Rising Stars Women's Asia Cup 2026: Defending champions India take on Pakistan on February 15 in Bangkok

NEW DELHI: The second edition of the Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars tournament will be held in Bangkok, Thailand, from February 13-22, the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) announced on Monday. As per the tournament schedule, India A women will take on Pakistan A on February 15, the same day the countries will lock horns in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo.

The upcoming tournament, which will be played in the T20 format, is designed to showcase the next generation of women's cricketing talent. It will feature 'A' teams from four full-member nations that hold One Day International (ODI) status, along with four leading associate teams from across the Asian region.

The second edition of the tournament was initially slated to get underway on June 6 last year in Sri Lanka. However, the event had to be postponed following a request from Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) President Shammi Silva, citing persistent adverse weather conditions as well as public health concerns arising from the outbreak and spread of chikungunya in the country.

According to the official schedule announced by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), India 'A' have been placed in Group A, where they will compete against Pakistan 'A', the United Arab Emirates, and Nepal. Group B will consist of Bangladesh 'A', Sri Lanka 'A', Malaysia, and Bangladesh. India 'A' are set to kick off their tournament campaign with an opening match against the UAE on February 13. They will then face arch-rivals Pakistan 'A' on February 15, before concluding their group-stage fixtures with a clash against Nepal on February 17.

The inaugural edition of the tournament played in Hong Kong witnessed India A beat Bangladesh A in the final.

ACC Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars 2026

Group A: India A, Pakistan A, UAE, Nepal

Group B: Sri Lanka A, Bangladesh A, Malaysia, Thailand

Pakistan A vs Nepal – February 13, 2026

India A vs UAE – February 13, 2026

Malaysia vs Thailand – February 14, 2026

Bangladesh A vs Sri Lanka A – February 14, 2026

UAE vs Nepal – February 15, 2026

India A vs Pakistan A – February 15, 2026

Sri Lanka A vs Malaysia – February 16, 2026

Bangladesh A vs Thailand – – February 16, 2026

India A vs Nepal – February 17, 2026

Pakistan A vs UAE – February 17, 2026

Bangladesh A vs Malaysia – February 18, 2026.



Rehan Ahmed and Adil Rashid issued visas to travel to India for T20 World Cup

NEW DELHI: Visas for England's Rehan Ahmed and Adil Rashid to travel to India for the T20 World Cup have been issued, with the ICC confident that Indian visas for all players, support staff and officials of Pakistani origin or nationals at the event will be arranged in time. It had emerged late last week that Rehan and Rashid, with Pakistan ties, had been waiting for clearances even as the rest of their team-mates in the England squad had received theirs.

A number of players of Pakistan origin from England and Australia have faced delays in securing visas to travel to India in recent years. An Instagram post by the USA's Ali Khan last week, claiming he had been denied an Indian visa, brought the issue to light once again. Political and diplomatic ties between India and Pakistan, always fraught, are at their lowest ebb currently and obtaining Indian visas for Pakistani nationals or those of Pakistan heritage has been especially difficult in recent years. Even the Pakistan's men's team faced a brief delay before traveling to India for the 2023 World Cup.

In all, there are 42 such applications from the squads of Canada, Netherlands, UAE, England, Italy, Bangladesh (where the former Pakistan legspinner Mushtaq Ahmed is part of the coaching staff) and the USA. Visas, it is believed, have already been issued to players and officials from the Netherlands and Canada, while visa appointments for members of the UAE, USA, Italy, Bangladesh and Canada squads are due to take place early next week

The ICC has taken on a more proactive role in facilitating applications and is understood to be in touch with Indian High Commissions and Consulates in various cities across the world to ensure the remaining visas are processed without issue. The global governing body is confident that all visas will be issued by January 31, when the support period for the tournament begins. The first games of the tournament are scheduled for February 7.

Connolly in search of runs, but shining with the ball

SYDNEY: Cooper Connolly has been urged to simply trust himself more as Perth Scorchers' rising star battles a rare batting slump ahead of a blockbuster Qualifier showdown with Sydney Sixers in Perth.

Connolly, who is in Australia's T20 World Cup squad, has become a surprise opening-over weapon with the ball this BBL season, snaring 13 wickets across the campaign at an average of 15.38.

In Saturday night's six-wicket win over the Melbourne Stars, Connolly dismissed both Tom Rogers and Joe Clarke, meaning he has now taken five first-over wickets this season.

Out of the top 10 wicket-takers this campaign, Connolly boasts the best average and economy (6.66), with his left-arm spin proving hard to handle.

But his batting has fallen away dramatically following a bright start to the campaign. Connolly started with impressive scores of 59 and 77, putting him well on track to match or beat last season's tally of 351 runs that came at an average of 50.14.

However, since then he has only managed 61 runs in his past eight knocks, dropping his season average to 19.70. His past six innings have been particularly low, returning scores of 2, 18, 0, 3, 0 and 4.

