

No contracts yet for Ritu & 17 others

SPORTS REPORTER

There has apparently been no resolution regarding the impasse between women's footballers and the team's head coach as six senior players are leaving to play in the Bhutan National Women's League today, a day prior to Peter Butler's return from England.

Sabina Khatun, Ritu Porna Chakma, Monika Chakma, Matsushima Sumaya, Masura Parvin and Rupna Chakma will leave for Bhutan this morning for the league, which is scheduled to begin on April 15.

The former four will play for Paro FC while the latter two have been roped in by Transport United. Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Tabithi Awal, along with women's wing chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron and other members of the executive committee, sat for a meeting with the six players.

BFF's media committee chairman Amirul Islam Babu told the media that it was a courtesy meeting with the players where the president wished them good luck. However, when asked whether there has been any decision made regarding the players' contract with the federation, the BFF spokesman did not give an answer.

He, however, hinted that the senior players will be called up ahead of the team's departure for the Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers, which will be held from June 29-July 5 in Myanmar.

The 18 senior players boycotted training under Butler since he started camp on January 29, alleging him of disrespecting the players and driving a wedge among them. Subsequently the seniors, led by Sabina, were excluded from the squad for two friendly matches away to UAE in February-March. The federation brought 36 other players in the camp – mostly juniors – under contract, leaving the seniors out of the payroll.

The BFF high-ups, however, had said before the Eid break that all 50-plus players will be called up for camp and that the 18 senior players will sign contracts. However, with Butler scheduled to return tomorrow and slated to start the camp thereafter, the departure of the six key players of the side only indicates that not much headway has been made in this regard.

Ritu Porna, the best player of last year's SAFF Women's Championship, told The Daily Star that there has been no discussion in the meeting regarding contracts.

"The federation has told us that it would call us up when there will be national engagement," Ritu Porna said, adding that she was looking to play all four months in the Bhutanese league.

"The president wished us well just like a guardian wishes well for their children," Ritu Porna said. "There hasn't been any discussion on our contract though."



Bangladesh players, seated in a relaxed mood, pose for a group photo at the National Cricket Academy in Lahore yesterday. The Tigresses will take on Scotland in a warm-up fixture at the Lahore City Cricket Association Ground today (3pm Bangladesh time), ahead of the ICC Women's World Cup 2025 Qualifier starting April 9 in Pakistan.

PHOTO: BCB

Hridoy embarks on unexpected captaincy journey

SPORTS REPORTER

Captaining the star studded Mohammedan Sporting Club in the ongoing Dhaka Premier League (DPL) was probably the last thing Towhid Hridoy expected to do this year.

Veteran Tamim Iqbal led the big budget team in the first eight rounds of the league before suffering a major heart attack during the match against Shingepukur Cricket Club at the BKSP in Savar on March 24.

Tamim fortunately survived the heart attack but will require a few months to recover from the incident, ruling him out from rest of the DPL season.

With Tamim not in the picture, the captaincy baton was expected to be handed to an experienced player like Mahmudullah, Mushfiqur Rahim or Mehedi Hasan Miraz.

However, Mahmudullah has some injury concerns as Mohammedan could avail his services in only two games thus far while the latter duo is expected to represent the national side in the upcoming two-Test series against Zimbabwe and won't be available for Mohammedan after April 9.

Thus, the coaching staff and team officials decided to name in-form batter Hridoy, who has made 266 runs this season so far at an average of 88.66, their skipper for the rest of the season.

As Mohammedan was preparing to take on Prime Bank Cricket Club in a high-voltage match scheduled today in Mirpur, Hridoy was asked about the challenge of captaining the side after their practice session yesterday.

The 24-year old, who has captained

age-level teams and also the 'A' team, relished the unexpected opportunity and was eager to take the challenge.

"I have captained age-level teams and also the A team. Sometimes these things are not in your hands. The responsibility was handed to me by the team and I have to respect to it. As a professional player, one has to take the challenge," Hridoy told reporters at the National Cricket Academy premises.



"Every sector has its own challenge. I will try to enjoy my role and try to contribute as much as possible in this department [captaincy]," he added.

Although Mohammedan are the highest spenders in the current edition of the DPL, things have not panned out exactly how they would have liked so far.

Mohammedan currently stand third in the points table with 12 points from eight matches, trailing leaders Abahani Limited by two points and matching second placed Gazi Group Cricketers in terms of points but falling behind them in net run rate.

Mohammedan will begin a crucial

phase in their campaign as they are set to face top sides like Prime Bank Cricket Club (fourth), Agrani Bank Cricket Club (fifth) and table-toppers Abahani in their next three matches and they still need at least two victories to earn a place in the Super League phase.

On top of that, the absences of important members have left Mohammedan in a vulnerable spot. But Hridoy remained optimistic and claimed that the vacuum created by these absences was an opportunity for their bench players to step up.

