

As rankings rise, BFF MUST LEAP FURTHER

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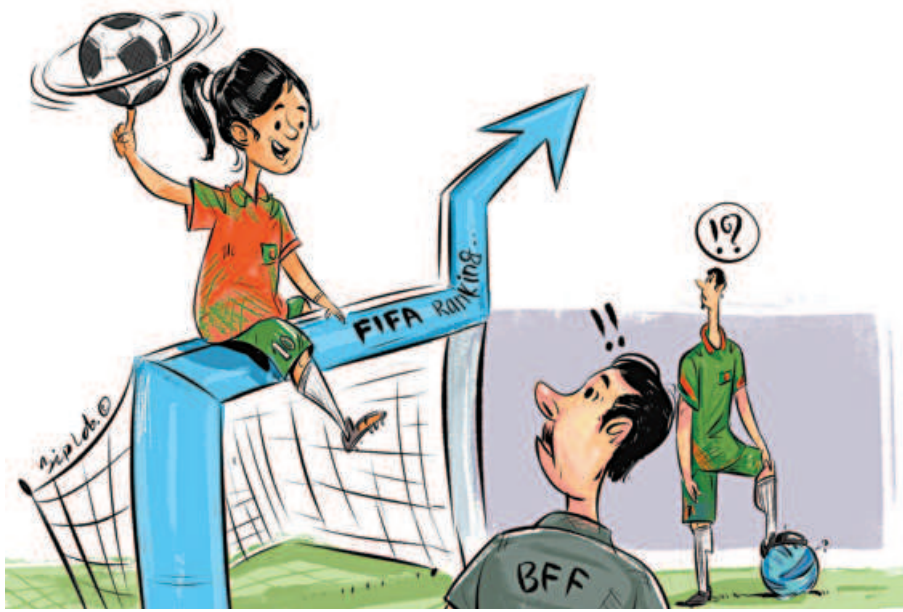
Bangladesh women's football, under the guidance of Peter Butler, is arguably going through its best phase at present, and the big leap in the latest FIFA Women's World Ranking is a timely reminder of that progress.

The game's governing body, FIFA, highlighted Bangladesh as one of the "biggest risers", as the team climbed 24 places -- from 128th to 104th -- following their historic qualification for the 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup for the first time.

While this is not the highest position Bangladesh women's team have ever achieved -- they peaked at 100 in 2013 -- the side earned the most points (+80.51) in the latest FIFA rankings update, marking a significant milestone.

What's more encouraging is that from the age-group levels to the senior national

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team, Bangladesh have shown consistent improvement -- not just in results, but in the style and brand of football being played.

It's a game that fans can now enjoy beyond just wins and losses, and the players have added clear entertainment value with their confident, attacking performances.

The players are doing their job. But every time women's football makes headlines, a familiar question resurfaces: when will the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) present a long-term roadmap to raise

the standard of the country's women's football structure?

Last month, Bangladesh topped their AFC Women's Asian Cup qualification group with a perfect record -- defeating hosts Myanmar 2-1 and thrashing both Bahrain and Turkmenistan 7-0. It was a commanding display that has rightly sparked national pride.

But now, after this historic qualification, the pressing question remains, and rightly so: can the BFF convert this success into

lasting development?

BFF president Tabith Awal, in a recent in-depth interview with The Daily Star, stated that "this success should motivate us all." He spoke of three key priorities: creating opportunities for players in top international leagues, attracting more sponsorship and branding, and drawing stronger government support. That includes establishing a well-structured, long-awaited women's league and a dedicated women's football complex.

Crucially, he admitted the federation's failure in providing a proper, standard women's league -- something players have long demanded.

Now, everyone is watching to see whether these promises will translate into tangible action, and without delay. There's no excuse to lag behind, especially when the players are improving at such a rapid pace. Long-term sustainability must be ensured.

When it comes to the women's league, it's crucial that clubs shift their mindset and actively collaborate with the BFF. If entertainment value and visibility are benchmarks for attracting sponsors and club interest, then our footballers have already made a strong case.

With each new achievement, the disparity between men's and women's football in the country grows harder to justify. Equal support is no longer optional; it's essential for the game's future.

U-20s eye successive wins

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will look to keep their winning momentum going in the AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers when the women in red and green take on unfamiliar opponents Timor-Leste in their second match at the Laos National Stadium today.

