



Bangladesh leg-spinner Fahima Khatun (L), who bagged the player-of-the-match award with a match-changing spell of three wickets for 38 runs in eight overs, celebrates the dismissal of Pakistan's Fatima Sana during their ICC Women's World Cup match at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# ‘Who are these girls playing cricket like boys?’

BISHWAJIT ROY

What kind of girls are they, playing cricket like boys? This was the kind of question that reverberated 40 years back in a society that typically had condemned the unconventional. Even to this day, however, this kind of disdainful and condescending mentality rears its head in society despite strides made by women in various fields.

After 40 years, Monowar Anis Khan, who was one of those to face and break the early days' barriers, however, could proudly now reply: "These are the girls who can make the nation proud."

Yesterday arrived another proud moment, courtesy of their successors, when Nigar Sultana-led Bangladesh women's team etched their names into the history books by sealing their first-ever victory in ICC Women's World Cup with a thrilling nine-run win against Pakistan at the Seddons Park in New Zealand.

"It's our victory. I am so delighted, so proud. For us, the journey was unknown. Considering that, I think this is the happiest day, most remarkable day in our cricketing history," said an excited Monowar, popularly known as Minu apa in the sports fraternity.

Each and every success of the women cricketers take Monowar down the memory lane as, back in those days, she was one of the few crying for a platform to materialise their dream. But she is now happy as the women's cricket gradually keeps finding its feet.

"The journey started in the early 80s. We had to hear many things from our neighbours, questions like: what kind of girls they are and why should they play out in the open like the boys when there are so many indoor games? See, one of my brothers encouraged me but another discouraged me.

"In the 1980s, there were only five countries -- England, Australia, New Zealand, India and the West



## SCORES IN BRIEF

<b>Bangladesh:</b> 243 for 7 in 50 overs (Fargana 71, Nigar 46, Sharmin 44; Sandhu 3-41, Sohail 1-31)	43, Bismah 31; Fahima 3-38, Rumana 2-29)
<b>Pakistan:</b> 225 for 9 in 50 overs (Sidra 104, Nahida	<b>Result:</b> Bangladesh won by 9 runs
	<b>Player-of-the-match:</b> Fahima Khatun

Indies -- who would play in the World Cup. Bangladesh could directly compete without playing in the qualifying rounds. But no organisation came forward to support. At one stage, all activities of the women cricketers came to an end, killing off the desires and dreams cherished in our hearts," Monowar recalled the struggles the women cricketers faced.

She said, on this auspicious day for Bangladesh women's cricket, it would be a crime not to mention the name and huge contribution of one man -- that of former coach Syed Altaf Hossain.

"The history of Bangladesh women's cricket will be incomplete without Altaf Hossain. You cannot imagine how those days were and we were so fortunate that

we had a man like Altaf Hossain by our side. It's very difficult to give all the details of his great contribution in a short time but I just want to share one thing, he was the one who used to preserve the balls used by the boys for the girls to use afterward. He had created the opportunity for us to bowl in the net against the third division and second division players. You cannot imagine how caring he was.

"When women's cricket in the country had rejuvenated in 2006 after a long break, again, it was that gentleman who took the charge to groom them," she continued.

Monowar believes that many social barriers are now removed and that the values and mindset have evolved. She also mentioned that many are appreciating the girls for playing international cricket and added that this win would hugely inspire the next generations of girls.

She, however, was not happy with the pace of improvement in terms of providing good facilities and financial packages. "We are progressing albeit very slowly. There are no round-the-year competitions, no long-term training plan, no facilities in the district levels and no academy. Yes, if you ask, then the reply will come: we arranged salary but the question is how much? We should focus on how we can uplift the standard both in terms of facilities and financial package," she observed.

In the end, it was, however, not the number of matches the Bangladesh women's cricket team won, rather the Tigresses' attitude is what impressed Monowar the most.

"Not only against Pakistan but also in the previous match and practice games - what I saw was they never gave up in any situation," she said.

Yes, we also believe that this 'never give up' attitude of the girls will keep bringing laurels one after another.

