

Rare experience for U-23s

SPORTS REPORTER

After training for almost two weeks in Dhaka, Bangladesh U-23 football team are set to leave for Bahrain this morning for a 12 day training camp and two practice matches against their Bahraini counterparts as part of preparation for the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers.

It is the first time that Bangladesh U-23 team are going for an overseas training and practice matches ahead of an AFC competition as Bangladesh Football Federation desires to strengthen the pipeline for the senior team, who are scheduled to play Hong Kong in home and away fixtures of Asian Cup Qualifiers in October.

Three Abahani players joined the camp yesterday after their AFC Challenge League commitment while four players from Bashundhara Kings -- Rimon Hossain, Mojibur Rahman Jony, Mehedi Hasan Sabon and Cuba Mitchell -- are supposed to join the 25-member camp from Qatar.

Asked about possible target for the Qualifiers in Vietnam, BFF's technical director and under-23 team's coach Saiful Bari Titu said that they would be able to ascertain that after the Bahrain tour.

Bijoy set to get another lifeline

SPORTS REPORTER

Anamul Haque Bijoy is set to get another opportunity to turn around his fortunes, as the struggling opener is one of the six players who will be leaving the country as part of the Bangladesh 'A' side for a four day fixture against South Australia from August 28-31.

Bijoy has come under scrutiny during Bangladesh's last Test assignment in Sri Lanka, where the 32-year-old scored two naughts, a single-digit score, and another shaky 19 in two Tests.

However, the selectors are keeping their faith in Bijoy, as this 'A' team tour has been designed with players who are likely to be part of the national team's upcoming tour of Australia for two Tests, part of the ICC Test Championship cycle 2025-2027, in August 2026.

Iftakhar Hossain, Amite Hasan, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Shahadat Hossain Dipu, and Hasan Murad are the five other players who will be leaving for Australia in two batches on August 17 and 18.

Several players who will play the four-day fixture are already in Australia with the Nurul Hasan-led 'A' side for the Top End T20 tournament.

According to BCB sources, pacer Hasan Mahmud, currently with the 'A' side for the T20 tournament, will play the four-day game. Opener Mohammad Naim, spinner Naeem Hasan, and wicketkeeper-batter Mahidul Islam, players with red-ball pedigree, may also get the nod for the four-dayer.



Pole vault king Duplantis keeps soaring

Sweden's Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis bettered his pole vault world record by a centimetre on Tuesday, clearing 6.29 metres at the athletics meet in Budapest. It was the 13th time that Duplantis broke the world record -- most by any athlete, surpassing legendary Ukrainian Sergey Bubka, who set the world record 12 times. Duplantis soared over the bar at the second attempt to improve on his 6.28m from Stockholm in June. It was the 25-year-old's third record of 2025, having also cleared 6.27m in Clermont-Ferrand in February.

PHOTO: AFP



'A' team begin Top End T20 campaign today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh 'A' team will be eyeing to make a winning start in the Top End T20 Series when they take on Pakistan Shaheens in the tournament opener at TIO Stadium in Darwin, Australia today.

The match will start at 03:30pm Bangladesh time and will be telecast live on T Sports.

Bangladesh, under the banner of the High Performance XI, had emerged as runners-up in last year's edition, losing to Adelaide Strikers Academy by 32 runs in the final.

This year, a more experienced side under the leadership of Nurul Hasan Sohan, and national team players like Mohammad Naim, Nayem Hasan and Hasan Mahmud have been selected in an attempt to better their previous year's result in the II team competition.

Pakistan Shaheens, which had reached the semifinal last year, want to start well this year.

"We are aiming to take the best possible combination into the match. Bangladesh 'A' are also a strong side, so our focus will be on fielding the right combination, especially as this is the first game of the tournament and we want to start well," Shaheens captain Muhammad Irfan Khan was quoted in a press release yesterday.

Bangladesh 'A' team will play at least five more matches in the tournament. They will play against Nepal, Perth Scorchers, Northern Territory Strike, Melbourne Star and Adelaide Strikers on August 16, 17, 19, 21 and 23 respectively.

Both semifinals and final will take place on August 24.



Rain, poor planning dampen HP camp's impact

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) High Performance (HP) Unit recently completed a near two-month-long training camp in Chattogram, which was frequently obstructed by rain raising questions over the benefit of holding a camp in the monsoon season.

In the camp, which started in mid-June with 28 players, the players worked on different skillsets, had some match scenario training and even a few practice matches against Bangladesh 'A' team.

However, due to persistent rain, players had to skip outdoor training in many days.

"Rain majorly impacted the camp... There was rain in at least 20 out of 45 days. We practiced outdoors only when there was no rain and the outfield was dry," said a cricketer, who was part of the HP training camp.

Apart from rain, there were also some complaints regarding the duration of the camp as many cricketers and coaching staff felt that it could have been planned better. "The camp ran for two months at a stretch. It became exhausting at times. When you don't have a break, it becomes difficult to run a long camp," HP batting coach Rajin Saleh told The Daily Star.

Usually, such camps are held ahead of an international assignment, but the HP Unit, which last played a full-fledged series against South Africa in May on home soil, have no series on the horizon till the series against Zimbabwe in May next year.

The lack of international exposure leaves no way for measuring the players' development and hampers their growth,

opined two members of the HP Unit's coaching panel.

"I think there should be two series, one before the camp and one after it. We could have worked on the areas which players lack in after the first series and then assess their improvement after the second one," Rajin said. HP head coach David Hemp echoed the same sentiment, saying, "If there were more international series, it could be better for the boys.

