

## No room for slip-ups for India

STAR SPORTS DESK

The Super Eights Group 1 of the ongoing T20 World Cup is set for a significant shape-up today, with defending champions India taking on surprise package Zimbabwe in Chennai and two in-form sides – South Africa and the West Indies – clashing in Ahmedabad.

The Proteas and the Windies will take the field in the day's first game. India will be hoping that the Aiden Markram-led South Africa prevail, as that would allow them to keep their semifinal fate largely in their own hands by winning both of their remaining Super Eight fixtures, including today's encounter.

On the contrary, Zimbabwe will be rooting for a West Indies victory, as that would further strengthen their chances of reaching the semifinals in what has already been an incredible World Cup campaign.

India suffered a 76-run hammering at the hands of South Africa in their first Super Eight fixture, a defeat that dented their net run-rate to 3.800. While both South Africa and the West Indies have won their opening Super Eight matches, a Proteas slip-up today could further complicate matters for India.

In that scenario, apart from winning all their remaining Super Eight games, India would also need Zimbabwe to beat South Africa – a statistically unlikely outcome, even though the lower-ranked Zimbabwe have already come this far by stunning Australia and co-hosts Sri Lanka.

Beyond the result of the day's first game, India skipper Suryakumar Yadav will have another pressing concern – how to address their faltering opening combination. Opener Abhishek Sharma's slump – including three consecutive ducks and an unconvincing 12 ball 15 in their last outing against South Africa – has hurt India's campaign.

India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak admitted that changes are being considered.

"There can be changes, yes," Kotak told reporters. "And obviously, it goes without saying that we discuss, because there are two leftie openers, number three is



left-handed."

India's top and middle order is heavily dominated by left-handers, offering opponents a clear tactical avenue.

Teams including Pakistan, the Netherlands and South Africa have targeted this vulnerability by opening the bowling with off-spin, dismissing one of India's openers in the first over with an off-spinner in multiple games.

With skipper Sikandar Raza and Brian Bennett in Zimbabwe's ranks, the African side will almost certainly look to exploit that weakness.

India have lost a wicket in the first over in three games

so far in the World Cup, and right-handed wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson could emerge as a potential solution to that recurring problem.

"People ask about Sanju as a right hander up front," Kotak said, without offering any clear indication. "Or you think of playing three spinners," he added.

Whether India opt for changes or stick to their current combination, one thing is certain – the outcomes of today's two matches will significantly reshape the semifinal race in Group 1 and could define the trajectory of multiple campaigns in a matter of hours.

## Shakib must clear legal hurdles to return: Aminul

SPORTS REPORTER

State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque said yesterday that Shakib Al Hasan and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza would be welcomed back to cricket if they can resolve the legal proceedings against them.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has officially spoken about Shakib's return following a recent board meeting, and there are suggestions that the all-rounder may even feature in the upcoming home ODI series against Pakistan, starting on March 11.

Aminul had previously stated that the government would take a lenient stance regarding the cases against Shakib and Mashrafe. Speaking after a program at Pallabi Bidyanketan on Wednesday, Aminul said that Shakib and Mashrafe, however, would still have to face and resolve the cases against them.

"Shakib and Mashrafe are legendary cricketers. I have seen the love of the people of Bangladesh for them and their attraction to cricket. I feel that the legal cases against them were the state's decision," he said.

Aminul noted that Shakib and Mashrafe should address the cases through their lawyers in accordance with state laws.

"As a sports person, I believe they should address those legal issues personally through their lawyers, in accordance with the law.

"Through their lawyers, if they face the legal proceedings against them and resolve everything to

prove their innocence to return to the field, I will welcome them. We will be hundred percent flexible in that regard," Aminul added.

Shakib, a former Awami League MP, has not returned to the country since the Awami League-led government was ousted in August 2024. His last match for Bangladesh was the Kanpur Test during the Tigers' tour of India in September 2024.

Meanwhile, BCB sources have claimed that documents related to the cases against Shakib were forwarded to the government yesterday.

