

U-17 girls eye 2nd round spot

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are looking forward to securing a place in the second round of the AFC U-17 Women's Championship Qualifiers when they will begin their campaign against Turkmenistan in Singapore on April 26.

In their second and final Group D game, the girls in red and green will take on hosts Singapore on April 30.

"We have taken a good preparation for the qualifiers and playing the SAFF U-17 Women's Championship was quite a good experience for the girls, especially playing against Russia in the tournament," said head coach Golam Rabbani Choton at the press conference yesterday. Choton also added that their target is to finish top of their group.

Captain Ruma Akter said, "We want to give our level best in the qualifiers as we have prepared well."

Bangladesh had previously qualified twice for the final round of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship, which has turned to the U-17 meet this time.

Bangladesh will leave for Singapore on April 23.



After sub par performances in his previous two games, Najmul Hossain Shanto on Sunday smashed a century to help Abahani Limited to a comfortable five-wicket win over City Club in their Dhaka Premier League encounter at the BKSP-4 Ground. Shanto's unbeaten 112-ball 102 ensured Abahani's joint-stay at the top of the table alongside defending champions Sheikh Jamal DC with 20 points.

PHOTO: STAR

Chirag shines with own mantra

SPORTS REPORTER

Legends of Rugganj skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has an eye on solidity and his teammate Chirag Jani has the skipper's approval when it comes to crunch situations. He finished the last Dhaka Premier League among top-five run scorers with the bat and at number three in the top wicket-takers' list.

Performance wise, this DPL, Chirag's third, is no different for the Indian all-rounder. He is in amongst the top two in the highest scorers' list and at sixth with the ball, and at 33, Chirag only wants to progress further.

"I enjoy playing here, it's my third time. I played for Brothers in my first year and then played for Rugganj for two seasons, so, I have a good idea about the conditions and the players," he told The Daily Star on his consistency.

Chirag knows the process he can maintain and Mashrafe earmarked him as one of those cricketers, who, not only in DPL but at the international level, is really adept at rotating strike.

"You have 300 deliveries and you need to take the game deep. You have to try to take singles so you won't feel the pressure. You will get a bad delivery after two-three overs and you need to take the opportunity," Chirag said regarding how he paces his innings. "Last year the wickets were a bit dicey but this season DPL wickets are improving."

His performances have flowed from winning the Ranji Trophy (Red ball) and Vijay Hazare Trophy (one-day) this year. "We are Ranji champions this

Where BFF failed but others succeeded

ANISUR RAHMAN

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) once struggled to roll tournaments on the ground due to financial constraints as the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) together had provided the board an inadequate USD 500,000 per year.

However, the scenario drastically transformed in the recent past as FIFA and AFC went on to triple their allocated fund for the BFF. On top of USD 1,500,000 (approx. Tk 16 crore), the BFF was also presented with a glorious opportunity to receive USD 7,067,406 (approx. Tk 74.9 crore) from 2016 to 2022, courtesy of the FIFA Forward programme - from which the game's global governing body offers

While India, Nepal, and Maldives availed complete funding as of September 2022 since 2016, the BFF received 15 per cent of the total approved amount of approx. Tk 74.5 crore from FIFA Forward fund.

its member association on the basis of pilot projects.

After becoming the president of FIFA in 2016, Gianni Infantino introduced the FIFA Forward programme, standing on three main principles: more investment, more impact, and more oversight. The aim was to improve the way FIFA develops and supports football across the globe so that football gets to flourish in every single country, allowing them to maximise their potential by overcoming barriers.

Interestingly, Bangladesh was the first



nation to get the approval of the Forward programme in 2017 but could hold on to the eligibility status.

The disclosure of the financial irregularities by the Investigatory Chamber of the FIFA Ethics Committee on Friday had shown how the BFF spoiled the opportunity to capitalise on the FIFA Forward fund. On the other hand, neighbouring India, Maldives and Nepal paint a completely contrasting picture in this regard.

As per the FIFA Forward requirements, the member associates are barred from spending the Forward funds beyond their respective approved projects. The BFF, however, according to the FIFA's Investigatory Chamber, had misused the Forward funds several times despite repeated warnings.

FIFA had inevitably stopped channelling Forward funds to the BFF who, in turn, resorted to stopping the development projects at the grassroots and youth level

in the past few years while citing financial constraints.

Back in March 2017, the BFF president Kazi Salahuddin had told The Daily Star: "Although we have not received the official letter, I have heard that the FIFA Development Committee approved the development proposal [worth USD 2,120,000] we submitted to them last year [2016]."

"Bangladesh is the first country to get approval as the [FIFA] Development Committee considered Bangladesh's proposal ahead of the ones from two other countries," Salahuddin had further said.

