

Butler's charges fly for Thailand with eyes on SAFF defence

STAR SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh head coach Peter Butler on Wednesday announced a 23-member final squad for the upcoming SAFF Women's Championship, set to be held in India from May 25. Two-time defending champions Bangladesh will undergo a 15-day preparation camp in Thailand, leaving for Bangkok today before flying to Goa on May 21.

The Bangladesh team will play two practice matches in Thailand – against top-tier club Kasem Bundit University FC on May 10 and second-tier outfit Bangkok Sports School on May 17.

Butler and his charges will begin their South Asian campaign against Maldives on May 28 before facing five-time champions and hosts India on May 31.

SQUAD

Rupna, Mili, Swarna, Halima, Shiuli, Afeida (captain), Surma, Kohati, Suravi Akter, Shamsunnahar Sr, Unnati, Arpita, Momita, Maria, Monika, Ripa, Ritu Porna, Umehla, Sagorika, Tohura, Anika Rania, Prity, Shamsunnahar Jr

DROPPED

Sapna Rani, Munki Akter, Sinha Jahan, Alpi Akter, Airin Khatun, Most Sultana

NEW FACES

Arpita Biswas and Momita Khatun

"Nabiran has an ACL injury. She wants to play, but she's not 100 percent fit. Sapna and Munki had poor performances and were not performing at the desired level. Hopefully, one day they will realise that I'm doing them a favour. So they are being left out of the group. They're not training with the group for valid reasons -- poor performance."

Bangladesh coach Peter Butler



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh's veteran wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim, alongside left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, looks skyward during their practice session in Mirpur yesterday -- perhaps gauging whether overcast conditions could influence their upcoming two-match Test series against Pakistan. Rain played a part in the Tigers' last white-ball series against New Zealand. And similar conditions could turn the Pakistan series into a battle of pace, bounce, and swing -- factors Bangladesh exploited to beat the same opponents in Rawalpindi in a Test series in 2024. Part of the World Test Championship, the Pakistan series begins tomorrow, with the first Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Will Tigers revisit Pindi template in Mirpur?

SPORTS REPORTER

Nahid Rana appeared at the Mirpur centre wickets near the evening yesterday and visualised bowling on the green track, ahead of his team's upcoming two Tests against Pakistan. Visualisation has sort of become a habit for the Bangladesh speedster, and he would not doubt have those memories from Rawalpindi in 2024, when Bangladesh put down a statement with their pace attack during a 2-0 series win.

The surface may not remain as green on Friday once trimmed, but it is evident that the home side are banking on their primary strength: pace.

Before that Rawalpindi Tests, Bangladesh's pace attack had a cumulative strike rate of 98.3 against Pakistan. During the series, that improved sharply to 48.4, with Hasan Mahmud, Taskin Ahmed, Rana and Shoriful Islam sharing 21 wickets. In the second innings of the second Test, Rana, Hasan and Taskin combined for all 10 wickets -- a first in Bangladesh's Test history.

That series win became a template, as Bangladesh had prepared wickets with a little bounce and pace in the most recent ODI series against Pakistan at home. At the beginning of this cycle, the Tigers are eager

to get wins under their belt and are going for the tried and tested.

With pace being pitted against pace, just like in Rawalpindi, Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons was asked which pace unit would fare better.

"I think we have two good fast bowling units... and two good spinning units... it's about who take hold of the important moments," Simmons said at yesterday's press conference, warning that on a "good cricket pitch", it is the batters who will have to "bat long and get big scores."

"We've got to put in place how we bat against them. You want to be higher in the rankings, so you have to play against all these top-class bowlers."

The former West Indies allrounder tried to downplay the effect of that last Test series in Rawalpindi. "It doesn't matter what happened then.

"It doesn't matter what happened then [in Rawalpindi]. Yes, you keep it in your mind, it gives you a boost inside that you won the last game, but it's a new game, it's a new place."

Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons



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There are suggestions that the visitors may opt for a lone spinner in Noman Ali for the Mirpur Test due to the sporting conditions in store, which is usually not the norm in Bangladesh.

Pakistan pace spearhead Shaheen Afridi said the Pakistan bowling unit will be up to the challenge.

"Bangladesh have always prepared spin tracks at home in the past. Home teams always utilise their own conditions," Shaheen said.

