

**AFC U-14 QUALIFIERS
Bangladesh
in ASEAN
zone**

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been included in the ASEAN zone when the forty six-nation inaugural AFC U-14 Championship qualifiers were held at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday.

Forty-six teams have been divided into four zones (West, Central and South, ASEAN and East) with 12 of the teams coming from West Asia, 13 from Central and South, 11 teams from ASEAN and 10 teams from the East.

Since there were 13 teams from the Central and South zone, the AFC has decided to move Bangladesh to the ASEAN zone as it is geographically closer to Southeast Asia.

As a result of the move, Bangladesh will have to face tough opponents like Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Singapore and Laos in Group F Qualifiers.

The top two teams from each zone, totaling eight teams, will qualify for the AFC U-14 Championship 2014 Finals. The venue and dates have not been finalised yet.

Broad out

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in Mumbai last month, and was not involved in last week's seven-wicket victory at Eden Gardens as Finn returned to fitness and replaced him.

After suffering more discomfort at net practice on Wednesday, Broad was sent for a second scan -- which showed exactly the same as the first one he underwent five weeks ago.

Eoin Morgan is England's Twenty20 vice-captain and would be the obvious candidate to lead the team in Broad's absence.

The selectors may, however, need to replace Broad in an inexperienced 13-man squad which contains only three other specialist seamers.

Test captain Alastair Cook confirmed Broad's absence at his press conference at the VCA Stadium.

"Stuart is out of this Test match," he said.

"His scan has showed a bruised heel, and we'll assess him over the next day or so to see what happens with the Twenty20. We'll know a bit more when it settles down."

Broad has endured an especially miserable tour, in which he did not manage to take a wicket in either of the first two Tests -- and was then dropped for the third, in order to accommodate fit-again seamer Steven Finn.

"It's the nature of sport, isn't it? Some people have good tours, and some people don't," added Cook.

"Unfortunately, more down to niggles and ailments, Broady hasn't quite managed to get into the tour.

"It's frustrating for him, and disappointing for us as a side. But we all know the class of Broady, and he'll be back."

BJMC's first

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Babu however blamed the poor condition of the pitch for not posting a bigger margin of victory.

"It is not a pitch for good football because the pitch is uneven and the players had to work hard to control the ball," alleged Babu. Babu however informed that the ground was available only a day earlier as a cricket league was held at the same venue.



Australia all-rounder Shane Watson (L) is having a chat with selector Rodney Marsh yesterday in Hobart where the first Test against Sri Lanka starts on Friday. PHOTO: INTERNET

Angelo ready to captain

Cricket

CRICINFO, Hobart

Angelo Mathews has expressed enthusiasm for the leadership role and appears ready to take over the captaincy once Mahela Jayawardene, Sri Lanka's current Test captain, steps down. Jayawardene accepted the post reluctantly in January and has seemed eager to be rid of the reins ever since. He has hinted he will step down after the tour of Australia as long as Sri Lanka avert disaster there, and his deputy's apparent willingness to take over will only make that move easier.

Mathews is already Sri Lanka's Twenty20 captain and has been groomed for the role in the longer formats. He arrives in Australia in form, having been the team's top-scorer in the home series against New Zealand, and has seen his Test batting bloom over the last 18 months. He has been the vice-captain in all formats since July 2011, and in the SLPL, he led the Nagenahira Nagas to the final of the competition.

Mathews' unflinching attitude and an

expanding reputation for even-headedness under pressure have made him appear much more like captaincy-material than at the end of Kumar Sangakkara's tenure, when he was considered for the role, but lost out to Tillakaratne Dilshan.

"I think that's totally up to the selectors -- if they think I'm ready for the captaincy, I'm ready," Mathews said. "It doesn't really matter for now because Mahela's been a great captain for years and I think he's been serving the country for decades. But if the selectors think I'm ready -- it's up to them."

If he does succeed Jayawardene after the tour, and there are no retirements, he will lead a side with three former captains and several other players senior to him in age, if not always in international experience. At 25, Mathews may be leading one of Sri Lanka's oldest Test sides, but he said he sees the older players' presence as a boon, rather than a challenge. Indeed, the prospect of having time to mentor Mathews in the initial phase of his captaincy has been the reason Jayawardene has cited for wanting to relinquish the captaincy before he retires.

Drought motivates SL

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Sangakkara and opener Dilshan, who urged the top order to make runs or risk being whitewashed in the series.

"Definitely in the top order someone has to put their hands up and put some big runs on the board, to help the middle order and the tailenders," the opener said.

"That's our target. The top order should make some runs this series. It's really important that Mahela and Sanga come into form. They're two experienced guys in the side."

However, Sri Lanka's lead-in form does not augur well with just four victories in their last 20 Tests. Their last away series win was in Bangladesh in 2008, and their current Test ranking is a lowly sixth.

Australia are coming off a 309-run drubbing by world number one South Africa this month, and Hobart will be the first chance for their new-look batting line-up after the record-breaking Ponting retired

with 13,378 Test runs.

