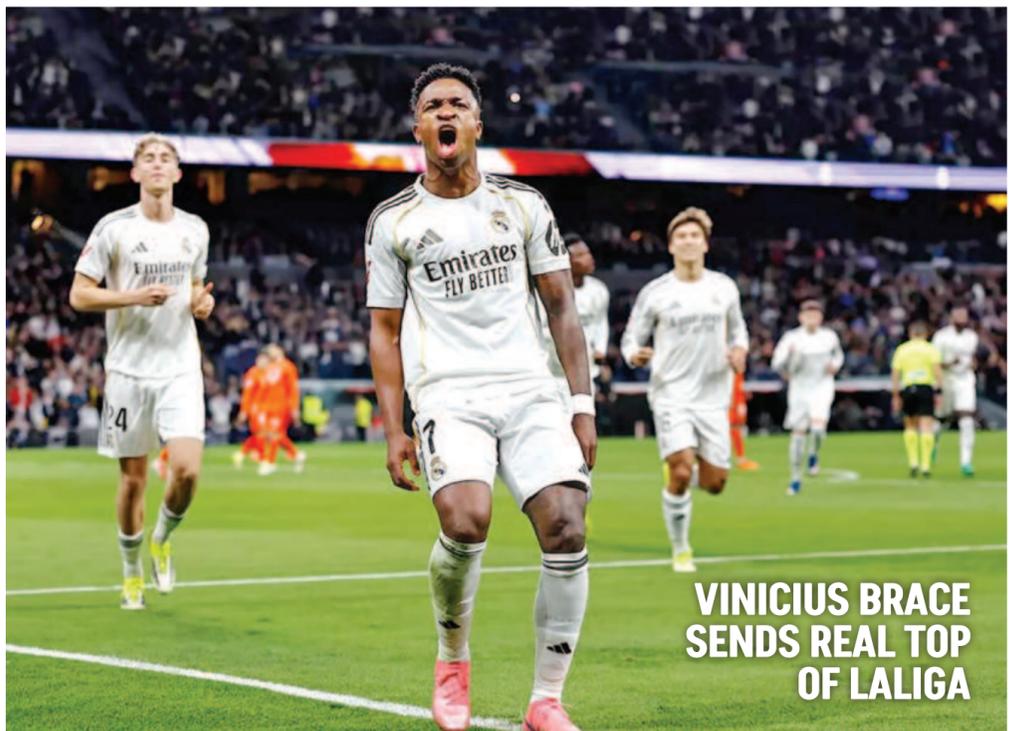
"Organising an inter-university table tennis tournament is a good initiative because the sport will now be visible at university level and it will spread further across campuses," Ridoy told The Daily Star.

"Since getting admitted to Dhaka University as an athlete, everyone has had a good perception of us. I am now proud to represent Dhaka University in an inter-university competition. I will try to bring laurels for our university," he added.

Former four-time national champion and BTTF joint secretary Nasimul Hasan Kochi also welcomed the initiative, saying the federation has long aimed to expand the sport's reach across the country.

"I can't remember whether the federation ever organised an inter-university tournament, though such tournaments were held outside without the federation's involvement. It's a good initiative to revitalise table tennis at university level, where it can flourish," said Kochi.

The federation hopes the tournament will serve as a platform to broaden participation and strengthen the sport's grassroots presence at university level.



## VINIICIUS BRACE SENDS REAL TOP OF LALIGA

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

Vinicius Junior struck twice from the penalty spot as Real Madrid surged to a 4-1 win over Real Sociedad, moving provisionally top of La Liga with 60 points. Trent Alexander-Arnold impressed on his first start in two-and-a-half months, while American coach Pellegrino Matarazzo suffered his first defeat after nine unbeaten matches in charge.