

## 'Everyone has gone silent out of fear'

Former Bangladesh women's cricket captain Jahanara Alam's allegations of sexual harassment have sparked widespread discussion in the country's sporting community. Bangladesh's table tennis legend Zobera Rahman Linu said such issues have long existed in sports and beyond. In an interview with *The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan*, Linu shared insights from her time in the Athletes Commission and suggested solutions; the excerpts of which are as follows:



WHEN WILL WOMEN ATHLETES GET SAFE SPACE IN BANGLADESH?

**The Daily Star (DS):** Sexual misconduct has emerged in cricket and other sports. What's your view?

**Zobera Rahman Linu (ZRL):** When I was the chairperson of the Athletes Commission of the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA; 2019-2023), this issue came to my attention first. During the last South Asian Games, my responsibility was to check on all the participants, and report it to the BOA. I had known about these problems for a long time, but it wasn't the right moment to speak up.

**DS:** What kind of knowledge did you have related to these issues?

**ZRL:** The problems that exist in other sports – like coaches abusing some, and some being abused by players. When I spoke to people in various sectors, they told me, "Apa, we are being abused this way." I then informed the BOA about what was happening, keeping their identities confidential. And we took some steps accordingly. We also warned those who were most implicated in bad behaviour. We took some actions like that.

Since Jahanara first reported it publicly, now everyone has taken notice. But these incidents have been happening for a long time. Actually, this is not limited to sport; this issue exists in all professional sectors. If sports are singled out, it won't sound good. People might think that these things only happen to women in sport.

**DS:** Did such issues exist during your playing days?

**ZRL:** When we used to play sports, we didn't face these things. At least, I didn't... But those who are coming into sport now are mostly coming from lower-middle-class backgrounds. What happens is that when they come here and receive some pocket money, it becomes very easy to abuse them.

Many incidents are happening secretly... The victims have kept silent, either just to stay on the team (to secure their spot) or to survive economically. But when Jahanara's matter came up, everyone gained the courage to speak. You will see many more things slowly come out.

**DS:** You reported incidents to the Olympic Association. Why did nothing progress?

**ZRL:** After we (a six-member team) informed the BOA, some actions were taken against them (the accused), but nothing more happened afterwards.

Because sometimes the girls who called me did not mention their names... because they fear that if we mention their names, the coach will exclude them. The same thing happened in cricket – everyone has gone silent out of fear.

**DS:** Are these incidents increasing because institutions fail to act?

**ZRL:** Yes, it is definitely increasing. First, the biggest issue, in my opinion, is that we are unable to bring the evidence forward. The victim cannot just claim to be a victim verbally. They need proof, right? When we cannot provide the proof... the accused gain an opportunity and others are encouraged, knowing the victims lack evidence.

**DS:** What's the way forward?

**ZRL:** In sectors like women's cricket, women's football, or whatever it is, the officials must be women, and the team management must be female. We do not lack good female organisers in Bangladesh, but we do not employ them. If you send a team abroad with a male manager, a girl might face many issues during the games. Will she speak openly about those issues to a male manager? Never. Every federation should mandate female officials with female athletes... And for influential officials involved, proven cases must lead to dismissal.

## Joy, Shadman fuel Tigers' charge

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Sylhet

Two big partnerships shaped Bangladesh's batting performance on the second day of the first Test against Ireland in Sylhet on Wednesday and although the second one eclipsed the former by two runs at stumps, it was the 168-run opening stand between Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Shadman Islam that really set the tone.

After Ireland got rolled over for 286 early in the morning, Shadman and Joy turned up to the crease and dictated the proceedings on a placid wicket, notching up a century stand in just 20.4 overs.

While Shadman fell for 80, Joy not only carried on to get a ton, but surpassed his career-best score of 137 he had made against the Proteas in Durban in 2022.

He then formed an unbroken 170-run stand alongside Mominul Haque (80 not out), and ended the day unbeaten on 169 with Bangladesh 338 for 1, leading by 52 runs.

Joy and Shadman's stand was Bangladesh's highest opening partnership in Tests within the last 10 years, surpassing Tamim Iqbal and Joy's 162 against Sri Lanka in Chattogram in 2022.

Asked whether they sent a positive message in the red-ball format through this partnership following recent disappointing performances from the top order in white-ball cricket, Shadman relayed that stringing together a big partnership was their main aim.

"A partnership always sends a good message. Partnership is very important in any format.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Whatever format we play in, good partnerships lead to a good score. That is our target," Shadman said yesterday.

"Joy and I were just talking about playing according to the ball and how the wicket was supporting us. When we started batting in the morning, there wasn't much help available. So,

we capitalised on the boundary balls," he added.

Shadman hoped Joy can notch up a double century and even surpass Mushfiqur Rahim's 219 against Zimbabwe – the highest score by a Bangladeshi in Tests. "I hope he does it. The way Joy is batting, we can definitely expect him to make it even bigger," he said.

## WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS PLAY-OFF Bangladesh out to defy odds

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh face Pakistan today in the first of a three-match play-off series at Dhaka's Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium, with the opening game set to begin at 2:00 pm. The series will determine Asia's sixth representative at the upcoming FIH World Cup Qualifiers.

Once a powerhouse of world hockey with four World Cup and three Olympic golds, Pakistan have struggled in recent years. Yet, as Bangladesh's Dutch coach Siegfried Aikman admitted, beating Pakistan remains a daunting task for his side.

At yesterday's press conference, held in a makeshift tent beside the stadium, most questions centred on Bangladesh's chances of an upset. Aikman, who has spent the past two and a half months coaching the U-21s for this month's Junior World Cup, is also guiding the senior team – featuring seven players from that youth squad.

"We've prepared the best we can and are ready to play," he said, before acknowledging the "huge gap" between the two teams in terms of experience and pace.

Bangladesh have never beaten Pakistan, although they have occasionally pushed superior opponents close since the mid-1970s. In their most recent meeting at the



2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou, Bangladesh took an early lead before eventually losing 5-2.

Aikman called facing Pakistan "a huge challenge", noting that their recent qualification for the FIH Pro League had boosted their confidence. "They have skillful players, great experience," said the Dutchman, who previously coached Pakistan.

Asked if his insight into the opposition might help, Aikman smiled: "They know me too, so it'll be interesting."

Pakistan coach Muhammad Usman, meanwhile, anticipates a closely-contested match. "Nobody can win easily. It is a competition," said Usman, who has stepped in for regular coach Tahir Zaman following his recent disagreement with the Pakistan Hockey Federation and reported resignation.



## Who is that player?

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

Following Day 1 of the ongoing Sylhet Test between Bangladesh and Ireland on Tuesday, Ebadot Hossain and Khaled Ahmed – unused squad members – were doing laps around the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium alongside an unknown face wearing the national team's kit. His name is Rahin Ahmed, a local academy player who has been added to the mix to bulk up the 14-member Test squad after some injury scares. During Day 1, Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Taijul Islam had to leave the field hurt for a time and substitute fielders had to step in. With only one more player left in the bench, the management felt the necessity of bringing in someone else as precaution – hence Rahin was brought in.

"Since the NCL is going on, we didn't pick a big squad. It wasn't possible to bring in another Test player during first day's play," national selector Hasibul Hossain Shanto informed *The Daily Star*.

Rahin, a left-arm pacer, hails from Green Sylhet Academy and prior to this has bowled as a net bowler in national team's practice.

## Friendly against Nepal to shape Bangladesh's India plans

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will look to find the right combination and fine-tune their strategy for the upcoming India fixture when they face Nepal in an international friendly at the National Stadium today.

The match kicks off at 8:00pm.

After being eliminated from the group stage of Asian Cup Qualifiers with two home defeats and two away draws, Bangladesh are now focused on restoring some pride in their remaining two



**We could not beat Nepal for some years, I know it very well. Nepal are a very competitive side. We had an experience against them last September in Kathmandu where we were very competitive against them but did not get the win. Tomorrow [Thursday] is a very tough day but we are convinced of winning.**

Bangladesh coach  
**JAVIER CABRERA**

matches against India and Singapore. Head coach Javier Cabrera is expected to give as many players as possible some match time, as he looks to finalise his preferred eleven for the November 18 clash against India.

With midfielder Sheikh Morsalin ruled out through injury and Fahamedul Islam suspended, Cabrera is set to make a couple of changes to the starting eleven that earned a 1-1 draw in their last away match against Hong Kong last month.

Canada-based midfielder Shamit Shome joined the camp late and took part in one full training session, suggesting he may get some minutes against Nepal before the India match.

Cabrera's charges will also be wary of a motivated Nepal side, who have not lost to Bangladesh in their last five meetings since a 2-0 defeat at this very venue back in 2000.

The two sides last met in Kathmandu in September, playing out a goalless draw in a dull affair. This time, Cabrera is expected to make better use of set-pieces against Nepal, who may themselves benefit from their familiarity with several Bangladeshi players – eight members of their current national squad play in the Bangladesh Football League.



## BONNA, HIMU AIMING FOR GOLD

Bangladesh's Bonna Akter and Himu Bachhar reached the final of the compound mixed team event at the Teer 24th Asian Archery Championships at the National Stadium in Dhaka on Wednesday. The duo defeated South Korea 158-153 in the semifinals after earlier wins over Bhutan and Iran, sealing a dream run on home soil. They will face India's Abhishek Verma and Deepshikha in today's gold medal match, with hopes high for Bangladesh's first-ever compound archery title.

PHOTO: BAF