

# Bahrainis outclass Nepal

Kingdom's national team take one step closer to advancing in FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifiers and securing berth in AFC Asian Cup 2027

● **Sayed Mahdi Baqer, Abdulla Yusuf, and Komail Al Aswad all on target for Bahrain**

TDI | Manama

Bahrain last night boosted their chances of advancing in FIFA World Cup 2026 qualification and securing their berth in the AFC Asian Cup 2027 following a 3-0 victory over Nepal at the National Stadium in Riffa.

Three players were on target for the Bahrainis in the contest, including Sayed Mahdi Baqer, Abdulla Yusuf, and Komail Al Aswad—all in the opening half.

It was the national team's second successive victory over their Nepali counterparts in under a week's time, adding to their 5-0 drubbing of the visitors last Thursday night at the same venue.

With the result, Bahrain improved to nine points on the Group H standings of the

joint-qualifiers and took one step closer to marching through to the third round of FIFA World Cup qualifying and ensuring their place in the AFC Asian Cup 2027.

They still have two matches to play, both in June—first against Yemen at home on June 6 and then against the UAE away on June 11.

The Emiratis are currently in first place in their pool with 12 points, and have already punched their tickets to the next stage of the World Cup qualifiers while securing their Asian Cup spot. They beat the Yemenis in last night's other Group H contest, played in Khobar, Saudi Arabia.

Bahrain's win yesterday maintained the fine start for national team head coach Dragan Talajic, who was at the helm of the Kingdom's squad for only his second official match.

Just like in their previous contest against Nepal, the nationals needed only a few minutes from kick-off to get onto the score-sheet.

Baqer opened their account in



Komail Al Aswad slots home Bahrain's third goal against Nepal last night

the seventh minute off a corner that was not cleared. His shot from close range took a deflection off Nepal defender Ananta Tamang and went into the right of the net.

In the 16th minute, the hosts

were awarded a penalty after Mohammed Jassim Marhoon was brought down in the box by Nepal's goalkeeper Kiran Kumar Limbu. The stopper had just saved a shot from Al Aswad on a quick counter, but the ball

rebounded towards Marhoon, whom he brought down with his challenge. Yusuf stepped up to take the spot kick and he coolly converted into the bottom-right corner.

Mahdi Humaidan had a good

opportunity to add to the score line in the 29th minute off a back-heeled pass from Yusuf, but he shot directly at Limbu. Al Aswad then made no mistake with his effort in the 36th, scoring on a one-on-one with Limbu after being released with a brilliant one-touch pass from Marhoon to make it 3-0.

In the second half, a header from substitute Hussain Abdulkarim in the 64th minute was punched away, and then he could not take advantage of a one-on-one with Limbu minutes later.

Ebrahim Al Khattal also had a header late on collected by the goalkeeper, and then Abdulkarim shot just over the crossbar with a minute to go in regular time. Ahmed Al Sherooqi also came close in injury time as Bahrain cruised to the final whistle.

There are five rounds in the FIFA World Cup qualification format for the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), which will have eight teams book their tickets to the global showcase, plus potentially another following an inter-confederation play-off.

## Bangladesh lawmaker Shakib recalled for second Sri Lanka Test

AFP | Dhaka

Newly elected lawmaker Shakib Al Hasan was yesterday recalled to the Bangladesh squad for the second Test against Sri Lanka.

The former captain, an all-rounder, successfully stood for the ruling Awami League during general elections in January.

He has not played for Bang-



Shakib Al Hasan

ladesh since the end of the 50-over World Cup in November and his last Test was in April 2023, against Ireland.

On top of his parliamentary duties, Shakib has been playing in the 50-over Dhaka Premier League this month.

Shakib's inclusion by the Bangladesh Cricket Board followed a 328-run thrashing in the opening Test in Sylhet on Monday, with the hosts failing

to post 200 runs in either innings.

