



## England's shaky batting face Pakistan spin test

AFP, Pallekele

Pakistan on Monday warned England's inconsistent batting line-up to expect a trial by spin when the teams clash in the T20 World Cup Super Eights.

Pakistan batsman Sahibzada Farhan told reporters that England struggled to 146-9 against Sri Lanka's spinners on Sunday.

Farhan said that England can expect more of the same from Pakistan's spinners when they meet on the same Pallekele ground in Kandy on Tuesday night.

Pakistan desperately need a win after their first match against New Zealand was washed out.

A defeat would put England, who skittled Sri Lanka for 95 to win by 51 runs, through to the semifinals with a game to spare.

Pakistan would then need to beat Sri Lanka in their final Super Eights match and hope other results go their way to reach the last four.

"What we saw in the Sri Lanka-England game was that the ball was gripping and England struggled against spin," said the in-form opener Farhan on Monday.

"Sri Lanka have one or two spinners but we have five in all so we will give England a tough time on a pitch that looks good and will grip," said Farhan.

Pakistan's spinners have taken 26 wickets in the four matches so far. Their seamers have dismissed only seven batsmen.

History will be against Pakistan as they have never beaten England in three previous Twenty20 World Cup clashes.

Pakistan are likely to bring in spinner Abrar Ahmed in place of seaming all-rounder Faheem Ashraf.

England may name an unchanged side for the fifth match in succession with Liam Dawson, Will Jacks, Adil Rashid and Jacob Bethell providing their spin options.

Sri Lanka and New Zealand are the two other teams in Pakistan and England's Super Eights group. They face each other in Colombo on Wednesday. The top two teams will qualify for the semifinals.



### SHORT CORNER

#### South Africa to host Bangladesh in November

Reigning World Test Championship (WTC) winners South Africa will host Bangladesh for an all-format series, including two Tests in November which are part of the ongoing 2025-27 WTC cycle, Cricket South Africa announced on Monday.

#### Mohammedan election on March 9

Mohammedan Sporting Club Limited is set to hold its annual general meeting (AGM) and the much-awaited election on March 9 at Dhaka Club Limited, ending a five-year gap since the last polls. A total of 371 members, including three donor members, will cast their votes to elect a 17-member board of directors -- comprising 16 directors and one president.

#### 'No one should become a Test player under these circumstances'

Bangladesh batter Mominul Haque has once again voiced his frustration at being labelled a "Test-only" player -- a tag he believes has consistently deprived him of opportunities in white-ball cricket.

#### Roadmap laid for 'transparent' sports polls

State Minister for Youth and Sports, Aminul Haque, has indicated that the existing ad hoc committees of various national sports bodies will remain in place until transparent elections are held.

\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star website

## ICC pre-seeds, surprises unfold

ASHAQ-UL-ALAM

Ahead of every major sporting event, analysts, ex-players and fans alike come up with predictions about how the tournament will pan out. Debates rage over which team will get knocked out early, who will proceed to the next phase and, eventually, who will lift the trophy.

Such speculations are usually welcomed as they add colour to the buildup of the tournament. However, the one stakeholder that should never indulge in such guesswork are the organisers themselves because if they begin forecasting their own events, the question of fairness would inevitably arise.

And that's exactly what International Cricket Council (ICC) has done in the 2024 and the ongoing edition of the ICC T20 World Cup with the pre-seeding of the Super Eight.

In both World Cups, 20 teams divided into four groups competed in the first round and the top two teams from each made it to the Super Eights, where they were again split into two groups of four.

In typical ICC fashion, the grouping of the first round was done at random. No draws were held, no official explanation for how it was done was conveyed, only a media release announced four five-team groups with India and Pakistan, like clockwork, grouped together yet again.

While other major sports organisations like FIFA and UEFA have been holding glitzy draw events for decades, where teams are placed in different pots



according to their previous results and stature and get seeded into groups at random, ICC has carried on with its closed door grouping ever since the inaugural ODI World Cup in 1975.

Moreover, ICC has also been guilty of tinkering with the World Cup's structure in every few editions. The first few ODI World Cups had teams divided into multiple groups in the first round, the 1992 edition saw the introduction of the round-robin league system, which was scrapped from the next edition.

The 2019 and 2023 editions saw the return of the round-robin system. However, the marquee event will revert to the multi-group system in the 2027 edition.

The T20 World Cup, similarly, has gone through changes across editions, the latest and the most significant one being the introduction of the pre-seeding system.

Through this system, the ICC, on the basis of T20I rankings, predicted which

eight teams would come out of the first round and declared which group they would compete in the second phase, regardless of whether they finish as group champions or runners-up.

The only way this grouping could be altered is if a weaker team sprung a surprise and eliminated a higher-ranked side. And ironically, it has happened in both editions.

Last time, it was the USA who forced their way into the Super Eight, knocking out Pakistan, and this time, it is Zimbabwe, who have eliminated Australia, beaten co-hosts Sri Lanka to march their way into the Super Eights as group champions.

