



Beyond the BOUNDARY

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

For many years, women's involvement in cricket in Bangladesh was largely confined to playing on the field. Recently, however, a new pathway has emerged as women step into officiating roles, proving that their contribution to the sport can extend further.

The shift began gaining momentum in late 2022, with the rise of female umpires in the country. At the forefront of this movement is Sathira Jakir Jessy, widely regarded as the pioneer of women's umpiring in Bangladesh. A former cricketer, Jessy chose to pursue umpiring at a time when very few women saw it as a professional option.

Her progress has been rapid. Jessy has already officiated in several major tournaments, including the ICC Women's World Cup, the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, and the ACC Women's Asia Cup. She has also stood in men's domestic and international matches, becoming one of the first Bangladeshi women to do so.

Jessy believes umpiring offers long-term opportunities for those involved in cricket. "I think women's umpiring is a very good profession," she said. "In fact, I'd say it's better than playing because a playing career has a certain age limit, but in umpiring, your value increases with experience."

She explained that the profession requires resilience and confidence. "First, you must be mentally very strong and ready for anything, whether officiating men's or women's matches," Jessy said. "If you are soft or lack confidence, you won't do well."

At the same time, she highlighted the importance of education. "A good educational background is important, especially proficiency in English," she added. "All the laws and playing conditions are written in English."

Jessy's success has already influenced other cricketers to consider officiating as a career after their playing days. National team players such as Sharmin Akhter Supta and Rumana Ahmed have completed umpiring courses, while others are exploring similar opportunities.

Another Bangladeshi official making steady progress is Mishu Chowdhury, who recently officiated at the ACC Women's Rising Teams Asia Cup in Thailand. She believes former players have a clear advantage when transitioning into umpiring.

"I believe it is much easier for former cricketers to become umpires because they understand the nuances of the game much faster than someone without a cricket background," she said.

Institutional backing has also played a role in developing this new pathway. Alongside continuing to organise training programmes, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has begun including women umpires in its payroll since 2025, with four women umpires currently on its payroll.

Chairman of the board's umpires committee, Iftekhar Rahman Mithu, said the initiative has already shown results. "We provided opportunities three years ago, and now they are officiating in World Cups and international matches," he said.

With more women joining training programmes and gaining experience, umpiring is gradually becoming a new frontier for female cricketers in Bangladesh – showing that their presence in the sport is expanding well beyond the boundary line.

Sensational Shopna rewriting the rules

Most athletes gain recognition after shining in the national colours. For **Shopna Akter Jili**, the order was reversed. Long before she played a key role in Bangladesh securing the inaugural SAFF Women's Futsal Championship in Thailand earlier this year, the teenage goalkeeper from Mymensingh had already become a phenomenon on rural football grounds. In local exhibition tournaments – popularly known as "khyap" matches – she drew crowds wherever she went. Videos of her reflex saves and lively personality spread widely online, earning her the nickname "Viral Shopna". A college student, Shopna grew up in a large family of seven siblings and is the only sportsperson among them. Her football journey began in 2017, and after showing early signs of potential she first caught wider media attention when she was selected as one of three girls to train in Portugal in 2022. Along the way, she has also navigated the patriarchal mindset that often surrounds girls' participation in sport in rural Bangladesh, doing so with confidence and flair. In a wide-ranging conversation with *The Daily Star's* Anisur Rahman and Khalid Hossain, Shopna reflects on her unusual path as she balances the realities of fame and responsibility at just 18, while reshaping perceptions of what girls can achieve and how. Excerpts from the exclusive interview follow:

The Daily Star (DS): You were reluctant to join the futsal squad at first.

Shopna Akter Jili (SAJ): At first, I felt I might not be able to adjust because the court seemed very small and the rules – especially about throwing the ball by hand – were difficult. But after about ten days of practice I understood everything.

DS: How does it feel to be credited alongside stars like Sabina Khatun and Krishna Rani Sarkar for the SAFF futsal triumph?

SAJ: It was a matter of luck for me to play alongside such seniors. They supported me a lot. If I made a mistake, they did not blame me but encouraged and helped me improve.

DS: How did your football journey begin?

SAJ: When I was studying at Nandail Panchrukhi Primary School, our senior team suddenly lost their goalkeeper. I used to play often, so a teacher asked me to try the position, and I gladly agreed. Our team later became champions in 2017, and many players from that team have gone on to play at higher levels.

DS: Did your family face criticism for allowing you to play?

SAJ: Some local people used to call my brother and say negative things, so initially he created some obstacles. But my father, mother and elder siblings always supported me, allowing me to continue.

DS: Have you faced negativity from coaches or officials?

SAJ: Some people have helped me a lot, but others have spoken negatively behind my back or spread rumours to hinder my progress. There were even attempts to push me out of the national team through false accusations, but instead of giving up, I decided to answer through my performance.



DS: Your fashion sense also makes you stand out.

SAJ: I have liked dressing up since childhood and enjoy grooming myself. But after joining futsal I feel it is better to stay simpler.

