

# SPORT



## Bangladesh U-16s not afraid

Take on defending champions North Korea today

ANISUR RAHMAN from Thailand

It was only thirteen years ago that a section of fundamentalist zealots under the banner of Islamic Oikya Andalan threatened to spoil the first-ever women's football competition in Dhaka. Though that competition was completed successfully, under the protection of police, women's football hardly took place in the years that followed. Then during the first regime of Kazi Salahuddin in 2010, women's football started to gain pace after being introduced at club level. Now it is being held regularly at the national level with participation of district teams, and the pace of progress has been furthered with the introduction of the Bangamata Primary School Gold Cup in 2011.

The current squad of the U-16 women's team comprises of some talented girls from Bangamata Gold Cup, and they have already achieved something that their predecessors never achieved: clinching back-to-back AFC U-14 Girls' Regional Championship titles and qualifying for the final round of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship, which also serves as the qualifiers for the 2018 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup.

Having stunned illustrious opponents like Chinese Taipei and Iran in the qualifying stage to emerge group champions in September last year, the girls in red and green have gone through rigorous training for the last one year. The stage is now set for them to display their potential and their first test is against none other than defending champions North Korea, one of the powerhouses in women's football with FIFA U-17 and FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup titles to their name.



The Bangladesh team go through a practice session yesterday at the Chonburi Stadium where they will begin their AFC U-16 Women's Championship campaign against defending champions North Korea today.

PHOTO: BFF

Considering the strength of today's opponents, the fear of being thrashed may be lingering in the minds of the Bangladesh players, but they are nevertheless upbeat about their prospects after having played a lot of practice matches (21 matches in Japan, South Korea, China and Singapore).

"They [North Korea] are also girls like us and there is nothing to be afraid of as we have already got rid of the fear after playing against teams from Japan, Korea and China," said a determined captain

Krishna Rani Sarker in Chonburi, Thailand yesterday morning.

The girls were in cheerful mood during a light training session in the afternoon as they built up to the most important match of their lives so far.

Midfielder Misrat Jahan Mousumi echoed the sentiments of her skipper as she said they are not afraid of the opposition.

"We got scared when we learnt that we would play against the world's top teams, but now we don't have any fear of them.

We lost to South Korea U-16 team 6-0 in a practice match but we all tried our best to fight till the last minute because we felt that we were not losing; we were just playing against them. We know their strength and got prepared that way," said Mousumi, who played in the holding midfield position.

The match between Bangladesh and North Korea will kick off at the Chonburi Stadium at 4:00pm (BST) while three-time champions Japan will face Australia at IPE Stadium at 5:00pm (BST).

## Rejuvenated Shopna carries team's hopes

SPORTS REPORTER from Thailand

Although Sirat Jahan Shopna was the main striker of the Bangladesh U-16 women's team during their AFC U-16 Women's Championship qualifiers last September, she was outdone by captain Krishna Rani Sarker, who hogged the limelight after becoming the top scorer in their group with eight goals, including a hat-trick, while Shopna failed to net even once in five matches.

Now, one year since the completion of the qualifiers and with the final round of the tournament having gotten underway in the Thai province of Chonburi on Sunday, the focus has returned to Shopna following her brilliant performances in practice matches in Japan, South Korea, Singapore and China.

Shopna, a tenth grade student of Shuti BM Pilot High School in Rangpur, scored 16 goals in those practice matches -- eight in the first tour of Japan, five in China, one apiece in Singapore and Korea and one more in the second tour of

Japan. The return was remarkable, especially considering that she sat out matches due to injury. But now she is fully-fit and ready to shoulder the responsibility up front.

Her teammates and coaching staff have pinned their hopes on the shy girl, trusting that she can make the difference in their matches. And she was also looking forward to repaying their faith.

"A belief has developed in the team that I can score goals if I am provided with the ball up front. I feel a bit of fear because everyone is banking on me to get the goals but as a forward I also want to strike every match," the 16-year-old said.

"I will try my best to do what I have done in the practice matches although I know I will not get many chances. I will be trying to pay back the faith which has been kept on me," added Shopna, who will be playing as the starting striker after Krishna switched to right-back since the SAFF Women's Championship, where Bangladesh became runners up thanks to Shopna's five goals.

## Choton eyes reward for hard work

SPORTS REPORTER from Thailand

Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton yesterday termed participation in the AFC U-16 Women's Championship finals as a fantastic and exciting moment for his side, who are eager to show their worth on the big stage after all the hard work they went through for the last one year.

"The girls have been working really hard, even in Thailand where they are training two sessions a day. They are mentally and physically prepared to face North Korea with the hope of doing something good for the nation," Choton said at the team hotel.

"We are not thinking of a win or a draw; we want to see the reflection of the progress we have made in the last one year. I believe the girls will react according to the merit of the game and will try to cash in on scoring

opportunities coming their way," said Choton, who has been with this group for the last two years.

He hopes that the players do not lose their concentration and keep believing that they can play good football at this level.

Replying to a query, Choton said, "I can say that there will be full effort from the players. Something bad may happen, but everyone has to accept the result sportingly," said a cautious Choton, who believes North Korea's strength lies in their physical strength and technical skill.

Choton's counterpart Song Sung Gwon did not try to dwell on the opposition, as he replied in one sentence: "We don't have any information about Bangladesh and can't predict the kind of performance they will put up."

Gwon however said that if Bangladesh secures a draw or win, it will be a big upset.

## Shakib wants six-month Test break

Squad for SA Tests to be named today

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has asked for a six-month break from Test cricket, saying that he needs a rest in order to stay fresh in the long run.

