

TIGRESSES BANK on unity and resilience

Bangladesh are set for their second appearance at the ICC Women's World Cup, beginning September 30 in Guwahati, having debuted in 2022 with a solitary group-stage win. Their preparation this time has been far from ideal, with no international fixtures since qualifying in April. Instead, the Tigresses relied on training camps and practice matches, including games against men's age-group sides, to sharpen skills under pressure. Bangladesh head into the showpiece event with a mix of experience and youthful promise, embodied by left-arm spinner Nahida Akter and young pace sensation Marufa Akter. Both bowlers shared their thoughts with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi and Samsul Arefin Khan on the team's preparation, expectations, and personal goals. From Nahida emphasising unity, discipline, and batting consistency to Marufa focusing on variations, fitness and confidence, the duo reflected Bangladesh's belief that collective effort and resilience can help them compete on the biggest stage.

PREPARATION AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Nahida, the team's highest wicket-taker in white-ball formats, said the side had worked consistently since returning from Pakistan earlier this year. Continuous camps and competitive matches, she felt, ensured the group entered the tournament well prepared. Personally, she has been fine-tuning her bowling while also developing her batting to meet team demands.

"I've been working in many aspects because in big tournaments you need to be prepared thoroughly. My batting confidence has improved a lot too, though my main focus remains bowling," she said.

Marufa, who will be playing her first ODI World Cup, viewed preparation slightly differently. Despite the lack of recent international matches, she stressed the importance of personal discipline and training. Having overcome shoulder injury setbacks during her exam period, she worked on bowling variations with the help of coaches.

"If you practise properly, it won't affect you too much when you go into matches. Variations might make a big difference in

conditions where wickets are usually good for batting," she explained.

TEAM BONDING AND CONFIDENCE

One theme both bowlers highlighted was the sense of unity within the squad. Nahida described it as Bangladesh's "biggest strength." Months of living, training, and playing together, she said, had helped create a family-like environment.

"We've probably spent more time with each other than with our own families in the last five months. The way we support each other on and off the field has been excellent. With such unity, we can achieve good results," she said.

Marufa echoed the same spirit, adding that the bowling units – both pace and spin – were focused on building partnerships. "Our goal is to work together. Pacers will apply pressure so that spinners can capitalise, or the other way around. It's all about teamwork."

CHALLENGE AHEAD: BATTING AND CONDITIONS

Bangladesh have often been criticised for their batting depth,

normal. If we can't put up 250+, our bowlers will struggle. The whole batting unit has to contribute, from top six to the lower order," she noted.

Marufa, meanwhile, pointed to the importance of adaptability. Known for her in-swingers, she is confident about regaining full sharpness and believes her added variations could help contain strong batting sides.

DEALING WITH CRITICISM AND EXPECTATIONS

The women's team has occasionally faced harsh criticism, including after defeats to U-15 boys in practice matches. Nahida admitted such comments could feel disheartening but stressed that the squad tried to block out the noise.

"Criticism will always be there, but taking it too seriously would affect our game. We try to focus on cricket and move forward," she said.

Marufa, who faced challenges balancing studies with cricket, added a lighter perspective. "Whenever I try to play defensively with the bat, it doesn't work. But when I hit, I feel peace," she laughed, recalling her admiration for Hardik Pandya's all-round style.

TARGETS AND AMBITIONS

Both bowlers made clear that Bangladesh's approach would be step by step. Nahida targeted a winning start against Pakistan to build momentum, while Marufa said the team's dream was to "do something special" without looking too far ahead.

For Nahida, the focus is on execution and consistency. For Marufa, it's about enjoying her first World Cup while aiming to contribute with both ball and bat. "Everyone dreams of playing in an ODI World Cup, and I had that dream too. It's a feeling I honestly can't describe in words – I'm extremely excited about this tournament," she said.

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and Nahida admitted that putting up competitive totals would be vital in Indian conditions.

"In World Cups, high scores are



Five youngsters primed for the spotlight

As the 2025 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup gets underway on September 30, here's a look at the emerging players poised to make a big impact.

Pratika Rawal (India)

Matches: 14, Runs: 703, Batting average: 54.07

Indian cricket's latest batting sensation made her international debut just last year in December, and hasn't looked back since, quickly replacing Shafali Verma to become Smriti Mandhana's partner at the top of the order.

