



U19s crash out of WC semifinal race

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's hopes of reaching the semifinals of the ICC Under-19 World Cup ended after a seven-wicket defeat to England in their opening Super Six Group 2 match at Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo yesterday.

In a must-win encounter, Bangladesh struggled with the bat after opting to bat first, getting bundled out for just 136 in 38.1 overs. Bangladesh made a promising start while defending the modest total as pacer Al Fahad struck twice early, removing England openers Joseph Moores (1) and Ben Dawkins (27) to reduce them to 39 for 2 in the ninth over. However, a decisive 78-run partnership between captain Thomas Rew and Ben Mayers steadied the chase and swung the momentum England's way. England reached 137 for 3 in 24.1 overs. The victory lifted England to the top of the points table with six points, with India second on four points and two matches in hand.

Bangladesh, who carried just one point from the group stage, are now mathematically out of semifinal contention. Even a win against Zimbabwe on January 31 in Harare would only take them to three points. Bangladesh won the tournament in 2020 and finished eighth and sixth in 2022 and 2024 respectively.



Sinner's statement win, Keys dethroned

Jannik Sinner stormed into the Australian Open quarterfinals with a commanding 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 win over close friend Luciano Darderi, firing 19 aces in Melbourne's sweltering 30°C evening. Fellow Italian Lorenzo Musetti battled heat and Taylor Fritz to face Novak Djokovic next, while Iga Swiatek powered through to meet Elena Rybakina. On the women's side, Jessica Pegula dethroned Madison Keys 6-3, 6-4, setting up a clash with Amanda Anisimova. As Melbourne braces for 45°C, the stage is set for blockbuster quarterfinals and a potential Sinner-Djokovic semi, with players navigating extreme conditions and high-stakes drama.

Will stagnation continue in the 'best time for cricket'?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh cricket finds itself in a state of drift. On Monday, the lush green outfield of the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium lay unusually quiet, while even the academy ground showed little sign of activity.

The loss of a World Cup place amid the ongoing impasse between the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the International Cricket Council (ICC) over security concerns in India has added to the gloom. On-field cricket now faces uncertain days, with the First Division League continuing with a reduced 12-team format and even the Premier League clouded by uncertainty.

While walking through Mirpur, this reporter overheard two BCB officials discussing possible renovations of existing facilities. From their conversation, it appeared such plans may have to be put on hold due to the upcoming national elections.

Ordinarily, the period immediately after the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) would see the Sher-e-Bangla buzzing with activity. National team players would return to prepare for upcoming assignments, media attention would intensify and discussions around squad selection would dominate. This year, however, the absence of a World Cup has left a noticeable void.

The Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) has organised a T20 Challenge Cup for players sidelined by the First Division League's club-versus-BCB conflict and those who went unsold in the



In this vacuum, rumour took over on Sunday night, with speculation swirling over BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul's departure for Australia. The speculation subsided only on Monday morning when Bulbul appeared at the BCB premises to attend a training programme for match referees.

turned up at the stadium to lodge a formal complaint with the BCB president, claiming they are yet to receive 75 percent of their contracted payments from last season.

Following the BPL final, Test captain Najmul Hossain Shanto spoke candidly about the need to strengthen the domestic structure. BCB officials also view the current lull as a potential opportunity to push forward with tournaments.

BCB game development coordinator Habibul Bashar believes the coming weeks are crucial.

"From what I understand, the BCL [Bangladesh Cricket League] four-day matches were supposed to take place. We can start thinking of upcoming assignments," Bashar told The Daily Star, adding that with Pakistan home series in March, the BCL could also be played in one-day format.

For Bashar, failing to make use of this window would be a missed opportunity. "It wouldn't be right to let this time go to waste. This is the best time for cricket. Later on, it rains or gets hot. This is the best time to play cricket in Bangladesh," he added.

A senior BCB official, speaking on condition of anonymity, revealed that plans are being drawn up for February. "Given the present situation, we are planning for February and hope to have an overall plan within a week," the official said.

With national team assignments too facing significant risks after ICC's decision to remove Bangladesh from World Cup, the domestic scene and its improvement gains even more importance.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Pakistan delay final call on T20 WC participation

AFP, ISLAMABAD

Pakistan cricket chief Mohsin Naqvi said on Monday a final decision on the team's participation in next month's Twenty20 World Cup will be delayed by up to a week, keeping open a possible boycott over Bangladesh's withdrawal.

Naqvi met Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday to take his advice on the situation, after which a call was expected to be made, but the cricket board boss posted on X that "the final decision will be taken either on Friday or next Monday".

Describing a "productive meeting" with the premier, he said Sharif "directed that we resolve it while keeping all options on the table".