Phil Hughes returns to the Australian squad at the ground where he was dropped after their shock loss to New Zealand a year ago, with a likely role at number three instead of opening the innings.

"This is the ground where things probably didn't pan out perfectly on a personal note," Hughes said this week. "Twelve months down the track, I feel like I'm in a better place now."

All-rounder Shane Watson has said he will be given the first opportunity to fill Ponting's vacancy in the batting order at number four against Sri Lanka.

"[Coach] Mickey Arthur talked to me at the end of the last [Perth] Test to say the way it was looking, they were going to move me down to four," Watson told reporters.

The series continues in the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground followed by Sydney, starting on January 3.

Nagpur Test from today

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several to stop the visiting team from running away triumphant for the first time since David Gower's outfit in 1984-85.

Indian openers Gautam Gambhir and Virender Sehwag have been pretty casual in their approach thus far, in stark contrast to the grinding efforts of rival skipper Alastair Cook, England's top batsman in the series, and rookie Nick Compton, who has slowly and steadily found his feet after a nervous debut in Ahmedabad's opening Test.

The middle order has been pathetic with only Cheteshwar Pujara showing spunk in the first two Tests before going off the boil. To give an impetus to the non-performing middle order, the Indian selectors have chopped the under-performing Yuvraj Singh from the squad and brought in the in-form Ravindra Jadeja and the Saurashtra all-rounder is almost certain to make his Test debut.

Jadeja can certainly complement the style of Pragnan Ojha and the off-spin of Ravichandran Ashwin, who has not looked the part of a Test bowler except in the closing stages of the Kolkata game when he concentrated on sticking to a correct line and limiting his variations to the minimum.

The other spinner, who has been

included in the squad at the expense of Harbhajan Singh, leg-spinner Piyush Chawla would bring in some more variety if picked in the eleven.

India have also dropped the out-of-form Zaheer Khan and replaced him with Delhi pacer Parvinder Awana.

But Ishant Sharma and Ashok Dinda, yet to play his first Test, appear to be the two first-choice pacers for the hosts and Awana may have to wait for his chance.

While India have a load of problems to confront, England are having very few and are expected to retain the winning eleven for the series finale.

They can sit on the 2-1 lead by playing for a draw, but it's fraught with danger and captain Cook has responded in a similar fashion after the team's victory in the third match.

While Cook has led from the front with aplomb, the other leading batsmen have rallied around him, with top batsman Kevin Pietersen playing the defining knock in the Mumbai Test and Matt Prior and Compton playing the supporting roles with panache.

The wicket at the Jamtha Stadium appears to be a dry one and should aid spin bowling quite early.

**Shuvo lifts
Knit Concern
title**

SPORTS REPORTER

Shuvo Khandoker clinched the men's singles title of the Knit Concern Group Badminton Tournament after beating former national junior champion Muhammad Sajjad Ullah 2-1 in the final at the Knit Concern Gymnasium in Narayanganj yesterday.

Shamol-Tipu pair lifted the title of the doubles event with a 2-1 win over the Bipul-Kawsar pair in the final. Some 32 shuttlers took part in the tournament. Tk 1.6 lakh were distributed among the winners. Joynal Abedin Mollah, chairman of Knit Concern Group and Knit Concern Badminton Club, distributed prizes among the winners.

Div I football

SPORTS REPORTER

T&T Club of Motijheel defeated Badda Jagoroni Sangsad 1-0 in the lone fixture of Popular Life Insurance Senior Division Football League at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. Shahed scored the all-important goal in the 55th minute. Mahakhali Ekadash will take on Dhaka Wanderers Club in today's fixture at the same venue.

**Sachin should do
what Ricky did**

Cricket

IANS, New Delhi

Former Pakistan captain Wasim Akram feels it is difficult for Indian selectors to give any sort of retirement advice to Sachin Tendulkar and, at the end, the batting maestro himself will have to do some assessment like Ricky Ponting did.

As the pressure of retirement mounts on Tendulkar, Akram feels that Indian cricket is in a "delicate situation".

"The question is who will bell the cat? Who will pop the question? Today, former cricketers are openly asking for Dhoni's head. Can you do the same with Tendulkar? A lot of people, like Sourav Ganguly, feel he should retire, but Sachin himself might still want to continue for another six months or so. It's difficult to give any advice to a legend like Sachin," Akram was quoted as saying by ESPNStar.com

"It finally boils down to your own assessment as Ponting did," he said.

The legendary fast bowler feels that Tendulkar has achieved everything in his cricketing career and now he himself must decide when to leave.

"When Sachin first stepped into international cricket, nobody would have thought that this lad would go on to score 100 tons and smash all batting records. If I was in his shoes I would have stepped down by now because there is nothing else left to achieve," he said.

Akram said the pressure on Tendulkar was mounting and India's twin defeats in the Test series against England were only making things difficult for him.

"When your most experienced batsman hasn't scored a Test century in almost two years, questions are bound to rise," said Akram.

As the Indian team goes through a period of transition with the retirement of stalwarts like Rahul Dravid, Ganguly and V.V.S. Laxman, Akram said changes should be made carefully and it was high time that the selectors asked Tendulkar about his future plans.