Matching her solid footwork with classical strokeplay, Rawal is capable of sending the ball to any corner of the ground, and is adept at both defensive and attacking play.

Georgia Voll (Australia)

Matches: 3, Runs: 173, Batting average: 86.5

Months into her breakout debut season with Australia, Georgia Voll was handed a central contract with the national side.

Voll got an opportunity in Australia's top-order owing to an injury to Alyssa Healy last year, and made the most of her outing against India. In the three ODI series, she smashed 173 runs at a strike rate of 108.80 and also scored a quickfire century in just her second game.



Annerie Dercksen (South Africa)

Matches: 11, Runs: 399, Wickets: 10, Batting average: 39.90, Bowling average: 24.30

South Africa's impressive all-round hope has good numbers in the ODI format, and has already won the ICC Women's Emerging Player of the Year for 2024.

Her ability to pick up wickets at key stages and score runs lower down the order will no doubt be a crucial aspect for South Africa. She made her ODI debut only in 2024, and has become a key cog in the South Africa limited overs setup in no time.

Rabeya Khan (Bangladesh)
Matches: 24, Wickets: 26, Bowling average: 28.38

Rabeya Khan made her T20I debut way back in 2019, but took some years to break into the ODI setup, playing her first game in the format in December 2022. Her bowling has improved over the years, as evidenced by her six scalps during the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifier 2025 in Pakistan.

The conditions in India and Sri Lanka will likely assist her leg-breaks, and the youngster can be destructive when operating with a senior pro like Fahima Katun.



ICC Women's Cricket World Cup Fixtures

DATE	MATCH	VENUE	TIME (BD TIME)
Sep 30	INDIA VS SRI LANKA	GUWAHATI	3:30 pm
Oct 1	AUSTRALIA VS NEW ZEALAND	INDORE	3:30 pm
Oct 2	BANGLADESH VS PAKISTAN	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 3	ENGLAND VS SOUTH AFRICA	GUWAHATI	3:30 pm
Oct 4	AUSTRALIA VS SRI LANKA	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 5	INDIA VS PAKISTAN	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 6	NEW ZEALAND VS SOUTH AFRICA	INDORE	3:30 pm
Oct 7	ENGLAND VS BANGLADESH	GUWAHATI	3:30 pm
Oct 8	AUSTRALIA VS PAKISTAN	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 9	INDIA VS SOUTH AFRICA	VISAKHAPATNAM	3:30 pm
Oct 10	NEW ZEALAND VS BANGLADESH	GUWAHATI	3:30 pm
Oct 11	ENGLAND VS SRI LANKA	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 12	INDIA VS AUSTRALIA	VISAKHAPATNAM	3:30 pm
Oct 13	SOUTH AFRICA VS BANGLADESH	VISAKHAPATNAM	3:30 pm
Oct 14	NEW ZEALAND VS SRI LANKA	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 15	ENGLAND VS PAKISTAN	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 16	AUSTRALIA VS BANGLADESH	VISAKHAPATNAM	3:30 pm
Oct 17	SOUTH AFRICA VS SRI LANKA	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 18	NEW ZEALAND VS PAKISTAN	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 19	INDIA VS ENGLAND	INDORE	3:30 pm
Oct 20	SRI LANKA VS BANGLADESH	NAVI MUMBAI	3:30 pm
Oct 21	SOUTH AFRICA VS PAKISTAN	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 22	AUSTRALIA VS ENGLAND	INDORE	3:30 pm
Oct 23	INDIA VS NEW ZEALAND	NAVI MUMBAI	3:30 pm
Oct 24	SRI LANKA VS PAKISTAN	COLOMBO	3:30 pm
Oct 25	AUSTRALIA VS SOUTH AFRICA	INDORE	3:30 pm
Oct 26	ENGLAND VS NEW ZEALAND	VISAKHAPATNAM	11:30 am
Oct 26	INDIA VS BANGLADESH	NAVI MUMBAI	3:30 pm

SEMI-FINALS

Oct 29	SEMI-FINAL 1	GUWAHATI/COLOMBO	3:30 PM
Oct 30	SEMI-FINAL 2	NAVI MUMBAI	3:30 PM

FINAL

Nov 2	WINNER SF1- WINNER SF2	NAVI MUMBAI/COLOMBO	3:30 PM
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