

It is allowance, not salary: Salahuddin

SPORTS REPORTER

A week after the women's football team's SAFF Championship triumph, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) wants to have a reality check before dreaming high for the team in coming days.

While the victorious team is still being showered with praises and getting promises of cash rewards from different quarters, the BFF, the custodian of women footballers, is coming under severe criticism for the 'low salary of the players' and no announcement of bonus.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin is apparently irritated with the criticism which he sees as a lack of information and not reflecting the real picture of the growth and the struggle the BFF over the last five to six years.

"I know Tk 10,000 is nothing at the moment and everyone is asking to give them Tk 40,000 to Tk 50,000. But where will I get the money from? We don't have sponsors and no individual is giving us money for women's football," the BFF president said. "Many are criticising us that we are providing only Tk 10,000 salary to each girl but I want to tell them that it is not salary; it is allowance from which they keep some portion with themselves and send the rest to their families."

Salahuddin also said, "Apart from that allowance, we have been bearing expenditure for food, sports gears, education, treatment, accommodation and many others things in the training camp which cost us Tk 1-1.25 crore per year."

The BFF boss also claimed that they have been spending crores of taka in organising domestic competitions for women footballers and their international engagements apart from the expenditure for the coaching and



Jamal & Co hungry for win over Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER

Fresh from a morale-boosting 1-0 victory over Cambodia, Bangladesh men's football team is looking forward to carrying the momentum to their second FIFA friendly of the week, against Nepal at Dasarath Rangasala in Kathmandu today. The match will kick off at 5:45pm (Bangladesh time).

The two teams will face each other for the first time since last year's SAFF Championship in Maldives, which ended in a 1-1 draw with the Himalayan nation progressing to the final at the expense of the men in red and green.

Bangladesh were not happy with the last-gasp penalty awarded to Nepal, but they will be hoping for a win, especially taking inspiration from the women's team's SAFF final victory over Nepal at the same venue last week.

"We are ready for tomorrow but we know it is Nepal's home ground. We have to respect the home team, who will have a good crowd to encourage them," captain Jamal Bhuyan said at a pre-match conference yesterday.

"A few days ago, our women's team made history here by becoming SAFF Women's Champions. The men's team also want to repeat that with a victory and we are hungry for that," said the captain of Bangladesh, who won 13 out of 23 meetings between the two sides.

Nepal, 174th in FIFA ranking, have had the upper hand in terms of results against 192nd-ranked Bangladesh in recent past.

‘Every girl who chooses sport faces social backlash’

Recently, international success in Bangladesh sport has mostly been achieved by the nation's women, most notably the women's national football team. But the women's cricket team kept that positivity flowing after an undefeated triumph in the ICC T20 World Cup Qualifiers. Captain Nigar Sultana Joty provided a deeper look into the struggles that women face when it comes to choosing a sport as a profession while speaking to The Daily Star's Ashfaq Ul Mushfiq. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): Women athletes have been getting a lot of success on the international arena in recent times. What is your take on the scenario?

Nigar Sultana Joty (NSJ): I always think the achievements of the women athletes in our country has always outpaced the facilities we are provided. But nowadays women's cricket, football and other sports are gradually improving. The further women athletes advance, the better it is for the younger generation that dreams of taking up a sport professionally.

DS: There are tales of the women's footballers having to overcome numerous societal barriers in order to pursue their careers. Could you share your experiences?

NSJ: Every single sportsperson has a story about their struggles and what they had to do to get to where they are. In our society, people usually live in a bubble. They want to see women engaged in household chores and do the work they deem is more suited to them. I think each and every single girl who chooses sport as a part of their life has to contend with social

backlash. A small-town girl with big dreams of playing cricket from a young age, my entire family fought society to get me into cricket. Since I loved cricket from an early age, my family was always by my side. Where I come from, my family and I had to change people's perspectives. That wasn't easy by any means.



DS: What is your analysis of your team's performance in the T20 WC qualifiers?

NSJ: We have always performed well in the qualifiers. But improvement has no end. When we are capable of scoring more than 140 on these wickets, we will be stronger. If the batters can give a good start and score more runs in the Powerplay or if the team picks up the pace and takes more singles and doubles in the middle overs, we can score

bigger totals. We batted well in the last four-five overs. If we can maintain that and improve at least five per cent, I think we have a better chance. Playing these matches also prepared us for the Asia Cup.

