



'I fail to fathom the value of women cricketers'

Former Bangladesh captain **Rumana Ahmed** has been absent from the national fold since last year's Asia Cup, yet her voice has only grown louder online. Speaking to **The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan**, the 34-year-old all-rounder shared her concerns over dwindling domestic opportunities and a future she fears is slipping away. The excerpts of the conversation are as follows:

DS: You've been vocal about women's cricket for quite some time. What's driving this?

RA: I've become frustrated seeing that we are always being treated differently, and we don't see the concerned bodies thinking much of our girls.

DS: The Women's Bangladesh Premier League (WBPL) didn't happen, domestic opportunities are shrinking, and there's no preparation before the fast-approaching World Cup. How do you see the current state?

RA: WBPL has never been materialised. Every year, they promise to hold the event from next year. Then, the discussion ends with it. The board even failed to draw a proper plan to give the women's team an ideal scenario for World Cup preparation. Moreover, they have only one tournament [Women's Dhaka Premier League] each year to judge the players, and there is favouritism in selecting the players as well. To be honest, I fail to fathom the value of women cricketers in Bangladesh.

DS: Is the board neglecting the pipeline, relying on just 18-20 players?

RA: The men's team benefits from various support squads with specific roles, but sadly, nothing like that exists for women's cricket.

DS: How do you rate Nazmul Abedeen Fahim's work since taking charge of the women's wing?

RA: We also had high expectations of him. But I only witnessed the number of games reduced in his tenure, rather than increased. Before he took charge, we played in the NCL [National Cricket League] and BCL [Bangladesh Cricket League]. This year, in the BCL, there were a total of three matches, but the tournament ended after two games. They planned to host the match later, but they didn't organise that. As domestic tournaments, only the Premier League took place this year. They are only working with 20-25 cricketers, so how do you form the pipeline?

DS: A big team like Rupali Bank skipped this year's WDPL. Did that hurt players financially?

RA: Our women players earn some money from this one tournament. But the players' payment was reduced drastically this year. The teams didn't pay the money on time, whereas the payment amount is also very low. Good teams don't want to come here right now, as there is no councillorship in women's cricket.

DS: What urgent steps are needed for women's cricket?

RA: I think the women's selection panel should be improved. There is only one selector right now, and everything is going under his order. The number of domestic tournaments should be increased. I have played a lot of cricket for Bangladesh, but now I'm not getting the chance to play in domestic cricket, let alone the national team. So where can I show myself and prove myself for the national team?

DS: Did BCB offer you, Salma Khatun and Jahanara Alam retirement roles?

RA: I've not received such a proposal so far... We are still working hard, and we have done a lot for women's cricket in the country. Actually, I don't know who our guardian is now.

DS: Reports say ex-coach Hashan Tillakaratne didn't want senior players. Is it true?

RA: He discriminated a lot in the team, bringing senior-junior grouping into the team... He had a favourite group of five to six players, and he always made plans with them. He never questioned [Fargana Haque] Pinky for scoring with a low strike-rate. But at the same time, he asked someone to hit from the beginning.

DS: What's your future plan?

RA: What will I think? If they don't come with an explanation related to my performance or fitness – which I'm ready to prove – then what should I do?

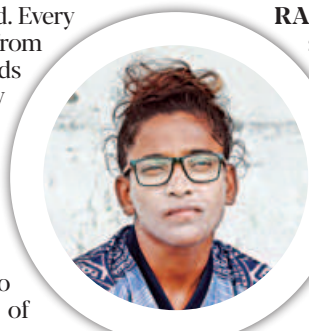


PHOTO: COLLECTED

Ritu Porna Chakma, the dazzling star of the Bangladesh women's football team, proudly holds both the Sports Person of the Year 2024 and Fans' Favourite Athlete trophies at the City Group-Prothom Alo Sports Awards, held at a hotel in the capital yesterday. "We want to take Bangladesh beyond Asia and onto the global stage," Ritu declared with determination. In other awards, Ritu's teammate Tohura Khatun was named Best Female Athlete, chess prodigy Manon Reza Neer claimed Best Emerging Sportsperson, the runners-up titles went to Bangladesh men's cricket stars Taskin Ahmed and Mehidy Hasan Miraz, and the Lifetime Achievement Award glittered in the hands of the nation's sprinting legend Mosharraf Hossain Shamim.

History beckons Butler's U-20s

SPORTS REPORTER

Having made history with a maiden Women's Asian Cup berth last month, Bangladesh are within touching distance of yet another historic achievement with a first ever U-20 Women's Asian Cup beckoning.

What looked like an uphill task before the campaign started now looks very much within the reach of Peter Butler's charges, thanks to their enterprising football in the Laotian capital of Vientiane over the last four days.

Bangladesh started their Group H campaign with an assured 3-1 victory against the hosts before dispatching Timor-Leste with an 8-0 drubbing, helping themselves to the top of the table with six points and a positive goal-difference of 10.

The fact that South Korea -- ranked 21st in the world as opposed to Bangladesh's 104th -- are second behind Bangladesh, courtesy of goals-scored count, speaks volumes of how dominating the women and red and green have been so far.

With South Korea on a positive goal-difference of 10 too, but behind Bangladesh due to having scored one goal less, they will have to beat Bangladesh in the last match today to grab the one spot for the group for the final round, which will be held in Thailand in April next year.


The top teams from the eight groups alongside three best runners-up finishers will go through to the final round, joining hosts Thailand as the 12th team.

The South Asian champions know they will be through as group winners with either a victory or a draw. Even a defeat by a small margin could be enough for them to progress, given the current standings of the other teams and the match-ups on the final match-day today.

