

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
 Women's Asian Cup
 Japan vs Vietnam
 Live from 3:00 pm
SONY SPORTS 1, 2, 5
 UEFA Champions
 League (Round of 16)

Galatasaray vs Liverpool
 Live from 11:45 pm
 Atalanta vs Bayern Munich
 Atletico Madrid vs
 Tottenham Hotspur
 Newcastle United vs Barcelona
 Live from 2:00 am (Wednesday)

Bangladesh face Asian reality

Butler calls for better support

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's historic debut in the AFC Women's Asian Cup ended without a point, or a goal scored, as the women in red and green expectedly lost all three group-stage matches in Australia, finishing the campaign with yesterday's 4-0 loss to Uzbekistan in Perth.

However, the experience of playing in Asia's top-flight competition is widely seen as a crucial step forward for the country's women's football.

Bangladesh were the only team among the 12 participants with a FIFA ranking beyond 100 – and also the youngest. The next lowest-ranked side, Iran, were placed 44 spots higher, highlighting the considerable gap the women in red and green had to bridge.

While the 3-0 and 5-0 defeats to powerhouses China and North Korea were largely expected given the differences in footballing standards, many had hoped Bangladesh might frustrate Uzbekistan, as they did against Myanmar in the deciding fixture in the qualifiers last year.

At the Perth Rectangular Stadium yesterday, a victory over the Central Asian side could have pushed the team into the quarterfinals, opening the door to opportunities such as competing in the Olympic Games qualifiers and



the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup.

The country's women's football still faces significant limitations in infrastructure, domestic league structure, training facilities and international exposure. Comparing the facilities available to Uzbekistan with those in Bangladesh, head coach Peter Butler said post-match, "The opposition brings TV cameras and video equipment – luxuries that we simply do not have."

"At times, it feels like a boxer entering a fight with one arm tied behind his back. At the AFC level, you face teams that are far better prepared than we are, both physically and logistically."

"A major issue we face is that we do not have a designated training pitch in Bangladesh. This is one of the primary challenges for our development."

Despite the defeats, Bangladesh's qualification for the Asian Cup itself marked a milestone for the country's women's football. The team have already shown their regional dominance by winning the SAFF Women's Championship in 2022 and 2024, but the Asian Cup campaign provided a valuable reality check about the standards required at the continental level.

"I have nothing but praise for the girls; they have come a long way. I have a lot of respect for them and I am very proud of what they have achieved," Butler remarked.

Rather than being treated as a one-off achievement, the appearance should serve as a foundation for long-term development. For that to happen, Bangladesh Football Federation must use this experience to provide the platform the players need and deserve – starting with basic requirements such as a "designated training pitch", an issue captain Afeida Khandaker also highlighted during the tournament.



The experienced Mustafizur Rahman will be a key figure for Bangladesh in their upcoming three-match ODI series against Pakistan, starting on Wednesday at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. Before the series, the mercurial Mirpur wicket is turning heads with its bright look, a complete opposite to its usually dark and gloomy appearance. Pakistan skipper Shaheen Shah Afridi and coach Mike Hesson looked on curiously during their practice session yesterday, trying to decode its mystery.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Different agendas for Bangladesh, Pakistan

SPORTS REPORTER

With the Pakistan team in town for Bangladesh's first ODI assignment in more than four months, both sides have begun preparations in Dhaka and are heading into the three-match series chasing different agendas.

For Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons, improving on their ODI mettle seems to be the goal along with getting over the hurt of missing the recently-concluded ICC T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

"I think we are at that stage now where we're getting past that [disappointment of missing the T20 World Cup]. It was very hurtful for the guys and I'm talking to them and it was very, very hurtful," Simmons said on Monday during the press conference.

The Pakistan series kicks off a sequence of ODI series for Bangladesh and although they have won their last two ODI series at home against West Indies and Sri Lanka, both by a 2-1 margin, the quality has seemingly declined since the last ODI World Cup in 2023.

Bangladesh, ranked 10th in the ODI rankings, need wins to climb up the ladder and secure a direct entry into next year's ODI World Cup. However, Simmons wants to look beyond the qualification.

"The ultimate goal is to get better at ODI cricket rather than just focusing on qualification math. Although the team currently lacks some of the experience it had when Bangladesh was at the top of the ODI rankings, the focus is

on playing to the level the current talent allows," Simmons said.

"The team is currently looking at a pool of 23 to 24 players who train together, ensuring that depth is available for the numerous upcoming one-day series," he added on the player pool, as was evidenced by the likes of Jaker Ali and Parvez Hossain Emon, who are not part of the squad for the Pakistan ODIs, going through batting sessions at the Mirpur Academy ground yesterday.

ODI outings.

"First, it is physically demanding to keep wicket for 50 overs and then immediately open the batting. Second, Litton is one of the team's better players of spin bowling, which is a vital skill for the middle overs. His experience and skill set are expected to provide the stability the team has lacked in that period," Simmons said on Litton.

Pakistan, on the other hand, named six uncapped players for the series. It was suggestive that



Soumya Sarkar and Saif Hassan raised faith in the top order in the last ODI series against West Indies in October. In the absence of a few experienced stars, Bangladesh middle-order does not look as steady as it did before 2023 World Cup.

The creaky middle-order situation made way for the inclusion of Litton Das in the middle-order despite producing single-digit scores in his last eight

Pakistan – fourth in the ICC rankings – wanted a shake-up. Even Babar Azam, who has a ton in Pakistan's last ODI series, was axed.

