

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

GTV & MASAANGA
BBPL
Dhaka v Khulna
Live from 1:30pm
Sylhet v Rangpur
Live from 6:30pm

BANGLA TV
Federation Cup
Semifinal
Bashundhara v Police
Live from 4:00pm

SONY SIX
Australia v New Zealand
Third Test, Day One
Live from 5:30am
South Africa v England

Second Test, Day One
Live from 2:30pm

Bangabandhu Bangladesh
Premier League
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National

Stadium, Dhaka
Dhaka v Khulna
Time: 1:30pm

Sylhet v Rangpur
Time: 6:30pm
Federation Cup

Semifinal
Bashundhara Kings v
Bangladesh Police

Time: 4:00pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National
Stadium, Dhaka

WHAT NEXT AFTER A DECADE OF SUCCESS?

SABBIR HOSSAIN

Weekend WINDOW

In Bangladesh's sporting landscape over the last decade, female athletes have started to corner a greater portion of the limelight. The age group successes in women's football and the significant growth and success of the Bangladesh women's cricket team on the international stage has been a highlight of the decade if one were to chart the rise of women's sports in the country over the last 10 years.

There were also names like swimmer Mahfuz Khatun Shila, weightlifter Mabia Akther Simanta, footballer Sabina Khatun,

that the successes have come through the athletes' self-motivation rather than a well-formed system and many impediments seen in earlier decades have remained. Sexual harassment has been a lasting concern in the overall health of women's sports in the country.

One big positive has been that female athletes, especially cricketers, have started to express their concerns over the huge pay disparity between male and female sportspersons.

It does not sound good when Ritu Moni, an all-rounder of the Bangladesh women's cricket team, talks about the same old barriers.

"It was not easy for me to become a cricketer from my area. All of my neighbours started to criticise me when they found me playing with male friends. And I had to struggle with poverty, but I am thankful to my brother because he gave me all-out support," Ritu said, portraying the struggle of female athletes in the country even in the 21st century.



After winning the T20 Asia Cup in 2018

woman FIDE master Sharmin Sultana Shirin and archer Ety Khatun, who made our country proud on the international stage with their sporting performances.

Their success and heartwarming stories about how they overcame all barriers to bring laurels for the country have led to a newfound belief among female sporting aspirants. Their rise also reflects the general increase in women's participation in a wide range of sectors in the country. The girls of Kalsindur Government Primary School were perhaps the first to plant the seed of hope, as they collectively overcame the difficulty of convincing rural parents to let their daughters pursue sport.

On the whole, it has been an encouraging decade in terms of creating a positive vibe in the state of women's sports in the country, although the road to making sure that there is no discrimination between male and female athletes in terms of pay gaps, facilities and safety at the workplace is still a long one.

While progress made over the last decade is encouraging, a big question remains about whether the existing system encourages females to take up sport as a profession and chase dreams through sport. The last decade's stories of women's sport have clearly portrayed

Celebrated table tennis player Zobera Rahaman Linu, who is the only Bangladeshi sportswoman to have her name listed in the Guinness Book of World Records after winning a record 16 national championships, identified successes and barriers while talking about women's sports in Bangladesh over the last decade.

"We have had some successes in different events, especially in football and cricket. There is some patronisation in football and cricket, though not that much, but it's not the case in other sports. I must say we could not progress as much as we desired in the last decade. In my view, the main impediment in this regard were the lack of financial support. There is very little opportunity to become self-sufficient by taking up sports as profession, so there is no way one can think of sports as her career," summarised Linu.

"That was why the female athletes mainly come from poor or lower middle-class families and the members of well-off families hardly encourage this pursuit because of financial uncertainty," she added.

She was also not ready to judge success through achievements in the South Asian (SA) Games.

"In 1980 I finished fifth in the Asian



After qualifying for the AFC U-16 Women's Championship in 2019.

Games... 40 years has passed but we have failed to achieve even that mark... you cannot only judge on the basis of SA Games these days; instead you have to think about where we stand on the Asian stage. We are still relying on individual dedication and sacrifice because the federations are hardly playing a major role."

Former sportsperson Parvin Nasima Nahar Putul also echoed the sentiment and placed emphasis on a women-friendly infrastructure so that the country could garner more international success through sports.

"How much are we investing in women's sports? All they achieved, have been through their self-motivation. Why, when women's sports have done a good job in the last decade, do we not spend more money on them? Financial problems are a major concern and I think the time has come to think about women-friendly infrastructure where female athletes can hone their skills without any barriers. In this new decade we have to think about accommodating more women in managerial capacities," Putul explained.