Bangladesh Cricket Board media committee chairman Jalal Yunus informed The Daily Star of this development last night. "We have received a letter from Shakib to the effect that he wants a six-month break from Test cricket with a view to staying fresh for the long term. The board is yet to decide whether to grant the request."

This development comes with the BCB set to name a 15-man Test squad to tour South Africa today, with the squad scheduled to depart for Johannesburg on September 16. It was learnt that Shakib is unlikely to be a part of the Test squad for the two-Test series.

Shakib -- the world's top-ranked all-rounder in all formats -- was recently made the T20I captain. He also turned in a stellar performance in the first Test against Australia in late August, taking a 10-wicket haul and hitting 84 in the first innings of his 50th Test.

In a career spanning more than a decade, Shakib has played just 51 Test matches while his contemporaries in countries like England and Australia have neared or crossed 100. This points to a wider lack of Tests for Bangladesh as a whole and in that context Shakib's request is a puzzling one. He has after all often spoken of the need for more Tests.

There have been murmurs of discontent within the dressing room, especially among seniors, at some of the decisions of head coach Chandika Hathurusingha. The Sri Lankan coach is part of the selection process and some of the selections -- the axing of senior player Mahmudullah Riyad, the drama surrounding Test specialist Mominul Haque's eleventh-hour inclusion in the squad for the first Test -- in the recently concluded Australia series have been contentious.

This development throws the squad announcement today wide open. Shakib is arguably the side's best player and most importantly lends the team balance -- he is worth his place as a batsman or bowler alone, and with him in the side Bangladesh almost have a 12th member. Therefore, the most significant part of today's squad announcement will surround whether the board will grant Shakib's request.

Apart from the South Africa Tests, Bangladesh are also scheduled to host Sri Lanka for a Test series within the next six months.



Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan (L) has asked to be left out of the Test squad for the tour of South Africa.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

## Shami, Yadav recalled

AFP, New Delhi

India on Sunday recalled pacemen Mohammad Shami and Umesh Yadav to the squad for the first three one-day internationals against Australia in the upcoming home series.

Spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja continued to be rested as the selectors announced a 16-member squad for the series starting September 17.

India and Australia will play five ODIs in all and three Twenty20 matches during the tour lasting nearly a month.

Rookie spinners Axar Patel and Yuzvendra Chahal have been retained for their performance during the Sri Lanka tour.

Squad: Virat Kohli (capt), Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan, KL Rahul, Manish Pandey, Kedar Jadhav, Ajinkya Rahane, MS Dhoni, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Jasprit Bumrah, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Umesh Yadav, Mohammed Shami.

## Women's transfers held

SPORTS REPORTER



There was not much excitement or enthusiasm except for on the part of the players who were present during the players' transfer for the upcoming women's Premier Division Cricket League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

A total of 45 cricketers were signed for nine teams for the upcoming season,

which kicks off from September 18. The teams will face each other in a league format and the top four teams will advance to the Super League phase.

Each team can register three players from the national pool of 17 cricketers, while two foreign players can feature in the playing eleven.

Defending champions Rupali Bank Limited retained national team skipper Rumana Ahmed with the highest payment of Tk 6.5 lakh, alongside Ayesha Rahman Suktara. Jahanara Alam and

Salma Khatun were also retained and will feature for five time league champion Mohammedan Sporting Club.

"We have a balanced team this season and if we can perform according to our potential we are confident of clinching the title this time," Jahanara told reporters yesterday.

The tournament was earlier scheduled to take place in April this year but the Bangladesh Cricket Board's women's wing was unable to start the league on time due to a shortage of venues.

Players of the Indira Road Krira Chakra take a selfie at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur during the women's players' transfer yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



## Sylhet returns to BPL

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet



Sylhet's re-entry into the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) was set in stone yesterday as the new franchise Sylhet Sixers was officially launched in the afternoon with hard-hitting national batsman Sabbir Rahman as

their icon player.

Sylhet previously participated in the BPL under the name Sylhet Royals, until they were suspended from the last season.

As a new franchise, the Sylhet Sixers were given the opportunity by the BPL governing council to directly recruit three players and they exercised that option by roping in all-rounder Nasir Hossain, wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan and left-arm spinner Taijul Islam.

Former national batsman Faruque Ahmed has been named the team director and Zahid Ehsan will be the head coach while former national pacer Hasibul Hossain has been chosen as the team manager.

"We will be a very competitive team and we have already got T20 specialists before the final draft. We are hopeful of a long run in BPL season," Faruque said.

"We are a good and competitive team and will fight well in BPL with the blessings of our supporters," said icon player Sabbir.

Player Nasir, former diplomat of Bangladesh at UN Abdul Momen, Sylhet City Corporation mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury and Bangladesh Cricket Board director Shafiqul Alam were also present at the launching ceremony.

## Anderson tops Test bowling rankings

AFP, London

James Anderson's career-best figures have catapulted the England paceman to the top of the International Cricket Council's Test bowling rankings.

The swing bowler produced something of a clinic as he took seven for 42 against West Indies -- a haul that included his 500th Test wicket -- in England's nine-wicket win at Lord's on Saturday that saw them to a 2-1 series victory.

Anderson has now overtaken India left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja to regain the number one spot he most recently held in August last year.

The 35-year-old Anderson is also the oldest bowler to top the rankings since Sri Lanka off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran in July 2009, a feat that ends a memorable season for the Lancashire star who took 39 wickets in seven Tests for England this home season at an average of just 14.1