

# India one step away from first AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup qualification on merit

Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), (UNI)

The Indian U17 women's team are a step away, or to be precise, a point away, from scripting history by becoming the first-ever batch to earn a place in the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup on merit.

The Young Tigresses will face Uzbekistan in the last qualifying encounter in Group G at the Dolen Omurzakov Stadium in Bishkek on October 17, at 18:30 IST, knowing that avoiding defeat will book their place at the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup China 2026.

"This game is what we have been working for all



these months," said captain Julian Nongmaithem, who scored a stunning 90th-

minute volley to guide India to a 2-1 win over Kyrgyz Republic in the first game on

Monday.

"It was a tough start to the qualifiers against Kyrgyz

Republic, but we were happy to get the win in the end finally. That gave us a good advantage heading into the last game," Julian added. As usual, the 14-year-old dedicated the goal to her late father, who passed away last year. "I know he's watching from heaven," an emotional Julian said after the game.

Kyrgyz Republic bounced back and defeated Uzbekistan 2-1 in the second match on Wednesday. That means India still lead the three-team group due to a superior head-to-head record, and a point against Uzbekistan will see them top the standings and book their ticket to China next year.

## Bangladesh recall veteran opener Soumya Sarkar for West Indies ODIs



Dhaka, (UNI)

Experienced opener and all-rounder Soumya Sarkar has been recalled to the Bangladesh squad for the upcoming ODI series against the West Indies.

Sarkar last featured for Bangladesh in February during the ICC Champions Trophy and missed the subsequent bilateral series against Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

Following a 3-0 whitewash in their most recent ODI series against Afghanistan, capped off by a 200-run defeat in the final match, the Tigers have made just two changes to their squad.

The other change sees wicketkeeper-batter Mahidul Islam Ankon earn his maiden ODI call-up.

Mahidul made his debut against South Africa in Tests in 2024, which is also his solitary international appearance across formats so far for Bangladesh.

Opener Mohammad Naim Sheikh and pacer Nahid Rana

are the two players from the squad that faced Afghanistan to miss out on selection for the upcoming ODI series.

Bangladesh will also continue to be without Liton Das, who is recovering from a side strain sustained during the Asia Cup and subsequently missed the ODI series against Afghanistan.

The three-match ODI series between Bangladesh and West Indies will be played in Mirpur from 18 to 23 October, before the action shifts to Chattogram for the T20I leg starting on October 27, an ICC report said.

Bangladesh squad: Mehidy Hassan Miraz (Captain), Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Soumya Sarkar, Mohammed Saif Hasan, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Tawhid Hridoy, Mahidul Islam Ankon, Jaker Ali Anik, Shamim Hossain, Quazi Nurul Hasan Sohan, Rishad Hossain, Tanvir Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Hasan Mahmud.



## Impressive Spain closer to qualification for 2026 FIFA World Cup finals

Madrid, (UNI): Spain continued its dominant march toward qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup finals with a commanding 4-0 win over Bulgaria in Valladolid.

Arsenal midfielder Mikel Merino netted twice to lead another convincing performance from Luis de la Fuente's side, which has now scored six goals without conceding during the current international window.

Goalkeeper Unai Simon has faced just one shot on target across the two matches. The results were even more impressive given Spain's lengthy list of absentees, including Lamine Yamal, Nico Williams, Rodrigo Hernandez, Dani Carvajal and Fabian Ruiz, while Dean Huijzen also withdrew through injury.

In their absence, players such as Alex Baena, Jeremy Pino, Pedro Porro and Merino stepped up, while veteran defender Aymeric Laporte's composed display against Bulgaria underlined his continued importance to the team's back line.

Spain tops Group E in World Cup qualifying with 12 points from four matches, scoring 15 goals without reply. The reigning European champions are now within reach of securing their ticket to the 2026 finals in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Following a comfortable win over Georgia on Saturday, De la Fuente's team again dominated from start to finish. Spain also thrashed Türkiye 6-0 away in September, and given their current form, few would bet against them maintaining a perfect record. Türkiye remains the only team capable of mathematically overtaking Spain, but with a vastly superior goal difference of 15 compared to Türkiye's 3, Spain holds a commanding advantage. Even if both sides win their penultimate matches, Türkiye would need a huge victory in Seville to leapfrog the Spaniards.

