

## BCB announces squad for U19 Asia Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 15-member squad on Sunday for the upcoming ACC Men's U-19 Asia Cup in the UAE, starting on December 8.

Bangladesh, who were pitted in Group B with Sri Lanka, Japan, and hosts UAE, will be led by Mahfuzur Rahman Rabby.

The 10th edition of the tournament will begin with a doubleheader as defending champions India will take on Afghanistan at the ICC Academy Oval-1. In the other match, Pakistan will square off against Nepal at the ICC Academy Oval-2.

Bangladesh will start their campaign with a contest against the UAE the following day at the ICC Academy Oval-1. They will face Japan on December 9 and cap off their group phase with an encounter against Sri Lanka on December 13.

The semifinals will take place on December 15, with the grand finale scheduled to be played on December 17.

India won eight of the nine editions so far, with Afghanistan taking home the trophy in 2017.

Bangladesh, who were able to reach the final on one occasion, succumbed to a five-wicket defeat against India in the final of the 2019 editions of the tournament.

Bangladesh squad: Mahfuzur Rahman (c), Ashiqur Rahman, Jishan Alam, Chowdhury Rizwan, Adil Siddik, Mohammad Asharuzzaman, Ariful Islam, Shihab James, Ahrar Amin, Sheikh Jibon, Rafi Uzzaman, Rohanat Doulah, Iqbal Hasan, Wasi Siddique, Maruf Mridha. Standby: Rizan Hossain, Nayeem Ahmed, Jehadul Hoque

## WC debacle committee meets selectors, players

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board's three-member special committee to assess the team's performance in the recently-concluded ODI World Cup in India met with selectors and players in their first meeting as a committee yesterday.

BCB directors Enayet Hossain Siraj (convener), Mahbubul Anam (member) and Akram Khan (member) form the three-member committee.

They called up chief selector Minhajul Abedin and selector Habibul Bashar for meetings before discussing with pacer Mustafizur Rahman and wicketkeeper-batter Liton Das.

"We gave our opinions," Minhajul told reporters after the meeting, adding that content of the meeting could not be divulged.

Convener Siraj however said that far from being an 'inquiry', the objective is to improve the team's performances going forward.

"The thing is that we are discussing with everybody. It's not an inquiry. The failings we had in the World Cup where our results did not go according to expectations, meant that we had to talk to everyone so that in the future we can take the team to higher levels. It's the initial stages and when we end, we will hand our findings to the board and they will give you all the details," Siraj told reporters after the end of the meetings.

Asked when the head coach and captain would be called upon, Siraj said: "We haven't scheduled it yet."

Bangladesh finished their worst World Cup campaign in ODIs since 2003, winning just two out of nine matches, finishing eighth in the standings despite huge expectations due to the experience prevalent in the side.



## Abahani, Rahmatganj through to Independence Cup semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani Limited survived a penalty shootout scare against Sheikh Jamal Dhamondi Club to move onto the semifinal of Independence Cup with a 3-2 victory on penalties in the second quarterfinal at Bashundhara Kings arena yesterday.

In the first quarterfinal of the day, Rahmatganj MFS confirmed a berth in the semifinals for the first time since 2018 with a come-from-behind 2-1 win over Bangladesh Police FC.

After the regulation time ended 0-0, Abahani finally broke the deadlock four minutes into extra-time with a strike from Jonathan Fernandes.

Abahani's Washington Brandao could have killed off the game in the first half of extra time but the lanky forward failed to beat Sheikh Jamal's goalkeeper Nayeem in a one-on-one situation.

Sheikh Jamal's Brazilian recruit Higor Leite then levelled the margin in the stoppage time of the first half of extra time with a brilliant free-kick.

Both teams failed to score in the second half of extra time as the match went down to penalties.

Abahani's substitute goalkeeper Shamim Hossain stopped two shots in the shootout but



off-target shots from his teammates Emeka Oghogbo and Rabiul Hasan killed off Abahani's advantage.

Finally, Iran's Milan Sheikh Soleimani converted the final penalty to send Abahani to the semifinal.

Earlier, Rahmatganj MFS's Ghanaian forward Samuel Mensah Konney scored a brace to power them to a win over Police FC.

Police FC, who have played the semifinal of the last two editions, came close to scoring twice but were denied by goalkeeper Md Nayem.

In the 24th minute, Rahmatganj defender Md Sayde conceded a penalty and Police FC's Colombian forward Edis Horacio Garcia converted it.

But Police could hold onto the lead for only five minutes as Rahmatganj scored two almost identical goals to take a decisive lead in the match.

In the 29th minute, Uzbek defender Iskandar Siddik Jonov headed down a free-kick

from Sushanta Tripura and Samuel then drove the ball home from inside the box.

Just two minutes later, Samuel again scored in almost a replay of the first goal.

Rahmatganj held onto their lead in the second half as Kamal Babu's charges left the field victorious.



**Opener Murshida Khatun** scored a T20I career-best 62 not out to lay the platform for the Bangladesh women's cricket team's historic 13-run win over South Africa in Benoni yesterday. The Tigresses, fresh from a first-ever T20I series win over Pakistan at home, scripted history by winning their maiden T20I over the Proteas Women in their backyard. Murshida's fifty saw the Tigresses post a commendable 149 for two before Shorna Akter's maiden fifer in the format helped Nigar Sultana Joty and Co restrict the hosts to 136 for eight.

PHOTO: ICC

## Ronaldinho tips PSG's Mbappe to win Ballon d'Or

AFP, Bangkok

Star French striker Kylian Mbappe can win the Ballon d'Or in "any team", Ronaldinho told AFP Sunday, but the Brazilian would like him to win it with Paris Saint Germain, "a big club".

