

Afg to host Tigers in UAE after Asia Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) yesterday confirmed that it will host Bangladesh for a white-ball series, consisting of three ODIs and as many T20Is, from October 2 to 14 in the UAE.

The series will begin with its T20I leg and will see the two teams go head-to-head in the first T20I scheduled for October 2, while the remaining two T20Is will be held on October 4 and 6 respectively.

The T20I series will be followed by three ODIs, which are scheduled to be played on October 9, 11 and 14.

The venues for the series have not been revealed by the ACB.

The two teams will begin the series after the Asia Cup, also scheduled in the UAE from September 9-28, in which both sides will compete in Group B alongside Sri Lanka and Hong Kong.

Last year Bangladesh were hosted by Afghanistan in a three-match ODI series in Sharjah, which Afghanistan won by 2-1 margin.

World Cup calls Jessy

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Shathira Jakir Jessy is set to become Bangladesh's first woman umpire at a senior World Cup, after being named to officiate in the upcoming ICC Women's World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

The 34-year-old previously officiated in the Women's Asia Cup, while she also officiated in the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers held in Pakistan in April, where she worked alongside fellow Bangladeshi umpire Masudur Rahman Mukul.

The former Bangladesh international recently stood in Bangladesh emerging team's home series against South Africa.

A Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) source confirmed the news to The Daily Star, adding that the International Cricket Council (ICC) will soon announce the full list of umpires for the eight-team tournament from September 30 to November 2.

Bangladesh, featuring for the second time in a row, will open their campaign against Pakistan on October 2 in Colombo before facing England in Guwahati on October 7. Their seventh and final league match will be against India on October 26 in Bengaluru.

The top four teams from the league format will qualify for the semis, scheduled on October 29 and 30, while the final is slated for November 2.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

A Bangladesh Police Handball Club player goes airborne and aims for goal against Dinajpur District Sports Association during a 43-07 victory on the opening day of Ruchi 36th National Women's Handball Competition at the Shaheed M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium yesterday. A total 19 teams are participating in the 10-day competition, which will conclude on August 25.

SAARC signings spark nostalgia, concerns for locals

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For those who experienced the golden era of Bangladeshi football in the 1980s and '90s, names like Ganesh Thapa and Raju Sakya of Nepal, or Sri Lanka's Pakeer Ali and Prem Lal, evoke a strong sense of nostalgia. These foreign stars were as beloved by local fans as homegrown legends like Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chunnu or Monem Munna. More than just their skills, they brought a spirit of camaraderie among South Asian footballing nations -- a sentiment that faded over the past two decades.

Since the launch of the professional league in 2007, players from the SAARC region have been largely absent in the domestic football scene.

However, the 2025-26 transfer window, which closed on Thursday night, marks a significant shift. A newly introduced rule now allows clubs to register and field up to four SAARC players as locals -- in addition to the three foreign players permitted on the pitch from a pool of five registered foreigners.

As a result, five of the 10 top-tier BPL clubs have signed 11 players from SAARC nations: eight from Nepal, and one each from Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and India. Notably, the traditional powerhouses -- Mohammedan, Abahani, and Bashundhara Kings -- have chosen not to capitalise on this new rule. Instead, it is the mid- and lower-table clubs, many operating under tight budgets, that have embraced the opportunity to bolster their squads affordably.

Brothers Union have made the boldest move, bringing in four players from the Nepal national team, including star forward Anjan Bista. Speaking to The Daily Star, manager Amer Khan admitted to some reservations about the policy but

acknowledged its practical value.

"We can get top Nepalese or Maldivian players for one-third of what we pay top local players. So, obviously, it's very lucrative," Amer said. "We remember how popular players like Pakeer Ali, Prem Lal, Chandra Siri, or Ganesh Thapa were. This rule gives fans a taste of that again. But the decision should've been made with more consensus from the clubs. It will



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Brothers Union manager Amer Khan

Mohammedan manager Imtiaz Ahmed Nakib voiced his frustration: "This rule will make it difficult to select players for the national team. We might have to look to the Championship League to find local talent."

Not all SAARC signings have been of high calibre. Arambagh KS, who were relegated two divisions in 2021 due to a match-fixing scandal involving several

Total foreign players: 37 from 12 countries (maximum 9 from Ghana)

Total SAARC players: 11 (Nepalese: 8; Sri Lankan: 1; Bhutanese: 1; Indian: 1)

New registration rules:

Maximum 5 foreigners for registration, maximum 3 on the pitch

Maximum 4 SAARC players for registration, all 4 eligible to play

Five age-level local players in the squad, one must feature in playing eleven

undoubtedly hurt our local talents."

Brothers Union have also utilised their full foreign quota -- three African players and two from South America -- meaning they could potentially field seven non-Bangladeshi players in their starting XI.

In total, BPL clubs have registered 37 foreign players from outside the SAARC region, with 11 SAARC recruits bringing the total number of international players to 48 this season. While foreign players add technical quality to teams, coaches and officials are concerned that their growing presence will limit opportunities for emerging Bangladeshi talents.

Indian staff, have raised eyebrows by signing a player from India's fifth tier under the SAARC provision. It's a move that underscores how some clubs -- under severe financial strain -- may exploit the rule simply to fill squad spots on a budget.

In the post-August 5 landscape, with most clubs drastically reducing budgets to survive, the new SAARC rule offers a cost-effective lifeline. But as the new season approaches, it also raises important questions about the long-term development of Bangladeshi football and the future of local players striving to break through.

BATTLE OF NO. 9S as Man Utd host Arsenal

STAR SPORTS DESK

It's not just Arsenal versus Manchester United at Old Trafford on Sunday. It's Viktor Gyokeres against Benjamin Sesko -- a clash of two blockbuster summer signings who could define the Premier League's new season for their respective sides.

For Arsenal, Mikel Arteta has finally landed the cutting edge his side desperately lacked.

In comes Gyokeres, the £66 million powerhouse from Sporting Lisbon who plundered 97 goals in just 102 appearances in Portugal, much of which came under United's current manager Ruben Amorim. His pace, power and ruthlessness in front of goal are designed to end Arsenal's 20-year title drought and may finally be the missing key to Arteta's puzzle.

Across the dugout, United manager Amorim is banking on second-placed finishes in the



everything on Sesko. Signed from RB Leipzig for £73.7 million, the 22-year-old towering Slovenian, who has scored

39 times in 87 games for the German side, has already drawn comparisons to Erling Haaland with his height, movement and finishing.

"I don't need to tell Ben, 'Ben', this is Manchester United, a lot of pressure. Every game is like do or die," Amorim said.

"He is always thinking about football. He's really obsessed about that."

Arsenal, stung by a hattrick of second-placed finishes in the

past three seasons, have turned to Gyokeres to prevent another collapse.

Injuries to Bukayo Saka, Martin Odegaard and Gabriel Jesus exposed their lack of firepower last season, as they drew 14 matches and finished 10 points off Liverpool. This time, Arteta insists his squad has "versatility" and "different qualities" to finally strike gold.

The Gunners were deadly in the air, scoring 17 goals from set-pieces last season -- the most in the league -- and having Gyokeres now only adds to that strength.

Meanwhile, United, desperate to bury the memory of last season's 15th-place disaster, have launched a spending spree. Alongside Sesko, they've splashed out on Bryan Mbeumo and Matheus Cunha in a £200 million attacking overhaul to get a shot at former glory.

There's an extra twist. Gyokeres and Sesko were both on Arsenal's radar before the Gunners chose the Swede, while United swooped in for the one who was not chosen.

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