

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

Digital abuse silently haunts female athletes

As part of the 16 Days of Activism relating to the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which began on November 25, The Daily Star Sports turns the spotlight on the digital ordeals faced by women in Bangladeshi sports. Women's cricket team allrounder Rumana Ahmed and shooter Kamrun Nahar Koly share how trolling, blackmail, body shaming and targeted harassment affect their confidence, careers and personal safety -- exposing persistent gaps in protection and reporting mechanisms.

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN and ANISUR RAHMAN

When athletes must worry more about online attacks than their on-field performance -- largely due to systemic failures -- it signals a deeper issue, something that has silently been undermining women's sports in the country.

For Rumana Ahmed, online abuse is not background noise; it disrupts focus.

"When negative things appear -- things I haven't even done -- those comments impact my career and performance," she said, adding that abuse spikes whenever form dips. Strangers fabricate reasons behind her form, letting the negativity "take a larger shape" over time.

While she has not seen teammates quit because of abuse, the rising visibility of women's cricket has intensified scrutiny. "Before, girls didn't get much focus. Now that the spotlight is here, bad comments are also increasing," she said.

Most abusers remain anonymous, as Rumana revealed that "many negative comments come from people I don't know."

Despite the emotional toll, reporting

rarely leads to action. Rumana said coaches or officials usually advise players to "avoid it" because they cannot control social media. Reporting tools on Facebook or Instagram are seldom used, partly because incidents have not escalated further, but also because athletes doubt whether complaints would help.

Rumana believes stronger legal enforcement and more support from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) are essential. "They are doing it more because nothing happens to them. BCB should take stricter steps; it affects our performance."

Shooter Kamrun Nahar Koly faces a different layer of harassment -- deliberate attempts to unsettle athletes before competitions. "Sometimes it's fake IDs, sometimes people around us. Even colleagues driven by professional jealousy use fake accounts," she said.

She added that harassment often spills beyond social media. "Many times, direct comments in person also disturb you. Something said intentionally to hurt you." With Artificial Intelligence (AI), she feels the threat has grown. Misuse of images, doctored photos and degrading montages circulate easily, which causes major

distress and harms their performance, leading to Koly saying that female athletes "always feel unsafe."

Both athletes point to a major gap: they do not clearly know where or how to report digital abuse. Koly recalls hearing about Police Cyber Support for Women (PCSW) but says athletes lack guidance. Even when complaints are made, especially involving senior or influential individuals, she says they are often "covered up" without justice.

Her message to younger athletes reflects the overall reality. "Laws exist, but applying them is hard. So we must protect ourselves -- limit posting, reduce social media involvement, be careful."

But when athletes are told to "limit posting" or "avoid" social media, it ultimately gives perpetrators more space to operate.

The experiences of Rumana and Koly reveal a troubling pattern: female athletes navigate digital abuse largely alone, with unclear reporting pathways, limited institutional backing and perpetrators acting without consequence. As women's sports gain visibility, systems that safeguard athletes must strengthen accordingly.



Root, Starc glow under Gabba lights

Following two single-digit scores in the first Ashes Test in Perth last month, Joe Root bounced back spectacularly to put England in a strong position as they reached 325 for nine, despite Australia quick Mitchell Starc taking 6-71 on Day 1 of the pink-ball Test in Brisbane yesterday.

** With an unbeaten 135 off 202 balls, Joe Root conquered his final frontier by scoring his maiden Ashes century in Australia.

** Root became the second English batter after Maurice Leyland (126 in 1936/37) to score a century on the opening day of a Gabba Test.

** Root and Jofra Archer (32* off 26) shared an unbroken 61-run 10th-wicket stand -- the highest for the wicket in a day-night Test, surpassing the 59 by Tom Blundell and Blair Tuckner in Mount Maunganui in 2023.

** England will be encouraged by their start, as no team has ever lost a day-night Test after scoring 300+ in the first innings.