Team-mate Jhye Richardson said the team are backing Connolly to rebound strongly in the finals.

"I think he just needs to trust himself. The runs will come," Richardson said. "He's too good not to get a couple of scores. He just needs to be confident and back himself.

"And I think Coops just needs to remember that he's still influencing the game for us. I know he's not getting the runs that he would like, but he's still having a really big impact [with the ball]."

Scorchers still finished on top of the ladder despite Connolly's batting struggles, with the likes of Finn Allen, Mitchell Marsh, Aaron Hardie and Ashton Turner all playing match-winning knocks this season. Josh Inglis and Laurie Evans are also part of what is arguably the strongest batting line-up of the league.

Connolly is confident the runs will soon flow for him. "Three weeks ago I was hitting them nicely and I still feel like I'm hitting the ball nicely," he said. "It's just a game of T20 cricket - sometimes you get out and have a few low scores. I'm looking forward to Tuesday and hopefully putting on a show."

A top of 39 degrees is forecast for Perth, meaning stifling conditions will greet the players when the match begins at 4.30pm local time.

Sixers would have missed the finals if they had lost to Brisbane Heat at the Gabba, but their five-wicket win rocketed them to second spot. Star Test duo Steven Smith and Mitchell Starc loom as keys to their title hopes.

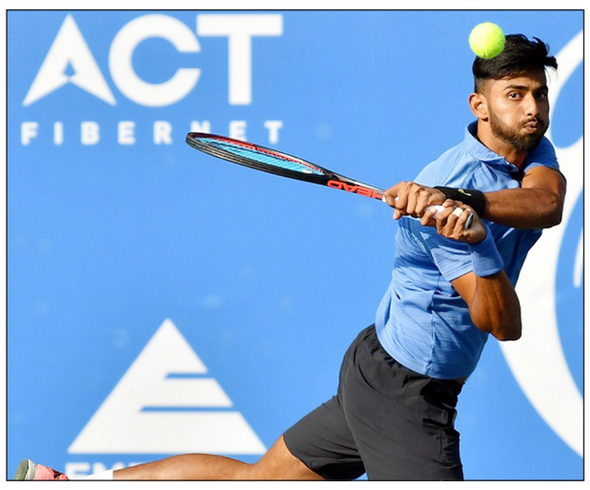
Smith has cracked scores of 54, 100 and 19 not out since completing his Ashes duties, while Starc snared 4 for 35 against Heat

The winner of the Scorchers-Sixers match will earn direct entry into Sunday's grand final, with the loser to host a must-win Challenger match on Friday against either Hobart Hurricanes or the Melbourne Stars.

Hurricanes and Stars lock horns in a Knockout encounter at Bellerive Oval on Wednesday night.

30-year-old Indian Niki Poonacha set for Grand Slam debut at Australian Open

MELBOURNE: Niki Poonacha is a late bloomer in tennis. Although he picked up a racket at the age of five, his exposure to tournament play came much later. He played his first ITF event at 17, and at 30, he is set to make his Grand Slam debut in the men's doubles at the Australian Open, partnering Thailand's Pruchya Isaro.Standing 6 ft 3', Poonacha has spent much of the past couple of years grinding on the Challenger circuit, a world away in facilities and scale from a Grand Slam. Ranked No. 7 among Indians and 144 in the ATP doubles rankings, the 30-year-old appeared relaxed when nudged to recall his first impressions of Melbourne.



"What I've heard from players is that the Australian Open is the most player-friendly event, now I've got to experience that," said Poonacha, who arrived in Melbourne over the weekend. "Right from the first welcome to the restaurants they have onsite that take care of your every dietary requirement, to the atmosphere on the grounds, there is nothing more I could ask for. This place has a different kind of energy."Poonacha, who grew up in Neyveli, an industrial town in Tamil Nadu, has been to Australia once before, 10 years ago, when he played an ITF event in Mornington.Wildcard entrants, Poonacha and Isaro face a stiff challenge in the first round as they take on Spanish pair Pedro Martinez and Jaume Munar on an outside court on Tuesday.

"I feel good here, I'm feeling the ball good on my racket," Poonacha said. "It's a good thing that we're playing with similar balls to the ones used in Chengdu (for the wildcard playoffs) in November. The courts are almost the same too."The burly Indian, who has soaked in the experience, walking the grounds and preparing for his opening match, described the stage as motivating."When I came here on the first day, I was a little overwhelmed by the people and everything around me, the hospitality they provide and the number of people coming to watch," he said, pausing.

Senegal walk-out after penalty but return to beat Morocco and win title

NEW DELHI: A disallowed Senegal goal in the 93rd minute. The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) controversially awarding a penalty to Morocco. Senegal players staging a walk-out, causing a 14-minute delay. Brahim Diaz's embarrassingly fluffing the panenka. And Pape Gueye scoring a screamer in extra time to lead Senegal to the African Cup of Nations title. The Afcon final on Sunday night between hosts Morocco and Senegal descended into a farce. Senegal won 1-0 but the title was overshadowed by the drama that unfolded in the stoppage time at the end of the match. After the VAR awarded a penalty against them, the Senegalese players were ordered off the field by their coach Pape Bouna Thiaw, with some □players going back to the dressing room. It was only after Sadio Mane convinced them to get back on the field that the game continued – after a 14 minute holdover.