Kashfia Feroz, a women's rights activist who has the experience of working with

IMPEDIMENTS THAT STILL EXIST

- Lack of financial support and investment
- Huge pay gap between male and female athletes
- Lack of women-friendly infrastructure
- Social barriers to freely pursue sport as profession
- Lack of pro-active initiatives from federations
- Reluctance of well-off families to encourage their female child to pursue sport
- Fear of sexual harassment
- Women's sport remains secondary to men's sport

female athletes in the country, appreciated the success of female athletes in the last decade but believed that the country is lagging far behind in terms of gender equality in sport.

"Women have had many successes in sport in the last decade. But have we invested enough, or the amount that they deserve? We are yet to ensure gender equality in sport, which means we are still identifying success



MAHFUZA KHATUN SHILA

on the basis of male and female. We have started to think of sports as a career for male athletes, but is that the case for females? Sport is still considered a hobby for female athletes," Kashfia said.

"Generally, our female athletes have come from families that are not economically well-off. In my opinion, well-off families or even families in rural areas do not think that sport can be a career for a female child. It's their power of will that has been pivotal in women proving themselves through sports," she added.

All of the above comments show that women's sport has been a major success story over the last 10 years in Bangladesh. But they also ask a pertinent question as we face a new decade: is the success sustainable? Another question is whether the system can catch up to the incredible will that female athletes have displayed. If not, past successes could well be the exception and not the norm.

The successes in 2010s

DHAKA, 2010

Six female athletes won gold medals in single events in Dhaka. The gold medallists were -- Sharmin Akter Ratna in the 10m air rifle category of shooting, Jaw U Pru in the 55kg kata event of karate, Morecom Khatun in 45kg kumite event of karate, Sharmin Farjana Rumi and Shammi Akhter in 46kg and 49kg taekwondo respectively, and Eti Islam in 52kg wushu.

Two gold medals came from team events. The team of Munni Khanom, U Chinu Marma and Jaw U Pru won gold in kata and the team of Syeda Sadia Sultana, Ratna and Tripti Datta won gold in 10m air rifle.

SHILONG-GUWAHATI, 2016

Among the four gold medals Bangladesh won in Shilong-Guwaahati SA Games, three of them were won by female athletes. Mahfuz Khatun Shila won two gold medals in 50m and 100m in swimming's breaststroke category. This was the first time that a Bangladeshi female athlete won two gold medals in the same competition. Mahfuz also became the first female Bangladeshi swimmer to win gold at the SA Games. Weightlifter Mabia Akter Simanta also achieved a historic feat as she became the first female Bangladeshi athlete to win gold in weightlifting.

KATHMANDU-POKHARA, 2019

In 2010, Bangladesh bagged a record 18 gold medals at home. In December last year, a new record was set as they managed to clinch 19 gold medals in Nepal. Six female athletes tasted gold in single events as Bangladesh created history. Mabia once again won gold but this time around, it was in the 76kg category of weightlifting. Fatema Mujib secured gold in the individual sabre in fencing whereas Marzan Akter Priya and Humaira Akhter Antara won gold in the 55kg and 61kg categories respectively in the kumite event of karate. Soma Biswas clinched gold in the single archery compound event while Ety Khatun won gold in the single archery recurve event. In the women's recurve team event, Ety, Monira Akter and Beauty Roy claimed gold whereas the team consisting of Sushmita Banik, Shyamoli Roy and Soma won gold in the team compound event. Ety and Sushmita also won gold in the mixed recurve and mixed compound events respectively. Ety created history as the 14-year old girl clinched three golds in a single tournament. Apart from these successes, the Bangladeshi women's cricket team, led by Salma Khatun, also won gold.

CRICKET

Almost a year before the men's team could clinch their first ever international trophy, the women's team won the T20 Asia Cup in 2018, defeating a strong Indian side in a nail-biting finish in Malaysia.

FOOTBALL

Even though the senior team failed, the age-group teams fared brilliantly in the latter parts of the recently ended decade. The U-15 team clinched the SAFF U-15 Championship on home soil in 2017 before the U-18 team won the SAFF U-18 Women's Championship in Bhutan the next year.

Bangladesh were the hosts of the U-19 Bangamata International Gold Cup in 2019 and the women's team reached the final. But due to cyclonic storm, the match was postponed and later Bangladesh and the other finalists, Laos, were declared joint champions. Bangladesh also qualified for the 2017 and 2019 AFC U-16 Women's Championship. Both tournaments were held in Thailand. In the latest edition the women's team earned their first point in the history of the tournament when they held mighty Australia to a 2-2 draw.

Rahmatganj advance to finals

SPORTS REPORTER

Rahmatganj Muslim Friends Society dashed all hopes of a rejuvenated Mohammedan Sporting Club making it to the final of the TVS Federation Cup with a single-goal win over the 10-time champions in a semifinal encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

In doing so, Rahmatganj penned a piece of history as this will be the first time that the Old Dhaka outfit will feature in the final of the season's curtain raiser tournament since its inception in 1980.