Batsman Towhid Hridoy, 23, who has yet to make his five-day debut, made way for Shakib in the squad after being left out of the first Test playing side.

Uncapped Mushfik Hasan has been ruled out of the second and final Test because of an ankle injury and was replaced by fellow pacer Hasan Mahmud.

## Australia-India Test series to start in Perth late November



India's Ravindra Jadeja (C) celebrates with India's captain Rohit Sharma (L) and India's Virat Kohli (R) after a wicket (file photo)

AFP | Perth

Perth will host the first match of a blockbuster five-Test series against India from November 22, Cricket Australia (CA) said yesterday as it released its international schedule for the 2024-25 season.

The series will then move to Adelaide for a day-night Test and then Brisbane's Gabba, which traditionally was the opening venue of Australia's Test summer.

The Melbourne Cricket Ground will stage the Boxing Day Test and the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series will wrap up at Sydney Cricket Ground starting on January 3.

CA chief executive Nick Hockley called it "one of the most highly anticipated summers of cricket in memory". "Fittingly, the Border-Gavaskar Trophy has been

put on the same footing as the (men's) Ashes with a five-Test series for the first time since 1991-92," he said.

Australia have not beaten India in a home series since 2014-2015.

The hosts have, however, won all four previous Tests at Perth Stadium.

"We're confident the schedule will maximise viewership and attendances and there will be a tremendous atmosphere in stadiums across the country," said Hockley.

Also released yesterday were dates for Australia's home one-day and Twenty20 series against Pakistan in November that will precede the India Test series, and the Women's Ashes against old rivals England.

The final match of the Women's Ashes, starting January 30, 2025, will be the first women's Test at the MCG since 1949.

## Ravindra, Dube help Chennai thrash Gujarat in IPL

● **Rachin Ravindra's explosive 46 off 20 balls leads Chennai's dominant performance**

AFP | Chennai

New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra hit an explosive 46 and took three catches to help holders Chennai Super Kings to their second straight IPL win with a 63-run thrashing of Gujarat Titans yesterday.

The left-handed Ravindra, in his debut IPL season, made his runs off 20 balls while captain Ruturaj Gaikwad also hit 46 as Chennai posted 206-6 at their home M.A. Chidambaram Stadium.

Seam bowlers Mustafizur Rahman, Deepak Chahar and Tushar Deshpande took two wickets each to help restrict Gujarat, led by Shubman Gill, to 143-8 and go down to their biggest IPL loss by runs.

Chennai's Shivam Dube top-



Chennai Super Kings' wicketkeeper MS Dhoni (R) attempts to stump out Gujarat Titans' David Miller

scored with his 51 off 23 deliveries to boost the total after Ravindra and Gaikwad gave the team a quick start in their opening stand of 62.

Old warhorse M.S. Dhoni shocked his fans ahead of the T20 tournament when he passed on the Chennai captaincy to Gaikwad after he had led

the team to its fifth IPL title last year.

Gaikwad, who led the team to a win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the IPL opener last week, survived an early reprieve on one and made use of the spill.

The left-handed Ravindra remained defiant and clubbed three sixes and six fours.

### Scorecard

**Chennai Super Kings 206 for 6 (Dube 51, Ravindra 46) beat Gujarat Titans 143 for 8 (Sudharsan 37, Chahar 2-28, Deshpande 2-21) by 63 runs**

Gujarat's Afghanistan spin wizard Rashid Khan denied Ravindra his fifty as the leg-spinner had the batsman stumped while Gaikwad fell caught behind off Australia's Spencer Johnson.

Dube reached his fifty in 22 balls before he fell in the 19th over to Rashid, who took two wickets but leaked 49 runs.

Gujarat, who won a title in their debut IPL season in 2022, were never in the chase after they lost Gill lbw off Chahar.

Gill took charge of the team and won his opening match on Sunday after Hardik Pandya switched to Mumbai Indians for another captain's role.

The final of the lucrative T20 tournament will be played in Chennai on May 26.