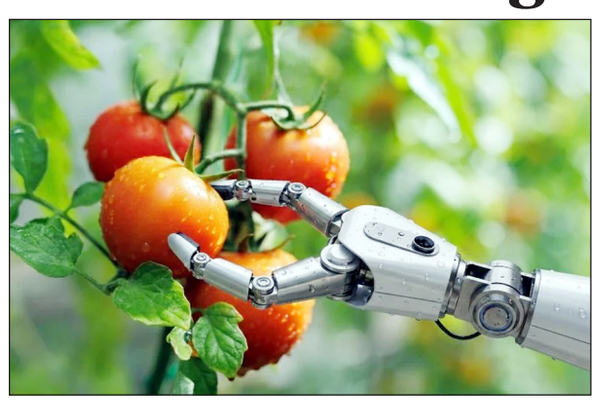
The penalty was awarded following a VAR check by Congolese referee Jean-Jacques Ndala after Brahim Diaz had been tugged to the ground by Senegal.

Robots that 'think before they pick' could transform Ttomato farming

Labor shortages in agriculture are driving growing interest in robotic systems that can automate harvesting. Yet some crops remain especially challenging for machines. Tomatoes, for example, grow in clusters, meaning robots must identify and remove only the ripe fruit while leaving unripe tomatoes attached to the vine. Doing this reliably requires careful judgment and precise control.

To address this problem, Osaka Metropolitan University Assistant Professor Takuya Fujinaga from the Graduate School of Engineering developed a method that allows robots to assess how easy each tomato is to harvest before attempting to pick it.

Fujinaga's approach combines image recognition with statistical analysis to determine the best direction from which to harvest each tomato. The system analyzes visual information about the fruit itself, the shape and position of its stems, and whether the tomato is partially hidden by leaves or other parts of the plant. By weighing these factors, the robot can make more informed control decisions and select the approach that offers the highest chance of a successful harvest. The model represents a shift in focus from the traditional 'detection/recognition' model to what Fujinaga calls a 'harvest ease estimation'. "This moves beyond simply asking 'can a robot pick a tomato?' to thinking about 'how likely is a successful pick?', which is more meaningful for real world farming," he explained. In trials, Fujinaga's system achieved a successful harvest rate of 81%, significantly outperforming expectations. Around one quarter of those successful picks involved tomatoes collected from the right or left side after earlier attempts from the front had failed, indicating that the robot adjusted its strategy when it encountered difficulty.



Scientists print working electrodes directly on skin with light

A new study from researchers at Linköping University and Lund University in Sweden shows that visible light can be used to form electrodes made from conductive plastics without relying on hazardous chemicals. The method allows electrodes to be produced on many different surfaces, opening the door to new types of electronics and medical sensors.

"I think this is something of a breakthrough. It's another way of creating electronics that is simpler and doesn't require any expensive equipment," says Xenofon Strakosas, assistant professor at the Laboratory of Organic Electronics, LOE, at Linköping University.

Scientists at LOE study conductive plastics, also called conjugated polymers, to develop technologies for areas such as healthcare and renewable energy. These materials combine the electrical behavior of metals and semiconductors with the flexibility and softness of plastics, making them especially useful for applications that require both conductivity and adaptability.

Polymers are built from long chains of hydrocarbons, with each repeating unit known as a monomer. When monomers link together, they form polymers through a process called polymerization. Traditionally, polymerization depends on strong and sometimes toxic chemicals. This limits how easily the process can be scaled up and restricts its use in sensitive fields such as medicine.

Researchers at Campus Norrköping, working with collaborators in Lund and New Jersey, have now developed a way for polymerization to occur using only visible light. The key lies in specially designed water-soluble monomers created by the research team. Because of this design, the process does not require toxic chemicals, harmful UV light, or additional treatment steps to produce functional electrodes.

"It's possible to create electrodes on different surfaces such as glass, textiles, and even skin. This opens up a much wider range of applications," says Xenofon Strakosas.

In practice, a liquid solution containing the monomers can be applied to a surface. A laser or another light source is then used to draw detailed electrode patterns directly onto that surface. Any solution that does not polymerize can be washed away, leaving only the finished electrodes behind.

"The electrical properties of the material are at the very forefront. As the material can transport both electrons and ions, it can communicate with the body in a natural way, and its gentle chemistry ensures that tissue tolerates it – a combination that is crucial for medical applications," says Tobias Abrahamsson, researcher at LOE and lead author of the study published in the scientific journal Angewandte Chemie.

To test the approach, the researchers used light to pattern electrodes

