

RANA BREATHES FIRE on home ODI debut

➤ Bangladesh won the first ODI against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday with 209 balls in hand, which is their third joint biggest win in ODIs in terms of balls remaining. They had earlier won by the same margin against New Zealand in Napier in December, 2023. Their biggest victory overall is against Zimbabwe in 2009, where they won with 229 balls to spare in Chattogram.

➤ Pakistan were bundled out for a mere 114 in 30.4 overs -- their lowest total against Bangladesh in ODIs. Their previous lowest total against the Tigers was 161 in 44.3 overs in Northampton during the 1999 ICC World Cup.

➤ This is Bangladesh's first win over Pakistan in ODIs since 2018. That victory came in an Asia Cup encounter in the UAE, which Bangladesh won by seven wickets. Since then, the two sides met only thrice more in the format before yesterday's game and the Tigers had lost all three.

➤ Nahid Rana ran through Pakistan in a fiery spell, claiming his maiden five-wicket haul in ODIs. The 23-year-old finished with 5-24, becoming the second Bangladeshi to claim an ODI fiver against Pakistan since Mustafizur Rahman (5-75), who did it in the 2019 World Cup.

SPORTS REPORTER

Nahid Rana made his way into international cricket with the Sri Lanka Test in March 2024, and emerged as a pace demon in the Rawalpindi Tests against Pakistan that year, but after a few underwhelming performances in away ODIs, some doubts crept in.

For Rana, a place in the XI in the first ODI against Pakistan yesterday was not a given. However, once included in his very first ODI game at home, the 23-year-old ran through Pakistan in a way reminiscent of the two Tests in Rawalpindi two years back.

Pakistan had made a solid start, reaching 39 for no loss before Rana joined the attack in the 10th over.

His first delivery lifted the match from a mundane state to an adrenaline pumped affair, the length delivery zipping off the surface and moving away at serious pace, leaving Sahibzada Farhan, who looked quite comfortable before that over, perplexed.

A loose fourth delivery was pounced on by Sahibzada but Rana came back with vengeance, producing another unplayable delivery that beat the bat, creating anticipation that great fast bowlers produce before releasing the wicket-taking delivery.

The last ball of the over gained on Sahibzada, who failed to adjust to the extra bounce and edged it to point.

Rana's first over was the premonition of destruction and the visitors' slightly inexperienced lineup soon felt his wrath.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Debutant Shmyl Hossain knew what was coming for him in Rana's next over but raw pace, angled at his body, saw him top-edge the ball, which landed safely into Litton Das's gloves.

Maaz Sadaqat had started well on his ODI debut but another delivery into the body from around the wicket saw him hurried into a top edge that went to fine-leg.

Mohammad Rizwan is no debutant, still, Rana's peach of an out-swinger sucked him in and Litton took a fine catch as Pakistan's good start turned into a Mirpur nightmare.

A planned execution of another short delivery to Salman Agha produced the

desired result as Tanzid Hasan Tamim fumbled before taking a sharp catch at short-leg.

In a devastating seven-over spell, Rana completed his maiden five-wicket haul in ODIs, finishing with five for 24. Pakistan were eventually bowled out for just 114 in 30.4 overs, and the fate of the game was pretty much decided in the first innings.

"Each batter has a weak area, but I believe in always trying to focus on my area of strength first," Rana, the player-of-the-match, said in the post-match press conference. "In international cricket, skill matters more than pace and that's what I am working on."

Inaugural WBPL pushed to July

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday pushed back the starting date of the inaugural Women's Bangladesh Premier League (WBPL) from April to July and has announced it will take place across three venues in Dhaka, Chattogram and Bogura.

The three-team tournament was earlier scheduled to take place from April 4-14, and will now be held across July 10-21, BCB announced through a press release.

"In view of the current global context, following consultations with potential franchise owners and key stakeholders, the BCB has decided to schedule the tournament in July to provide additional preparation time for teams, including squad formation, international player recruitment, and operational planning," the press release read.

According to the revised schedule, the tournament will take place five days after the conclusion of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in England, which is set to run from June 12 to July 5.

"The revised window also aligns well with the international cricket calendar, particularly the ICC Women's T20 World Cup scheduled in June 2026, ensuring greater availability of overseas players," the press release read.

The BCB also announced that the opening ceremony and the first match will take place at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura and the final will be held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka. The BCB is yet to finalise the three franchises for the inaugural tournament. The board had initially set the deadline for submission of Expressions of Interest (EOI) for franchises till March 4, and had later extended it to March 8.



