



The Bangladesh U-21 hockey team began preparations yesterday at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium for their historic debut in the Men's FIH Hockey Junior World Cup, set for November 28 to December 10 in Tamil Nadu, India. This marks the first time a Bangladesh team will compete in a World Cup at any level. Guided by coach Mohammad Ahsiquzzaman, the squad is working on building cohesion ahead of the 24-team tournament. Drawn in Group F, Bangladesh will face France, Australia, and South Korea. They secured their spot by finishing fifth in last December's Men's AHF Asia Cup under former coach Moududur Rahman Shuvo.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Futsal was born in Bangladesh today'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh futsal team's newly appointed Iranian coach, Saeid Khodarahmi, said that futsal was "born today in the country" as he addressed the media for the first time on Sunday, expressing hope to develop the sport.

The 59-year-old coach appears more focused on long-term futsal development in Bangladesh rather than immediate success in the upcoming Futsal Asian Cup Qualifiers, where Bangladesh is grouped with 13-time champions Iran, 76th-ranked Malaysia, and 97th-ranked UAE. The Qualifiers are scheduled for September 20-24 in Kuantan, Malaysia.

"It's my first visit to your country and I feel at home. My responsibility here is very tough," said Khodarahmi. "Today I want to ask the [BFF] president [Tabith Awal]: How many futsal stadiums does Bangladesh have? How many coaches, referees, and players? I think futsal was born in your country today -- congratulations to Bangladesh Football Federation."

"I may make mistakes -- inform me, and support us for improvement, not for failure. I promise to begin a long-term plan for 2026 if the [BFF] president agrees. Bangladesh futsal will become strong in South Asia," said Khodarahmi, who worked for five years in Myanmar's futsal system.

Although Bangladesh has played traditional men's football since its independence and introduced women's football in the 1990s, it lacks experience and infrastructure in futsal.



Gritty Gill, resilient India

AGENCIES

Shubman Gill notched up a defiant century on the final day of the fourth Test against England at Old Trafford, Manchester, yesterday, scoring 103 to become only the third captain in Test history to register four centuries in a single series -- joining Sir Donald Bradman and Sunil Gavaskar in an elite club.

With India staring at a massive challenge after a top order collapse left them reeling at 0-2 early on, Gill, along with KL Rahul, orchestrated a remarkable recovery.

The pair stitched together a resilient 188-run stand for the third wicket, grinding down England's bowlers on a wearing fifth day pitch. Rahul, unlucky to miss out on a century, was dismissed for 90 after being trapped LBW by a visibly limping Ben Stokes, who brought himself on to bowl despite battling injuries. But the right-hander managed to play 230 deliveries, taking away the shine off the ball and time from the game.

Gill, meanwhile, was undeterred -- even after taking a painful blow on the hand -- and brought up his century off 228 balls, laced with 12 boundaries. It was a statement of character from the 25-year-old, captaining India for the first time in a Test series. His innings spanned nearly seven hours.

Gill also set another new record. With 722 runs scored so far in the series with a Test to go, he went past teammate Yashasvi Jaiswal (712 runs in 2023/24) for most runs scored by an India



batter in a series against England. The right-hander is also 89 runs away from Bradman's record of most runs as captain in a series (810).

However, just before lunch, Gill who played 238 deliveries, fell to Jofra Archer, nicking behind for 103, leaving India at 223-4, still trailing England by 88 runs in the second innings. England had a chance to tighten the screws immediately, but Joe Root dropped Ravindra Jadeja at slip the very next ball, much to the frustration of the home crowd.

Brushing the let-off aside, Jadeja (57) notched up his half-century and Washington Sundar (53) followed suit as the duo stitched together an unbeaten 100-run stand, propelling India to 322-4 at Tea and leading by 11 runs in hopes of saving the Test and the series.

BCB eyes NCL T20 performers for World Cup push

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is set to hold the upcoming NCL T20 tournament in September-October window before the BPL players' draft. Last year the tournament saw many younger players get an opportunity, and ahead of the T20 World Cup next year, it would be vital to remain on the lookout for talents.

