

# Under-18s ease past Maldives

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh produced another spirited performance to notch up a commanding 2-0 win over Maldives in their second match of the SAFF U-18 Championship at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu, Bhutan yesterday.

Saikat Mahmud Munna put Bangladesh ahead in the ninth minute before Jafar Iqbal struck the second in the 45th minute to take Bangladesh on top of the five-team table with six points. Hosts Bhutan, who also moved to six points following a 1-0 win over defending champions Nepal, trail Bangladesh on goal difference.

This win might be considered a consolation for Bangladesh as the senior side had been thrashed by their Maldivian counterparts 5-0 in a friendly match in Male last year.

Following an incredible come-from-behind win against India, Bangladesh picked up right from where they had left the other day and took full control of midfield with nice exchange of passes before grabbing the lead.

The build-up to the opening goal was brilliant too as the boys in red and green completed nine passes before midfilder Sohanur Rahman fed the ball through to Munna, who drove a grounder with his left foot to beat the Maldives goalkeeper.

The charges of Mahabub Hossain Roxy came close to doubling the lead but Maldives goal-



Bangladesh midfielder Saikat Mahmud Munna (C) is ecstatic after scoring the opening goal against Maldives in their SAFF U-18 Championship fixture at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu, Bhutan yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

keeper Ahmed Samah Ali brilliantly denied Jafar in the 36th minute.

However, Samah was helpless when Jafar produced a spectacular finish with his left foot from almost 25 yards out after a string of passes with his fellow forwards. The goal raised the tally for the Chittagong Abahani winger to three from two matches following

his brace in the 4-3 win against India on Monday.

Maldives looked a bit more organised after the break and even launched a few attacks on the Bangladesh half. The islanders almost reimbursed one goal but Bangladesh goalkeeper Mahfuz Hasan Pritom made a nice decent coming out off the blocks in the

75th minute.

Bangladesh, too, launched a brilliant counterattack when Biplo Ahmed ran down from the left flank to enter the box and drove a powerful shot, only for the keeper to come to Maldives' rescue.

Bangladesh coach Mahabub Hossain Roxy said his charges executed the gameplan perfectly.

"Our plan was to score early by applying pressure which the players executed well. In a word, we didn't let the opposition get a grip of the match," the coach said.

Bangladesh will play their second match against holders Nepal on September 25 before facing hosts Bhutan in their last match on September 27.

## Weather to blame for 'poor' rating

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said that inclement weather was responsible for the below-par outfit at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium during the first Test against Australia, after the ground received a 'poor' from the International Cricket Council (ICC).

In a press release on September 14, the ICC wrote that the venue for the first of the two-match Test series between Bangladesh and Australia had been rated 'poor' by match referee Jeff Crowe.

In reply to the ICC's observations, BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said that flood and constant rainfall in the country were the main reasons behind the issue.

"For the last five months there were floods and rain and it was due to this inclement weather that it happened. We did not get any complaints about the venue, which hosted the final of ICC T20 World Cup in 2014 along with the Asia Cup. There was no lack in preparations. They [ICC] have raised [an] observation about the grass and I am hopeful it will be fine through passing the days," Nizamuddin told reporters yesterday.

He also informed that there was no lack of commitment from the grounds men in preparing the ground since it was renovated last year and added that they worked continuously before the series.

## WCL match moved to SA from Kenya

AFP, Nairobi

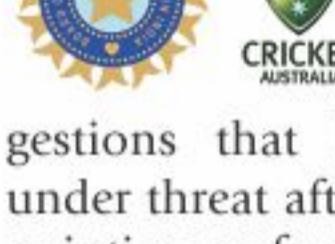
The World Cricket League (WCL) Championship qualifying match between leaders Netherlands and Kenya has been moved from Nairobi to East London in South Africa due to security concerns in Kenya.

Kenya was due to host the sixth round match at the Nairobi Gymkhana club grounds on October 6 and 8.

## Australia looking to bounce back

### Second ODI against India today

AGENCIES, Kolkata



Skipper Steve Smith on Wednesday dismissed suggestions that his captaincy was under threat after a string of disappointing performances by the once all-conquering Australian side.

The upcoming ODI will be Smith's 100th match since he made his debut in 2010 as a leg-spinner before making his mark as one of the best batsmen in world cricket.

And currently the team is looking to level the five-ODI series after losing the opener to India on Sunday despite a flying start.

Smith's men were recently tested in a two-match Test series against low-ranked Bangladesh that ended 1-1, after going down 2-1 to India in March.

Their form in the 50-over-game also seems to have taken a sharp dip, with the team failing to make it to the semi-final of the Champions Trophy in England early this year.

Former captain Michael Clarke, who is part of the TV commentary team for the current series, on

Tuesday said Smith's captaincy was under the scanner although his batting had been outstanding all through.

