

'Sabina's time has come to an end'

Nine rebels drafted for Jordan tour

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh coach Peter Butler has virtually closed the door on the country's top-scorer and long-time captain Sabina Khatun by leaving her alongside four other SAFF winners in a 23-member team, declared for the upcoming Jordan tour, on Sunday.

When asked about the reason behind the exclusion of Sabina, who has scored 36 goals in 56 appearances for the country over a 15-year career, the Englishman said: "I think Sabina has run her race. If I'm being honest with you, if I'm being practical, I think her time's come to an end. I think you've got to move on."

The exclusion of Sabina as well as Sanjida Akhter, Masura Parvin and Krishna Rani Sarkar – all of them key members of both SAFF-winning teams, along with Matsushima Sumaya, who was part of the SAFF-winning team last year, comes in the wake of a long-standing rift between the coach and the senior players, which first came to light during the SAFF campaign in Nepal last year.

Since the boycott of Butler's training camp by 18 senior players on January 30 this year, nine have been called back to the camp recently – all of them earning their places for Jordan tour – alongside 11 members who were part of the team which played two friendly matches in UAE in February. Three new faces – goalkeeper Ferdousi Akter, midfielder Shanti Mardi and forward Umela Marma – were added.

Although there was no mention of the rift from the coach behind the exclusion of these senior players during a press



PHOTO: AI-GENERATED

BANGLADESH SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Rupna Chakma, Meghla Rani, Ferdousi Akter,
Defenders: Sheuli Azim, Shamsunnahar Sr, Afeida Khandaker (C), Joynab Bibi
Midfielders: Monika Chakma, Maria Manda, Munki Akter, Shopna Rani, Kohati Kisku, Halima Akter, Shanti Mardi
Forwards: Ritu Porna Chakma, Tohura Khatun, Shamsunnahar Jr, Mosammatt Sagorika, Shaheda Akter, Surobhi Akond, Mosammatt Sultana, Nobirun Khatun, Umela Marma

conference yesterday, he mentioned that form, fitness, game time, discipline, attitude, and above all an eye on giving exposure to young players, were the main considerations for his team selection.

Apart from the exclusion of the five senior players, the appointment of Aleida Khandaker as the captain was also an eyebrow-raiser. Although she did captain a young side to UAE, with senior players such as Monika Chakma, Ritu Porna Chakma and Maria Manda back in the squad, the coach had the option to choose from.

"I think she's a good leader. I think she's got character. I think she leads by example. She's not a massive talker," Butler explained. "Why shouldn't I have the right to choose my captain? Experienced or inexperienced, captains lead by example, not just from a vocal perspective but from practical perspective."

Mahfuz Akter Kiron, the women's wing chairman of BFF, was asked whether she had a talk with the coach regarding the exclusion of the senior players and why they were not given an opportunity to prove their form or fitness to the coach. She didn't provide a direct answer to these questions, instead said that she believed in professionalism and didn't see the point of her asking questions on team selection.

The Bangladesh team will fly for Amman this morning to play against 74th-ranked Jordan on May 31 and 94th-ranked Indonesia on June 3 as part of preparation for June-July's AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers.



PHOTO: AFP
Retired Spanish superstar Rafael Nadal gestures during a ceremony honouring his career during the French Open on Court Philippe-Chatrier at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris yesterday.

Real Madrid bring Alonso home again

AGENCIES

Xabi Alonso has been appointed Real Madrid manager, the Spanish giants confirmed on Sunday, marking an emotional return to the Santiago Bernabeu.

The 43-year-old has signed a three-year contract until June 2028 and succeeds Carlo Ancelotti, who coached his final game on Saturday before departing to lead Brazil.

Ancelotti ended his second spell at Real without a major trophy this season. In response, the club acted swiftly to secure Alonso, who had recently announced his departure from Bayer Leverkusen after an extraordinary campaign.

Alonso took charge of Leverkusen in October 2022 and transformed the club's fortunes. This past season, he guided them to their first ever Bundesliga title along with the German Cup and led them to the Europa League final. Although under contract until 2026, Leverkusen agreed to release him early at his request.

Alonso will be officially presented as Real's new head coach on Monday and begin his duties on June 1. His first challenge will be the revamped 32-team Club World Cup in the USA, where Real will face Al Hilal, Pachuca and RB Salzburg in the group stage, starting from June 14.

This appointment brings Alonso back to familiar territory. A former Real Madrid midfielder, he joined the club from Liverpool in 2009 and made 236 appearances, winning La Liga, two Copa del Rey titles, and the club's 10th Champions League crown.

After retiring, Alonso began his coaching journey at Real Madrid's youth academy, before progressing to Real Sociedad B and then Leverkusen.