Minhajul Abedin, BCB's head of programmes, believes that it would be ideal to approach the World Cup with a pool of 20 players. In that regard, he felt that the domestic T20 tournament would be a good gauge for performances.

The Tigers have won back-to-back T20I series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan. When asked what process would be required to find additions or better options for the current side, Minhajul

NCL four-day competition would begin from October 15 after the T20 tournament. This time, the tournament committee is thinking of including two foreign players -- a batter and a pacer -- in each side.



said: "It's difficult to say without the domestic T20 tournament taking place. If we get a few performers, we can build as they will have six months to prepare for the World Cup."

NCL T20 will be played from September 15 to October 4, BCB officials confirmed to The Daily Star. Three venues have been chosen and it is expected that sporting wickets will be on offer to better prepare players for major competitions. Meanwhile, proposals are being readied to add some variety and competitiveness to NCL's four-day first-class competition.

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"From the technical committee, we will suggest this for the NCL longer version," Minhajul told The Daily Star.

"We want the four-day competition to be more competitive and lively, which is why we will suggest these changes," he added, explaining why the NCL may see foreign players taking part for the first time.

There are, however, some predicaments to foreign players' availability during the October-November window as subcontinent players remain busy with their own domestic engagements during that time. BCL four-day competition is slated to begin in February next year and there is an ongoing discussion that a foreign team such as Sri Lanka 'A' or Afghanistan 'A' could play in the tournament as focus has shifted to improving the nature of domestic competitions across the board.

'Don't see young players coming thru in men's team'

Peter Butler, the successful coach of Bangladesh women's football team, bared all in a freewheeling interview with The Daily Star's Atique Anam. The former West Ham United midfielder spoke about his football methodology, plans for the future, the shortcomings of the federation, men's football, and the controversies he has found himself in. Following is the second and final part of the two-part interview:

The Daily Star (DS): After the 7-0 win against Bahrain in the Asian Cup Qualifiers, you had said you hoped people would finally notice women's football and that it's been all about men's football in Bangladesh. Would you elaborate that statement?

Peter Butler (PB): Honestly, what I've done has been groundbreaking. It's never been done before in women's football -- coming in, ripping it apart, facing controversy. That narrative has run its course now. I was never deterred.

With the men's team, I don't see young players coming through. Even when I ran the academy for four months, there were none being selected. As a coach, you have to be brave -- to pick young players, give them minutes, build a platform.

I think (Javier) Cabrera should be coaching the Under-23s and Under-20s. If you want a successful senior national team, the head coach should oversee youth programmes. I did it in Liberia -- it worked. Same in Botswana -- we reached 86th in FIFA rankings. But it's not easy.

DS: In Botswana and Liberia, you drastically reduced the squad's average age. Was that your ultimate aim?

PB: When I took over Botswana in 2014, the squad's average age was 27-29. Some were 35. One player -- Boitumelo Mafofo -- was 35 (33 in fact). He was a legend, super fit, lean. I ripped the squad apart, brought in young players from the U-20s and U-23s, and kept a few experienced leaders like Mafofo. They led by example.

DS: So, it's not all about age?

PB: Absolutely not. Age is just a number. It's about ability and attitude, on and off the

pitch. In Liberia too, a senior player told me, "Coach, if you need me as an impact sub, I'll do it. If you drop me, I respect it." That mentality is gold. The young players now excite me -- they are the future of this game.

DS: Talking about age and experience, you benched captain Sabina Khatun right after your very first match in 2024, against Chinese Taipei, and that caused quite a bit of backlash. What was the thinking behind this move?

PB: I couldn't play the system I wanted -- the type of football I wanted -- which was high intensity and high press. I couldn't include her in the team because she'd lost her legs. I'm very respectful of what she's done for the women's game in this country. I think she's been influential -- to a level. But if she had been willing to be an impact player, I could have involved her. She wasn't. So, I had to make a decision.

I've got no axe to grind. But what they did -- whatever it was -- was completely wrong. And they tried to take me on -- they took on the wrong person.

DS: So you're saying that the selection for the Asian Cup Qualifiers wasn't based on any sort of grudge?

