



Ritu Porna Chakma poses in front of the iconic Sydney Opera House yesterday as the Bangladesh star and her teammates enjoyed a well-earned break following their spirited Women's Asian Cup debut against holders China on Tuesday. Ritu and company return to action against another tournament favourites, North Korea, on Friday. PHOTO: FACEBOOK

History beckons India as England seek 'PERFECT GAME'

AGENCIES

India, bidding to become the first team to successfully defend the ICC T20 World Cup title, face an England side hoping to play a "perfect game" in their semifinal at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium today.

The teams are meeting in the last four of the tournament for the third time in a row, with one victory apiece, and the winners went on to lift the trophy on each occasion.

In 2022, England crushed India by 10 wickets in Adelaide and beat Pakistan in the Melbourne final. Two years ago, India won in Guyana by a similarly dominant 68 runs before downing South Africa in Barbados.

India went undefeated in 2024, but this time around, they suffered a defeat against South Africa in the Super Eight stage before responding well with victories over Zimbabwe and West Indies.

India's top order has struggled at the tournament with opener Abhishek Sharma, the top-ranked batter in the format, managing only 80 runs in six matches with three ducks to his name.

Sanju Samson's unbeaten 97 in their win over West Indies was a welcome boost, however, and India boast explosive firepower in the middle order with skipper Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya and Shivam Dube.

There are fewer concerns over the hosts' bowling unit led by top-ranked leg spinner Varun Chakravarthy and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, though the fielding needs to improve after 13 dropped catches.

India's bowling coach Morne Morkel agreed

India had not put together a flawless display in the tournament yet, but said that did not matter.

"It's not about how you get to the semifinals. It's about the next two games, how we're going to play there," Morne told reporters in Mumbai after India's final training session before the semifinal.

The Indian team had another training session on Tuesday night, which was pushed back by an hour to ensure it did not coincide with a lunar eclipse, which is considered unlucky in the country.

Meanwhile, twice champions England will be confident of causing an upset having found form following a sketchy start to the tournament.

All-rounder Will Jacks has scored 191 runs down the order and captured seven wickets to earn four player-of-the-match awards, and captain Harry Brook, Tom Banton and Sam Curran have all made useful contributions with the bat.

"If there's ever a time we want to play our perfect game, it's probably Thursday night," Curran told reporters on Tuesday.

"We've all been chipping in at different times but we know in T20 cricket it probably just takes a couple of our guys to come good with bat and ball."

Former captain Jos Buttler has struggled badly, however, making only 62 runs in seven matches, and his opening partner Phil Salt also looks short of confidence. England spinners Adil Rashid, Liam Dawson and Jacks will look to disrupt India's rhythm, particularly at the Wankhede, where the shorter boundaries and a turning track could prove to be decisive.

98 DAYS TO GO



The man who died standing

On July 17, 1994, at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Roberto Baggio stood at the centre of one of football's most poignant images. Having carried Italy through a turbulent World Cup – scoring decisive goals against Nigeria, Spain and Bulgaria – the injured playmaker entered the final against Brazil as both hope and doubt. After 120 goalless minutes, the match went to penalties. With Italy trailing, Baggio needed to score the final kick. Instead, his shot flew over the crossbar. While Brazil celebrated, Baggio remained still – hands on hips, head bowed.

** Read full story on The Daily Star's website

'Mile decision taken two months ago'

SPORTS REPORTER

Many were surprised to see goalkeeper Mile Akter in Bangladesh's starting XI for their AFC Women's Asian Cup opener against nine-time champions China on Tuesday, as experienced Rupna Chakma was left on the bench.

But the move, team officials revealed, had been planned well in advance.

The tall shot-stopper justified the decision of coach Peter Butler with an impressive display that helped Bangladesh avoid a heavier defeat, even though they eventually lost 2-0 to the reigning champions.

"We started our plan regarding Mile at least two months ago. After discussing the matter with the head coach, we decided to start her against China," said goalkeeping coach Masud Ahmed after Wednesday's recovery session.

