



Bangladesh national team cricketers were supposed to be playing official warm-up matches ahead of the T20 World Cup, set to begin on February 7 in Sri Lanka and India. Instead, the Tigers are preparing for a domestic five-day, three-team tournament -- the ODOMMO Bangladesh T20 Cup 2026 -- which begins today with Dhumketu XI facing Duronto XI. The tournament was arranged by the Bangladesh Cricket Board to fill the World Cup void after Bangladesh were replaced by Scotland following the board's refusal to send the team to India due to security concerns. However, pacer Mustafizur Rahman, whose exclusion from the Indian Premier League sparked the chain of events that led to Bangladesh's omission from the global event, appeared all smiles during yesterday's practice, set to turn out for Dhumketu XI today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Pakistan in form on the field, in limbo off it

AGENCIES

Pakistan arrived in Colombo riding a wave of confidence ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup.

A 2-1 series win over South Africa, victory in a home tri-series, and a dominant 3-0 sweep of Australia had restored belief in a team eager to silence recent doubts.

On the field, Pakistan looks settled, sharp and ready. Off the field, however, attention shifted from cricketing form to a decision that could define their campaign.

The controversy centres on whether Pakistan will finally boycott their high-profile group match against archrivals India in the global event on February 15.

The situation escalated after Bangladesh refused to play in India over security concerns and was replaced by Scotland in the aftermath of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman's exclusion from Indian Premier League franchise Kolkata Knight Riders.

Pakistan have backed Bangladesh, and although their participation in the tournament was later approved by its government, the restriction on facing India remains unresolved.

The Pakistan government has instructed the team to take part in the tournament but to boycott the India match. However, the Pakistan Cricket Board has reportedly yet to formally notify the ICC, leaving the matter clouded in uncertainty. The ICC has already issued a warning, hinting at potential future consequences.

The stakes could not be higher. A forfeit would hand India two points and leave Pakistan with no margin for error in Group A. They would then need



to beat the Netherlands, the United States, and Namibia to remain in contention for a semifinal spot.

Captain Salman Agha made it clear that the decision to finally boycott the India match lies beyond the players' control. "That is not our decision. We have to follow what our government decides," he said, while emphasising that the team remains focused on winning matches.

The government, however, has not clarified its position should Pakistan and India meet later in the tournament, potentially in a semifinal or final. Pakistan are eager to avoid a repeat of the 2024 T20 World Cup, where a shock super-over defeat to co-hosts the United States ended their campaign early.

Since then, the team has faced criticism for struggling to adapt to the evolving demands of T20 cricket. The batting unit has been under scrutiny, and last year's record -- with 21 of 34 T20 wins coming against lower-ranked teams -- did little to silence doubters.

Now, as Pakistan stand at a crossroads, their form suggests promise, but their fate may hinge more on politics than performance. Whether they take the field against India or not, the decision will shape not only their World Cup journey but also the future dynamics of international cricket.

'To change my life, I had to change myself'

Bangladesh batter *Sobhana Mostary* has turned around a difficult start to her international career, with recent ICC events underlining her growing consistency and attacking intent. Bangladesh booked qualification for this year's ICC Women's T20 World Cup in dominant fashion, going unbeaten across seven matches at the Qualifier in Nepal, with Mostary finishing as the tournament's second-highest run-getter. In an exclusive interview with *The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi*, she reflects on her early struggles, the factors behind her improvement, and more. Excerpts follow:



DS: Early in your career, there was criticism around your lack of big scores and questions over your place in the team. How challenging was that phase mentally, and what kept you going?

SM: I admit that the start of my career was not what I, the people around me, or the cricket board had expected. It was a very difficult time... I realised that if I wanted to change my life, I had to change myself.

DS: Your coaches have described you as the team's most improved batter.

SM: I am grateful to the management and especially my captain, [Nigar Sultana] Joty apu. I am thankful they never demotivated me. Sometimes getting dropped is good because it makes you realise what you need to focus on.

DS: What do you see as the biggest factors behind your recent consistency at the international level?

SM: Fitness is a factor, but the main difference is adapting to international intensity. I worked on maintaining my temperament and focus after crossing 35-40 runs. In the past, when I had to hit immediately, my fitness wasn't where it needed to be; shots that used to travel 60 yards and get caught are now going 80 yards for sixes. Practising patience against big teams like England and Australia in the last World Cup also gave me the confidence to hold the innings together.

I read an article about Rohit Sharma having a tough start to his career, but he ended up becoming a legend and winning the World Cup. I want my career to finish beautifully like his.

DS: Who have been your batting inspirations over the years?

SM: I follow South African captain Laura Wolvaardt. My childhood idol is Harmanpreet Kaur because I like her long-handle batting style, which I also use. At a younger age, I liked Tamim Iqbal. When I was nine, I once cried for a week because my father bought me an SS bat instead of a CA bat, which Tamim bhai was using. My father then got me the CA bat after a week.

DS: Finally, how did you react to the Bangladesh men's team missing out on the T20 World Cup?

SM: I was hopeful they would be able to go. I remember going to the Australia World Cup when I was young, and it was the best time of my life. Every player dreams of playing in the World Cup, so missing it is very hard to accept, but we have to accept the reality.

JAHANARA ALLEGATIONS BCB inquiry finds misconduct by Monjurul

SPORTS REPORTER

The Independent Inquiry Committee formed to examine allegations raised by former Bangladesh women's team captain Jahanara Alam has found prima facie evidence of inappropriate conduct by former selector and team manager Monjurul Islam.

The committee -- chaired by Justice Tariq ul Hakim, former judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh -- examined four specific allegations made by Jahanara. While two allegations could not be substantiated, the remaining two were found to have evidence of misconduct upon initial examination.

Following the findings, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has engaged its legal team to take appropriate action in line with its zero-tolerance policy on harassment and misconduct.

"The committee noted behaviour inconsistent with professional standards, and observed that certain actions fell within the definition of misconduct and harassment under the applicable guidelines of the Supreme Court," stated the BCB

press release, provided yesterday.

"The board is committed to pursuing appropriate actions and measures in accordance with its regulations and applicable law," it added.

The BCB also announced the formation of a Complaint Committee, headed by Rubaba Dowla, BCB director and chairperson of the Women's Wing Committee.



"Simultaneously, the BCB has strengthened its institutional safeguards through the adoption of a BCB Complaint Committee in accordance with the High Court Division's 2009 judgment," the statement further read.

"In addition, the committee has been entrusted with working towards the establishment of an independent complaint mechanism and the implementation of mandatory awareness training

to ensure a safe and respectful environment across Bangladesh cricket."

The inquiry process had faced several delays. Last year, after Jahanara had alleged in a YouTube interview with journalist Riasad Azim that she received indecent proposals from members of the national team management during the 2022 ICC Women's World Cup, soon BCB initially formed a three-member committee on November 8 -- later expanded to five members on November 12. On December 2, the board announced that the report was expected by December 20. However, in a press release on December 21, BCB confirmed it had formally received Jahanara's complaint and granted the committee an extension until January 31. The report was ultimately submitted to board president Aminul Islam Bulbul on February 2.

Jahanara had accused Monjurul of ruining her career in national colours because she did not accept his advances. She also named the late Towhid Mahmood and another board official, Sarfaraz Babu, as having approached her with indecent proposals.

MCC announces 73 law changes

STAR SPORTS DESK

As many as 73 changes in laws of cricket have been announced by the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), with the amendments set to come into effect from October this year. The MCC said the 'new edition of the Laws of Cricket', the first since 2022, has been drafted in to ensure laws are 'up to date and fit for the modern game and that they should be as inclusive as possible'. Major changes are as follows:

Mandatory completion of final over: If a wicket falls during the last over of the day in multi-day cricket, the over must be finished.

Wicketkeeper positioning clarified: Keepers will no longer be penalised for having gloves marginally ahead of the stumps during the bowler's run-up.

'Bunny hop catch' removed: Fielders going beyond the

boundary may touch the ball only once while airborne and must then land fully inside the boundary for the remainder of the play.

Laminated bats legalised in open-age cricket: Laminated bats -- made by bonding multiple pieces of wood -- are now permitted beyond junior levels.

Overthrow defined for the first time: An overthrow is now officially described as a throw at the stumps to prevent runs or attempt a run-out. Misfields near the boundary will no longer be treated as overthrows.

Fielding captain's role in deliberate short runs: The fielding side gains additional authority to decide which batter faces the next ball in cases of deliberate short running, expanding existing provisions.

Ball considered 'finally settled' sooner: The ball will be deemed settled when held by any fielder or stationary on the ground.



Bangladesh's players celebrate one of their four goals against Nepal in their last round-robin match of the SAFF Women's U-19 Championship in Pokhara yesterday. Alpi Akter's hat-trick ensured the five-time champions sealed a dominant win and finished the group stage with three straight victories. They will face India in Saturday's final.

PHOTO: SAFF