## ‘Feeling exactly as I felt around 20 years back’

SPORTS REPORTER

May 31, 1999: Bangladesh had stunned the world by registering an incredible triumph over Pakistan in their maiden World Cup appearance in Northampton. And fast forward to March 14, 2022 - culminated in another event of seismic proportions as Bangladesh women's team sealed a sensational nine-run victory against the same opponent in their maiden World Cup appearance as well.

Although the two historic feats cannot be measured on the same scale, however, one man, who has been associated with both memorable occasions for Bangladesh, can add more to the existing parallels is Manjurul Islam, former fast bowler of the Tigers.

The 42-year-old, being the selector and the team manager of the Tigresses, is currently in New Zealand where he could relate the joy of the two glorious feats of Bangladesh cricket.

"I am really lucky, to be honest. I was part of the maiden World Cup appearance for the Bangladesh men's team back in 1999, where we registered a memorable victory over Pakistan in Northampton," said an elated Manjurul to The

Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"And after over twenty years, our girls played their maiden fifty-over World Cup and sealed a scintillating win over Pakistan. Here, I am part of the Bangladesh women's team and feeling exactly the same as I had felt around 20 years back."

The latest win did not come as a surprise as Bangladesh women's team have managed to stamp their authority over Pakistan in recent times. Prior to yesterday's encounter, Nigar Sultana Joty and her troops had the last laugh in six out of twelve encounters against Pakistan, which includes three consecutive victories as well.

## WHAT THEY SAID

**"I cannot describe this in words because it's our first-ever win in a World Cup and this is history that we've made today (yesterday) here. We are looking forward to carrying this momentum throughout the tournament."**

Nigar Sultana Joty.

**"I'm always ready to play for my team and I was not nervous. I just bowled in the right areas and the success came."**

Fahima Khatun.

**"I think we have created history and this win will take Bangladesh women's cricket forward for the next generation. Its a huge achievement for all of us and we are very happy."**

Jahanara Alam.

## DPL kicks off today

SPORTS REPORTER

The country's premier 50-over competition is set to get underway today as the Dhaka Premier League returns in its original format after it was held in the T20 format last season due time constraint induced by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Gone are the days when some of the biggest international stars used to play for the various local clubs in the tournament. Now even national team stars find it difficult to play the whole tournament due to international



assignments, just as will be the case this time around. But the tournament still holds sway for the local cricketers in terms of livelihood and being in focus for national team contention.

The tournament will get underway with 11 teams after Prime Doleshwar rescinded their name from the tournament and it will be the first time since gaining List A status that the tournament will not be a 12-team competition. BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said in a press conference yesterday that the situation was a bit 'embarrassing' since a team withdrew

from the premier competition just before the start.

"We were forced to make the schedule with 11 teams since there was no other option. The legal and technical implications are being considered and any punishment [to Doleshwar] will be decided by the board," he said.

DPL has not been shy of controversy. Even last season, Mohammedan Sporting Club's Shakib Al Hasan's outrage at the umpires in a game against Abahani caught the attention of the cricket fraternity. It also brought fresh questions regarding umpiring consistency and allegations of bias in the league.

Despite the controversies, the competition gives an opportunity for local cricketers to catch the spotlight. "We were champions the last three terms and we want to continue in that vein. If you think of national team, the BPL, DPL, NCL and BCL are platforms where you can perform," Abahani skipper Mosaddek Hossain said yesterday at the captains' meet.

There will be international stars such as Mohammad Hafeez, Najibullah Zadran and Hanuma Vihari, inducing excitement among the local players. Meanwhile, Mohammedan, who built an outfit heavy with national team stars, are hopeful of making an impact early so that their national stars can then take them further when they arrive after national assignments.

The fixtures for the first two rounds have been chalked out. Abahani play against Rupganj Tigers at SBNCs while Prime Bank and Gazi Group play against City Club and Legends of Rupganj respectively at BKSP in the opening day's fixtures.



The two Test matches in India and Pakistan saw contrasting fortunes for the hosts yesterday, thanks to two leading fast bowlers in the world. While Australia's Mitchell Starc (L) bowled some fiery reverse-swinging deliveries to skittle out hosts Pakistan for 148 in the first innings, India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah (R) was at his lethal best as he helped his side to a 238-run victory over visitors Sri Lanka.

PHOTO: AFP