Uzbekistani forward Turaev Akobir separated the sides with a 16th minute header and the solitary goal proved decisive as Rahmatganj held on to the slender lead to secure a win.

With the Black and Whites eliminated, all six former Federation Cup champions have made their exits from the tournament and so, this year's Federation Cup will see a new champion crowned on Sunday. The second semifinal, to be played today at the same venue, will feature



Rahmatganj players celebrate after securing their maiden Federation Cup final berth with a 1-0 win over Mohammedan SC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

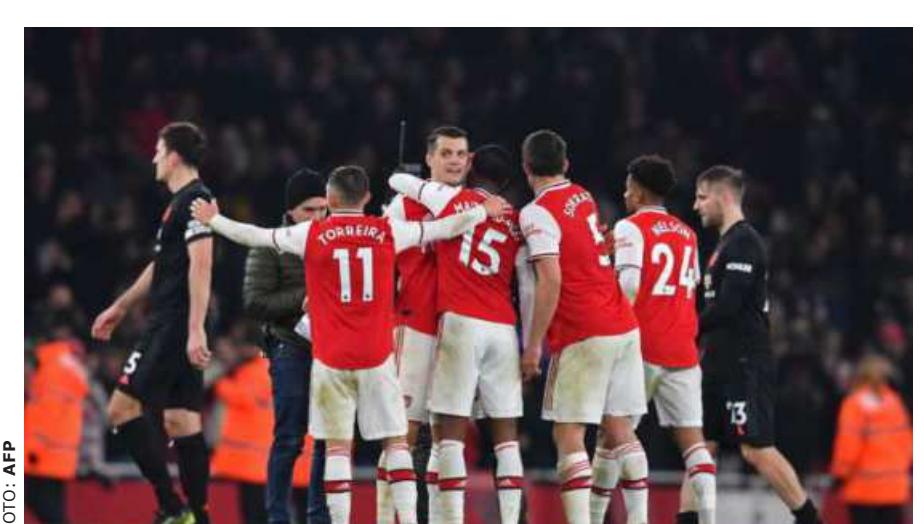
Pogba suffers fresh setback

AFP, London

Paul Pogba will undergo surgery on a recurring ankle injury and is expected to spend another month on the sidelines, Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer confirmed after his side's 2-0 defeat to Arsenal on Wednesday.

The French World Cup winner made his comeback after nearly three months out in a 2-0 defeat at Watford 10 days ago, and also made an appearance off the bench in a 4-1 thrashing of Newcastle four days later.

"We've had scans and it's nothing major, it's something that has to be sorted and dealt with. He's been advised to do it as soon as possible," said Solskjaer.



Arsenal secured a 2-0 win over Manchester United in the English Premier League at the Emirates Stadium on Wednesday. Nicolas Pepe opened the scoring in the eighth minute while Sokratis Papastathopoulos added the second just three minutes before half-time.

POLICE TAKE ON KINGS TODAY

On our side we are calm and confident as our players are showing positive signs which makes us think we are on the right track to once again be in the tournament final.

BASHUNDHARA KINGS COACH OSCAR BRUZON

We can't compare our team with Bashundhara in terms of squad strength. They even have quality players who can change the game on their bench.

BANGLADESH POLICE COACH NICOLAS VITOROVIC

The last time Mohammedan played in the Federation Cup final was in 2009.

"Our target was to reach the final with an outright win and we did it," coach Jilani said. "We know Mohammedan plays pressing football and today our plan was to press harder them in the first 15 minutes and the boys carried out the plan perfectly and we got the result. Then, we tried to defend the lead and the backline executed the plan really well."

Mohammedan coach Lane was frustrated with the outcome but is still proud of the performance his charges put up. "Obliviously it is quite disappointing. For the first 15 minutes, we did not turn up. We slept, they scored a goal and then they defended very well. And although we tried to come back in every way, their defence was solid. You can't win a match at such a level if you sleep for first 15 minutes," said Lane.

Saif SC part ways with Nizam

SPORTS REPORTER

Saif Sporting Club axed Maldivian head coach Mohammad Nizam following the team's poor performance both on and off the field throughout the ongoing Federation Cup, confirmed Saif SC managing director Nasiruddin Chowdhury yesterday.

Saif SC were eliminated from the quarterfinal stage of the tournament with a massing 3-1 defeat at the hands of newcomers Bangladesh Police FC on December 31.

"The club management is not happy with his [Nizam's] performance in the Federation Cup. Especially his performance was not good off-the-field in terms of the disciplinary ground, which had an impact on the team. That's why we terminated his contract today," Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

Nizam, who signed on for the current season, is scheduled to fly out from the capital today.

"We have a lot of CVs from coaches from different parts of the world and we are expecting to pick one within the next week," said Chowdhury, adding that they cleared all their dues with Nizam as per the contract.