"A great player like him can have the opportunity to win the Ballon d'Or in any team, but as I love PSG, I would like him to do it with PSG," the 2002 World Champion said.

"I hope he will win it. He is a good friend and a very great player. I like his style of play," he said during an interview with AFP in Thailand.

The prestigious award still eludes the French captain, who finished this year in third place - his best ranking to date.

"Winning the big competitions will help him a lot," said Ronaldinho, who wore No.10 for PSG from 2001 to 2003.

Next year promises to be both busy and potentially uncertain for Mbappe. Mbappe has to negotiate an uncertain contract, which could see his departure from Paris in June. Real Madrid, which has been courting him for several years, appears best placed to attract him.

## Bailey wary of Australia's post-Warner era

REUTERS

Australia's chief selector George Bailey has cautioned against repeating the mistakes made in the aftermath of leg spinner Shane Warne's retirement when long-standing opener David Warner finally calls time on his Test career.

Warner was named on Sunday in Australia's 14-man squad for the first Test in Perth from December 14-18 of the three-match series against Pakistan as he aims to bring the curtain down on his career in Sydney against Shan Masood's team in January.

"I think when you've had someone who's had that longevity and been so dominating in the role, it's just to temper the expectations of whoever is going to be the replacement there," Bailey said.

"Think back to Warne finishing up as a spinner and how many spinners got brought in and shuffled out in the quest to replicate Warne."

"I don't think you ever try and replicate someone who's played a role as someone has, and done it as well as someone has, and I'd put David in that category in the way he's opened the batting for Australia for such a long period of time."

"That's something we're conscious of and making sure that fit post-David is the right one."

Warner's selection for the opening Test comes as his former teammate Mitchell Johnson launched a withering critique of the 37-year-old's recent form and questioned whether he deserved to continue to be selected. "It's been five years and David Warner has still never really owned the ball-tampering scandal," Johnson wrote in The West Australian on Sunday, referring to Warner's year-long ban for involvement in sandpapering the ball to affect flight.



the virtue of patience and trust in defence on a sporting track, seeing out the new ball in both innings. Stand-in skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto approached the second innings with more of a Test cricket approach after a hurried first innings while seniors such as Mushfiqur Rahim and Mominul Haque played around the youngsters. Taijul Islam led the spin department with a lot of vitality, picking up crucial wickets while Shoriful Islam found immaculate lengths to trouble batters.

The wicket, too, appeared to serve the law of average: Not a rage turner while having good bounce for batters to capitalise on and for pacers to threaten.

Thus following a World Cup debacle, the Test team played to their merit while showing that transition was going well in the longest format.

"The most important thing was

how we could manage without those key players against such a big side. But the younger stars were able to stand up and be counted," selector Habibul Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

"It was not about finding new players to replace the experienced ones but about finding players who we can use since many of the regular stars can miss matches or even a series due to injury and other things," Bashar observed.

There were players such as Shadman Islam, who is in form through the NCL but did not make the first Test eleven. Khaled Ahmed has been a regular feature in Tests and will be waiting in the wings.

"Transition is taking place day by day and so far it is going well. Even Taskin and Ebadot missing means we have Khaled and Hasan [Mahmud], so the gap we expect would be 20 to 18, not 20 to 15," Bashar added.

## 'Nothing should distract us from the fact we are Italy'

REUTERS, Hamburg

Defending Champions Italy will face a tough task to defend their Euro title as they are drawn in Group B along with Spain, Croatia, and Albania for the 2024 edition in Germany.

Italy defeated Spain on penalties in the semifinals on their way to winning Euro 2020, but lost 4-0 to the Spanish in the 2012 final. Croatia reached the semifinals at the last World Cup.

"Yes, it could have been better," Italy manager Luciano Spalletti said following the draw in Hamburg on Saturday.

"Being in the fourth pot makes you realise that you have teams ahead of you but nothing should distract us from the fact we are Italy."

"A tough group, Albania showed that they know how to stay on the pitch. Croatia is strong and experienced. Spain? Anyone who loves this sport must play it, the taste of challenge and comparison," Spalletti added.

Spain's opening game is against Croatia, before they take on Italy.

"If it's not the toughest group, it's one of the toughest," Spain manager Luis de la Fuente said.

"Italy are European champions, Croatia always reach the later stages and although they are not at their best, they are two



historic teams. And don't forget Albania, top of their group."

Meanwhile, hosts Germany will face Scotland in the opening match of Euro 2024 in Munich.

The Germans, three times winners, will kick off the one-month tournament in Munich on June 14, with the final on July 14 at Berlin's Olympic stadium.

Germany will also play Hungary, who came through the qualifying campaign unbeaten, and Switzerland in Group A.

"It's no group of death but a very strong group and we are looking forward to it," Germany manager Julian Nagelsmann said.

France and the Netherlands will meet

again after coming through qualifying in the same group, drawn in Group D alongside Austria and the winners of playoff A.

England, runners-up at Euro 2020, are in Group C alongside Denmark, Slovenia and Serbia. England, who needed extra time to see off Denmark in the 2020 semi-finals, start the tournament against Serbia.

"You look at Serbia with a centre forward like Aleksander Mitrovic and then you have to be careful not to assume anything when you see these draws, that's for certain," England manager Gareth Southgate said.

"You can look at it on paper but the games aren't played on paper. There are some teams that you are glad to avoid in Pot 3 and Pot 4 but all of the teams that we play are more than capable."

In Group E, Belgium face Romania, Slovakia and the winners of playoff B, Israel, Bosnia, Ukraine or Iceland.

Portugal are in Group F, alongside Turkey, Czech Republic and the playoff C winners, one of Georgia, Greece, Kazakhstan or Luxembourg, who finished third in Portugal's qualifying group.

The top two in each of the six Euro 2024 groups proceed to the round of 16 along with the four best third-placed finishers.