** By dismissing Harry Brook for his 415th Test wicket, Mitchell Starc became the most prolific

left-arm pacer in Test history, surpassing Wasim Akram (414 in 104 Tests). Starc reached the mark in his 102nd.

** Starc now has 86 wickets in day-night Tests -- the most by any bowler -- 43 ahead of teammate Pat Cummins, who missed this match due to injury.

** Starc took his third first-over wicket of the Ashes by removing Ben Duckett for a first-ball duck. He now has 26 first-over wickets in Tests, the most in history, with James Anderson next on 19.

** Starc, who claimed six wickets on the day, also became the first bowler to take more than 20 pink-ball Test wickets against a single team (England).



'Size doesn't matter': Amirul on Bangladesh's spirit

Bangladesh defender Amirul Islam has been one of the standout performers at the ongoing FIH Hockey Junior World Cup in India, repeatedly converting penalty corners with his drag-and-flick expertise to trouble top sides such as Australia, France and South Korea. He leads the scorers' chart with 12 goals in four matches. Amirul, who debuted for the senior team at the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games after joining the U-21 setup in 2019, spoke to **The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman** following Bangladesh's emphatic 13-0 win over Oman yesterday. Here are the excerpts:

The Daily Star (DS): Having scored only five in last year's AHF Junior Asia Cup, how did you transform your performance?

Amirul Islam (AI): Credit goes to my teammates for providing the penalty corners. I also wanted to repay the trust coach [Stefried Aikman] placed in me. Since the Junior Asia Cup, I've worked hard with his guidance to improve my conversions, and it's paying off here.

DS: Where would you like to finish with two matches left?

AI: My focus is on the team, not individual goals. I'll give my best in the remaining matches while upholding the coach's trust.

DS: Did you expect to perform so well against top teams?

AI: Coach inspired us, saying 'size doesn't matter' and 'focus on your strengths'. We concentrated on team performance and tried to execute his instructions fully. I think we are now able to understand 90 per cent of the coach's instructions. Overall, we performed well.

DS: Bangladesh are set to finish 17th-20th. How confident are you about 17th?

AI: We're confident. The team are mentally strong, and everyone will focus on not dropping points in the next two matches.

DS: Your teammates call you 'Hamza' because of your hairstyle.

AI: I enjoy the comparison. Hamza [Chowdhury] is a top international footballer, so I take it positively.

DS: Thoughts on the irregular domestic league, last played early 2024?

AI: We hope domestic competitions resume soon to advance hockey. The federation should also send teams abroad to improve at international level.

BIGGEST-EVER WORLD CUP DRAW takes centre stage

The draw for the first-ever 48-team FIFA World Cup will unfold at 11pm (Bangladesh Time) tonight, streamed live and free on FIFA+ and FIFA's official YouTube channel after FIFA opted against traditional television coverage. The star-studded ceremony at Washington DC's Kennedy Center will feature global sporting icons including Tom Brady, Shaquille O'Neal, Wayne Gretzky and Aaron Judge assisting Rio Ferdinand on stage as the 12 groups for next year's finals across the United States, Mexico and Canada (June 11-July 19) are revealed. With new rules keeping the top four seeds apart and an expanded format introducing an extra Round of 32, the draw marks the moment when the biggest World Cup truly begins to take shape.

THE DRAW MECHANICS

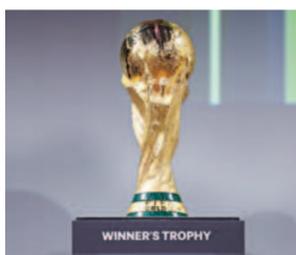
● 48 teams split into four pots of 12 based on FIFA rankings

● One team from each pot drawn into each of the 12 groups (A to L)

● Hosts already placed: Mexico in Group A; Canada in Group B; USA in Group D

● Top four seeds -- Spain, Argentina, France, England -- kept apart until the semi-finals if they all win their groups

● Confederation limits: maximum one team per group, except UEFA (up



to two)

WHO ARE IN THE POTS?