With one-day gap each between the match days, Butler's charges went through recovery -- stretching gym and swimming -- at the team hotel on Saturday.

With South Korea labouring to a 1-0 win against Laos on Friday night, the Bangladesh players should be confident enough of securing the top spot in the group with a victory and not wait for few more hours to learn their fate once the other groups are done with.

As Butler said after the Timor-Leste game, Bangladesh will "give it their best shot."



Powered by three remarkable centuries from [L-R] Rachin Ravindra (165*), Henry Nicholls (150*) and Devon Conway (153) -- marking only the third occasion in Test history with three individual scores of 150 or more in a single innings -- New Zealand crushed hosts Zimbabwe by an innings and 359 runs on day three of the second and final Test at Queens Sports Club yesterday, securing a clean sweep.

PHOTO: ZIMBABWE CRICKET

TEAM	OPPOSITIONS	YEAR	MARGIN OF WIN
England	Australia	1938	Innings and 579 runs
Australia	South Africa	2002	Innings and 360 runs
New Zealand	Zimbabwe	2025	Innings and 359 runs
West Indies	India	1958	Innings and 336 runs
Australia	England	1946	Innings and 332 runs

Slot's new-look Liverpool aim for instant silverware

AGENCIES

Liverpool manager Arne Slot begins his reign with the chance to lift silverware at the first attempt when his side face Crystal Palace in Sunday's Community Shield at Wembley.

The fixture pits last season's Premier League champions against the FA Cup winners, and for Slot, it's an opportunity to make an instant statement.

Despite storming to a record equalling 20th English league crown with four matches to spare, Liverpool have undergone significant changes over the summer.

A nearly £300 million recruitment drive brought in German playmaker Florian Wirtz, French forward Hugo Ekitike, and dynamic full-backs Milos Kerkez and Jeremie Frimpong. All four could debut at Wembley, giving fans a glimpse of a refreshed squad designed to defend the title and compete on all fronts.

Slot emphasised the rarity of winning a trophy in the opening match of the campaign, but warned of the threat posed by Palace, who stunned Manchester City to claim their first major honour in May. The build-up has been tinged with emotion following the tragic death of Diogo Jota in a car accident last month.

Liverpool will wear a "Forever 20" emblem on their shirts all season in tribute



- 🌱 FA Cup winners have beaten Premier League champions in seven of the last nine Community Shields.
- 🌱 Liverpool will play their 17th Community Shield; Crystal Palace are making their debut.
- 🌱 The last four debutants lost, including Southampton (1976) and Wimbledon (1988) - both beaten by Liverpool.
- 🌱 Liverpool have won only one of their past six Community Shields as league champions.

to the Portuguese forward, whose number has been retired. "The tributes have been emotional and impressive," Slot said.

Wirtz arrives from Bayer Leverkusen for a club record £100 million, having produced 57 goals and 65 assists in 197 games. Ekitike, signed from Eintracht Frankfurt for £69 million, brings pace and directness to complement Liverpool's attacking options. At the back, Kerkez will challenge Andy Robertson, while Frimpong replaces the departed Trent Alexander-Arnold, now at

Real Madrid.

Liverpool have also seen Luis Diaz join Bayern Munich and Jarell Quansah depart for Leverkusen, leaving gaps for the new signings to fill.

Sunday will be a test of how quickly Liverpool's new faces can gel under Slot's philosophy. Win, and the champions begin their title defence on Friday against Bournemouth with early momentum; lose, and questions over cohesion may come sooner than expected.

Half-baked Kings set for Asian challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Five-time Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings will depart Dhaka for Doha this morning to play their AFC Challenge League playoff against Syrian Premier League runners-up Al-Karamah SC -- but with minimal preparation and tempered expectations.

The rising powerhouse of Bangladesh football endured a challenging season last year, finishing third in the domestic league and parting ways with key players such as Robson Robinho and Miguel Ferreira, the latter departing midway through the campaign. Although the Kings managed to clinch the Federation Cup and the inaugural one-off Challenge Cup, their continental campaign ended in disappointment, finishing bottom of their AFC Challenge League group with no wins.

Now, they find themselves in the playoff stage -- alongside Abahani Limited, who will host Kyrgyz side Muras United in Dhaka on the same day -- set to face Al-Karamah SC, a former AFC Champions League and AFC Cup runners-up from Syria.

However, the Kings' preparation for the crucial tie has been far from ideal. The team had only two weeks of training before heading to Qatar and will have just a single day to prepare on location before taking on the Syrian giants.

Longtime Abahani captain Mohammad Ridoy, who recently switched allegiance to Bashundhara Kings, acknowledged the lack of adequate preparation in a conversation with The Daily Star.

"The players had been away from competitive football for a while, even though many of us continued working on our fitness individually," Ridoy said. "But if we had just a bit more time to train together, things could definitely have been better."

Adding to the concerns is the fact that Kings' head coach and several foreign recruits will only join the squad in Doha a day or two before the fixture. The club has brought back Brazilian striker Dorielton Gomez and signed Rafael Augusto from Abahani, alongside Nigerian forwards Sunday Emmanuelle and Tony Emmanuelle from Mohammedan during the current transfer window.

They will also be bolstered by national team defender Tariq Kazi and England-based youngster Cuba Mitchell, with newly-appointed head coach Sergio Farias set to take charge of the team in Doha.

Ridoy, who joined Kings training on August 1 after representing Abahani for six seasons, is under no illusions about the scale of the task ahead.

"AFC competitions are always tough," Ridoy remarked. "No matter who the opponent is, it's always going to be a big challenge for us."