Naqvi threw the national cricket team's participation into doubt on Saturday, saying Pakistan could pull out after the International Cricket Council (ICC) replaced Bangladesh in the tournament.

Local media also reported that Pakistan could also boycott a February 15 match against arch-rivals India over political tension.

Pakistan's reaction comes after the ICC rejected Bangladesh's demands to relocate their World Cup matches from India to Sri Lanka over security fears.

On Saturday, the ICC replaced Bangladesh with Scotland as per the Twenty20 international rankings.

Pakistan backed Bangladesh's stance in Wednesday's ICC Board virtual meeting, saying there was a precedence of relocating India's matches on security fears from Pakistan in last year's Champions Trophy.

Milan stalemate with Roma leaves Inter five clear

REUTERS, ROME

AC Milan's title hopes suffered a blow as they were held to a 1-1 draw by AS Roma in a rain-soaked clash in the capital on Sunday that left Inter Milan five points clear at the top of the Serie A standings.

Second-placed Milan moved to 47 points, while Roma climbed to third on 43, level with Napoli, who suffered a 3-0 defeat earlier on Sunday.

Inter had cranked up the pressure in the title race with a 6-2 comeback win against Pisa on Friday.

Roma had several chances to grab the opening goal in the first half but Milan keeper Mike Maignan was in inspired form, producing a reflex save on the line to deny the hosts just before the break, with his performance earning him the Man-of-the-Match award.

Milan made the breakthrough in the 62nd minute when Koni De Winter rose to glance home a header from a cross.

However, the home crowd were roaring 12 minutes later when Lorenzo Pellegrini netted from the spot.



Barca reclaim LaLiga lead as race tightens



AGENCIES

Barcelona returned to the top of La Liga with a 3-0 win over bottom side Real Oviedo on Sunday, staying one point clear of Real Madrid in a tightly contested title race.

Goals from Dani Olmo, Raphinha and teenage sensation Lamine Yamal ensured the Catalans moved onto 52 points, after Real Madrid had briefly taken pole position with a win over Villarreal on Saturday. Atletico Madrid remain third on 44 points after a comfortable 3-0 victory over Mallorca.

Although Oviedo sit bottom of the table, Barcelona were made to work for their win, struggling to break through in the first half before their quality told after the break. The result kept Hansi Flick's side firmly in control at the top, with the pressure remaining on their closest rivals in the weeks ahead.

Elsewhere, Atletico strengthened their grip on third place with goals from Alexander Sorloth and Thiago Almada, alongside a David Lopez own goal, to beat Mallorca. Real Betis' push for European football suffered a setback with a 2-1 loss at Alaves, while Celta Vigo were beaten 3-1 at Real Sociedad.

With the title race tightening and European spots still up for grabs, La Liga heads into another decisive round of fixtures.

Carrick magic reshapes the competitive balance

AGENCIES

Arsenal remain top of the Premier League, but their grip on the title race has loosened after Manchester United beat them 3-2 at the Emirates on Sunday, halting the Gunners' charge toward a first championship in 22 years.

The defeat allowed Manchester City and Aston Villa – both winners this weekend – to close the gap to just four points, injecting fresh tension into what had been shaping up as a comfortable run-in.

Much of that shift in momentum has come from Manchester United's revival under Michael Carrick. United followed up their victory over Manchester City by beating Arsenal, lifting themselves into the top four and displacing Liverpool.

Having taken over a side that had won just once in seven matches, Carrick has quickly restored belief and direction, transforming United into genuine contenders for Champions League qualification.

Liverpool, by contrast, are heading in the opposite direction. Once steady in the race for European places, they have slipped to sixth after a damaging defeat in Bournemouth, exposing ongoing issues around fatigue, injuries and squad balance.

Despite heavy summer investment,



they find themselves short of depth in key areas, and the consequences are now reflected in their league position. With Champions League spots under threat, their room for recovery is shrinking.

Tottenham, meanwhile, are drifting further from the conversation entirely. A campaign that began with promise has unraveled into inconsistency and unrest, leaving Spurs marooned in mid-table. Patience with Thomas Frank is wearing thin, with supporters increasingly restless and results failing to offer reassurance.

The table now tells a story of renewed uncertainty. Arsenal remain in front but

no longer unchallenged, with City and Villa closing fast, United rising again, and Liverpool struggling to keep pace. What once appeared a settled hierarchy has been reshaped by managerial impact, squad depth and momentum swings.

Above all, Carrick's influence at Old Trafford stands out. Victories over both City and Arsenal have lifted United into the top four and restored a sense of purpose and identity. While it is far too early to crown him as the long-term answer, the transformation has altered the competitive balance near the top of the Premier League.