Masud said they had been working specifically on how to use Mile's height against China's strengths.

"During the domestic league and national team training sessions, we worked on China's strong points and how we could utilise Mile's height. She has proved that she is capable of playing at this level," he said.

Mile herself admitted she had known beforehand that she would get the nod against China and prepared accordingly. "I knew I would play against China. I understood it during the domestic league matches."



Pakistan exclude Babar for Bangladesh ODIs

AGENCIES

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced a 15-member squad for the upcoming three-match ODI series against Bangladesh, scheduled from March 11 to 15.

The most notable exclusion from the squad is former captain Babar Azam. In the most recent ODI series, Babar scored a ton, underlining his form in the 50-over format. However, he struggled during the T20 World Cup, managing only 91 runs in six matches at a strike rate of 112.34.

All three ODIs will be played at the Shere Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur.

PAKISTAN SQUAD:

Shaheen Shah Afridi (captain), Abdul Samad, Abrar Ahmed, Faheem Ashraf, Faisal Akram, Haris Rauf, Hussain Talat, Maaz Sadaqat, Mohammad Rizwan (wicketkeeper), Mohammad Wasim Jr, Muhammad Ghazi Ghorri (wicketkeeper), Saad Masood, Sahibzada Farhan, Salman Ali Agha and Shamyl Hussain.

Built for sports, used for markets

MIRZA SHAKIL

In the heart of Bhuapur Upazila, Tangail, the Sheikh Russel Mini Stadium stands as a silent monument to unfulfilled promises.

Built with hope and public money at a cost of 41 lakh taka, the stadium was meant to inspire the youth of the area and nurture the dreams of aspiring athletes.

Instead, in its derelict state, it has become perhaps the best example of why the new State Minister for Youth and Sports, Aminul Haque, pledged to focus on open playgrounds rather than closed-door infrastructures to create a new sports environment for tomorrow's Bangladesh.

The stadium construction tender was held in 2017, and two joint venture companies – Akhtar Enterprise and Four Sight Company, a Dhaka-based contractor – were awarded the project.

Even before completion in 2019, cracks appeared in the pavilion building, raising concerns about construction quality. Despite these issues, the stadium was handed over to authorities, yet it has remained largely unused.

Sports enthusiasts allege that not a single

shape athletes now hosts cattle trading.

During a recent visit, a disheartening picture emerged. The playing field was riddled with potholes. Gallery benches were buried under dirt and weeds. Rain had eroded the soil and damaged the palisades.

Cows and goats roamed freely, and waste lay scattered, robbing the stadium of its beauty. The building's lining was falling off, the public toilet was in disrepair, and even

Sports Association, Md. Ratan, echoed these concerns. Since the construction of the stadium next to Shialkol Hat, he said, there have been repeated complaints about irregularities, and despite informing authorities multiple times, no effective action has been taken.

The residents believe that if swift steps are taken to convert the mini stadium into a vibrant sports centre, it could play a



the goalposts stood broken and neglected. Local footballer and college student Saiful Islam said: "There is a stadium near our house, but we have not been able to use it. We want to practice football, but the field is full of potholes."

Former player and sports organiser Aktaruzzaman Khan added: "I tried to hold tournaments here, but local influential figures barred me. Now drug sellers and addicts use the stadium at night, and the local administration seems unaware."

Well-known player Tanjinur Rahman Islam questioned why such a large amount of public money was spent if the facility would not serve its purpose.

Former General Secretary of the Upazila

vital role in steering local youth away from mobile phones, drugs, and crime.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md. Mahbub Hasan stated that he will discuss the matter with concerned officials and take necessary measures.

The National Sports Council has built sports structures across the country, recognising the importance of infrastructure and modern facilities to compete internationally. Yet, what is the value of concrete structures without proper utilisation?

Many stadiums host only a few national programs each year and remain unused the rest of the time – soulless bodies without activity.



day of sports has been held there in almost six years. Instead, the stadium witnesses a different scene every Saturday.

A bustling market fills the grounds, where cows, goats, and furniture are bought and sold. The field that was supposed to

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