If the USA and Zimbabwe's qualifications were examples of how pre-tournament speculations sometimes get overturned by the spontaneity of a sporting event, the awkward distribution of the teams in the Super Eights exposed why one should avoid predicting what will happen in a tournament solely based on rankings.

Zimbabwe are placed in Group 1, replacing Australia, alongside West Indies, India and South Africa, who also finished at the top of their respective groups.

Meanwhile, all four runners-up -- England, New Zealand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- are in Group 2.

This bizarre grouping goes against the conventional norm of handing an advantage to whoever performed better in the first round. Instead, the runners-up are comparatively being rewarded, getting grouped with teams who are comparatively less in-form.

The ICC claims it pre-seeded the Super Eights for logistic reasons, giving fans a heads-up about where their team is likely to play, making it easier to make necessary travel arrangements.

But this decision undermines the very essence of a multi-team tournament -- unpredictability. In trying to control the uncontrollable, ICC has once again struggled to act like a truly global sporting body.

## Chivu confident Inter can overturn Bodo deficit

AFP, Milan

Cristian Chivu said Monday that his Inter Milan team can turn around a two goal deficit against Bodo/Glimt and reach the last 16 of the Champions League.

Inter lost 3-1 in Norway last week and risk joining reigning Italian champions Napoli in being eliminated from Europe's elite club competition.

"We don't have any obligations, only a duty. All we need to do is go out on the pitch and do what we know we can do," Chivu told reporters ahead of Tuesday's clash at the San Siro.

"We have to go out there knowing that if there's a team to turn this around, it's us... We can't lose faith in ourselves or our self-confidence."

"If we want to have any chance of qualifying from the play-offs we need to be the best version of ourselves."

Inter will be without captain Lautaro Martinez in attack, while the availability of key midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu is also uncertain.

The winners of the tie will play either Manchester City or Sporting of Portugal in the last 16 next month.

Bodo/Glimt have had a remarkable debut campaign in the Champions League, sneaking into the knock-out stage with shock victories over Manchester City and Atletico Madrid in their final two league-phase matches.



## 'True cricket lovers' treated to Akbar show

SPORTS REPORTER

Crowds began streaming into the Shaheed Chandu Stadium from the morning, and the strong turnout continued throughout yesterday as Bogura marked the start of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) one-day tournament. Akbar Ali ensured the spectators were not disappointed, smashing a blazing 111 to power his star-studded North Zone side to a 54-run win over East Zone.

Initially, only two galleries were opened to accommodate fans, as per sources. However, as the steady flow of spectators continued, authorities were compelled to open a third. While national team players such as Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Najmul Hossain Shanto hit fifties but could not carry on for bigger scores, Akbar took his opportunity in front of a near-capacity crowd, notching his



A large crowd turned up at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura to watch the opening match of the BCL, between North Zone and East Zone, yesterday. (Inset) Akbar Ali of North Zone raises his bat after reaching his century. PHOTO: BCB

first List A ton. The right-handed wicketkeeper-batter, who led Bangladesh to the U-19 World Cup title in 2020, described the atmosphere as a rare experience in domestic cricket.

"The whole stadium was 70-80 per cent full in terms of crowd presence," Akbar told The Daily Star. "From the morning, the way the crowd arrived, we aren't used to seeing such scenes in domestic cricket."

"It was a very different experience for us since, except maybe BPL, we don't see such crowds in domestic matches. I think this kind of crowd presence is really good, and we welcome it."

Bogura last hosted international cricket in 2006, staging its only Test match -- between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka -- and its most recent ODI, when the Tigers faced Zimbabwe. More recently, the venue held a Bangladesh U-19s versus

Afghanistan U-19s series, where strong crowd turnout was again a notable feature.

Veteran Mominul Haque, who scored 83 for East Zone, praised the Bogura crowd as well.

"Bogura is a place where people are true cricket lovers. Whenever I've come here -- whether for the Premier League or HP camps -- I've seen that because matches are rarely played here, people turn up whenever they do occur. Having a crowd is very good for the players; it makes for better matches," Mominul said.

The ground will now hold a special place in Akbar's memory after his first List A hundred. Like the venue itself, he has often been overlooked by selectors, even as many of his U-19 teammates have progressed to the national side.

"Things that happen for the first time are always special. Even in the Premier League, I often don't get many overs when I come in to bat. I remember an innings of 89 when the overs ran out. I've missed a few opportunities before. This time, once I crossed 70, I told myself that since I had time in hand, I should make it count," Akbar said.



Arsenal's Swedish striker Viktor Gyokeres (C) celebrates with Martin Odegaard and Noni Madueke after scoring his second goal in a 4-1 thrashing of Tottenham Hotspur in Premier League's North London derby on Sunday. The big win took the Gunners five points clear of defending champions Manchester City, who have a game in hand. PHOTO: AFP