

India, South Africa run back 2024 final in Super Eights

Rain threat looms over England–Sri Lanka tie

AGENCIES

Ahmedabad braces for a blockbuster Super Eights clash of the ICC T20 World Cup today as unbeaten India take on equally flawless South Africa in a high-voltage rematch of the 2024 edition's final.

In that game in Bridgetown, India had come out on top by seven runs in a thrilling final to lift their second ever T20 World Cup title.

This time, both sides are eyeing to begin their Super Eights leg with a win and take early control of the four-team Group 1.

India's struggling opener Abhishek Sharma has been under the spotlight before the match. The Southpaw, who tops the ICC batters rankings in T20Is, has had three successive ducks so far and missed one game owing to sickness.

However, his captain Suryakumar Yadav has thrown his weight behind out-of-form opener and said his team will continue to "cover for him" till he returns to form.

"People who are worried about Abhishek's form, I worry for them,"



Suryakumar said with a smile. "It is a team sport, it happens. Team requires him to play with his identity, so if he fires it's okay, otherwise we are there to cover for him. Last year he covered for us, now we



will do it for him," he added. Though India topped their group and carry a 12-match unbeaten streak in T20 World Cups, their batting has yet to fully ignite.

Spin could once again shape the outcome. India boast the world's top-ranked T20 bowler in Varun Chakravarty, who has nine wickets in four matches.

But South Africa, led by Aiden Markram, arrive with momentum and balance. Their own slow-bowling options, spearheaded by Keshav Maharaj, have thrived on surfaces offering grip, while their batting unit has looked measured and adaptable.

Elsewhere, England face Sri Lanka in a rain-threatened Super Eights Group 2 match in Kandy, with skipper Harry Brook warning his side must be ready to adapt if showers reduce the contest to a sprint.

"I think you just have to prepare as if it is a T20," Brook told reporters. "I think you can sometimes go down a bit of a rabbit hole thinking that you're going to play a five-over game and then it ends up being a T20 and you kind of play it slightly differently."

"So, I think we've just got to prepare as if it is a T20 game and hope that the rain stays away. And then if it doesn't, then we've got to adapt," he added.



The first Super Eight match of the ongoing T20 World Cup, between Pakistan and New Zealand, was in danger of being washed out at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday. Pakistan skipper Salman Ali Agha elected to bat, but relentless rain prevented any further on-field action even two hours after the coin toss. In case of a washout, both teams are set to collect a point each, as no reserve days have been set aside for any Super Eight fixtures. PHOTO: AFP

BCB-ICC tie 'not best right now'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board vice-president Faruque Ahmed said the board's relationship with the International Cricket Council is "not at its best", expressing hope that newly appointed State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque will act prudently to avoid further complications.

The BCB election on October 6 last year was marred by allegations of irregularities, including vote rigging and manipulation, and Aminul's earlier criticism of cricket administration has raised speculation over whether the current board structure will remain unchanged.

Speaking on the sidelines of an Iftar organised by the Bangladesh Sports Press Association in Gulistan, Faruque acknowledged concerns about a possible ICC embargo but avoided firm predictions.

"I believe there will be a difference between the statements he made before becoming Sports Minister and those he makes now. When you are in a position of responsibility, you have to think differently and more carefully," Faruque said.

"It is difficult to say anything definite at this moment. However, you should keep in mind that our relationship with the ICC is not at its best right now. If any incident occurs and the ICC finds fault, they may decide to take action if they wish."

WOMEN'S ASIA CUP RISING STARS

Unbeaten run fuels REDEMPTION BID

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Before departing for the ACC Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars 2026 tournament in Thailand, Bangladesh set two key objectives: to compete for the title and provide players with much-needed international exposure after a prolonged lack of matches.

Having reached the final unbeaten, Bangladesh now focus on lifting the trophy when they face India at the Terdthai Cricket Ground in Bangkok today, believing their goal of offering valuable match experience has already been fulfilled.

Leg spinner Fahima Khatun has led the side, alongside left arm spinner Shanjida Akther Meghla and left-arm pacer Fariha Islam Trisna, who recently featured in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup qualifiers in Nepal. While Fahima is a regular in the national eleven, Meghla and Trisna have had limited opportunities due to the presence of established players such as Nahida Akter and Marufa Akter.

All three have impressed – particularly skipper Fahima, who has led from the front with 89 runs and six wickets in four matches. Meghla and Trisna have claimed seven and two wickets respectively. Shorifa Khatun and Fatema Jahan added five and four wickets, while Lata Mondol and Sarmin Sultana contributed 83 and 75



runs, highlighting the team's collective strength.

Head coach Nasiruddin Faruque expressed satisfaction, saying several players are ready to challenge for national selection.