## Dutch midfielder Frenkie de Jong signs new Barcelona contract

Madrid, (UNI)

FC Barcelona has announced that Dutch international midfielder Frenkie de Jong has signed a new contract keeping him at the club until June 2029.

The extension means the 28-year-old will complete a decade with Barcelona, having joined from Ajax in 2019.

De Jong has made 267 appearances for the club, scoring 19 goals.

De Jong had confirmed during the summer that talks were underway over a renewal, and at Wednesday's signing ceremony, he reiterated his lifelong ambition to represent Barcelona despite reports of interest from other

clubs.

"I always dreamed of playing for Barca and now that I am living the dream, I want to continue it for many more years and win more titles," he said.

During his six seasons with the Catalan side, De Jong has won two La Liga titles, two Copas del Rey and two Spanish Super Cups.

"I have always wanted to play for Barcelona, and I want to stay here as long as possible. I am very happy at the club, in the city, with my companions and with the Board of Directors," said the midfielder, adding that he has "always felt valued at FC Barcelona."

## Abhishek & Mandhana named ICC Players of Month for September

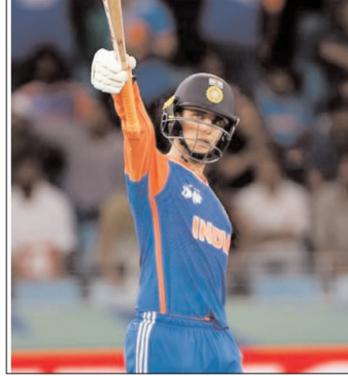
Dubai, (UNI)

Abhishek Sharma and Smriti Mandhana have won the ICC Player of the Month awards for men and women, respectively, after some fine efforts that helped edge out other strong contenders for September.

Abhishek's superlative efforts in the Asia Cup T20I tournament were lauded by fans and critics alike and reflect in the Player of the Month awards.

The flamboyant batter accumulated 314 runs in seven matches during the period at an average of 44.85 and an outstanding strike-rate of 200.

The 25-year-old was named the Player of the Tournament and achieved the highest rating points ever in the ICC Men's T20I Batting Rankings during the Asia Cup, reaching 931 at the end of the Super Fours stage. He won ahead of team-mate Kuldeep Yadav and Zimbabwe's Brian



Bennett.

Abhishek said, "It feels great to win this ICC award and I am happy that it has come for some important match-



es that I could help win."

"I am proud to be part of a team that can pull off victories from the most difficult of situations. Our recent

track record in T20Is reflects our outstanding team culture and positive mindset," he said.

"I thank the team management for their guidance and to all my teammates for their support. I am also thankful to the panel that selected me for this award," Abhishek added.

Smriti Mandhana, a left-handed opener like Abhishek, was outstanding in a home ODI series against Australia, scoring 58, 117 and 125 in the three matches. The India vice-captain scored 308 runs in four ODIs during the period at an average of 77 and a strike rate of 135.68.

Mandhana, who is in the midst of India's campaign in the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025, struck the fastest century by an India batter during the Australia series when she reached the three-figure mark off just 50 deliveries in the third match.

## Ishant Kishan stretches Jharkhand's total, Sahil's all round show leaves TN reeling in Ranji tie

Chennai, (UNI)

After stretching his overnight score, adding another 48 runs on the second day, skipper Ishant Kishan, who scored 173, in Jharkhand's healthy total of 419, then led astutely to reduce Tamil Nadu reeling at 18 for five, when rain stopped play during tea on the Elte A Raji Trophy Group match at the Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts and Science Ground in Coimbatore, today.

Earlier resuming at 307 for six in 90 overs, Jharkhand, thanks to left handed Ishant

Kishan and all round show by another not out batsman No.8 Sahil Raj, who stretched their seventh wicket partnership to 214 runs in 61.2 overs leading the team to a big total. Ishan, resuming at 125, scored 173 (247 balls, 15x4, 6x6) and Sahil added 13 to his overnight score of 64. Sahil scored 77 off 183 balls with seven fours and



two sixers as the duo not only rescued the Jharkhand's innings after losing six wickets on the opening day yesterday, virtually outbatted the home side. For Tamil Nadu left arm pacer Gurjapneet Singh claimed four wickets, while left arm medium pacer Jatin Kumar Pandey and his fellow new ball bowler Sahil Raj shared the spoils claiming three and two wickets respectively in 11 overs.