The match will kick off at 3:00 pm (Bangladesh time). Although the charges of English coach Peter Butler struggled a bit in the first half of their opening match against hosts Laos, they dominated the second half to secure a comfortable 3-1 win.

Buoyed by that victory, Bangladesh will be aiming to collect full three points against Timor-Leste before facing former champions and group favourites South Korea on Sunday.

Like Laos, Timor-Leste are also unfamiliar opponents for Bangladesh. However, Timor-Leste are not expected to pose as tough a challenge, having suffered a heavy 9-0 defeat to South Korea in their opening match -- a result that also gave the Bangladesh technical staff an opportunity to analyse their game.

However, Afeida and Co. will need to improve their overall performance, particularly in passing and game control, to achieve a better result against Timor-Leste -- a result that could ultimately boost their chances of qualifying for the finals as one of the best three runners-up.

Bangladesh players did not hold an outdoor practice session ahead of today's encounter. However, according to a Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) statement, the players went through stretching and gym workouts before undergoing a recovery session in the swimming pool.

9 PSG players on Ballon d'Or shortlist

REUTERS

Nine players from treble-winning PSG have been nominated for the men's Ballon d'Or this year, as France Football announced the list of nominees on Thursday.

PSG coach Luis Enrique, Chelsea's Enzo Maresca, and Liverpool's Arne Slot were nominated for the men's Coach of the Year award.

Ousmane Dembele, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Desire Doue, Achraf Hakimi, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Nuno Mendes, Joao Neves, Fabian Ruiz, and Vitinha are all on the 30-man list.

Dembele scored 35 goals and claimed 16 assists in all competitions as PSG won the Ligue 1 title, French Cup, and Champions League and were Club World Cup runners-up to Chelsea.

Other nominees include Barcelona's Raphinha (34 goals, 25 assists), Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (34 goals, 23 assists), who was named Premier League Player of the Season, and Manchester City striker Erling Haaland (34 goals, five assists). Barca's Lamine Yamal (18 goals, 25 assists) made the cut while the 18-year-old winger was also nominated for the Kopa Trophy for best Under-21 player, an award he won last year.

NATIONAL CRICKET LEAGUE

No explanation as Mymensingh still missing

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) tournament committee held a coordination meeting yesterday for the upcoming NCL T20 in September. In the background, however, frustration and suspicions were being raised regarding Mymensingh division's continued exclusion from the National Cricket League (NCL).

Formed in 2015 after being carved out of Dhaka division, Mymensingh remains the only administrative division yet to be included in the country's premier domestic first-class competition. Hopes of inclusion were once again dashed when Mymensingh was left out of the recent meeting, chaired by BCB tournament committee chairman Akram Khan.

A member of the Mymensingh divisional sports association informed that they have not received any explanation from the BCB regarding their NCL exclusion, and if they are not included, they will take legal steps if necessary.

"We haven't received any explanation on why Mymensingh are excluded," former BCB director Abdullah Al Fuad Redwan,

now a member of the Mymensingh divisional sports association, told members of the media on Thursday.

"After the division was created, we have been trying to play the NCL and have appealed in various government departments. Lastly, the NSC sent a letter to the BCB to include Mymensingh division when Faruque Ahmed was the

"Without Mymensingh division's inclusion, we won't let NCL be organised and if necessary, we will take legal steps."

Abdullah Al Fuad Redwan, member of Mymensingh divisional sports association.

president. Back then, the president said that it will happen.

Redwan, also former general secretary of the Mymensingh divisional sports association, further said that they will not allow the NCL to take place if Mymensingh are not included. "If necessary, we will take legal steps," he warned.

The BCB was aware of the developments, and when The Daily Star asked director Akram Khan, he said that a discussion on the matter has to be undertaken by the board directors and BCB president and it was not solely under his jurisdiction, adding such decisions have to be approved in an AGM (Annual General Meeting).

When The Daily Star asked a board director regarding the comments from a member of the Mymensingh Sports Association, it appeared BCB were not highly concerned at the moment.

"Yes, they can file a case, but as you can see, everything has been designed through involvement with the districts," a BCB director said on condition of anonymity.

"There were matters of increasing venues, and there were other issues related to players. So these things take time. As far as I heard, according to our constitution, it may be that for a new district, you have to include them through the AGM."

With these developments, it is likely that Mymensingh's fate will depend on the legal steps and decisions from legal bodies.

U-17 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Girls pitted in strong group

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been placed in a strong Group H alongside hosts Jordan and Chinese Taipei in the AFC U-17 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers, following the official draw held at the AFC headquarters in Malaysia on Thursday.

A total of 27 teams will compete in the qualification round, with the eight group winners advancing to the final tournament. They will join four automatic qualifiers -- DPR Korea, Japan, Korea Republic, and hosts China PR -- in the 12-team final round scheduled for April 30 to May 17, 2026, in China.

The Group H matches will take place from October 13 to 17, 2025.

The qualifiers will be in a single round-robin format, which could favour Bangladesh, considering their history with the format. They previously reached the final round of the competition twice (2017 and 2019 in single round-robin format) before crashing out in a double round-robin system in the 2023 edition.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's U-17 men's team have been drawn with hosts China PR, Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam, Timor-Leste, and Sri Lanka in Group A of the AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers.

The men's qualifiers, featuring 38 teams, will be held from November 22 to 30, 2025. Seven group winners will qualify for the finals, joining nine teams that secured their spots by qualifying for the FIFA U-17 World Cup in Qatar later this year.

Tennis' richest stage RAISES THE BAR

AGENCIES

The US Open has once again redefined the financial landscape of tennis, standing at the forefront of both tennis excellence and athlete advocacy.

In a bold move that reflects both growing player influence and the tournament's continued commercial strength, the United States Tennis Association (USTA) has announced a record-breaking \$90 million in total player compensation for the 2025 edition -- the highest in the sport's history and a 20% jump from last year's \$75 million.

At the heart of the increase is a landmark payout of \$5 million each to the men's and women's singles champions -- up 39 percent from the \$3.6 million awarded in 2024.

The move comes amid heightened demands from players for more equitable revenue sharing across all competition tiers. In March, 20 leading players -- including Novak Djokovic, Coco Gauff, Aryna Sabalenka and Jannik Sinner -- jointly signed a letter to Grand Slam organisers urging greater transparency and inclusion in

Grand Slam 2025 comparison:		
Tournament	Prize pool	Singles champions (each)
US Open	\$85 million	\$5.00 million
Wimbledon	\$73 million	\$4.01 million
French Open	\$65.7 million	\$2.97 million
Australian Open	\$62.8 million	\$2.26 million

- 2025 US Open, starting from Aug 24
- Singles winners: \$5 million each -- highest ever in tennis (+39%)
- Doubles champions: \$1 million -- new high
- Total prize pool (excluding non-performance costs): \$85 million

decision-making. The tournament, long a leader in equality since introducing equal prize money in 1973 under

the advocacy of Billie Jean King, continues to evolve. The current \$90 million figure also includes player

accommodations, meals, and other non-performance-related costs, reflecting a more holistic approach to player support.

Alif chosen over Sagor for Olympic scholarship

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite earning a direct qualification for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, archer Sagor Islam has been overlooked for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) scholarship for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics due to a recent dip in performance.

Sagor became the third Bangladeshi athlete to qualify directly for the Olympic Games, following in the footsteps of golfer Siddiqur Rahman and archer Ruman Sana.

However, the young archer was not nominated for the monthly IOC scholarship, worth approximately US\$1,500, which runs through to the 2028 Summer Olympics.

Instead, Asia Cup gold medalist Abdur Rahman Alif has been nominated in the recurve division. Himu Bacher and Puspita Zaman have been selected in the compound division, which will be included in the Olympic Games for the first time.

"We nominated the names of archers

on the basis of their performances, and Alif was ahead of Sagor, who is now even struggling to secure his place in the squad for the upcoming World Archery Championship," Tanvir Ahmed, general secretary of the Bangladesh Archery Federation, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Referring to the case of expatriate archer Ruman Sana, Tanvir added: "We don't want to make another example like Ruman Sana, who also struggled to secure his place in the national squad after qualifying directly for the Tokyo Olympics."

Ruman, who had received the IOC scholarship earlier, was also not considered for the Paris Olympic scholarship despite his direct qualification for the Tokyo Olympics.

Besides archery, three shooters -- Robiul Islam Tomas, Kamrunnahar Koly, and Shaira Afeida -- have also been nominated for the IOC scholarship. The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) sent the names of all six athletes to the IOC last month for final approval.

