



### PRITY STARS, TEAMPLAY SHINES

Bangladesh forward Sauravi Akanda Prity leaves her marker floored during their 4-1 win over Nepal in the SAFF Women's U-17 Championship in Thimphu yesterday, keeping title aspirations alive. While Prity grabbed the spotlight with a hattrick, it was teamplay that set the tone, as patience in possession carved the first opening. In the 38th minute, Umme Kulsum and Mamoni Chakma twisted and turned to take 16 touches down the left midfield, destabilising Nepal's shape, before Thuinuye Marma calmly slotted home in a move that lasted around 33 seconds. "I could score the hattrick because of my teammates," said Prity, dedicating the feat to the fans.

PHOTO: SAFF

WC QUALIFIERS

France overlook Ekitike

AFP, Paris

Hugo Ekitike was left out of France's squad announced Wednesday for the start of their 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign, though coach Didier Deschamps handed a first senior call-up to Monaco winger Maghnes Aklouche.

Ekitike, 23, has impressed since joining Liverpool from Eintracht Frankfurt this summer, scoring three goals in as many competitive games. He also netted five times in five appearances for France's Under 21s last season, but faces stiff competition for a senior spot.

France, World Cup winners in 2018 and runners-up in 2022, begin their qualifying bid against Ukraine in Poland on September 5, before hosting Iceland in Paris on September 9. Azerbaijan complete Group D, with further fixtures in October and November. Group winners qualify automatically for the finals in North America.

Aklouche, also 23, has long been on the fringes of the squad thanks to his form with Monaco, which has attracted interest from top European clubs. He was part of Thierry Henry's Olympic silver-medal team in Paris last year.

Rayan Cherki, who debuted for France in June's Nations League finals before moving from Lyon to Manchester City, is also included.

'Playing the U-15 boys was a good move'



Bangladesh top-order batter Sharmin Akhter Supta had a fantastic run in the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers in Pakistan where she finished as the second highest scorer with 266 runs. In a conversation with The Daily Star's Samsul Arelin Khan, the 29-year-old said that Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) decision to include the Under-15 men's team in the Women's Challenge Cup was a good move and expressed her desire to make winning contributions in the upcoming World Cup. The excerpts are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS):** How are you preparing for the World Cup?

**Sharmin Akhter Supta (SAS):** Cricket is just like life, you make mistakes and learn from them daily. Preparation-wise, the BCB tried their best to arrange international matches. But we had a gap in our FTP [Future Tours Programme] and that's why they failed to organise competitive matches. All the big teams were already engaged. I think the BCB's decision to arrange the Women's Challenge Cup with the U-15 boys team was a very good move. They played brilliantly in the competition. We got the opportunity to play few competitive matches here. We also played with the Sylhet division's U-17 team before the series. Apart from that, the coaching staff are regularly working with us in the nets.

**DS:** There are questions over the team's batting strength and depth. As a top-order batter, does it add extra pressure?

**SAS:** If top-order batters don't score big, it becomes difficult for the middle or lower-order. When we play well at the top, the middle-order batters can play with a

relaxed frame of mind. But I don't believe that we lack in batting depth. Our No. 5, 6 batters and even our lower-order has done really well in the qualifiers.

**DS:** Recently power-hitting coach Julian Wood worked with the women's team for five days. What was the experience like?

**SAS:** He worked on how we can generate power and develop the correct mindset for T20s. He told us that 50 over cricket and T20 cricket is different. He told us how we can maintain a positive intent. But before that, we have to know how to play power shots and develop the belief that we can play the shots. It was a good session for us.

**DS:** In the 2022 World Cup, Bangladesh finished seventh out of eight teams. Can we do better this time?

**SAS:** Last time, we went through a similar crisis. As the World Cup was held during Covid, we didn't get enough matches prior to it. Wanting to outdo one's previous performance is part of human nature. Last time, we won one game, and of course, this time we will try to win more games. We qualified as the last team in the tournament so we have to compete with the best seven teams in the World Cup. Definitely it will be really difficult but we won't go there only to participate.

**DS:** Are you eyeing any personal milestone in the World Cup?

**SAS:** I feel better scoring 30 runs in a winning cause than scoring a century in a losing cause. If I can help the team win matches in the World Cup, everyone will remember me and it will give me the utmost satisfaction. That's my goal.



Sinner 'very happy to be healthy again'

AGENCIES

World number one Jannik Sinner began his bid for back-to-back US Open titles with an emphatic victory on Tuesday, returning to action after doubts over his fitness surfaced ahead of the tournament.

Italian star Sinner waltzed to a 6-1, 6-1, 6-2 win over Czech world number 89 Vit Koprivá, needing just 1hr 38min to advance to the next round.

"Very happy that I'm healthy again," said Sinner, who was forced to retire in first set of his Cincinnati Open final against Carlos Alcaraz earlier this month.

"It feels great to be back here. Obviously, it's a very special tournament," added Sinner, who is attempting to become the first man to repeat as US Open champion since Roger Federer won five in a row from 2004-2008.

Sinner entered Flushing Meadows a year ago in a cloud of controversy over doping allegations but the crowd was firmly on his side this time as he clinched victory with a beautiful backhand winner. He faces Alexei Popyrin in the third round today.

BPL outlook clouded by stalled fixing probe

ANISUR RAHMAN

The new season starts in under three weeks with the one-off Challenge Cup in mid-September, but the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is yet to finish its probe into allegations of betting, spot-fixing and match manipulation against three top-tier clubs.

Fakirerpool, Young Men's Club, Dhaka Wanderers Club and Chittagong Abahani were flagged by FIFA's Fraud Detection System in January for suspicious activity during last season's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). While Wanderers and Abahani were relegated to the Championship League, Fakirerpool remain in the top flight, despite the allegations being unresolved.

The BFF had previously demoted clubs such as Arambagh, Uttar Baridhara and Karwan Bazar Pragati Sangha for similar offences. The question now is whether it will act decisively against Fakirerpool – their management has changed since the political transition in August last year – even if that reduces the



- » BFF probe into betting, spot-fixing and match manipulation involving Dhaka Wanderers, Ctg Abahani and Fakirerpool still incomplete ahead of new season, with time running out.
- » FIFA flagged irregularities last January via its Fraud Detection System.
- » Wanderers and Ctg Abahani relegated, but Fakirerpool's top-flight status under scrutiny.
- » BFF committee admits evidence was harder to secure this time.

number of BPL outfits this season. It has been an open secret within the football fraternity that a couple of clubs had been involved

in gambling and match fixing last season, allegedly profiting in crores of taka. Yet the BFF only moved after FIFA's intervention, as it did in the past.

"We have already circulated the draft reports among committee members and are waiting for directives from the BFF. We will review them again before submission," said Humayun Khalid, who has been the chairman of the Fixed Match Detection Committee for more than a decade.

"We interviewed players and officials from at least eight matches, but this time there were no clear media reports to guide us. Still, based on monitoring and intelligence, we are certain malpractice occurred," he added.

The detection committee submits only its recommendations, while sanctions are imposed by the BFF's disciplinary committee. However, the latter has yet to deliver a verdict on Azampur FC Uttara, accused of malpractice during the 2022-23 season, even though the investigation concluded more than a year ago.



Former Bangladesh fielding coach and current head coach of the Netherlands, Ryan Cook, and bowling all-rounder Aryan Dutt make their way out of the Osmani International Airport in Sylhet, after arriving in the country on Wednesday. The Dutch will play a three-match T20I series against Bangladesh at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, set to run from August 30 to September 3.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR