



U-19 World Cup: India starts as favourite against Bangladesh

NEW DELHI, JAN 16:

Seeking to continue its confident start to the tournament, a well-balanced India will begin as the firm favourite despite facing a tricky Bangladesh in its second match of the ICC Under-19 World Cup in Bulawayo on Saturday.

Five-time champion India started its campaign on expected lines, registering a six-wicket win over the USA after bundling the opponent out for a paltry 107 in a rain-hit match, with right-arm pacer Henil Patel returning exceptional figures of 5/16 in seven overs and the other bowlers also doing a fine job.

The star-studded Indian batting line-up will hope to get an extended run at the crease against Bangladesh, which is likely to pose a greater challenge to the Ayush Mhatre-led side after a rather comfortable win against the USA.

The opening duo of Mhatre and the incredible 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi will again lead the batting in the company of vice-captain Vihaan Malhotra, all-rounders Aaron George and Vedant Trivedi, and wicketkeeper Abhi-



gyan Kundu.

D. Deepesh, RS Ambrish, Henil Patel, Kishan Kumar Singh, and Udhav Mohan offer the team pace bowling options, while the likes of Kanishk Chouhan, Khilan Patel, and Mohamed Enaan shoulder the spin bowling responsibility.

Champions in five of the 16 editions, India is by far the most dominant team in the history of the competition, which started back in 1988 with Australia emerging as the winner in the inaugural event.

Raising its prospects further is the team's form over the previous year, having won series in England, Australia, and South Africa. The victory against the USA was India's 14th in the last 17 matches, and the side is backing itself to continue the excellent run of

form against its next opponents.

As far as Bangladesh is concerned, it has captain Azizul Hakim, who has a fair bit of experience, and a lot will depend on how he marshals his side in the tournament in Zimbabwe and Namibia.

With his deputy Zawad Abrar, Hakim will spearhead the Bangladesh batting. The duo have been prolific at the under-19 level, having scored over 1,000 runs in Youth ODIs since the last edition of the tournament in 2024. Kalam Siddiki, with 857 runs in this period, is another prolific run-getter in the side.

Bangladesh also carries a potent bowling attack, with pacers Iqbal Hossain and Al Fahad expected to get plenty of support in pace-

friendly conditions in Zimbabwe.

These two are the most successful bowlers since the last U19 World Cup, with 45 and 43 wickets to their names, respectively. Not too far behind is left-arm spinner Samiun Basir, who had 29 wickets in this period, at an economy of under four.

TEAMS (FROM)

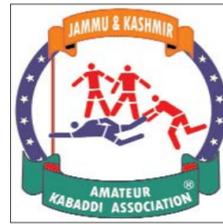
INDIA: Ayush Mhatre (c), R.S. Ambrish, Kanishk Chouhan, D. Deepesh, Mohamed Enaan, Aaron George, Abhigyan Kundu, Kishan Kumar Singh, Vihaan Malhotra, Udhav Mohan, Henil Patel, Khilan A. Patel, Harvansh Singh, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Vedant Trivedi.

BANGLADESH: Azizul Hakim Tamim (c), Zawad Abrar, Samiun Basir Ratul, Sheikh Parvez Jibon, Rizan Hossain, Shaharia Al Amin, Shadin Islam, Md Abdullah, Farid Hasan Faysal, Kalam Siddiki Aleen, Rifat Beg, Saad Islam Razin, Al Fahad, Shahriar Ahmed, Iqbal Hossain. Reserves: Abdur Rahim, Debashis Sarkar Deba, Rafi Uzaman Rafi, Farhan Shahriar, Farzan Ahmed Alif, Sanjid Majumder, Md Sobuj.

Kabaddi selection trials postponed

**HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS
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The selection trials for the 72nd Senior National Kabaddi (women) Championship, which were scheduled to be held at MA Stadium here, have been



postponed due to unavoidable circumstances.

As per a handout issued by the J&K Amateur Kabaddi Association (JKAKA), the revised dates for the trials shall be made public shortly.

All concerned players, affiliated district units,

and clubs have been advised wait till the fresh dates for the trials are announced, the handout added.

The handout mentioned that the cooperation of all presidents and secretaries of district association are highly appreciated.

World Champion D Gukesh seeks fresh start at Tata Steel Masters

NEW DELHI, JAN 16:

World champion D Gukesh will look to regain consistency after a largely forgettable 2025 season when he begins his campaign at the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament, taking on World Cup winner Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan in the opening round here on Saturday.

The event will be a stern test for the Indian Grandmasters, featuring the youngest-ever field in the world's oldest running elite tournament, which began in 1938 and has been held under the Tata Steel banner since 2011.

Gukesh, who won the World Championship in 2024 after defeating China's Ding Liren, will aim to improve on his runner-up finish in the previous edition. He had lost to compatriot R Praggnanandhaa in the tie-breaks after both finished level on points.

Following that, Gukesh



experienced mixed fortunes, registering notable victories including one against world number one Magnus Carlsen at Norway Chess, but also suffering early exits at the World Cup and the Grand Swiss.