They showed enough promise and firepower and dismantled the Tamil Nadu top order picking up five wickets to send the home team reeling at 18 for five when the heavens opened up. Right arm medium pacer Jatin Kumar Pandey and his fellow new ball bowler Sahil Raj shared the spoils claiming three and two wickets respectively in 11 overs.

## England men's tour of New Zealand 2025: Rivalry fueled by passion & promise

London, (UNI)

As the cricket calendar shifts towards the southern summer, England's men's team is gearing up for an exciting white-ball tour of New Zealand this October and November 2025.

The six-match series, comprising three T20 internationals followed by three One Day Internationals (ODIs), promises a thrilling blend of tactical battles, emerging talent, and a historic rivalry that has consistently delivered some of cricket's most unforgettable moments.

This tour comes at a pivotal juncture for both nations. With the World Test Championship underway and the next T20 World Cup on the horizon, the series offers a crucial platform for rising stars to prove their mettle while providing opportunities for seasoned players re-



turning from injury or rest to regain form. New Zealand's home conditions—always challenging and strategic—are ideal for testing

white-ball skills and team depth.

For cricket fans, this series rekindles one of the most fiercely fought rivalries in the modern game.

## India lose 2-4 to Australia at Sultan of Johor Cup 2025

Johor (Malaysia), (UNI)

The Indian Junior Men's Hockey Team suffered a 2-4 defeat against Australia in its fourth pool-stage match of the ongoing Sultan of Johor Cup 2025 here.

Indian Captain Rohit (22') and Arshdeep Singh (60') scored for the Blue Colts while Oscar Sproule (39', 42'), Andrew Patrick (40') and Captain Dylan Downey (51') were the goalscorers for Australia on Wednesday night.

The first quarter saw a tight contest between both sides however, India were dominating the possession and dictating the tempo of the game. In the early moments, Australia came close to scoring but were met with a brilliant save by Prince Deep Singh after which the Blue Colts hardly put a foot wrong in the first half,



The second quarter saw India win the first penalty corner of the evening in the 17th minute but Anmol Ekka's flick had too much power and went over the post.

In the 22nd minute, India won another penalty corner but this time it was successfully converted by the team's leading goalscorer and Captain, Rohit (22') with a simple low strike

past everyone and into the net. Amir Ali came close to extending the lead in the 25th minute as he made a strong solo run from the left and took a shot from distance which was saved by the Australian goalkeeper.

Australia turned the tide in the third quarter with three back-to-back goals to take a lead in the contest. The first goal

came in the 39th minute as Australia launched a great move from the right flank to find an unmarked Oscar Sproule (39') on the far post who finished it into the net to equalise.

Just a minute later, they took the lead when a deflection during a penalty corner fell perfectly for Andrew Patrick (40'), who made no mistake in finding the back of the net. Moments later, Oscar Sproule (42') scored his second of the evening, this time with a powerful back-handed strike in front of goal.

India won a penalty corner in the 49th minute but this time, Captain Rohit's flick went off-target and the scores remained the same. Two minutes later, Australia won their fifth penalty corner of the match and their Captain Dylan Downey stepped up and slotted it home to further strengthen their lead.

## F1: Russell, Antonelli confirmed at Mercedes for 2026



Beijing, (UNI)

Mercedes has announced it will retain George Russell and Kimi Antonelli as its drivers for the 2026 F1 season, confirming one of the sport's least surprising moves ahead of this weekend's United States Grand Prix.

The announcement comes 10 days after Russell's dominant win in Singapore and cements Mercedes' plans for F1's next major rules overhaul.

"Confirming our driver line-up was always just a matter of when, not if," said team principal Toto Wolff.

"We wanted to take our time, handle the negotiations properly, and make sure everyone was

happy. George and Kimi have proved a strong pairing, and we're excited to continue our journey together."

The deal locks in Mercedes' future as F1 prepares for sweeping technical changes in 2026, which will see new chassis and engine regulations aimed at greater efficiency and sustainability. Russell, the only driver outside Red Bull and McLaren to win this season, sits fourth on the standings with six races remaining. His two victories have helped Mercedes stay in contention for second in the Constructors' Championship.

The Briton's contract length was not disclosed, though the team said both drivers will continue "into 2026." "I'm really proud to be continuing our journey together," Russell said. "Next year will mark my tenth since I first signed with Mercedes back in 2017. It's been a long and successful partnership so far, and I can't wait to see what lies ahead, especially with the new regulations."