



With his arms wrapped around his opponent, two-time defending champion (L) Bagha Sharif attempts to choke Rashed Boli during the final of the 117th edition of the historic Abdul Jabbar Bolikhela at Laldighi Maidan in Chattogram yesterday. Sharif, hailing from Homna in Cumilla, defeated Rashed after a gruelling 40-minute battle to secure his third consecutive title. A total of 101 wrestlers (bolis) from across the country participated in this year's competition.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Stalled growth, steep climb

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh women's cricket remains trapped in a cycle of stagnation, with a fragile talent pipeline failing to produce adequate replacements. This lack of depth, resulting in the selectors rotating a core group of only 20-22 players, has hampered international performance.

The recall of Sarmin Sultana exemplifies this issue. After a six-and-a-half-year hiatus, she scored just 42 runs in the just-concluded three-match WODI series against Sri Lanka.

However, the 32-year-old was retained for the T20 squad – replacing out-of-form opener Farzana Haque Pinky – despite having gone through a lean patch, including modest returns in the Asia Cup Rising Stars tournament (93 runs in five matches), the Emerging team's series against South Africa (40 in three), and the National Cricket League (126 runs in seven innings for Rajshahi).

Chief selector Sazzad Ahmed Shipon admitted that, currently, only Sharmin Akter Supta, Nigar Sultana Joty, and Sobhana Mostary are producing mentionable international performances. He explained that Sarmin was picked for her "better strike rate".

"We are trying to change the style of play and bring in new players. That's why Sarmin was included in ODIs... We expected more from her, but that hasn't happened yet. Let's see if things improve in T20s," Shipon told The Daily Star after



PHOTO: BCB

Bangladesh's seven-wicket defeat to Sri Lanka in yesterday's series-deciding third WODI in Rajshahi, admitting that finalising the squad for June-July's T20 World Cup in England and Wales remains a challenging task.

"The stress is about making the right selection at the right moment. The squad has to be submitted early, which makes things complicated," he said.

The pace bowling department is another area of concern, with limited options beyond Marufa Akter and Fariha Islam Trisna. "It would be wrong to say it's not bothering us," Shipon added. "We are currently playing one pacer.

We still have to decide how many pacers to take and how many to play in England conditions."

Batting coach Nasiruddin Faruque attributes this stagnation to structural failures. With the Women's Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League delayed – due to the disputes between the previous board and clubs – and the

Women's Bangladesh Premier League postponed until July, players lack the sustained competitive exposure needed to develop. The last domestic competition – the Women's National Cricket League T20 – was held in November last year.

"In the Premier League, out of nine teams, only three or four are competitive. When bowlers are spread across teams, each side ends up with only one or two quality bowlers, which reduces overall standards," Faruque said.

He emphasised that batting development requires sustained exposure to competitive matches and quality wickets. "Producing a batter is a lengthy process. Players need to play many matches and develop the habit of scoring runs.

"If someone comes in 50-60 percent ready, you can develop them further. But if they come in at 10 percent, progress becomes very difficult," he explained.

Faruque noted that while the Tigresses are experiencing "slow progress", they continue to lag behind rivals like India and Sri Lanka, who benefit from stronger domestic and school-level structures.

For now, Bangladesh women's cricket remains caught between limited resources and growing expectations. Ultimately, sustainable success cannot be manufactured through temporary fixes. Unless the domestic structure is prioritised and revitalised, Bangladesh may find themselves perpetually playing catch-up.

"To be honest, in the current national team, nobody except [Sharmin Akter] Supta, [Nigar Sultana] Joty and Sobhana [Mostary] have performances worth mentioning in international cricket"

Chief selector
Sazzad Ahmed Shipon

"Overall, there is progress, but it is slow. Other teams are moving forward faster because of their structure."

Batting coach
Nasiruddin Faruque

Tigers using NZ T20Is to fix ODI puzzle

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Bangladesh will take on visiting New Zealand in a three-match T20I series starting Monday in Chattogram, following their 2-1 ODI series victory. However, the team management's focus appears to extend beyond just the shortest format.

Spin bowling coach Mushtaq Ahmed hinted that Bangladesh are still searching for answers in key positions ahead of the 2027 ODI World Cup. That long-term planning influenced the inclusion of new faces Ripon Mondol and Abdul Gaffar Saqlain in the T20I squad, as part of efforts to build bench strength.

"T20 is a great format for development. Bringing in players like Saqlain and Ripon is important, but you want to win matches, so it's about finding right balance," Mushtaq said at a press conference yesterday.

Although Bangladesh missed out on the 2026 T20 World Cup, they have already qualified for the 2028 edition. Still, Mushtaq suggested that "with no T20 World Cup coming up soon, it's a good time to develop players for the 50-over format".

"Bangladesh cricket is moving in right direction... Performances in T20s can build confidence and help players transition into ODIs. It's a useful



PHOTO: BCB

platform to strengthen the bench."

New recruit Saqlain impressed during practice, troubling left-handed opener Tanzid Tamim with movement away from the bat. He also showcased his hitting ability in the Emerging Asia Cup. With Bangladesh lacking a pace-bowling all-rounder in ODIs, the team management is keen to assess Saqlain's potential.

Ripon, meanwhile, has shown promise with his death-over bowling, an area the team is eager to develop further.

