

‘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



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, Mosammat Sagorika, Shaheda Akter, Surobhi Akond, Mosammat Sultana, Nobirun Khatun, Umela Marma

of these senior players during a press 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 Afeida 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 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 of inexperienced, captains lead by example, not just from a vocal perspective but from practical perspective.”

Mahfuza 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: REUTERS

World number one Aryna Sabalenka cruised into the French Open second round with a dominant 6-1, 6-0 win over Kamilla Rakhimova but expressed confusion over line-calling systems on clay. With Roland Garros still using line judges, unlike other majors shifting to electronic calls, Sabalenka admitted: “Honestly, I’m so confused.”

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 midfielder turned successful Real coach – as he aims to guide the club back to European and domestic glory.



BFF post draws double dose of fan frustration

KHALID HOSSAIN

The Bangladesh Football Federation’s (BFF) recent online posts have opened the floodgates of fan frustration – though not always for the reasons one might expect.

On Sunday, BFF’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.

The ticket sale, managed by BFF and the online platform Tickify, was meant to begin at noon on Saturday but was delayed until 8:00pm. When sales finally opened, the site crashed minutes later due to an “unexpected surge” of over 150,000 requests that overwhelmed the system.

Despite apologies from both BFF and Tickify, many fans vented their frustration on social media, with the women’s team squad post becoming a surprising hotspot for ticket-related complaints.

Amid this chaos, the women’s football squad announcement itself has not escaped criticism. The exclusion of former captain Sabina Khatun, along with Sanjida Akter, Masura Parvin, Krishna Rani Sarkar, and Matsushima Sumaya – all veterans and SAFF Championship winners – sparked a backlash questioning the rationale behind the selections.

The 23-member squad, announced on Sunday, features a mix of returning players and emerging talents. Yet the omission of several senior players who had previously clashed with head coach Peter Butler drew widespread criticism.

“Sumaya and others have been dropped – BFF must explain,” wrote one fan, encapsulating the wider sense of dissatisfaction. Others dismissed the squad as “pointless”, question the inclusion of only four defenders, and asked repeatedly: “Where are Sabina, Sanjida, Sumaya and Masura?”

The latest squad selection comes amid lingering tensions within the women’s team setup. In January, 18 senior players, including Sabina, boycotted training in protest against Butler’s management. While nine of those players have now returned to the fold, Sabina and four others remain sidelined.

Sabina – Bangladesh’s all-time top scorer and a two-time SAFF Championship-winning captain – is currently playing in the Bhutan Women’s League for Paro FC, alongside Sanjida (Thimphu City), Krishna (Transport United), Masura (Transport), and Sumaya (Paro).

The women’s side is widely seen as the country’s most successful sporting outfit in recent years, and as the squad prepares to depart for Jordan – where they will face the hosts on May 31 and Indonesia on June 3 – fans fear the current disunity could undermine years of hard-earned progress.

As one commenter put it: “First cricket collapsed. Now it seems women’s football is heading the same way.”

ARSENAL

‘ladies saved the club’

REUTERS

Former Arsenal and England striker Ian Wright said the women’s team have saved the north London club after they beat defending champions Barcelona 1-0 on Saturday to win their second Champions League title after an 18-year wait.

Renee Slegers’ Arsenal, featuring in their first Champions League final since lifting the trophy in 2007, held firm to deny favourites Barcelona a third consecutive European crown.

Arsenal withstood a flurry of chances from Barcelona before forward Stina Blackstenius struck a winner in the 75th minute, to the delight of their 5,000 travelling fans at the Jose Alvalade Stadium in Lisbon.

“The ladies have saved the club. We’ve got something to celebrate,” Wright said, adding that Arsenal should hold a parade in north London for their Champions League win.



“They have beaten Barcelona in the Champions League, no one gave them a chance. Even I was saying it was going to be tough because they average four goals a game.

“The embarrassment of not getting anything this season when we played so well with the men,” he said. The women “deserve everything they are getting, all

the accolades because this is a magnificent achievement.”

Barcelona were playing in their sixth final in seven years, with a team widely regarded as the best in the world, featuring Ballon d’Or winners Alexia Putellas and Aitana Bonmati, two of the most influential midfielders in the women’s game.



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

Norris wins maiden Monaco Grand Prix

AFP, Monaco

Lando Norris won his maiden Monaco Grand Prix on Sunday to close the gap on his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri in the battle for the 2025 drivers’ world title.

Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc took second with Piastri completing the podium in the eighth race of the season.

Norris closed to within three points of Piastri after adding the jewel in the F1 calendar to his season-opening win in Australia.

Four-time reigning world champion Max Verstappen took fourth with Lewis Hamilton in the other Ferrari rounding out the top five.

“Monaco, baby! It’s a dream” Norris exclaimed over the team radio, after becoming the first McLaren driver to win on the sinuous streets of the Principality since Hamilton in 2008.

“It feels amazing, it’s a long gruelling race. An amazing weekend with pole, with today. This is what we dream of, this is what I did dream of as a kid,” beamed the 25-year-old.

He was pushed hard to the end of the gruelling and at times chaotic afternoon in the Monaco sunshine by Leclerc, who took second, 3.131s behind.

“Lando did a better job and he deserves to win. It is above our expectations here, I thought we would struggle to be in the top 10 so it has been a good weekend, but I wish I’d won,” said the Monaco-born Leclerc.

Piastri rued a tricky time in qualifying on Saturday.

“I got close but not close enough, and you run around here where you started,” said the Australian.