'Should start preparing now for next qualifiers'

Bangladesh women's football team returned home early Wednesday after their maiden campaign in the AFC Women's Asian Cup, where they faced China, North Korea and Uzbekistan before exiting in the group stage in Australia. Captain Afeida Khandaker, now back with the U-20 camp ahead of next month's AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup in Thailand, spoke to *The Daily Star's* Anisur Rahman about the experience and what lies ahead. The excerpts follow:



Afeida Khandaker bumped into India women's cricket stars [L] Smriti Mandhana and [R] Jemimah Rodrigues on their way back from Australia. PHOTO: FACEBOOK

The Daily Star (DS): How significant was the Asian Cup experience, and where does the gap with top teams like China or North Korea lie?

Afeida Khandaker (AK): Hoisting the national flag and singing the national anthem on such a stage was a proud moment for us. We might not even have had the opportunity to play friendly matches against teams of that level, so facing them in the tournament was a great experience.

You can see the difference in their playing style. They groom players from a very young age, while many of us start much later. When you learn something early it stays with you.

DS: There were hopes of reaching the quarterfinals by beating Uzbekistan. Did the team believe it could happen?

AK: Of course. Everyone tried their best and even after conceding early we did not lose confidence. We kept attacking for goals, but luck was not with us.

DS: What should be the immediate priorities

if Bangladesh are to target bigger goals like the World Cup or Olympics?

AK: Good grounds should come first. If you are not used to quality pitches, it becomes difficult on fast surfaces abroad where the ball moves quickly. We also need a better dormitory for residential camps and proper food.

Preparation cannot start just six months before a tournament. First we must qualify for the Asian Cup, then think about the World Cup or Olympics. We should start preparing now for the next Asian Cup qualifiers with a proper four-year plan.

DS: You will now lead Bangladesh in the upcoming U-20 Asian Cup. What are your expectations?

AK: We are in a tough group with China, Vietnam and Thailand. But around 10-12 senior players in the U-20 squad gained valuable experience from the Asian Cup in Australia, which should help us. We will try to perform well and fight to get out of the group stage.

SHORT CORNER

Iran cannot participate in World Cup, sports minister says

Iran cannot participate in the 2026 World Cup after co-host the United States launched airstrikes against the country alongside Israel, killing its leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, sports minister Ahmad Donyamali said on Wednesday. "Considering that this corrupt regime has assassinated our leader, under no circumstances can we participate in the World Cup," the minister told state television. The World Cup will be held in the United States, Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19.

NSC orders probe into BCB election

The National Sports Council (NSC) has formed an independent inquiry committee to investigate alleged "irregularities, manipulation and abuse of power" in the 2025 Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) elections, according to an NSC press release on Wednesday. The committee was asked to submit its report to the State Minister for Youth and Sports, Aminul Haque, within 15 working days of its formation. The move comes in response to several complaint letters alleging that the electoral process was compromised.

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91 DAYS TO GO



Argentina's shootout supremacy

December 18, 2022, Lusail Stadium witnessed one of football's most dramatic nights. After a 3-3 stalemate between Argentina and France in the World Cup final, the title was decided in a tense penalty shootout. Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez's psychological edge proved decisive as he saved Kingsley Coman's effort and saw Aurelien Tchouameni miss. Gonzalo Montiel then sealed the victory, handing Lionel Messi the coveted trophy and ending Argentina's 36-year wait. The triumph once again highlighted the Albiceleste's remarkable composure and dominance in the World Cup's so-called 'lottery' of penalty shootouts.

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A CRAZY CHAMPIONS LEAGUE NIGHT

It was a night of chaos, drama, and ruthless dominance across Europe in the Champions League last 16 fixtures on Tuesday. At St James' Park, Barcelona were seconds from defeat before Lamine Yamal coolly converted a 96th-minute penalty – the last kick of the game – to snatch a 1-1 draw against Newcastle United. In Madrid, Atletico Madrid ran riot against Tottenham, winning 5-2 as goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky endured a nightmare start that saw Spurs concede three goals in 15 minutes, with the keeper making two glaring mistakes. The second-choice goalkeeper was substituted in the 17th minute, with even Atletico players and fans sympathising with the Czech. Liverpool suffered another setback in Turkey, falling 1-0 to Galatasaray thanks to Mario Lemina's header. Meanwhile in Bergamo, Bayern Munich produced a ruthless display, thrashing Atalanta 6-1 with Michael Olise inspiring a result that virtually seals their place in the quarterfinals.

PHOTO: REUTERS/AFP