There were also discussions around including Mosaddek Hossain in ODIs, but those plans appear to have been

shelved. Bangladesh fielded five top-order batters in the last two ODIs, exposing a lack of depth in the middle order. Mahidul Islam Ankon is yet to get a chance despite being a middle-order option, while Shamim Hossain remains on the sidelines.

Addressing these gaps will be a priority, and the upcoming series may serve as a testing ground to improve balance in the ODI squad.

However, it prompts a broader question about Bangladesh's long-term plan for the next T20 World Cup, especially as the challenges in this shortest format appear to run deeper.

SAFF WOMEN'S C'SHIP

Thailand tune-ups with three-peat target

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team will undergo a two-week training camp and then head to Thailand for two tune-up matches, aiming to secure a third successive title at the upcoming SAFF Women's Championship, scheduled for May 25 to June 6 in Goa, India.

"We do not want to miss out on a hat-trick of titles, which is a rare opportunity," BFF women's wing chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron said yesterday.

The women in red and green have been in training since the conclusion of the AFC Women's Asian Cup and the AFC Women's U-20 Asian Cup. On Friday, the squad travelled to Chattogram for intensive sessions at the Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ), where they began training yesterday.

May 28: Bangladesh vs Maldives

May 31: Bangladesh vs India

June 3: Semifinals

June 6: Final

Kiron confirmed that Peter Butler's 29-member squad will return to the capital in early May before departing for Thailand. There, they are scheduled to play two closed-door practice matches against a Women's Premier League side and a second-tier club, followed by their flight to Goa, tentatively on May 21.



Mexico lead CONCACAF charge

Teams from the CONCACAF region (North and Central America and the Caribbean) have collectively made 46 World Cup appearances so far. Mexico lead the way with 17 appearances. The United States sit second with 11, while Costa Rica, in third, have featured six times on the world stage.

**Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Confetti rain, Kempes, and the dream of a captive nation.'



Aminul urges Abahani to reclaim lost pride

SPORTS REPORTER

State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque visited Abahani in Dhanmondi yesterday, reaffirming his commitment to keeping the country's sports arena free from political influence and urging the club's officials to reclaim their lost pride with proper management.

The visit was the first by a government high-up since the club was vandalised and trophies looted on August 5, 2024, following the ouster of the Awami League-led government.

Abahani have since struggled to continue sporting activities, especially football, due to the absence of key directors who previously provided financial support.

"The current government wants to ensure an environment where clubs can operate with complete independence," Aminul said after meeting Abahani directors, including Tanveer Mazharul Islam Tanna, Anjan Chowdhury Pintu, Sheikh Bashir Ahmed and Fahim Sinha. Mohammedan director-in-charge Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan and Tamim Iqbal, president of the BCB ad hoc committee, were also present.

Aminul also urged organisers and players to maintain cordial relations off the field and called on Abahani officials to revamp management. Officials requested protection from political labelling of sponsors, while the minister was later honoured with a jersey.

'Strong bonds, competition driving NZ cricket'

Will Young was among the more experienced players in an otherwise inexperienced New Zealand ODI squad that suffered a 2-1 defeat in the recently concluded three-match series against hosts Bangladesh. Arriving in the country after a successful tour of India, Young and his side encountered tougher batting conditions and a hostile pace attack. The New Zealand number three spoke about the conditions, Bangladesh's bowling threats, and more in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): How good was Nahid Rana in the ODI series?
Will Young (WY): He's got the tools to be a great bowler – consistently around 150kph, even in this heat. He moves the ball in the air as well and gets good bounce. So, he's got plenty of attributes there that suggest that he's going to be a really good bowler for many years.

DS: Are Bangladesh more threatening in these conditions or in pace-friendly wickets?
WY: It's tough to say because we haven't faced this attack in New Zealand. But they're clearly building towards the 2027 ODI World Cup. South African conditions might be closer to New Zealand's, and their balance looks good. With some pace in the wickets, they could be a real threat – and they certainly are in

this [white-ball] series.

DS: You played when Bangladesh recorded their most famous Test win at Mount Maunganui. What was that like?
WY: I got fifties in both innings [laughs]. Ebadot [Hossain] took six in the second innings. The conditions weren't what we expected – it was very hot. We had four seamers and Rachin [Ravindra] was our only spinner. It was disappointing, but it serves as a reminder to better assess conditions and pick a balanced side that can adapt to different conditions.

DS: Winning the World Test Championship – how significant was it?
WY: It meant a lot. It was early in my career, but I was in the squad in Southampton. I suppose the

likes of Tim [Southee], Trent [Boult] and Wags [Neil Wagner] in that bowling attack, along with batters like Kane [Williamson] and Rosco [Ross Taylor]... they've played so much cricket together, and it culminated in winning that World Test Championship. It was thoroughly deserved.

DS: Ricky Ponting spoke about New Zealand's close-knit cricket community. Your thoughts?
WY: I hadn't heard that, but we have six domestic teams, only 16 contracted cricketers per team in the domestic circuit, and 20 contracted national players. So, there are about 120 professional cricketers in New Zealand. There's a lot of information sharing, healthy competition, and strong relationships. Players also bring experience back from franchise cricket, which helps the whole system grow.

****Read full interview on The Daily Star's website**



Striker Dorielton Gomes once again proved decisive as his early goal helped Bashundhara Kings secure a 1-0 victory over Brothers Union in their Bangladesh Football League fixture at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday. The Brazilian, who took his tally to 14 goals, helped the five-time champions to three-point lead at the top.

PHOTO: BFF