DS: You recently said you did not want to play qualifiers anymore. Are we trending in that direction?

NSJ: I think the qualifier is difficult and, at times, hectic. One slip in a match and you're out of the World Cup and your dreams are shattered. We used to play fewer T20I matches, so we were ranked lower. But after being included in the ICC's Future Tours Programme, we will play bilateral series and more T20Is. Winning can then lift our ranking and we won't have to play the qualifiers anymore.

DS: What are your expectations in the upcoming Asia Cup. What is the difference in quality between you and other teams?

NSJ: In T20 cricket, the difference in levels are very close. Whichever teams makes fewer mistakes on a particular day has a higher chance to win the game. As hosts, we will give 110 per cent to defend our title.

Can Spain break Portugal jinx?

AGENCIES

Spain lock horns with Portugal tonight at the Estadio Municipal. Spain's shock 2-1 home defeat to Switzerland on Saturday leaves La Roja needing to beat Portugal away to progress to the semi-finals of the UEFA Nations League.

Portugal went top of Group A2 with a comfortable 4-0 win in the Czech Republic.

Spain have an excellent record against Portugal and have won 17 out of the 39 matches but beating Portugal isn't something Spain has been able to do recently. The Iberian neighbours have drawn their last four matches, and Spain has not won at Portugal in nearly two decades.

Playing in Portugal, Spain is winless since a 3-0 victory in a friendly in 2003, when Fernando Torres made his national team debut with Spain, and not long after Cristiano Ronaldo began playing for Portugal.

The teams have drawn four on the trot since coach Fernando Santos took over Portugal after the 2014 World Cup.



Tigers looking to regain confidence

SPORTS REPORTER

Dropped catches and general misfielding almost proved ruinous for Bangladesh in the first T20I against the UAE at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Sunday, with the visitors pushed till the end in a nervy encounter.

Ultimately, mistakes from the UAE cost them the game and the night belonged to Afif Hossain and Mehedi Hasan Miraz as the Tigers recorded a seven-run win.

But ahead of the second T20I today, the focus will very much be on the poor performances that enabled the UAE to make a game of it on Sunday.

The Tigers started the innings in the worst possible way, losing wickets in the Powerplay as usual. They were three down inside the first five overs before Yasir Ali failed to read a googly from leggie Karthik Meiyappan and saw himself castled to leave Bangladesh reeling on 47 for four in 7.1 overs.

Afif looked in a positive frame of mind and it was his unbeaten 77 off 55 deliveries along with skipper Nurul Hasan Sohan's unbeaten 25-ball 35 which saw the Tigers reach 158 for five, a score not particularly assuring, especially against an associate member.

Afif was also dropped twice, the first instance coming pretty early in his innings. If that chance had been taken, Bangladesh's total would likely have been very small.

But although the 23-year-old capitalised on those missed chances, the game began to slip away from the Tigers when it was their turn with the ball.

Mohammad Saifuddin and Mustafizur Rahman struggled early in the Powerplay before Shoriful Islam effected a run-out when the non-striker Muhammad Waseem was out of his crease after a straight-drive ricocheted off the bowler's fingertips and onto the stumps.

The other opener Chirag Suri looked well in control before he departed after being stumped from a Miraz delivery that straightened after pitching and beat the batter with its flight.

Miraz then bagged Aryan Lakra before taking a blinder of a catch at point off Mustafizur to thwart the UAE's confident chase. That led to the hosts losing the plot and losing wickets at regular intervals.

Despite having just two wickets in hand in the last three overs, the UAE found boundaries in the death over with the visitors' fielding in chaos. Mosaddek Hossain dropped a sitter near the boundary and Saifuddin dropped another in the last over.

But the UAE were unable to get Shoriful away, losing two wickets in back-to-back deliveries to lose the match.

Despite the win, there were plenty of areas to improve upon, but when Mehedi spoke in a video message to the media, he said the win was very important for morale. It was an indication of a win-starved team low on confidence heading to the T20 World Cup.

"We needed to win a match since we lost the last few matches we played, especially in the Asia Cup, despite going close. We are trying to minimise mistakes," Miraz said as the Tigers gear up for a tri-series in New Zealand and the T20 World Cup in a positive frame of mind.



Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo is all smiles during a training session yesterday ahead of their UEFA Nations League encounter against Spain tonight.

PHOTO: AFP