Now, he follows a path similar to Zinedine Zidane – another iconic midfield turned successful Real coach – as he aims to guide the club back to European and domestic glory.



Erling Haaland secured the points for the visitors from the penalty spot.

Chelsea ended Nottingham Forest's dreams of a first appearance in the Champions League since they were European champions back in 1980.

Levi Colwill tapped in Pedro Neto's cross for the Blues' goal in a 1-0 win at the City Ground to secure fourth place for Chelsea.

Meanwhile, Newcastle narrowly avoided throwing away their place in the top five after losing 1-0 at home to Everton.

However, the Magpies finished fifth after Aston Villa were controversially beaten 2-0 at Manchester United, who finished the campaign in 15th.

A place in the Europa League is Villa's consolation for finishing sixth.

CITY, CHELSEA, NEWCASTLE secure Champions League spots

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City, Chelsea and Newcastle secured places in next season's Champions League as Liverpool lifted the Premier League trophy after a 1-1 draw against Crystal Palace on a dramatic final day of the season yesterday.

A record-equalling 20th league title for Liverpool and relegation for Ipswich, Leicester and Southampton had long since been decided, leaving the focus of attention on the battle for European places.

Liverpool and Arsenal had already secured their place in the Champions League by finishing in the top two, while Tottenham will join them after winning the Europa League on Wednesday.

City ensured a disappointing season did not end in disastrous fashion by qualifying for Europe's top competition for the 15th consecutive season by beating Fulham 2-0 to finish third.

Ilkay Gundogan's overhead kick from close range put Pep Guardiola's men in front before

out of the Pakistan tour.

"Mustafizur suffered a clip fracture on his left thumb while playing his last match of the Indian Premier League yesterday [Saturday]... As per our current assessment, he will be unavailable for selection for the next two to three weeks," BCB physio Delowar Hossain Siva was quoted as saying in the press release provided by Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

Khaled Ahmed, not quite a regular face in white-ball formats, has replaced Mustafizur in the squad.

Known as "the Fizz" for his ability to deceive batters, his absence was felt in the remainder of the two T20Is against UAE. Against an opponent like Pakistan, the 29-year-old was set to play a pivotal role.

No other Bangladesh bowler bar Mustafizur had an economy rate under five in the UAE T20Is. Even in the first T20I, UAE looked good to chase down Bangladesh's score of 191 before Mustafizur stepped in to stem the flow of runs.

Just a day after the first T20I in UAE on May 17, he flew to Delhi the day after and appeared in his first IPL game this season. But he had taken everything on his stride. The pace variations kept him effective – not just the back-of-the-hand slowers but also on-pace deliveries.

Given his guile, Delhi Capitals skipper Fa du Plessis had used Mustafizur in different kinds of game phases. Among players who featured in only three IPL games this season, he ended with one of the highest bowling impact scores per match.

It is a big hit for the Tigers, given the rest of the pacers have been in disarray. When the pressure is on, Fizz is the one they turn to in shorter formats, and it means the Pakistan tour just got a bit more difficult.



Paris St Germain cruised to a 3-0 French Cup final win over Stade de Reims, a week before their much-anticipated Champions League showdown with Inter Milan. Manager Luis Enrique hailed the performance as perfect preparation for the club's historic European quest. "We're ready. We want to make history," he said. With the trophy secured by halftime, PSG now shift focus to chasing their first-ever Champions League title on May 31, determined to end years of continental frustration.

PHOTO: PSG

SHORT CORNER

BFF post draws double dose of fan frustration

Yesterday, Bangladesh Football Federation's Facebook post announcing the national women's team squad for the upcoming tri-nation series in Jordan was quickly overwhelmed by angry comments about the ongoing ticketing fiasco for the Bangladesh men's Asian Cup Qualifiers against Singapore on June 10 -- a highly anticipated fixture as England-based Hamza Choudhury is set to make his home debut.

World No.1 Sabalenka powers into Round 2

World number one Aryna Sabalenka cruised into the second round of the French Open on Sunday with a 6-1, 6-0 win over Russia's Kamilla Rakhimova. Sabalenka broke Rakhimova five times as she wrapped up victory in an hour to make a convincing start to her Roland Garros campaign.

'No hurry': Dhoni calm on future as CSK finish with win

After beating Gujarat Titans by 83 runs on Sunday, Chennai Super Kings ended with four wins in 14 matches with debate raging once again over the future of their veteran M.S. Dhoni, who took over as leader midway after injury to regular captain Ruturaj Gaikwad. The 43-year-old Dhoni has been linked with retirement but chose to keep his cards close to his chest after the game.

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