"The documents were forwarded yesterday, but since this is a policymaking issue, it will be handled by the relevant authorities, and for now, the board is not involved in the proceedings. If anything is required [from the board], we will be notified," a BCB official said on condition of anonymity.

## Darwin, Mackay to host Bangladesh Tests in August

AFP, Sydney

Test cricket will return to the Australian city of Darwin for the first time in over two decades in August, organisers said Wednesday as they unveiled the schedule for an upcoming series against Bangladesh.

Cricket Australia said the first of two Tests against Bangladesh would kick off on August 13 in the Northern Territory capital, the first such match there since July 2004 when they hosted Sri Lanka. The second Test from August 22-26 will be played in Mackay in the eastern state of Queensland. Bangladesh had played the opening Test at the Darwin venue in their maiden tour of Australia in 2003. Bangladesh's second Test during that tour was held in Cairns.

The Tests will be the Australia's first since thrashing England 4-1 in the Ashes in January.

## Tigresses to fine-tune in Scotland

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are set to play a tri-nation series in Scotland as part of their build-up to the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, to be held in England and Wales from June 12 to July 5.

After limited international exposure hampered their campaign at last year's 50-over World Cup, Bangladesh Cricket Board is keen to ensure stronger preparation this time.

Women's wing chairperson Rubaba Dowla said the series follows the team's unbeaten qualifying run and forms part of a structured roadmap that includes the Women's Bangladesh Premier League (WBPL) and a home white-ball series against Sri Lanka. "All of these are part of our overall plan," she said after a Women's BPL Governing Council meeting in Mirpur yesterday.

The Tigresses are expected to arrive in Scotland two weeks before the marquee event. Alongside the hosts, the Netherlands are likely to complete the tri-series line-up, with matches set for Edinburgh.

## From Brook's hardest winter to redemption in Kandy

AGENCIES

Richly talented yet relentlessly scrutinised, Harry Brook found his redemption beneath the floodlights of Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy, crafting an innings that may forever define his captaincy.

For months, the 27-year-old England skipper had carried more than a bat to the crease; he bore the weight of criticism, controversy and doubt. But on Tuesday night, chasing 165 against Pakistan in the ICC T20 World Cup, Brook delivered not merely runs, but a statement.

When Phil Salt fell first ball, a hush rippled through the stands. England's campaign, already uneven, threatened to unravel. Brook, typically stationed at number five, made a captain's call. He walked in at first drop, shoulders squared, eyes steady – a silent message to his dressing room: trust me. What followed was breathtaking. Brook unfurled drives that split the infield, hooks that pierced the night sky, and deft nudges that kept the scoreboard breathing. It was the second-fastest century in T20 World Cup history and the first by a captain – a blend of audacity and calculation.

Where others might have lashed blindly, Brook measured risk with precision. Against a snarling Pakistan attack led by Shaheen Shah Afridi, he alternated violence

with vigilance, farming strike when wickets tumbled at the other end.

Yet the runs were only half the story.

Before the tournament, Brook had apologised for a late-night altercation during a white-ball tour of New Zealand, admitting he lied to shield teammates. The episode, coupled with a barren Ashes and tabloid-fuelled criticism, had prompted calls for his resignation. In Australia, he was mocked for reckless dismissals; at home, questioned for judgment off the field.

"I've had the hardest winter of my life," he would later confess. But in Kandy, there was clarity. Every single taken, every boundary pierced through noise accumulated over months. Afridi himself would call it "the best innings of his life – a captain's innings."

