



Runaway favourites: Defending champions India begin quest for third title with match against USA

MUMBAI, FEB 07:

The biggest party in the cricket world kicks off with the ICC Men's T20 World Cup beginning in India and Sri Lanka on Saturday.

Two-time winners India will look to make a hat-trick of titles, a feat that has not been achieved so far. No team has been able to defend its title successfully — not even on home ground.

But the Suryakumar Yadav-led team seems set to create history. India have been the most successful side with a 51-8 win-loss record in T20Is since October 2023. India have won all their nine bilateral series in the run-up to this biennial tournament.

Experts say the competition against India is ridiculously lop-sided; critics agree that this India team is better than the one which won the title in 2024.

In-form India playing in home conditions make them the overwhelming tournament favourites ahead of South Africa, England, Australia and New Zealand.

India captain Suryakumar Yadav acknowledged that there will be pressure of playing in front of the home crowd but it is an opportunity very few players get in their lifetime. "I have shared my experiences of the 2023



ODI World Cup with the players before adding that 'yes, there will be pressure playing in front of the home crowd but if you see the positive side, there will be lots of cheers and encouragement'. They (fans) have seen us play a certain brand of cricket for the last two years. I have told the boys, 'let's entertain and give them a good time', he said.

The 10th edition of this biennial tournament has 20 teams from as far as Americas, Europe, Australia, Middle East, and Africa. Italy makes an appearance for the first time after shining in the European qualifiers.

But India's immediate neighbours Bangladesh and Pakistan have stirred up

controversies off the field. Bangladesh have been replaced by Scotland after their refusal to play in India. Pakistan, who were initially uncertain about their participation in the tournament, have boycotted their match against India. They start their campaign against the Netherlands in Colombo on Saturday.

In cricket, India vs USA is a no-brainer. It is only the margin of victory for India that is of importance. But make no mistake, it is a match in which India have everything to lose and USA have everything to win. If India win, they hardly get the credit. If they lose, they will get the brickbats and a blemish on their record.

Suryakumar said there are no weak opponents in the World Cup, even unfamiliar ones like the USA and Namibia. "I don't see any weak teams. A couple of bowlers or batsmen can do the job. There is no strong or weak team in this format. All are good," he said.

The USA team comprises of immigrants from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and South Africa.

Saurabh Netrawalkar, Harmeet Singh, Milind Kumar and skipper Monank Patel have played cricket in Mumbai. The pitch at Wankhede Stadium has a reputation of being batting friendly. Dew is likely to make an impact on the game.

Brook hopes focus to shift to on-field action as formidable England face Nepal in T20 World Cup

MUMBAI, FEB 07:

An embattled Harry Brook will hope England hit the top gear and the focus shifts from the incident at a Wellington club to cricket when the two-time champions take on Nepal in their T20 World Cup opener, here on Sunday.

Brook is at the helm of a formidable England side which has had a successful run in the T20I format, but the talk around the camp has also been around the incident at the nightclub where the English captain was reportedly involved in an altercation with a bouncer during a night out in the pre-Ashes tour.

The England captain fielded a question related to the incident during the Captains' Press Conference along with his peers, while all-rounder Will Jacks too had to confront those in their pre-match media commitment here on Friday.

"I wasn't actually in New Zealand, so I don't know anything about it. It's just one of those things that he obviously made a wrong decision and he accepted that. He has went out trying to move forward in a positive direction with that," Jacks said.

"He knows what he has done and there's nothing you can change about that, so there's no point focusing on it too much. On his per-



spective, he wants his cricket to do the talking," Jacks added.

Away from the off-field episode, England have had a perfect build-up to the World Cup and will be one of the teams to beat in the competition.

Placed in Group C along with debutants Italy, Nepal, Scotland and the West Indies, England know they will have to hit the top gear from the word go.

England won 11 out of their 17 T20Is while losing only two last year and the team has tremendous fireworks across the board to pile up, or even chase bigger totals.

However, bowling in dewy conditions would be a challenge and England will

need their experienced campaigner in Adil Rashid to come up with solutions.

For Nepal, it is another opportunity to make a strong dent on the world stage. In the last edition, they almost got the better of South Africa with the Proteas winning by a mere one run and Bangladesh were shot out for 106.