DS: You have played in many districts. Have you ever faced problems?

SAJ: I cannot even count how many districts I have played in. In places like Bogura and Nilphamari the crowd and organisation were wonderful, but once in Sirajganj the crowd was so big that I became quite scared. The biggest problem happened in Kushtia when spectators came too close to the field, and there were also some disruptive boys. Only five minutes of the match were played before organisers moved me to a safe location.

DS: How do you ensure security when travelling for matches?

SAJ: Most people in northern Bangladesh know me now. I still try to tag along a trusted female figure to accompany me and set conditions about proper safety and arrangements before agreeing to play anywhere. At the venue, usually other female players surround me, while organisers and police help manage security.

DS: How much do you earn from playing "khyap" games?

SAJ: I receive about 20,000 taka per match. My elder brothers mainly support the family, but whenever I can, I also help financially. Earlier I used to get five or six request calls every day, but it is not possible to play daily. Now I usually decline such offers.

DS: How has life changed after becoming a champion?

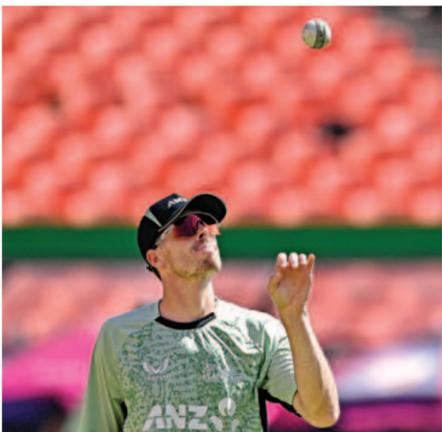
SAJ: Sometimes I am sleeping at home and four or five women enter my room just to see me once. Managing such attention can be difficult, but it's a big achievement for me. Before, I could move around freely and sometimes felt aimless. Now, as a national team player, I feel much more responsibility and think carefully before making decisions.



HISTORY BECKONS

India, NZ clash in blockbuster final

India and New Zealand will face off in a high-intensity T20 World Cup final at the world's largest cricket stadium, the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, today. While the Black Caps roared into the final with a sweeping win over in-form South Africa in the semifinal, India booked their place in the title decider with a nerve-racking win over England in a high-scoring contest.



➤ India hold the edge over New Zealand in the overall T20I head-to-head, winning 16 of the 30 matches between the two sides. The Black Caps have won 11, while three matches ended in ties.

➤ However, India are yet to beat New Zealand in T20 World Cups, having lost all three encounters so far.

➤ India and New Zealand have met three times in the finals of ICC events. The Black Caps came out on top in the Champions Trophy in 2000 and the 2021 ICC World Test Championship, while India won the most recent meeting in the 2025 Champions Trophy final.

➤ India now have the chance to become the first host

country to win the T20 World Cup, as well as the first team to successfully defend the World T20 title.

➤ Meanwhile, New Zealand are chasing their first global T20 crown, having lost their only other final against Australia in 2021.

➤ However, there are ominous signs for India. Their only defeat in this edition of the T20 World Cup came at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, where they suffered a 76-run thrashing against South Africa in the Super Eights. They also carry the heartbreak of losing the 2023 ODI World Cup final to Australia at this ground, despite entering that final on the back of 10 consecutive wins.



FORTIS
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SPORTS REPORTER

Gambian forward Essa Jallow scored twice as 10-man Fortis FC defeated defending champions Mohammedan SC 2-1 in Cumilla yesterday to rejoin Bashundhara Kings atop the Bangladesh Football League, leaving the losing side in the sixth place.

Essa opened the scoring in the 20th minute with a clever chip over Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujon Chowdhury and doubled his tally in the 51st minute with a close-range header from Pa Omar Babou's low free-kick at Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium.

Fortis were a player down in the 62nd minute when Sajed Hasan Jummon Nijhum handled a goal-bound header, conceding a penalty that Muzaffaroz, returning to the club after leaving in the first phase, converted with ease. However, Fortis held firm to claim all three points – taking their tally to 21 – and now trailing Kings only on goal difference.

95 GOALS
DAYS
 FIFA

When Mexico delivered 95

At the 1970 FIFA World Cup in Mexico, 32 matches delivered 95 goals. While 1930 and 1934 hold the record for the fewest goals (70), the game has only gotten bigger. Qatar 2022 currently sits at the top with a record-breaking 172 goals. The 2026 World Cup, featuring the highest number of 48 teams and 104 games, has every chance to set the bar even higher.

**** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'From an 11-second storm to a 13-goal epic'**



Bangladesh players moved from Sydney to Perth yesterday, ahead of Monday's must-win group game against Uzbekistan in the AFC Women's Asian Cup. Afeida Khandaker and company visited Kings Park for light walking and stretching to aid recovery following Friday's 5-0 loss to North Korea. Team physiotherapist Isnad Zaman reported that the squad recovered quickly, with hopes of advancing to the next stage still alive.

PHOTO: BFF