"We also used home conditions for our spinners because visiting teams struggled against spin. Now, the track is green. Our bowlers are ready for the challenge. We know how to use these conditions to take wickets and win games for Pakistan."

BCB sets councillor nomination deadline

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) ad hoc committee decided to invite nominations for 192 councillors from various associations, clubs, and organisations for the upcoming elections, with a deadline set for May 16.

The decision was taken during the fourth meeting of the BCB ad hoc committee, held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

"... the names of 192 councillors will be invited under three categories, pursuant to Article 12.7 of the BCB Constitution," a press release said.

In the last BCB elections, held on October 6 last year, a total of 192 councillors from three different categories were enlisted in the final voters' list. Among them, 71 were from regional and district cricket associations, 76 from the club category, and 55 from other organisations.

However, that election was marred by controversies, leading to an investigation into alleged irregularities. Following the probe, the National Sports Council (NSC) dissolved the Aminul Islam Bulbul-led board on April 7, subsequently appointing an 11-member ad hoc committee headed by Tamim Iqbal.

Additionally, the board will form a committee to assess applicants for 64 district coach positions through theoretical and practical tests. It also approved a three-month contract extension for match referees and umpires whose terms ended on April 30.



Players and officials of Chattogram City FC, champions of Bangladesh Championship League, celebrate their title following the last match at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. The port city outfit lost the last match 2-0 against runners-up City Club, yet finished six points ahead with a total of 42 points in 18 matches. Both clubs will be eligible to play in the Bangladesh Football League -- the top-tier professional league, next season.

PHOTO: BFF

Uzbekistan first to unveil provisional WC squad

AGENCIES

Uzbekistan became the first side to announce a preliminary squad for the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026 -- set to be held across the USA, Mexico, and Canada from June 11.

Preparations for their historic debut will ramp up with a three-week training camp in Tashkent from May 6-26, with head coach Fabio Cannavaro naming a 40-man squad. The camp will include a series of closed-door friendlies against domestic Super League clubs. They will announce the final 26-man squad on June 2.

35 DAYS TO GO



Germans lead the final race

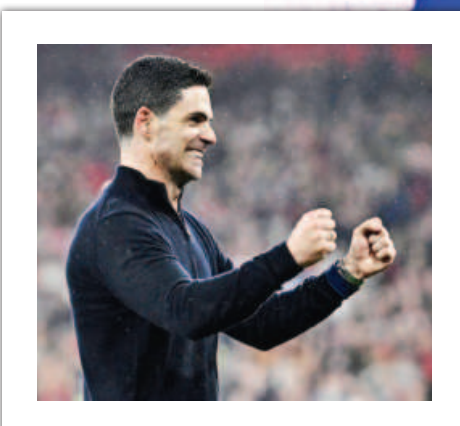
The eight teams that have won the World Cup have collectively appeared in 35 finals. Germany lead with eight final appearances, followed by Brazil with seven. Italy and Argentina have each played six finals. France have appeared four times, Uruguay twice, while England and Spain have reached the final once each.

**Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Pele's dummy: The art of deception'

Arsenal end 20-year wait

STAR SPORTS DESK

Bukayo Saka's close-range finish in the first half of the second leg of their semifinal against Atletico Madrid sealed a 1-0 win on the night (2-1 on aggregate), sending Arsenal into the Champions League final for the first time in 20 years on Tuesday. The moment sparked wild celebrations at the Emirates Stadium among players, fans, and even coach Mikel Arteta -- a scene that underlined what it meant for the Gunners. Leading the Premier League title race, Arsenal now stand on the brink of a prestigious double: domestic glory and European supremacy.



** The showpiece in Budapest on May 30 will be only the second Champions League final in Arsenal's history; their previous appearance ended in a 2-1 defeat to Barcelona in 2006.

** The 20-year gap between Arsenal's two finals is the longest by any team in the European Cup/Champions League since Atletico Madrid (40 years, 2014), and the longest by an English side since Liverpool (2005).

** Tuesday marked Arsenal's 225th match in the European Cup/Champions League -- more than any club yet to win the trophy, ahead of Atletico Madrid (192).

** Of the 44 instances of teams playing 14 or more matches in a single Champions League campaign, Arsenal are the only side to remain unbeaten through their first 14 games.



PHOTO: ARSENAL