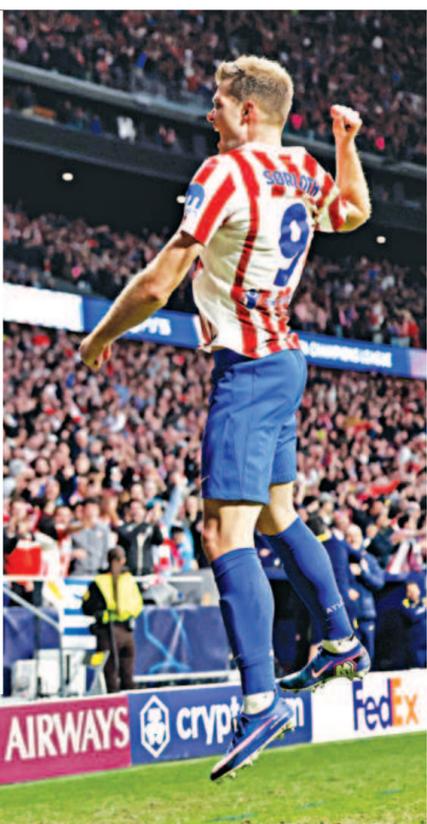
England, twice champions in 2010 and 2022, had limped through the group stage, beaten by the West Indies and rattled by Nepal. Few fancied them lifting a third crown. Yet Brook's hundred hauled them into a fifth straight semi-final and reshaped the narrative.

It was not just a century. It was stewardship under fire.



Alexander Sorloth's hat-trick fired Atletico Madrid into the Champions League last 16 with an emphatic 4-1 win over Club Brugge on Tuesday, progressing 7-4 on aggregate from the play-off round. Brugge could not keep the Norwegian target man at bay as he settled an entertaining tie with a display of lethal finishing at the Metropolitano stadium. After Joel Oronoz had cancelled out Sorloth's opener, Johnny Cardoso smashed Atletico in front and Sorloth added two more goals late on to seal his team's victory.

PHOTO: REUTERS



## Arctic thunder: A small club's giant statement

AFP, MILAN

Bodo/Glimt are on the march in the Champions League after dumping out European giants Inter Milan, the latest chapter in a remarkable rise for the tiny club from north of the Arctic Circle.

Kjetil Knutsen's team reached the last 16 of the biggest club competition on the planet with two wins over last year's beaten finalists – a 5-2 aggregate victory giving them the greatest result in their history.

"I think it's an amazing evening for the club, for the players, for the town and also for Norwegian football," said Knutsen, who has been in charge of Bodo/Glimt since 2018.

Tuesday's triumph was their fourth straight win in the Champions League, with Manchester City and Atletico Madrid also falling in the final two league phase matches, which allowed Bodo/Glimt to snatch a spot in the knockout play-offs.

Bodo/Glimt were only promoted to Norway's top tier, a competition which had been dominated for three decades by Rosenborg of



Trondheim, in 2017 but have since been crowned national champions in four of the last six seasons.

And since then, they have slowly risen up the domestic and European ranks, last season becoming the first Norwegian team to play in the semifinals of a major European competition with their run to the last four of the Europa League.

Before this season, their best result was beating Lazio on penalties in the quarterfinals of

the Europa League before being eliminated by Tottenham Hotspur.

But now, the team of no stars with a tiny budget have moved to a whole new level with one of either City or Sporting of Portugal awaiting next month.

Bodo/Glimt had previously been considered tricky opposition due to their artificial pitch and the frequently frigid conditions at their 8,200-capacity Aspmyra Stadium.

But they have now added

strong away performances to their armoury, with a solid defensive display on Tuesday allowing Jens Petter Hauge and Hakon Evjen to dish out two sucker punches.

"I always look forward, so that's how we're thinking. For me, history is not so important," added Knutsen.

It was, however, a rude awakening for three-time winners Inter, whose stature and budget dwarf that of the Norwegians and who are heavy favourites to win Serie A this season.

A pasting at the hands of Paris Saint-Germain might have coloured their last European campaign but Inter got to that final by seeing off Bayern Munich and Barcelona in epic knockout ties.

Defeat to Bodo/Glimt was also symbolic after Norway swatted Italy aside twice in World Cup qualifying.

Italy face the prospect of no team reaching the last 16 with Juventus and Atalanta trailing Galatasaray and Borussia Dortmund, the latest blow to the reputation of a grand old footballing nation which has since fallen on hard times.