Pot 1: USA, Mexico, Canada, Spain,

Argentina, France, England, Brazil, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany

Pot 2: Croatia, Morocco, Colombia, Uruguay, Switzerland, Japan, Senegal, Iran, South Korea, Ecuador, Austria, Australia

Pot 3: Norway, Panama, Egypt, Algeria, Scotland, Paraguay, Tunisia, Ivory Coast, Uzbekistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa

Pot 4: Jordan, Cape Verde, Ghana, Curaçao, Haiti, New Zealand, four UEFA play-off winners, two intercontinental play-off winners

BCB prioritises stable coaching setup before T20 WC

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is focusing on ensuring stability in the national team's coaching panel ahead of the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup, having resolved its issues with senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin, and planning to continue with Mohammad Ashraf as the batting coach.

Last month, Salahuddin submitted his resignation citing personal reasons and expressed desire to step down following the Ireland series. However, after positive discussions with BCB high-ups, he has withdrawn his resignation, confirmed BCB cricket operations chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim. "He [Salahuddin] will continue his contract until it expires after the 2027 ICC World Cup," Fahim told The Daily Star on Thursday. Fahim added that the board is satisfied with the current coaching set-up, including Ashraf, who worked as a specialised batting coach



during the recent Ireland series.

"We are happy with the way it's going now. He [Ashraf] will also carry on,"

Fahim said.

It is understood that the BCB is considering offering Ashraf a long-term contract. Trainer Itikhairul Islam, who stepped in after strength and conditioning coach Nathan Kiely's departure during the Asia Cup T20, is also expected to receive an extension.

Ashraf has reportedly been assigned to oversee a week-long batting camp for selected national team batters starting December 6 in Mirpur. He will work alongside head coach Phil Simmons and Salahuddin, which means he will miss his coaching duties with Barishal Division in the ongoing National Cricket League.

Ashraf, who last played for the Tigers in 2013, said he was enjoying his return to the setup in a new role.

"Alhamdulillah, we had a very good series. The team played well, and I also enjoyed doing my job very much," Ashraf told The Daily Star.

He noted that the team's culture

remains intact, including the traditional winning song "Amra Korbo Joy" -- a practice revived during his captaincy.

"The culture is the same, Mashallah. The boys are also very conscious now. It existed in our time, but now they are even more aware of the need to work on fitness and skills."

Looking ahead, Ashraf believes the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), starting on December 26, will play a crucial role in preparing the players for the T20 World Cup, where Bangladesh are placed in Group C alongside West Indies, England, Nepal, and Italy.

The global event will begin on February 7, just two weeks after the BPL's conclusion. "The BPL is a huge platform. If we can ensure good wickets -- where teams score 180 to 220 regularly -- that will be excellent preparation," he said.

"If our batsmen and bowlers maintain their form, I certainly see us playing in the second round," he added.

SHORT CORNER

Sanjida's Nasrin face Nepal's APF Club today in SAFF Club C'ship

The inaugural SAFF Club Women's Championship kicks off on Friday at Dasharath Rangasala Stadium in Kathmandu, featuring five league champions from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Bhutan. Bangladesh Women's League winners Nasrin Sports Academy will face Nepal's APF Club in the second match, following the opening clash between Pakistan's Karachi FC and Bhutan's Transport United Ladies Club at the same venue.

Tigresses tune up for WBCL ahead of WC qualifiers

Bangladesh women's team players began a week-long fitness camp on Thursday, eyeing the upcoming Women's Bangladesh Cricket League (WBCL), which starts on December 15 in Rajshahi. All-rounder Shorna Akter turned heads on the first day, emerging as the fastest runner, while her energy during plyometric drills also drew attention.

Bangladesh U-17s tie series after nine-wicket loss

Sri Lanka U-17s thrashed Bangladesh U-17s by nine wickets in the second three-day match at Bashundhara Sports Complex on Thursday to tie the two-match series 1-1. Bangladesh U-17s won the earlier game by 27 runs in a tight contest at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

**Read full stories on The Daily Star website.