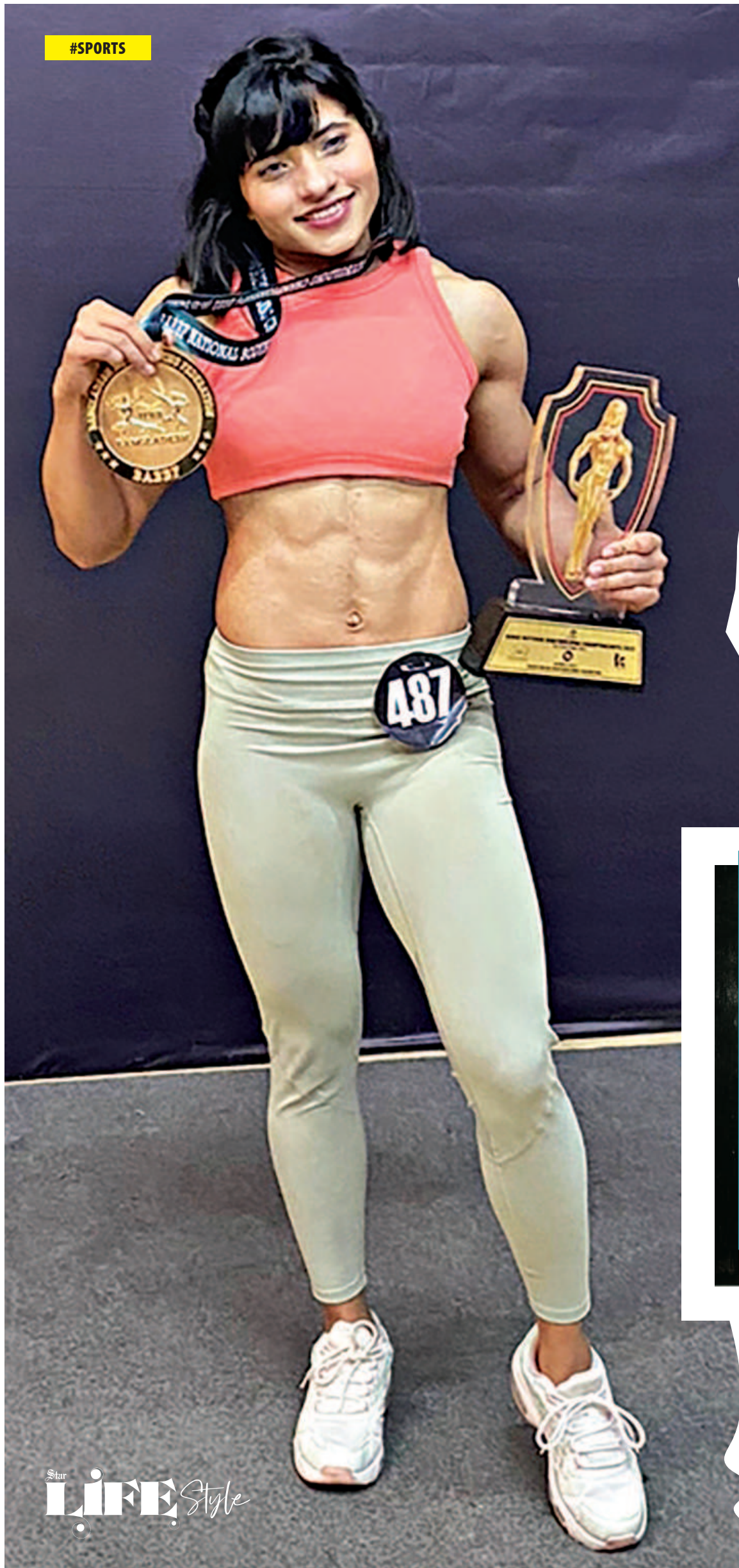


#SPORTS



Women's bodybuilding is on the rise in Bangladesh. Even if we rewind the clock to a few years back, we would hardly find any news that had women and bodybuilding paired together. But despite the lack of opportunities and the alarming number of obstacles they have to overcome, more and more women are entering the field of professional bodybuilding and the number of participants in such events are rapidly increasing with each passing event. We recently had the opportunity to speak with three athletes who are at the pinnacle of the Bangladesh scene to learn more about their journeys and accomplishments as well as get their take on what steps can be taken to create more opportunities in the field.

## FIT AND FEARLESS:

# The rise of women's BODYBUILDING

To start off, let us get introduced to three of the most prominent figures in the game today; Maksud Akter Mou, Nusrat Meem, and Afia Jannatul Anika.