Among their most recent achievements is a 2-1 victory over two-time T20 World Cup winners the West Indies, a feat that would certainly fuel Nepal's fire.

Nepal also have fared well in the past, making the final of a tri-series last June which involved the Netherlands and Scotland. They had also made the summit clash of a T20I Quadrangu-

lar series featuring Qatar, Hong Kong and Kuwait.

Teams (from):

England: Harry Brook (c), Tom Banton (wk), Jos Buttler (wk), Ben Duckett, Phil Salt (wk), Jacob Bethell, Sam Curran, Liam Dawson, Will Jacks, Jamie Overton, Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Josh Tongue, Luke Wood.

Nepal: Rohit Paudel (c), Aarif Sheikh, Aasif Sheikh (wk), Dipendra Singh Airee, Basir Ahmad, Kushal Bhurtel, Sudneep Jora, Lokesh Bam, Gulsan Jha, Karan KC, Sompal Kami, Sandeep Lamichhane, Sher Malla, Lalit Rajbanshi, Nandan Yadav.

Match starts at 3:00pm IST.

BCCI announces Rs 7.5 crore cash prize for India's U-19 team after World Cup win

NEW DELHI, FEB 07:

The Board of Control for India (BCCI) announced Rs 7.5 crore as reward money for the Indian Under-19 cricket team after they secured the 2026 Under-19 World Cup by defeating England in the finals on Friday. BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia expressed pride in India's Under-19 team for winning the 2026 Un-

der-19 World Cup, remaining undefeated, and defeating England in the final. He announced that the BCCI will award the team a cash prize of Rs 7.5 crore. The BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, while speaking to ANI, said, "The whole country and BCCI are proud of our Under-19 side on their Under-19 World Cup 2026 victory.

The way our team defeated England in the finals, and how they remained undefeated in the tournament, we are all proud. The BCCI will reward the team with Rs 7.5 crore cash prize."

Earlier, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had congratulated the Under-19 team for its stupendous showing at the World Cup.

J&K Police team wins in Volleyball

**HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS
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A Volleyball Tournament was organized by Bhiya Volleyball Club under the aegis of the District Kathua Volleyball Association, marking an enthusiastic start to the sporting season in the region.

The tournament aims to promote volleyball at the grassroots level and provide a competitive platform for local talent. The opening match of the tournament was played between Bhiya Volleyball Club and Grah Volleyball Club, setting the tone for exciting contests ahead.

Both teams displayed commendable skills and sportsmanship, drawing applause from the spectators present at the venue. On the first day of the tournament, Swami Krishna Nand Ji Maharaj and Surinder Mehta, President of Bhraman Sabha Kathua, along with SHO Hiranagar, Amit Sangra, graced the occasion as



chief guests.

Their presence boosted the morale of the players and added significance to the event.

Office bearers of the District Kathua Volleyball Association, including Kamal Sharma, President, Mohinder Sharma, General Secretary, and Keshav Sharma,

Treasurer, were also present and appreciated the efforts of the organizers for hosting the tournament. A total of 16 teams from different areas are participating in the tournament, reflecting the growing popularity of volleyball in the district.

The matches are being played in a competitive yet

friendly atmosphere. The first quarter-final match was contested between Mala Volleyball Club and the J&K Police (JKP) team. After a closely fought encounter, the JKP team emerged victorious by 2-1, securing their place in the next round of the tournament.

India U17 blank Bangladesh U19 to win SAFF U19 Women's title

POKHARA [NEPAL], FEBRUARY 7: They may have been playing in a higher age-category tournament; they may have been written off for it. But the India U17 women's team showed their mettle in the final to clinch the SAFF U19 Women's Championship, defeating Bangladesh U19s 4-0 at the Pokhara Rangasala Stadium, on Saturday, February 7, according to the All India Football Federation (AIFF).

Captain Julian Nongmaithem (42') opened the scoring before Elizabeth Lakra (63' penalty), Pearl Fernandes (68') and substitute Anwita Raghuraman (83') completed a commanding triumph, as the Young Tigresses emphatically avenged their earlier round-robin defeat (0-2) against Bangladesh.

India had sent their U17 women's national team to Pokhara to participate in the SAFF U19 Women's Championship, in order for the Young Tigresses to prepare for the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup, later this year.