Usually worried about Bangladesh's unpredictable surfaces and its uneven bounce, Hesson was more willing to experiment in this series.

"I don't think anyone particularly was dropped. It is a great opportunity for us to look at some younger talent," Hesson said.

93 DAYS TO GO



The five-time club

Mexico's Antonio Carbajal, who passed away in May 2023 at the age of 93, was the first player in history to appear in five consecutive World Cups (1950-1966). Since then, five others have matched the feat: Lothar Matthaus (Germany), Rafael Márquez (Mexico), Lionel Messi (Argentina), Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal) and Andres Guardado (Mexico). Of them, Messi and Ronaldo are on course to becoming the first players to compete in six World Cups in the upcoming in the USA.

**Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: "The hatrick lore of the FIFA World Cup"



Newcastle eye history against Barcelona

AGENCIES

The knockout stage of the Champions League begins on Tuesday with four compelling round of 16 first-leg clashes across Europe, but much of the spotlight will fall on the meeting between Newcastle United and Barcelona on Tyneside.

Premier League champions Liverpool launch the night's action with a difficult trip to Galatasaray in the intimidating atmosphere of Istanbul. In Spain, Atletico Madrid host Tottenham Hotspur in what promises to be a tightly contested tactical battle, while in Italy, Atalanta welcome six-time European champions Bayern Munich to Bergamo.

Yet the most anticipated tie of the opening night sees Newcastle face Barcelona in a historic occasion for the English side.

Manager Eddie Howe has called the clash the "biggest game" in the club's history, as Newcastle prepare for only their second appearance in the Champions League last 16.

Having comfortably overcome Azerbaijani side Qarabag FK in the play-off round, Newcastle now face a major step up against the La Liga leaders coached by Hansi Flick.

The tie also rekindles memories of the club's famous first Champions League meeting in 1997, when Newcastle stunned Barcelona 3-2 with a hat-trick from Faustino Asprilla.

After years of decline under Mike Ashley, Newcastle United have been revitalised since their 2021 takeover and now hope the visit of Barcelona can spark another memorable European night on Tyneside.

FROM CHAOTIC BUILD-UP TO T20 KINGS

AGENCIES

The 10th edition of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup began in confusion and controversy but ended with a statement of dominance as India cemented their legacy as the kings of the shortest format.

What started as a tournament overshadowed by political drama and uncertainty eventually delivered thrilling cricket, unforgettable moments and a historic triumph for the hosts.

India thrashed New Zealand by 96 runs in the final at the colossal Narendra Modi Stadium in front of nearly 86,000 spectators. The emphatic victory allowed India to retain the title and lift the trophy for a record third time, reinforcing their supremacy in T20 cricket.

It was also historic for several reasons: India became the first team to win the tournament on home soil, the first to defend the title successfully, and now stand as the most successful team in the tournament's history.

Yet the road to glory began under a cloud. The tournament's build-up was chaotic, dominated by political tensions that saw Bangladesh



withdraw from participation.

Their late replacement by Scotland created logistical challenges, while Pakistan initially threatened to boycott their high-profile group clash with India in solidarity with Bangladesh.

After intense negotiations with the International Cricket Council, Pakistan reversed their stance and the highly anticipated encounter went ahead in Colombo. India won the emotionally charged contest, though tensions lingered with no

handshakes exchanged between the two teams afterward.

Despite the rocky start, the tournament quickly found its rhythm and delivered the excitement that T20 cricket promises. High-scoring thrillers, nail-biting finishes and standout individual performances kept fans on the edge of their seats.

For the ICC, the event also provided another step toward its goal of globalising the game through the shortest format.



Eight associate nations participated in the expanded 20-team competition. None managed to defeat a full member side, yet several pushed the established teams to their limits.

Netherlands nearly stunned Pakistan in the opening match, while the USA gave eventual champions India an early scare.

Nepal displayed admirable fighting spirit, and debutants Italy played several competitive matches that hinted at cricket's growing

reach. The tournament also produced several remarkable storylines.

One of the most dramatic encounters came when South Africa and Afghanistan tied their group-stage match before producing the first-ever double Super Over in T20 World Cup history.

After both sides were tied again in the first Super Over, South Africa eventually prevailed off the final ball of a nerve-shredding second showdown.

Another major headline was the shock early exit of Australia.

Missing key pacers due to injury, Australia lost to the tournament's surprise package Zimbabwe and later to Sri Lanka. A rain-affected match elsewhere sealed their fate, eliminating the former champions before the second phase.

For India, the campaign was defined by resilience and redemption. Wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson emerged as one of the tournament's heroes.

Initially not part of the opening plans, he seized his opportunity with a stunning unbeaten 97 against the West Indies in a crucial Super Eights clash.

Samson followed it with another match-winning 89 in the semifinal against England and delivered again in the final, completing a remarkable redemption arc.

There were also individual feats that electrified the competition. Finn Allen blasted the fastest century in tournament history – a breathtaking 33-ball hundred – during New Zealand's semifinal victory over South Africa.

His brutal display of power-hitting shattered the previous record set by Chris Gayle in 2016.

Meanwhile, Italy produced one of the tournament's most emotional moments by securing their first-ever World Cup victory with a dominant 10-wicket win over Nepal.

The historic triumph moved players to tears and symbolised cricket's expanding footprint beyond its traditional strongholds.

Ultimately, though, the story of the tournament belonged to India.

From a troubled start overshadowed by politics to a triumphant finish in Ahmedabad, the hosts turned chaos into glory and emerged as the undisputed T20 kings.