That time, Abu Nayeem Shohag, the now terminated general secretary, informed the media that under the FIFA Forward programme, the board included the following projects: three youth development plans - comprising U-12, U-14, and U-19s - three women's development plans (U-12, U-14 and U-19s), grassroots age-group festival

for U-12, U-14, U-16 and U-18s, U-18 National Championship, National School Championship, the Pioneer Football League, National Football League and youth tournaments of the Bangladesh Premier League and Bangladesh Championship League.

Except for a few competitions - the likes of Pioneer Football League, youth competitions of BPL and BCL and age-group festivals - the rest of the aforementioned ones could hardly take place due to the misuse of FIFA Forward funds by BFF.

The FIFA website showed Bangladesh availed only USD 621,438 out of approved USD 7,067,406 Forward fund against seven projects from 2016 to 2022. The total available fund in that timeframe was USD 11,445,000.

Bangladesh, thus, had failed to utilise a staggering 85 per cent of the allocated fund, whereas India (USD 4,250,000 against nine projects), Maldives (USD 4,250,000 against five projects) and Nepal (USD 2,249,999 against 10 projects) availed their share of approved funds till September, 2022.

India, Maldives, and Nepal used the Forward funds to the fullest - in improving infrastructure, domestic leagues and the national teams. Unfortunately for Bangladesh, however, despite the flow of money from FIFA increasing by leaps and bounds, the game's local governing body still continues to cite financial limitations as their struggle to complete all its competitions in a calendar year lingers on.

The misuse of Forward funds by the BFF has seemingly driven the country's football on the brink of calamity, for which the board can find none but themselves to blame.



time and won two years before as well. Confidence is high after winning two trophies. It's true, I couldn't get ahead but I must maintain the process for better opportunities."

For Chirag, better opportunities may come internationally or in franchise cricket like IPL but it is the dream of playing at the international level that pushes Chirag the most. "Everyone hopes to play in the IPL but international remains my big aim before the IPL. I want to work hard and perform," he said.

He plays alongside Test stars Ravindra Jadeja and Cheteshwar Pujara in Saurashtra. In the Premier League, he plays against stars like Shakib Al Hasan. His confidence level certainly has been boosted.

"It's great fun to perform while playing with such international stars. It gives me extra motivation and also I ask them questions about match situations. I have that maturity which I didn't have before. I am playing freely which is fun. I have played against all players in Bangladesh and the white-ball cricket is very good compared to the international level. It feels good to dominate."

Asked on how Bangladesh may fare at the World Cup, he felt taking the game deep will work out for the Tigers.

"Sometimes they fall behind in pressure situations, especially with the bat. Liton [Das] is in great form and Shakib bhai is the best all-rounder. No need to think too much, just take the game deep and play freely as wickets would be similar [in India during the upcoming 50-over World Cup]."

Unstoppable Haaland destined for more

AGENCIES

Manchester City's Erling Haaland equalled the goal-scoring record in a 38 game Premier League season when he scored twice against Leicester City on Saturday to take his tally to 32.

The Norwegian striker has eight matches left in the season to break the all-time record shared by Andy Cole and Alan Shearer, who scored 34 goals in 42 game seasons.

Haaland, in his maiden Premier League season, could obliterate the record in the remaining games.

Haaland has now drawn level with Mohamed Salah's record of 32 goals in a 38 game season, achieved by the Egyptian in 2017/18.

With 47 goals, Erling Haaland has broken the record for most goals in one season in all competitions by a Premier League player, surpassing Mo Salah in 2017/18 and Ruud van Nistelrooy in 2002/03 (both 44).

Southampton, Bournemouth, Everton, West Ham, Wolves, Nottingham Forest, Crystal Palace and Chelsea have all scored fewer Premier League goals this season than Haaland. He trails the combined efforts of his teammates 45-32.

City boss Pep Guardiola took him off at halftime, with the second leg versus Bayern looming on Wednesday. The popular player lingered long on the Etihad pitch after the final whistle, however, waving and smiling at fans. He said Haaland's response to sitting out the second half was "excellent as always", pointing out that his star



PLAYER	CLUB	GOALS	SEASON
Andy Cole	Newcastle	34	1993-94
Alan Shearer	Blackburn	34	1994-95
Erling Haaland	Man City	32	2022-23
Mohamed Salah	Liverpool	32	2017-18
Alan Shearer	Blackburn	31	1993-94 & 1995-96

striker was coming off a groin injury.

"You see his body language, his face during the game. He's like John (Stones), John and he come from injuries... and after 45 minutes, (it) was good for them to rest."



Arsenal defender Rob Holding stands in disappointment after watching Bukayo Saka misses a penalty in the 52nd minute against West Ham United, with the score reading 2-1 in favour of the title aspirants at the London Stadium on Sunday. Rubbing salt on their wounds, West Ham forward Jarrod Bowen netted home just two minutes later and the contest ended 2-2, reducing Arsenal's cushion to four points with second-placed Manchester City left a game in hand.

PHOTO: REUTERS