India played with composure and maturity far beyond their years, dominating possession and controlling the rhythm of the contest from the first whistle. Their movement off the ball, quick passing combinations, and intelligent use of width ensured Bangladesh were constantly stretched and unable to set-



tle into any meaningful pattern.

India's approach was clear: build patiently, switch play through the wings, and attack with pace whenever gaps appeared. Alva Devi Senjam and Pritika Barman were particularly influential in linking midfield to attack, while the defensive unit remained disciplined, giving Bangladesh little room to breathe.

After probing for much of the first half, India finally broke the deadlock in the 42nd minute with a beautifully constructed move. Alva delivered a cross towards the far post, where Pritika arrived completely unmarked. She took a moment to steady herself before sliding a perfect pass into the box for Julian, who slammed the ball into the net to send

India into the break with a deserved lead.

Bangladesh attempted to regroup at half-time and produced their first real chance of the match in the 51st minute. Shanti Mardi's lofted ball released Sree Moti Trishna Rani, who surged past three Indian defenders. However, with goalkeeper Munni rushing off her line, Trishna dragged her effort wide, a miss that proved costly.

India made them pay just minutes later. In the 63rd minute, the Young Tigresses doubled their advantage from the penalty spot. A long ball forced Bangladesh goalkeeper Yearzan Begum into hesitation, allowing Alva to nip in and steal possession. As Alva prepared to shoot, Protima Munda brought her down from be-

hind, leaving the referee with no option but to award a penalty. Elizabeth stepped up and thundered her spot-kick into the roof of the net.

The contest was effectively sealed five minutes later, as Pearl displayed her predatory instincts. Yearzan failed to control a simple backpass, and Pearl pounced instantly, disposing the goalkeeper before rolling the ball home for India's third.

With Bangladesh offering little resistance, India began to play with freedom and confidence, and the fourth goal arrived in the 83rd minute. Alva once again dazzled down the left flank, cutting back a pass for Anwita Raghuraman, who calmly slotted home to complete a well-earned victory. (ANI)

Asian Rifle/Pistol C'ships: Elavenil wins air rifle gold, Shambhavi breaks Asian junior record to top podium

NEW DELHI [INDIA], FEBRUARY 7: Olympian Elavenil Valarivan held off the challenge from Japan's Misaki Nobata to clinch gold in the 10m Air Rifle women's event as Shambhavi Kshirsagar broke the Asian Junior Finals Record enroute to win gold in the junior category in the Asian Rifle/Pistol Championship, New Delhi 2026 which is being held here at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range on Saturday.

Meghana Sajjanar joined Elavenil on the podium after securing the bronze medal, while Manyata Singh and Aneesh Sharma, along with Shambhavi, ensured India swept the Junior women's podium, as per a press release from the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI).

India continued their dominance in the championship, racking up ten gold medals on day four of competitions to

take their total medal tally to 43 medals, including 27 gold, 10 silver and eight bronze. Ojasvi Thakur secured the gold in the women's youth category. India started the day sweeping the podium in the 50m Men's Pistol event with former 10m Air Pistol World No 1, Saurabh Chaudhary winning the gold, followed by Kamaljeet Chaudhary and current World Champion Ravinder Singh winning silver and bronze respectively. Yogesh Kumar won gold in the junior category of the event.

Elavenil was placed fifth after the end of two series, but slowly clawed her back into the lead by the 18th shot. She kept her composure until the end to remain at the top of the pack with Nobata Misaki and Meghana close behind. Arya Borse who was in medal positions until the 18th shot, missed out after hitting a low 9.8, which was followed by two 10.2's.

Nobata finished her finals with two back-to-back 10.8's, but Elavenil scored ten hits, which was 10.6 in the elimination stage, including one 10.9. The Indian trio also won the team gold with a combined score of 1892.6.

In the Junior finals, Shambhavi created a new Asian Junior record of 253.7, eclipsing the 253.1 which was created by Isha Anil Taksale in Jakarta in 2024. She was in her dominating best from the start and continued that momentum to win the gold with a massive four-point difference over Manyata Singh, who finished on 249.7. Shambhavi's last eight shots read, 10.7, 10.7, 10.8, 10.8, 10.9, 10.5, 10.9 and 10.7, highlighting her dominance. Aneesh Sharma secured bronze with a final score of 227.5. Shambhavi and Aneesh, along with Sandrata Roy, combined to win the team gold with a score of 1884.2.