"I don't think so. I'm not in a bad place with my captaincy," Smith told reporters when asked to com-

ment on Clarke's remark.

"Obviously results haven't been the way we would have liked and that's something we are trying to rectify," he said ahead of the second match in Kolkata on Thursday.

"It was a disappointing start to



Australia skipper Steve Smith will be hoping that his team can turn their fortunes and square the series against India in today's second ODI.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Match cancelled due to UAE's absence

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's opening Group E match of the AFC U-16 Championship Qualifiers was cancelled yesterday after the opposition team, the United Arab Emirates, withdrew from the competition due to political crisis with Qatar.

Bangladesh team management was officially informed of the cancellation yesterday morning even though no Qatari representative was present at the managers' meeting on the previous day.

"We were ready to play the match against UAE in the afternoon but we were informed in the morning that the match would not take place due to the absence of Qatar," head coach Anwar Parvez Babu informed over phone.

"We missed an opportunity to gather experience of playing against a strong team like UAE, but we didn't have anything to do about it," added Anwar Parvez.

The withdrawal of UAE means the group has been reduced to a three-team affair, with hosts Qatar and Yemen being the other teams.

Bangladesh players trained in the afternoon and then watched day's second match between Qatar and Yemen.

Bangladesh will take on Yemen tomorrow.

Ten group winners and five best second-placed teams will advance to the finals to be played in Malaysia next year.

## Mathews to miss first Pak Test

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's former skipper Angelo Mathews was ruled out of the first Test against Pakistan next week due to injury, the cricket board said Wednesday.

Mathews will miss the match starting September 28 in Abu Dhabi due to a calf strain, the board said.

Two uncapped players have been brought into the squad, wicket-keeper batsman Sadeera Samarakrama, 22, and 28-year-old batsman Roshen Silva.

Sri Lanka will play two Tests, five ODIs and three T20Is against Pakistan.

**Squad:** Chandimal (captain), Thirimanna,

Karunaratne, Kaushal Silva,

Samarawickrama, Kusal Mendis, Roshen Silva,

Dickwella, Herath,

Sandakan, Dilruwan Perera,

Surakan, Lakmal, Nuwan Pradeep, Vishwa Fernando

and Lahiru Gamage.

## 'Delighted to score first ODI hundred'

AFP, Manchester



Jonny Bairstow said he was delighted to have joined an "elusive club" after finally scoring his maiden ODI hundred as England beat West Indies by seven wickets in their series opener at Old Trafford on Tuesday.

Bairstow finished on exactly 100 not out, getting to three figures six years after playing a winning hand on debut against India in Cardiff.

That the match was just of the difficulty he has had in establishing himself in the white-ball set-up and England's uncertainty over how to best deploy the man in the 50-over game.

But having brought in

Bairstow as an opener in place of the struggling Jason Roy for their previous ODI, an eight-wicket Champions Trophy defeat by Pakistan in Cardiff in June, a match where the Yorkshireman's 43 was a rare highlight for the hosts, they retained him as a batsman at the top of the order as Jos Buttler again kept wicket.



JONNY BAIRSTOW

PHOTO: BCB

The selectors' decision was rewarded by an expertly-paced innings from Bairstow, who ensured England made light work of chasing down West Indies' below-par total of 204 for nine in a match reduced to 42 overs per side by a wet outfield.

"I'm really pleased," said Bairstow, who put on 125 for the second wicket with Yorkshire colleague and England Test captain Joe Root.

"I'm delighted to have scored my first one-day hundred for England," added the 27-year-old. "There aren't many people who've done it -- and to join that elusive club is something, when you make your debut at Cardiff against India, you want to do.

"So you've got to enjoy it when you do."

When he slipped going for a third run that saw him complete his century, there were, just briefly, fears he might once more be denied an international three-figure score.

"When I slipped coming back for the third, I thought 'Oh no, not again!' But luckily enough, it was slippery enough on the boundary for him [the fielder] to slip too."

## Brathwaite cleared

PTI, Dubai

The International Cricket Council (ICC) cleared the bowling action of West Indies off-spinner Kraigg Brathwaite on Wednesday, who had been reported last month.

An independent assessment of Brathwaite's bowling action was performed at the Loughborough testing centre in England on August 31.

"The bowling action of Windies off-spinner Kraigg Brathwaite has been found to be legal, and the player can continue bowling in international cricket," the ICC said in a statement.

The ICC said that the amount of elbow extension in Brathwaite's deliveries was well within the 15-degree level of tolerance permitted under regulations.

Brathwaite was reported during the first Test against England last month.

The 24-year-old has played 40 Tests, grabbing 12 wickets so far. His 10 ODI appearances have fetched him just one scalp so far.