

» After ending their 21-year winless streak against Australia in ODIs on Tuesday, Bangladesh will be aiming to secure their first-ever ODI series victory in five attempts over the visitors in the second match of the series in Mirpur today.

» A victory in either of the remaining two ODIs would hand Bangladesh their fourth consecutive ODI series win, something they last achieved during 2021-22.

» For Australia, a series loss would be their fifth in the last six ODI series.

» Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto needs 19 runs to become the 11th Bangladeshi batter to reach 2,000 ODI runs.

» Nahid Rana is currently the leading wicket-taker among players from Full Member nations in ODIs in 2026, with 20 wickets from seven matches at an average of 16.00. Mustafizur Rahman is second on the list, having taken 12 wickets from five matches at the same average.

» Australian leg-spinner Adam Zampa is three wickets away from becoming the seventh Australian bowler to claim 200 wickets in ODI cricket.

Rana turns heads as Tigers ready for the kill

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The world is hyping to one tune right now. The FIFA World Cup. And Bangladesh is no different. But one speed star is breaking barriers like never before, taking the share of the attention. Nahid Rana.

Rana is a sensation unlike any before in Bangladesh cricket. His fiery spell in the first ODI against Australia proved he understands his place in the nation's cricketing dreams. It feels as though the cumulative hopes of a country have been answered in a single pacer - one who bowls so terrifyingly fast that opponents cover before a ball is even delivered.

Rana's blitzkrieg pace was on full show on Tuesday, intentionally unleashed against a mighty Australian lineup as a statement of intent. The catalyst for his violent spell arrived when Australian skipper Josh Inglis crunched a back-foot drive off a 148.4 kph delivery. That shot fired Rana up like nothing else.

He returned the next over, bowling every single delivery at 147 kph or above. Inglis, completely rooted to the crease, nicked one behind the wicket. Rana's aggressive celebration and vocal send-off carried genuine substance.

Given Australia's trademark steel, this friction will undoubtedly add spice to the rest of the series. Rana's four-wicket haul secured the best ODI figures by a Bangladeshi bowler against Australia since the Tigers attained ODI status.

If pace is the ultimate currency, Rana is in full business. Consequently, despite the looming World Cup, the Bangladesh team has a golden opportunity to seal a memorable series victory.

Rana isn't just turning heads domestically. West Indies legendary fast bowler Ian Bishop openly marveled at the serious "heat" Rana generated. "Nahid Rana is yet to play international cricket in Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, or England. That's a mouthwatering prospect if he continues on this upward trend," Bishop tweeted.

Australian batsman Alex Carey also acknowledged the daunting prospect of facing Rana in the upcoming matches. "He bowled really well," Carey told reporters. "I think we all knew the pace, but until you face it firsthand... he's a really tall athlete and gets bounce as well. We've got a chance to play against him in the next two ODIs on Thursday and Sunday, and hopefully, we can keep him out of the

series from now on."

Searching for a five-wicket haul, Rana clocked his fastest delivery of the match at 150.5 kph. He clearly wanted that ultimate recognition that only Australia can induce.

Carey even noted that Rana was welcome to join him at the Adelaide Strikers in the Big Bash League (BBL).

With 20 wickets in just seven matches, Rana is now the leading ODI wicket-taker this year.

While Mosaddek Hossain's brilliant innings saved Bangladesh's blushes on Tuesday, the Tigers will look to their new spearhead to seal an incredible series win this Thursday.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

I was eager to play for a while, even though I'd been dealing with this discomfort since I arrived. I was happy, enjoying every moment, and excited as always. I felt great; I was keen to get started and shake off the fears you have when you're dealing with this discomfort, so I could play freely. I said at the time that this group wouldn't let us down, and they've shown that this year by competing against any opponent, in any competition, and continuing to demonstrate the same desire and enthusiasm to compete. It's a very winning group that always wants more.

LIONEL MESSI



Argentina superstar Lionel Messi silenced injury concerns with a brilliant return, scoring just minutes after coming off the bench as Argentina defeated Iceland 3-0 in their final World Cup warm-up in Alabama. The 38-year-old, recovering from hamstring soreness, looked sharp in a 20-minute cameo ahead of his sixth World Cup. Defending champions Argentina now turn their focus to Group J, where they begin their title defence against Algeria on June 16.

PHOTO: REUTERS

TOUCHLINE

Separate opening ceremonies to kick off World Cup 2026

STAR SPORTS DESK

The 2026 FIFA World Cup, set to be staged across three countries for the first time in history, will also feature three separate opening ceremonies, marking another unique milestone for the tournament.

According to FIFA, Mexico will kick off the World Cup on June 11 and launch a trilogy of opening ceremonies that will continue in Canada and the United States.

Each ceremony will begin 90 minutes before the kick-off of the host nation's opening match.

The first ceremony will take place at the iconic Estadio Azteca in Mexico City at 11:30 pm (Bangladesh time) on June 11. The second ceremony will be held on June 12 at 11:30 pm at BMO Field in Toronto, while the third will take place at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles on June 13 at 5:30 am Bangladesh time.