PB: Oh no, never. I would never do that. The president asked me if I had a problem with bringing some of the girls back in. I said I'd take them into training, but they'd have to do fitness tests. I said I wanted Maria, I wanted Sheuli, I wanted Shamsunnahar, I wanted Monika, I wanted Ritu Porna, and I want Rupna.

DS: But the other seniors didn't even get to give the fitness test.

PB: No, they didn't, because they'd already

gone to Bhutan. But they weren't part of my plans.

DS: But before Asian Cup qualifiers, you did say Sabina could still play a part -- as an impact player or a mentor. And if Masura Parvin improved her fitness, there could be a chance.

PB: I think there was.

DS: Not anymore?

PB: No. You have to be realistic. Nabiran has really come to a level, and Kohati has come a long way. Sagarika, Tohura, Shamsunnahar, Trishna -- they're the new kids on the block. We have to acknowledge that.

DS: During the players' rebellion, there were allegations that you were very strict with the senior players and said things about them.

PB: Those were complete lies. No truth in any of it.

DS: But you did impose some restrictions -- like curfews and phone use?

PB: Yes. I wanted them in bed at a reasonable hour. Phones were collected -- no TikTok and all that. I told them to stay off social media. I never banned it, just told them to be sensible. I never did anything drastic.

DS: Let's talk about you football methodology. You have experimented with formation throughout your tenure. In the Asian Cup Qualifiers, you used 3-4-3 and 3-5-2 formations. In SAFF U-20s, you went back to four defenders. Which one is your preferred system?

PB: The only time I played a 3-5-2 was against UAE. It didn't fully work -- but there was a method behind it. I wanted to test their adaptability. My base formation is closer to a 4-1-4-1 or 4-3-3, depending on whether we're in possession or not. But I believe in exposing players to different systems. Systems don't make players; players make systems. I'm educating them to be flexible.

DS: How do you train your players for the high-line defence, knowing it can be a high-risk-high-reward approach?

PB: It takes a lot of work. We use positioning protocols -- like pressing triggers at 30 metres, the defensive "D," and the half-way line. It must be choreographed -- players must move in unison. You need forwards like Tohura, Shamsunnahar, Ritu, and Monika pressing aggressively. If the front doesn't press, the high line collapses. We drill this daily.

DS: But it can be counterproductive if defenders don't have the fitness that the system demands. In some matches in the qualifiers, especially towards the latter parts of the games, your defenders got easily outpaced by the opposition forwards.

PB: I disagree. I don't think we have a fitness issue at all. In fact, we often finish stronger than the other team. Sometimes games fall into what I call a "holding pattern," where both teams hesitate. That's not fatigue -- it's tactical. If we were unfit, we wouldn't

beat teams 7-0 or challenge teams ranked 50 spots above us.

DS: Afieida mentioned in an interview that Rupna's role as a sweeper-keeper has made the defenders' job much easier.

PB: Absolutely. It's all about interpretation. I want my teams to build from the back in a U-shape -- centre-backs split, full-backs push high, and the deep-lying midfielder drops in to create a pseudo back three. Rupna has improved a lot. She's confident with the ball now and reads the game well.

DS: Another footballer, Nabiran, used to play as a forward, now she's a centre-back and doing really well. How did this transition happen?

PB: We were training one day and Maria got injured. We were short -- Surma (Jannat) was just coming back from injury -- and I needed a centre-back. I just said, "Nabiran's not a striker, she's a central defender." Everyone looked at me like I was crazy. They said, "You know she used to play there," and I replied, "Yeah, but not very well." I said, "I'm going to turn her into one because she's the perfect high-line defender we have, along with Kohati."

DS: You've also redefined roles in midfield. Monika as a No. 10, for example.

PB: Yes. I play Monika as a No. 10. Maria is more aggressive and industrious. Sapna is a great passer -- maybe the best in the team -- but needs to improve off the ball. Monika and Sapna are both very attack minded, while Maria gives us that work rate. Each one brings something unique. Ultimately, my aim is to build a squad that's tactically smart, athletically prepared, and mentally tough. We're getting there.