"We need to adjust to the situation and do whatever is best for the team. It's a big-budget team. Probably, a few players will leave for national duty. But it's a positive sign for our back-up players as they are also players and they also need to get opportunities," said Hridoy.

Despite regularly featuring in both white ball formats for Bangladesh, Hridoy is yet to make his Test debut. The batter is unlikely to get that opportunity in the Zimbabwe series as well as selectors have hinted they are unlikely to experiment with the squad against Zimbabwe.

Still, Hridoy, who averages 45.65 in first-class cricket, spoke about his dream of representing Bangladesh in Tests one day.

"Every player wants to play Test matches. It's a dream for me to play in the red-ball format. If I get the opportunity, I will definitely play. Just like any other player, I also want to play in this format. If I can do well in the domestic red-ball matches, hopefully then I will be able to play for the national side."

Black Caps wrap up happy home summer in style

AGENCIES

New Zealand capped off a dominant home summer with a commanding 43-run victory over Pakistan in the third and final ODI at Mount Maunganui, securing a 3-0 series whitewash. In a rain-shortened clash, the Black Caps showcased their depth and composure, led by stand-in skipper Michael Bracewell, who impressed with both bat and leadership.

Bracewell, who smashed a brisk 59 off 40 balls, praised the team's complete performance and the character shown across the series. "It was an enjoyable day, always nice to finish the season on a high... it was great to see different guys step up at different times," he reflected post-match.



The bench strength shone brightly once again, with Rhys Mariu backing up his debut with another

classy half-century. But it was the young pace trio of Ben Sears, the man-of-the-series who became the first New Zealander to claim five wickets in successive

"We're clear about our style and these quicks executed it brilliantly—fast, aggressive, and relentless," said Bracewell, applauding the bowlers' adaptability and firepower.

Despite a fighting half-century from Babar Azam, Pakistan fell short, bowled out with two overs to spare. The Black Caps had earlier posted a competitive 264/8, thanks to timely contributions from their top and middle order.

The win not only completed a clean sweep but also highlighted

"It's a disappointing series. I will give credit to New Zealand, they played really well in all departments of the game. They are like true professionals in all departments. And we need to improve and that's it, we need to play better against the new ball."

Pakistan captain
Mohammad Rizwan

ODIs, Jacob Duffy, and Nathan Smith who stole the show throughout the series. Sears, in particular, dazzled with back-to-back five-wicket hauls, including 5/34 in the finale that crushed Pakistan's chase.

the team's growing depth ahead of a packed international calendar. With new faces rising to the occasion and leaders stepping up, the future looks bright for New Zealand cricket.



KL Rahul of Delhi Capitals greets Chennai Super Kings' MS Dhoni with a handshake following their Indian Premier League match at M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai yesterday. Delhi won by 25 runs, with Rahul playing a pivotal role, scoring 77 runs off 51 balls to help his team post a total of 183 for six. Meanwhile, the 43-year-old Dhoni, whose family [inset], including his parents, were in attendance -- a rare sight -- made 30 runs off 26 balls in a subdued performance by both him and his team.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Man United look for double over City

STAR SPORTS DESK

It has been a disappointing season for both Manchester clubs but the 196th instalment of the Manchester derby is still a cause for excitement. While City are fighting for a top-four finish, United, positioned 13th, are well away from a European spot and will hope for a strong finish to the season to add wind into Ruben Amorim's sails.

● Man City have won more Premier League away games against Man Utd than any other side. Five of their nine wins have come under Guardiola, the most of any visiting manager in the competition.

● The Red Devils are also looking to complete their first Premier League double over City since 2019-20, following their victory away from home earlier this season.

● But home advantage counts for little in the Manchester derby. The away team have won 10 of the last 18 Premier League meetings between the two sides (D2 L6). Since 2015-16, the only top-flight fixture with more away wins is Crystal Palace versus Liverpool (12).

● In all competitions this season, only Leicester City (26) have conceded the opening goal in more matches among all Premier League sides than United (23).



Everton's Idrissa Gueye makes a lunging tackle on Arsenal's Mikel Merino during a 1-1 draw in their Premier League fixture at Goodison Park yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Gunners trip up at Everton

REUTERS, Liverpool

Everton did neighbours Liverpool a massive favour by holding title-chasing Arsenal to a 1-1 Premier League draw at Goodison Park on Saturday when Iliman Ndiaye's penalty cancelled out a Leandro Trossard opener for the visitors.

Second-placed Arsenal have 62 points from 31 games, 11 behind leaders Liverpool, who have a game at hand when they go to Fulham on Sunday. Arsenal took the lead in the 34th minute with the first shot on target in the game as a poor header in midfield allowed Raheem Sterling to race clear and feed Trossard, who took a touch and drilled his shot low into the far right corner.

Everton were awarded a penalty two minutes into the second period when Myles Lewis-Skelly hauled down Jack Harrison in the box and Ndiaye netted his ninth goal of the season in all competitions to leave Arsenal's flagging title hopes in tatters.