Defending champion Praggnanandhaa is the only Indian this year to have secured qualification for the Candidates Tournament, scheduled for March-April. However, his form has dipped since sealing his place in the prestigious event.

Top seed Arjun Erigaisi, who will not feature in the Candidates, remains In-

dia's highest-rated player as 2025 ended and will be keen to claim his maiden Tata Steel Masters title in this Dutch coastal town known for high-quality chess amid harsh winter conditions.

The fourth Indian participant, Aravindh Chithambaram, has been consistent enough to hover around the 2700 rating mark in the latest FIDE list and will be competing in one of the toughest tournaments of his career.

Gukesh skipped the Tata Steel Rapid and Blitz events, underlining his determination to focus fully

on this tournament. However, he faces a formidable field that includes Anish Giri, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, Vincent Keymer, and the strong Indian contingent.

While the tournament format remains unchanged, a new time control has been introduced, with no additional time added until 40 moves are completed, mirroring the system to be used in the upcoming Candidates Tournament.

The opening-round encounter between Gukesh and Sindarov, the 19-year-old World Cup winner, promises excitement. Known for his aggressive, no-draw approach, the youngest-ever world champion is expected to bring intensity from the very first move. In other Indian match-ups, Arjun Erigaisi faces Praggnanandhaa, while Aravindh Chithambaram takes on Germany's Matthias Bluebaum.

BPL 2026 resumes as Bangladesh players call off boycott

NEW DELHI, JAN 16:

Aggrieved cricketers called off their boycott "in the greater interest of the game" after Bangladesh's cricket board and players' welfare association arrived at a consensus, leading to the resumption of the scheduled BPL (Bangladesh Premier League) Twenty20 matches on Friday.

The BCB (Bangladesh Cricket Board) on Thursday stared at the prospect of its flagship T20 league coming to a halt after senior national players revolted against director Najmul Islam for his disparaging comments against them.

The BCB went into damage control mode and removed Najmul as head of its finance committee, a move that may have helped bring the situation under control for the time being.

The Cricketers' Welfare



Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) president Mohammad Mithun said they had to "compromise on some things" for the sake of the players.

Mithun, who was flanked by BCB director Iftekhar Rahman at a press conference at the board premises late on Thursday night, said, "Keeping the greater interest of cricket in mind, we will resume playing tomorrow (on Friday)."

"They (the BCB) have assured us that they will reach out to him (BCB director M. Nazmul Islam)

and fulfill our demands as early as possible." The two BPL matches that were abandoned on Thursday—Chattogram Royals vs. Noakhali Express and Rajshahi Warriors vs. Sylhet Titans in Dhaka—are now being played on Friday.

Earlier on Thursday, despite the removal of Najmul from the key BCB post, two matches of the BPL scheduled on the day were postponed.

The furore started after Najmul, while reiterating Bangladesh's refusal to travel to India for next

month's T20 World Cup on account of "security worries," rejected concerns surrounding players' remuneration should the country withdraw.

He stated that the players would not be compensated, as they have not justified the support so far, having failed to win a single ICC event.

The comments caused an outrage, with CWAB calling for his immediate ouster from BCB.

Bangladesh is refusing to tour India, citing security concerns after pacer Mustafizur Rahman was dropped from the IPL on BCCI's instructions for unspecified "developments all around."

The BCB is still in talks with the ICC to figure a way out after the world body showed reluctance to shift Bangladesh's four games in India to Sri Lanka.

ICC officials to visit Bangladesh to resolve T20 World Cup imbroglio

NEW DELHI, JAN 16:

A two-member team of the ICC will land in Dhaka on Saturday to resolve the deadlock surrounding Bangladesh's participation in next month's T20 World Cup in India, hoping to allay their security concerns having already indicated that a change of venue is impractical.

Bangladesh has been asking the global governing body to relocate its World Cup matches, scheduled to be held in Kolkata and Mumbai, on the pretext of a perceived security threat to its players.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) raised this demand after national team pacer Mustafizur Rahman was abruptly delinked from his IPL contract with the Kolkata Knight Riders following a BCCI directive.

"Yes, that's the information (ICC officials' visit to Dhaka) at the moment.

Discussions are going on at the moment, and all possible ways to handle the situation will be discussed. We expect Bangladesh government officials to also take part in the talks," a source privy to the development told PTI on condition of anonymity.

He said the Bangladesh Cricket Board has already conveyed to the ICC of its apprehensions during a recent video conference, particularly with regard to playing in Mumbai.

Bangladesh is scheduled to face Nepal in their final Group C match at the Wankhede Stadium on February 17.

But the board informed the ICC that remarks by a few Indian politicians from Mumbai could be considered as a threat to its players' security.

The BCB source indicated that the possibility of moving the matches to a different Indian city, possibly to the southern parts,

or to Sri Lanka will be pondered over in the parley, which might take place at the Sher-e-Bangla stadium in Dhaka.

However, it's learnt that the ICC was firm in its view that such hypothetical scenarios could not be viewed as a strong reason to shift the venues of matches.

In its own security assessment of the marquee event, the ICC had placed the threat perception at low to moderate -- a regular norm during such events.