Maksud is currently working as a personal trainer in the UAE. She is certified by ACE (American Council on Exercise) as well as Ereps (level 3 certified). She

works as a floor-in-charge at Ruslan's Studio, one of the best gyms in Dhaka. Her journey started in 2017 when she joined the gym to boost her confidence. She took to bodybuilding like a duck to water and started excelling at it. Soon, she began taking part in various competitions and has been consistently finishing in the top 3 in

has followed up on that success by winning two further competitions and is looking to further build her resume, while also working as a professional trainer.

### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES BOTH ON AND OFF THE GYM

While Anika had her family's support right from the get-go, both Maksud and Meem had to overcome a lot of obstacles. Maksud grew up on action movies and is a lifelong fan of Arnold Schwarzenegger and always wanted to join a gym, but never got the chance to do so since many girls did not pursue bodybuilding back then. "It was while I was studying in India that I found out about the female body building scene and started to pursue my passion", added Maksud. For Meem, she had to follow her passion against her family's wishes. "It is not that they did not want to support me. It was just extremely difficult for me to make them understand the concept. It was just so uncommon back then," Meem stated. Even after their families came around and they got their shots, they have had to, at times, endure unwanted comments and ridicule from society. "Some of my male clients get bullied for being trained by a woman. I never understood that. You don't see people getting ridiculed for being treated by female doctors. Isn't this the same thing," exclaimed Maksud.

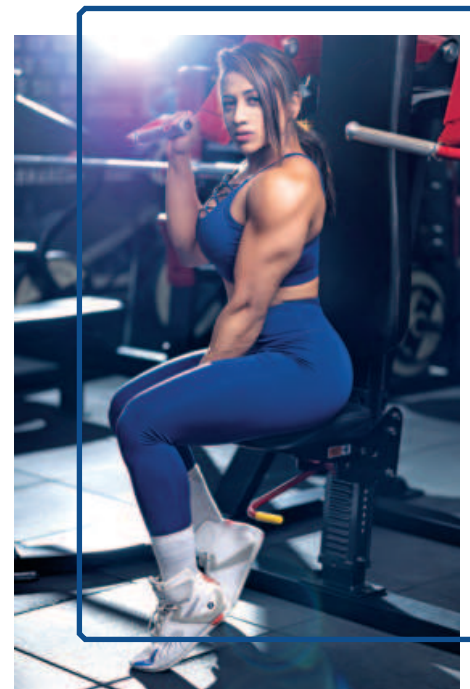
Obstacles outside of the sport exist in a dime a dozen, but there are a lot of barriers within it as well. "First of all, body building can be a very expensive game to enter and there are not a lot of sponsors that you can rely upon," explained Anika. Meem added to this by explaining the importance of training throughout the year and how it is really hard to keep up with financially, saying, "You have to train the entire year. You can't just train before a competition and expect to win. You have to spend a lot to keep up your training, and most of the time, you have to bear your own cost." Maksud elaborated on the lack of education and certification, as well as the gap between national and international

competition. "Bodybuilding is somewhat of a neglected sport and does not get enough exposure. We also have very little communication with IFBB, so the competitions here often don't align with international ones. All this can make it really difficult for us to pursue our dreams," she stated.

### MARCHING ON WITH THEIR HEADS HELD HIGH

These strong and bold women have crushed all barriers that were put in front of them and have achieved huge success in their respective careers. They have been consistently expanding the horizon and their stories have inspired more women to enter the sport. "I am a professional athlete before anything else. You must forget about the norms set by society and be prepared for a journey that is yours alone. You must be prepared to fight your battles. Everything is possible," explained Maksud. Meem reveals how bodybuilding is more a way of life than a sport and that you must enter with an open mind and clear head, saying, "People will talk smack. People will criticise everything that you do regardless of how well you do it. It is up to us to keep moving forward and achieving our goals." Anika also concurs with this and has encouraged any aspiring bodybuilder/gym-goers regardless of their gender to just be brave enough to get started with their journey. "My advice to everyone is to just join a gym and start working out, everything else will fall into place," she stated.

By Irfan Aziz  
Photo: Warrior Talks, Ruslan's Studio



began her career in 2019 and within this short time, she became the champion of the 9th Bangladesh Games and is also the first ever female athlete from Bangladesh to compete in international competitions such as Amateur Olympia in Mumbai and the Dubai Muscle Show, finishing within the top 7 in both of these competitions. She aims to create more history by becoming the first woman from Bangladesh to obtain a IFBB Pro Card. Meem is a professional trainer who

various national competitions, including the likes of Bangladesh Games, and plans to take her game to the next level this year by making the transition to international competitions. Jannat is a relative newcomer to the sport, but has already taken it by storm. She started working out in April 2021 and took part in her first competition organised by the Bangladesh Bodybuilding Federation (BABBF) a year later in March 2022, and won first prize. Since then, she