"For the future, Farjana Easmin Medha

and Sadia Akter are performing well," Faruque told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Players like Trisna don't get many chances in the national team because Marufa usually plays as the main pacer, so this is a great opportunity for her to show her value. Meghla also doesn't get many national matches, so this tournament is a chance for them to fight for a spot.

"Fahima is doing very well so far. She hasn't had many batting opportunities in the national team, but here she is showing her skill. I planned to promote her from number six to number four in the last match, and she contributed fully."

Faruque also noted that other teams fielded experienced internationals, with India led by Radha Yadav and including Minnu Mani, Pakistan featuring Shawaal Zulfikar, and Sri Lanka captained by Anushka Sanjeevani. "I saw India chase well against Sri Lanka [on Friday]; they are playing well," he said.

Reflecting on conditions, Faruque said the wickets in Bangkok are "tricky" and "good bowling has dominated in all the matches".

The tournament, formerly the ACC Women's T20 Emerging Teams Asia Cup, was first held in Hong Kong in 2023, where India beat Bangladesh in the final. This time, the women in red and green are determined to go one step further.

SHORT CORNER

23 Bangladeshis in The Hundred Auction

A total of 23 Bangladesh cricketers have registered for The Hundred Auction 2026 set to take place in central London on March 11 and 12. Pacer Mustafizur Rahman has the highest base price among the Bangladeshis, set at £100,000. No one from Bangladesh has ever competed in this league, which has been running since 2021.

Flick tells Barca stars to lead 'responsibility' for dip

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick told his team they must feel responsibility after two damaging defeats ahead of Sunday's clash against Levante in LaLiga. After a 4-0 thrashing by Atletico Madrid last week in the Copa del Rey semifinal first leg, Barca fell to a 2-1 league defeat against Girona on Monday, giving Real Madrid a two-point advantage at the summit.

Neymar hints at possible retirement

Former Brazil captain Neymar said he is thinking of retiring at the end of the year after being hampered by injuries but hopes to go to the 2026 World Cup first. He missed the start of the Brazilian season in January after undergoing knee surgery in late December.

Floyd Mayweather to come out of retirement

Floyd Mayweather is coming out of retirement and will return to professional boxing after his exhibition fight with Mike Tyson this spring, the 48-year-old announced Friday.

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Title tension rises as Arsenal visit Spurs

AGENCIES

As the Premier League season is reaching its climax, the storyline feels all too familiar for Arsenal – points slipping away while closest rivals Manchester City gain ground.

Still, Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta insists his side must endure such crunch situations to eventually lift the title that has long eluded the Gunners.

"The more repeatedly you are in these kinds of positions, you're going to win it. ... So, first of all, you have to be there, and then in April or May, it will be decided who is the best, who can get over the line," Arteta said ahead of their visit to a spiraling Tottenham side, who are playing their first match since the firing of manager Thomas Frank on Sunday.

In the last four seasons, Arsenal have finished second – almost every time losing ground in the final stretch. To put it into perspective, during those four seasons, the Gunners dropped at least 10 more points than City in three campaigns and six more in another across the final 12 matches of each season. They lost the title race to City



twice during this period.

The omens do not look encouraging for Arsenal this time either. In one of the more shocking results of the season, Arsenal (17-3-7, 58 points) surrendered a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw at Wolverhampton Wanderers on Wednesday.

The result trimmed the Gunners' lead to five points over Manchester City, who had a game in hand entering the weekend, and marked the second straight league match in which Arsenal squandered a lead.

That may heighten the nerves in North London. Arsenal have dropped only seven points from winning positions this season – the eighth-fewest in the league and fewer than City's 11. Arteta believes those nerves can still be channeled positively as the Gunners attempt to win their first league crown since 2003-04.

"I think it's becoming more and more exciting because that means that you are closer," Arteta said.

Meanwhile, Spurs (7-11-8, 29 points) are simply trying to steer clear of the relegation scrap, beginning the weekend in 16th place and five points above the drop zone.

That would make them eager to start life under the new coach on a positive note, adding another layer of difficulty to an already tricky trip for Arteta's Arsenal.

With the title race tightening and familiar pressure mounting, Arsenal once again find themselves walking a fine line between promise and heartbreak – knowing that how they navigate the decisive weeks ahead could finally determine whether this season ends in vindication or *deja vu*.



PHOTO: BFF

BANGLADESH GET GOING IN SYDNEY

Bangladesh's women's football team began preparations for the AFC Women's Asian Cup soon after arriving in Sydney on Thursday night, holding their first training session at Valentine Sports Park early the next morning. Despite travel fatigue, the squad completed a two-hour session before continuing their acclimatisation with gym work in the afternoon. Bangladesh will begin their campaign against defending champions China on March 3.