The ceremonies will blend music, culture and football, reflecting the individuality of each host nation while celebrating the unity that defines the expanded global tournament.

Several prominent names from the music industry will perform, including Shakira in Mexico, Nora Fatchi in Canada and Katy Perry in the United States.

Bangladeshi-American DJ and music producer Sanjoy Deb will also perform at the opening ceremony in Toronto.

Iran warns over unauthorised flags, anti-team slogans

Iran threatened to halt its matches at the World Cup if unauthorised flags are displayed or slogans targeting the national team are chanted at stadiums, Iranian media reported, citing Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali, following criticism of the team's presence at the tournament. The World Cup begins on Thursday, with Iran opening their Group G campaign against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15. They next face Belgium at the same venue on June 21 before taking on Egypt in Seattle on June 26. "We have informed FIFA that if unofficial flags are brought or slogans against the national team are chanted in the stadiums where Iran plays in the World Cup, the team manager will definitely be responsible for stopping the match," Donyamali said on Tuesday, according to Iranian media.

PHOTO: AFP

Iran forward Mehdi Taremi signs autographs for fans outside the Marriott Hotel before leaving for a training session in Tijuana, Mexico, on June 9, 2026, ahead of their World Cup opener against South Africa tonight.

Artan receives hero's welcome in Mogadishu

AFP, Mogadishu

Somali referee Omar Artan, who was denied entry to the United States for the World Cup, returned to a hero's welcome in Mogadishu and vowed to take part in the next tournament in 2030.

More than 100 supporters lined up outside the VIP section of Mogadishu's main airport, waving national flags as Artan disembarked from a Turkish Airlines flight to cheers.

"I will be at the next World Cup and will continue to make Somalia proud... Despite what has happened to me, I am not discouraged," Artan told journalists.

Artan's rejection has sparked outrage at home.

Artan, who in 2025 was named men's referee of the year by the Confederation of African Football (CAF), was barred from entering the US on Saturday after arriving at Miami International Airport.

A US State Department official told AFP late Tuesday that the referee was "associated with suspected members of terrorist organizations", therefore "making the traveler ineligible for admission to the United States".

FIFA also confirmed that he would no longer be part of the World Cup set to start on Thursday.

Artan's appointment to the 52-strong roster of referees for the finals in Canada, Mexico and the United States had been a huge source of pride for his compatriots.

I really hope that there's a massive re-think of how immigration enforcement is impacting human rights and human dignity, and that especially for the World Cup, there is a re-think of the policies that we have unfortunately seen prevailing, especially in the US. I also hope that the dehumanisation of the other, the dehumanisation of migrants, the dehumanisation of refugees and asylum seekers is put to an end, because nobody benefits from divisive and polarising narratives.

UN rights chief VOLKER TURK

Azteca awaits World Cup whistle

AGENCIES

Mexico will launch their home World Cup campaign against South Africa tonight under pressure to deliver the winning start fans expect at the Estadio Azteca, where the tournament returns for a third time.

The Group A clash marks a return to the World Cup stage for the iconic venue that hosted matches in 1970 and 1986, while also reviving memories of the 2010 tournament opener, when South Africa held Mexico to a 1-1 draw in Johannesburg.

This time, the hosts arrive as clear favourites, and know victory could prove crucial to their hopes of finishing top of a group that also includes South Korea and the Czech Republic.

Mexico have gone unbeaten in their last eight matches, equalling the longest unbeaten run they have taken into a World Cup and providing further encouragement for Javier Aguirre's side ahead of the tournament.

The atmosphere is expected to be festive as more than 80,000 fans pack the renovated Azteca for the first match of the expanded 48-team tournament, but the occasion will bring its own pressure for a side expected to make the most of home advantage.

South Africa, meanwhile, are back at the World Cup for the first time since hosting the tournament in 2010 and Belgian coach Hugo Broos, who faced Mexico in the 1986 World Cup, believes his largely domestically

based squad can surprise more fancied opponents.

South Africa's preparations were disrupted by visa issues that delayed the arrival of several members of the travelling party, costing them valuable time to acclimatise to conditions in central Mexico.

Yet Broos's side emerged from a difficult qualifying campaign and will hope to frustrate the hosts once again, 16 years after

earning a draw in the last World Cup opener involving the two nations.

In the day's second fixture, South Korea face the Czech Republic in another Group A clash in Guadalajara on Friday (8:00am Bangladesh time).

Hong Myung-bo's side endured a difficult qualifying campaign before securing a place at a record 11th consecutive World Cup.

South Korea reached the last 16 in 2022, where they were knocked out by Brazil.

The Czechs, meanwhile, arrive confidently after winning six consecutive qualifiers and friendlies following a crisis late last year, when a shock defeat to the Faroe Islands left their campaign in jeopardy.

That loss proved the turning point, prompting the appointment of 74-year-old Miroslav Koubek, who guided the team through the playoffs and into their first World Cup since 2006.