The Bangladesh side, it's learnt, will again raise the point of Mustafizur's removal from the IPL to reinforce its claims of security threats to its players in India, along with the recent spate of anti-Bangladesh protests in various parts of the country.

other member nations, too, can come up with such demands in future, which can pose significant challenges to an already-published schedule.

The governing body will also try to convince Bangladesh of the tight security measures which will be in place during the World Cup.

Meanwhile, Andrew Ephgrave, the anti-corruption unit head of the ICC, too, will be in Dhaka to look deeper into the incident of nine local players getting suspended by BCB for their alleged involvement in match-fixing.

They were expected to feature in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

The issue was raised during a press conference held by the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh on Thursday, and ICC deemed that the issue should be looked into more closely.

Anmolpreet Singh's century powers Punjab to 291 against Saurashtra in second semi-final

NEW DELHI, JAN 16:

Anmolpreet Singh's century and wicketkeeper-batter Prabhshimran Singh's fighting 87-run knock helped Punjab to post 291 in 50 overs against Saurashtra on Friday in the second semi-final of the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy 2025-26.

Batting first, Harnoor Singh and Prabhshimran Singh stitched an opening stand for 60 runs. However, during the 13th over, Harnoor Singh was run out after a fantastic effort from Chirag Jani. Harnoor made 33 runs off 43 deliveries,



including five fours and one six.

Keeper-batter Prabhshimran Singh and Anmolpreet Singh then stitched a brilliant 109-run partnership for the second wicket. The partnership was broken af-

ter Chirag Jani dismissed Prabhshimran for 87 runs. His innings off 89 balls included nine fours and three sixes.

The 75-run fifth-wicket partnership was broken after Anmolpreet was dis-

missed by speedster Chetan Sakariya during the fifth ball of the 47th over.

Anmolpreet played a fantastic knock of 100 off 105 deliveries, including nine fours and one six. Ramandeep Singh was dismissed after he made 42 off 38 deliveries, including three fours. The rest of the batters failed to contribute as Punjab were bundled out for 291 runs.

For Saurashtra, Chetan Sakariya (4/60 in 10 overs), Ankur Panwar (2/54 in 10 overs) and Chirag Jani (2/73 in 10 overs) were the wicket takers.

Mumbai Indians eyes revenge against UP Warriorz, Delhi Capitals faces RCB as Navi Mumbai leg concludes

NEW DELHI, JAN 16:

After 10 days of high-octane cricket, the first phase of the Women's Premier League (WPL) will conclude on Saturday with a double-header.

While UP Warriorz will take on Mumbai Indians for the second time in three days, Royal Challengers Bengaluru will face Delhi Capitals at the DY Patil Stadium later in the day.

Returning to winning ways after defeats in the first three outings, UP Warriorz will hope to keep the momentum going when it once again meets defending champion

Mumbai Indians. However, the UP outfit will have to sort out its batting order, with opener Kiran Navgire falling to find form in four outings so far. While there is a possibility that the team management could explore the idea of promoting Phoebe Litchfield to open the innings and bring Shweta Sehrawat up the order, the Warriorz' middle order needs to be more consistent.

For Mumbai Indians, it will be about regrouping. In the previous outing against the Warriorz, the MI bowlers bowled wide and short, and got pun-

ished by Harleen Deol. And, in a day game, where the surface would be flatter, and the temperature would soar, it would be a challenge for the bowling unit to rise to the occasion.

The batters, too, need to step up, be consistent and back captain Harmanpreet Kaur and Nicola Carey, who has been impressive with the bat and the ball so far.

In the other game of the day, the Capitals need to hold their nerve and make sure they don't fumble in crunch situations. In two consecutive games, the Capitals stuttered under

pressure, and coming on the back of a last-ball win, the Jemimah Rodrigues-led side needs to back itself. While the captain needs to ensure that she remains calm and composed in challenging situations, the team will have high expectations from the in-form Lizelle Lee and Shafali Verma, whose all-round performance paved the way for the Capitals' win against Warriorz.

With hardly any turnaround time, RCB needs to take things in its stride and start afresh in what could be a crucial group league fixture.

Steve Smith surpasses Warner for most tons in BBL history

NEW DELHI, JAN 16:

Australia's Steve Smith made history on Friday, becoming the batter with the most centuries in the Big Bash League (BBL) tournament.

Smith achieved this milestone during his side Sydney Sixers' derby match against the Sydney Thunder.

He brought up his fourth BBL ton, outdoing David Warner and Ben McDermott and had laced his knock with five fours and nine sixes, getting his runs at a strike rate of 238.09.

During the run-chase, he smacked Ryan Hadley for 32 runs in an over, including four successive sixes

and a four, the most expensive in BBL history.

Smith has scored 1,318 runs in 36 matches and 35 innings for the Sixers at an average of 48.81 and a strike rate of almost 151, four centuries and eight fifties.

A 141-run opening stand between Smith and Babar

Azam (47 in 39 balls, with seven fours) killed the game in 12 overs, with Lachlan Shaw (13*) and Jack Edwards (17*) taking Sixers to five wicket win in 17.2 overs.

Sydney Sixers are at fourth spot with five wins, three losses and a no result and have 11 points.