"The changes have to be made carefully. One shouldn't tamper too much with the team line-up. But the middle order needs a few new faces. And somebody needs to ask Sachin about his future plans and for how long does he want to continue," suggests Akram.

NZC says sorry to Ross

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand cricket chiefs issued a public apology to axed captain Ross Taylor Wednesday, as a weakened Black Caps side prepared to depart for South Africa without the in-form batsman.

Taylor opted to sit out the tour against the Proteas after being replaced as skipper by opener Brendon McCullum last Friday, leaving a gaping hole in the New Zealand batting line-up as the side faces the world's top-ranked Test team.

The axing also exposed deep divisions within New Zealand cricketing circles and provoked a backlash against administrators over Taylor's treatment.

New Zealand Cricket (NZC) chairman Chris Moller acknowledged the issue could have been handled better, but stood by the decision to appoint McCullum and said there would be no sackings at the organisation.

"The board has reviewed all aspects of the captaincy issue and wishes to publicly place on record its apologies to Ross Taylor and his family for the manner in which events have unfolded," Moller told reporters.

The drama is a distraction any team poised to confront the Proteas at home could do without, let alone one ranked eighth in the world and already without star spinner Dan Vettori and gifted batsman Jesse Ryder.

"What's unfolding at the moment is very disappointing," McCullum, a close associate of coach Mike Hesson, told reporters this week after denying he had any role in Taylor's downfall.

"I'm sure that will all heal in due course," he added.

McCullum's optimism appears misplaced, as cricketing greats and media commentators called for heads to roll at NZC amid claims the sport has lost its way

under the current leadership.

Former coach Mark Greatbatch called for Moller's departure Wednesday, accusing him on commercial radio of being "involved with too many underhand dealings in the last two or three years".

Former captain Martin Crowe has demanded NZC's entire top echelon, including Hesson, stand down, saying they had permanently damaged cricket in New Zealand, where popularity for the sport runs a distant second to rugby union.

2nd 4-day meet

FROM PAGE 16

three ODIs. Bangladesh is then expected to tour Zimbabwe in April.

T20 World Cup 2014

According to Anam, the members of the ad-hoc committee currently have their hands full with the preparations for the ICC World Twenty20 which will take place in Bangladesh in 2014. "The International Cricket Council (ICC) has made a new rule, according to which we have to make the venues ready at least six months before the match," said Anam. "So we have to get a move on with regard to the building of the stadium in Cox's Bazaar. We also have to work on the floodlights for the venue in Sylhet. There are several other issues," he added.

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 16

against Nepal, a side against which Bangladesh lost once and drew once in the last two encounters.

In the third and final match, Bangladesh will take on Northern Mariana Islands, whom Bangladesh have never met before. Since the introduction of AFC Challenge Cup in 2006, Bangladesh only once qualified for the finals which was in the last edition under the guidance of Brazilian coach Edson Silva Dido.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS**
- 1 High point
 - 5 Dance syllable
 - 8 Flabbergast
 - 12 Fly high
 - 13 Fond du —
 - 14 Sea eagle
 - 15 Multi-Grammy-winning gospel singer
 - 17 Helps
 - 18 Faux —
 - 19 Inquire
 - 20 Snob
 - 21 With it
 - 22 "Unh-unh"
 - 23 Threw a party for
 - 26 Kingston's island
 - 30 Prayer ending
 - 31 Space
 - 32 Thy
 - 33 Commemorative coin, maybe
 - 35 Doctrine
 - 36 Thanks-giving veggie
 - 37 Two, in Tijuana
 - 38 Capital letter key
 - 41 Zodiac cat
 - 42 Ernesto Guevara
 - 45 Novice
 - 46 "Lord of the Rings" cast member
 - 48 Small Black-bird
 - 50 Franc replacement
 - 51 Hang in the balance
 - 52 Solidify
 - 53 Marries
 - 2 Prolonged sleep
 - 3 Baseball's "Say Hey" kid
 - 4 Work unit
 - 5 Necklace fastener
 - 6 Yarn bundle
 - 7 Performance
 - 8 "Will & Grace" actor
 - 9 Small combo
 - 10 Loosen
 - 11 Egg container?
 - 16 Incursion
 - 20 Muppet eagle
 - 21 Founder of a major auto company
 - 22 Siesta
 - 23 Online help page
 - 24 Ostrich's cousin
 - 25 Afternoon social
 - 26 Cookie holder
 - 27 Charged bit
 - 28 Pool stick
 - 29 Illustrations
 - 31 Jewel
 - 34 Tit for —
 - 35 Hit the horn
 - 37 Beelzebub
 - 38 Put an end to
 - 39 Stevenson villain
 - 40 De-crease?
 - 41 Queue
 - 42 Hint
 - 43 Group of cattle
 - 44 Cupid's alias
 - 46 Trail the pack
 - 47 Ever-green type

Solution time: 21 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: FLICK CONCERNING A SPECIAL WALKING SURFACE WITH SUPERHERO-LIKE POWERS: "THE FANTASTIC FLOOR."
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals O