

Busy Eid for Bangladesh's football teams

STAR SPORTS DESK

While most people in Bangladesh will be busy over the next week, celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr with their families and friends, three separate national football teams of the country will be away from home, preparing for crucial international assignments.

The men's senior national team will leave for Vietnam tomorrow night to play an international friendly match against the hosts on March 26, on their way to Singapore where they will play their final AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture. Singapore have already booked their place in the continental tournament and Bangladesh already out, but this will mark the first international match for the men in red and green. The Singapore fixture could also mark the end of coach Javier Cabrera's tenure.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh women's under 20 team will leave on the same night for Thailand to play their maiden Women's U-20 Asian Cup, which begins on April 1. Debutants Bangladesh have been pitted in Group A against Thailand (April 1), China (April 4) and Vietnam (April 7). Eight teams from the 12-team competition will play in knockout stage.

On the morning of March 21, Bangladesh under-20 men's football team will depart for Maldives to participate in the SAFF Under-20 Championship. Mark Cox's charges will face Pakistan on March 24 and India on March 28 in three-team Group B. Group A features the four other nations of SAFF – Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Three days in, Cox sees promise in U-20s

SPORTS REPORTER

Irish coach Mark Cox has begun shaping his understanding of the Bangladesh U-20 squad after three days of training, ahead of their departure for the Maldives on March 21 for the SAFF U-20 Championship.

Last edition's runners-up Bangladesh open their campaign against Pakistan on March 24, before facing defending champions India in their final Group B match on March 28. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.

"I've been with this group now for three days. I had done some research on a few of the players and, by speaking with my coaches, I've also developed a good understanding of them," Cox said in a video message shared by the Bangladesh Football Federation after yesterday's training at the National Stadium in Dhaka.

Cox highlighted the potential within the squad, while underlining the need for greater cohesion and tactical awareness. "There is a lot of potential within Bangladeshi footballers. They play well as a team, but we need to bring them together more. They are technically sound, and now we need to give them better tactical understanding," he said.

He also pointed to the importance of building the team beyond physical attributes. "Physically, they are naturally fit, but I want to see how they blend



USA-based Ronan Sullivan chases the ball as Nazmul Huda Faysal passes it to a teammate during a training session of the under-20 team at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. The Bangladesh team will depart for Maldives on Saturday morning to participate in the SAFF U-20 Championship, which begins on March 23.

PHOTO: BFF

socially and psychologically. That's crucial for a team. It's about giving them that extra 10 percent they need to compete at international level."

The squad has also been bolstered by five overseas-based players – US-based Ronan Sullivan, Declan Sullivan, Farzad Aftab and Amir Sami, along with UK-based Ibrahim Nawaz – who have been training alongside the 28 home-based players.

Defender Moltazin Alam Himel believes the team is already benefiting from the new coach's approach. "Training has been good. We've worked hard over the last three days with a focus on the March 24 match," he said.

"The coach is guiding us on what to do and how to prepare through high-intensity sessions. We are getting ready for our first match against Pakistan," Himel added.

BCB grants partial NOCs, Mustafizur exempt from NZ T20Is

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh players are off vacationing after the ODI series triumph against Pakistan and while most of them will reassemble after the Eid-ul-Fitr to prepare for the home white-ball series against New Zealand, the plans for the six Pakistan Super League (PSL)-bound players will be different.

The Tigers will play three ODIs against New Zealand on April 17, 20 and 23 respectively and will then lock horns in a three-match T20I series against the same opponents on April 27, 29 and May 2.

Before the series, Bangladesh are set to begin a white-ball camp from March 27.

However, the PSL-contracted players – Mustafizur Rahman, Parvez Hossain Emon (Lahore Qalandars), Shoriful Islam, Nahid Rana, Tanzid Hasan Tamim (Peshawar Zalmi), and Rishad Hossain (Rawalpindi Pindiz) – will not join the camp as they have been granted No Objection Certificates (NOCs) from the Bangladesh Cricket



Board (BCB) to play in the league, set to run from March 26 to May 3.

At the time of filing this report, Tanzid's signing had not been made official, however, sources at the BCB's cricket operations had confirmed that he had been picked by Peshawar.

The BCB has granted partial NOCs to all of the players, wanting to keep majority of them available for the ODI series, as qualification for the next year's ICC ODI World Cup is still on the line.

Left-arm pacer Mustafizur, who recently shrugged off an injury scare in the third ODI against Pakistan at Mirpur, has been given a two-part NOC.

"Mustafizur has been given NOC from March 26 to April 12 and then April 24 to March 3. Mustafizur will be available for the ODI series. He will be exempted from the T20I series as we look at other bowling options," a BCB official informed The Daily Star.

Tanzid, Shoriful, Rana and Rishad were handed NOCs till April 12, and will be available for selection for both ODI and T20I series.

Meanwhile, Parvez was granted NOC till April 21 as he is only being eyed for T20Is for now.

BCB cricket operations chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim had previously mentioned in a media brief that the board will protect its interest in regards to NOC but at the same time would grant it if it feels the players can gain valuable experience from competing in franchise leagues.

With the 2-1 series win over Pakistan, Bangladesh have climbed one spot to ninth in the ICC ODI rankings. Although the team won't leap any higher even if they win 3-0 against New Zealand, the team has the chance to bridge the gap with England, who are currently eighth and leading Bangladesh by nine rating points.

The Blackcaps are set to arrive in Dhaka on April 13.



Ruthless Japan set up final with Australia

A ruthless and clinical Japan powered past South Korea 4-1 on Wednesday, booking their place in the Women's Asian Cup final, where they will face Australia on Saturday. While Australia have battled through a series of hard-fought matches to reach the final, Japan's journey has been nothing short of dominant. They have scored an astonishing 28 goals across five games, conceding just once; a remarkable run that highlights both their attacking firepower and defensive solidity.

PHOTO: AFP

84 GOALS
DAYS



From goal glut to goal drought

A total of 84 goals were scored in 18 matches at the 1938 World Cup in France, giving an average of 4.67 goals per game. However, this is not the highest goals-per-match record in World Cup history. The 1954 tournament in Switzerland produced a record average of 5.38 goals per match. In contrast, the lowest average – 2.21 goals per game – was recorded in the 1990 World Cup in Italy.

****Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Oliver Kahn: The final sigh of a fallen titan'**

Senegal seeks inquiry into AFCON title removal

REUTERS, DAKAR

Senegal's government yesterday called for an international investigation into what it said was suspected corruption within the Confederation of African Football (CAF) after the country was stripped of its 2025 Africa Cup of Nations title.

CAF's appeals board ruled on Tuesday that Senegal had "forfeited" the January final by briefly leaving the pitch in protest during stoppage time, converting a 1-0 extra-time win into a 3-0 default defeat in favour of hosts Morocco.

In a statement, the government condemned CAF's ruling as "grossly illegal and profoundly unjust" and called for the opening of an international independent investigation to address what it described as suspicions of corruption inside CAF's leadership.

CAF did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Senegalese Football Federation earlier said it would appeal the decision to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, calling the ruling unprecedented and unacceptable and vowing to file its challenge in Lausanne "as soon as possible."

AGENCIES

Paris Saint-Germain, Real Madrid, and Arsenal advanced to the Champions League quarterfinals, while Sporting CP completed a major comeback to end Bodo/Glimt's remarkable run.

PSG delivered the most dominant performance of the night, defeating Chelsea 3-0 at Stamford Bridge and progressing 8-2 on aggregate.

The tie was effectively decided early when Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored in the sixth minute after capitalising on a defensive mistake. Bradley Barcola added a second with a well-taken finish, and substitute Senny Mayulu scored in the second half to complete the win.

Chelsea, already trailing heavily from the first leg, were unable to respond. PSG's overall control and efficiency highlighted their return to strong form as they move into the next round.

Manchester City were also eliminated after losing 2-1 at home to Real Madrid, going out 5-1 on aggregate.

Real had built a commanding

lead in the first leg, and the second match quickly tilted further in their favor when City's Bernardo Silva was sent off for a handball that denied a clear goal.

Vinicius Junior converted the resulting penalty. Although Erling Haaland equalized before halftime, Madrid remained in control and added another late goal to secure the win. The result marked another instance of Real Madrid knocking City out of the competition.

Arsenal progressed with a 2-0 victory over Bayer Leverkusen, sealing a 3-1 aggregate win. Eberechi Eze opened the scoring with a long-range effort late in the first half. Declan Rice added a second goal after the break to confirm Arsenal's place in the quarter-finals. The team created additional chances but were unable to extend the margin further. Their overall performance was solid and consistent across both legs.

The most notable comeback came from Sporting CP, who overturned a 3-0 first-leg deficit against Bodo/Glimt by winning 5-0



after extra time. Gonçalo Inacio and Pedro Gonçalves scored in regular time, and a late penalty from Luis Suárez leveled the aggregate score to force extra time.

Maxi Araujo then gave Sporting the lead in the tie early in extra time, and Rafael Nel scored a fifth goal late on to complete the turnaround.