Actually, when someone only works in the nets, sometimes you can't understand his improvement. But if he plays international matches against any kind of opposition, it gives a clearer idea regarding his strength and weaknesses."

A BCB official insisted that some players

from the HP Unit might feature in the Emerging Teams Asia Cup in November and some in the South Asian (SA) Games in Pakistan in January next year, but the future of both tournaments is in the dark due to the recent India-Pakistan conflict.

"The next international series is Emerging teams Asia Cup. It is yet to be decided whether the HP team or 'A' team will participate. Probably, the 'A' team will go, but it will be formed with a mix of cricketers from the HP and the 'A' team," HP Unit's outgoing manager Jamal Babu told The Daily Star.

He also informed that the HP team will hold another camp in Rajshahi between August 22 and September 10, before the players join their respective NCL teams.



Against heavy odds, five-time Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings notched a 1-0 victory over eight-time Syrian league champions Al-Karamah SC in the AFC Challenge League preliminary round in Doha, Qatar, on Tuesday. The only goal of the game, played in front of a small group of expatriate fans, came in the sixth minute courtesy of a brilliant backheel from Nigerian forward Emmanuel Sunday. Kings, playing without a head coach and on the back of only two weeks of training, now remain Bangladesh's sole representative in the group stage of the competition.

PHOTO: BASHUNDHARA KINGS

Steadfast Sapna 'can't imagine leaving football'

Once on the fringes, Bangladesh midfielder Sapna Rani has become a key figure for both senior and U-20 sides in the past ten months, starring in the 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers and helping secure SAFF titles under English coach Peter Butler. The Thakurgaon native, once active in various sports, entered football in 2017 and did not look back ever since, rising through the age groups to become a composed, versatile midfielder whose game sense belies her years. In a conversation with The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman, she reflected on her journey, mindset, among others. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): After being part of the senior team's consecutive SAFF Championship-winning campaigns, in 2022 and 2024, you've been part of two landmark milestones this year: the national team and the U-20s both qualifying for their respective AFC Asian Cups. How do you view this achievement?

Sapna Rani (SR): It's a major highlight of my career, having been part of both squads. I was also in the team that won our first SAFF Championship in 2022. Both missions were demanding, starting long before the tournaments began.

DS: Which campaign felt tougher: Myanmar or Laos?

SR: The U-20 tournament in Laos was harder. The home side were strong in every department, especially fitness. We'd never played them before and had no idea what to expect [in our campaign opener], so the fear was real -- even more than against South Korea [in the third and final match]. But as the match went on, our confidence grew.



DS: How do you rate Bangladesh's chances in the Asian Cup in Australia next March?

SR: We're grouped with Uzbekistan, China, and DPR Korea -- all ranked higher. We aim to fight hard against Uzbekistan, although the other two will be huge tests.

DS: What kind of preparation is needed?

SR: We've told the [Bangladesh Football] Federation what we need: training abroad and as many friendlies against strong teams as possible.

DS: Take us back to when your playing career kickstarted.

SR: I was nicknamed 'Sachin Tendulkar' while I played school cricket as an opening batter. I also played volleyball, badminton, and athletics. In 2017, Rangatuli Academy spotted me in

an inter-school football tournament. A year later, BKSP selected me, but I couldn't afford to join until Joya Chakma arranged a full scholarship. I joined the U-15 national camp in 2019. Initially, I played in the forward role, often as a winger under coach Paul Smalley, but later settled into a more defensive midfield position.

DS: Was it difficult to break into the senior team?

SR: [Coach] Butler sir values discipline and performance, but to secure my place I had to work harder and take extra responsibility.

DS: How did you shape your creative midfield style?

SR: The midfield is the heartbeat of the game -- you have to control play and be strong. I look up to Monica [Chakma] Apu,

as well as Toni Kroos.

DS: You're known for long-range strikes. How did that develop?

SR: Coaches usually encourage me to shoot from distance. As a midfielder, I can't always get into the attack, so I take my chances from range. My childhood coach, Sudha Sir of Rangatuli Academy, first taught me how to strike from distance, and I built on it at BKSP and national camps.

DS: Do you prefer scoring or setting up goals?

SR: Both, but as a midfielder, I enjoy creating for others a bit more. To be honest, I think in Bangladesh the strikers get way more accolades compared to the midfielders, whereas it's us midfielders who create the scoring opportunities.

DS: Are you satisfied with your football journey so far?

SR: I played for fun as a child, but now it's a profession I can't imagine leaving. Football has given me a lot.

DS: Can football support your family?

SR: Yes. Winning the SAFF Championships helped me contribute financially. It feels good to be able to support my family.

DS: Tell us about them.

SR: We're six in the family. My father can't work due to heart problems, so the family depends on me. Coming from a struggling background, I've always wanted to make my parents happy through football.

DS: Studying for the HSC exam, how do you balance football and academics?

SR: It's tough after training, but studying is essential for the future, especially for girls.

DS: Several senior players are abroad, playing in Bhutan league. Any chance we'll see you play outside Bangladesh?

SR: I'm leaving for Bhutan this weekend to join RTC Club. I've heard the altitude can cause breathing issues, but I'm excited. Playing abroad is a dream come true.

DS: Where do you see yourself in the future?

SR: Like many players, I dream of playing in a European league.

what to WATCH

T SPORTS

Top End T20 Series

Pakistan Shaheens

vs Bangladesh A

Live from 3.30 pm

STAR SPORTS

CPL

Antigua &

Barbuda vs St

Kitts & Nevis

Live from 5:00 am

(Friday)