

Let us begin with milestones and high points of April.

PM awards the women's team

The Bangladesh National Women's Team and the U14 boys were given a reception by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the occasion of Pahela Baishakh at the Ganabhaban. The prime minister invited successful athletes marking the Bengali New Year. On behalf of the U-16 girls' national team, the Bangladesh National Women's Team captain Sabina Khatun received an award from the Prime Minister.

I would like to mention here that the Bangladesh National Women's Team, riding on its performance, has advanced 11 places in the latest FIFA rankings. The Bengal girls are now ranked 103rd among 177 nations with 1003 points up from their previous 114th with 987 points. Among the South Asian nations, Bangladesh is third trailing India and Nepal.

China Trip of U16

I would like to congratulate the Bangladesh U16 girls, who have come back after another brilliant performance in China. A team, which consists of 70% of U14 players, beat a physically superior Chinese outfit. The U16 team, which has already qualified for the AFC finals in September, played five matches in as many days beating the Shaanxi provincial U14 team in both their encounters. Against the Chinese U14 team, the Bengal girls lost one, drew one and won one. Three wins, one draw and one loss in five matches, is a great achievement especially given that they were playing against one of the global power houses of football.

It was important to note that the girls learned from every match and from each of their mistakes continuously improving their game from one match to the next. Hence the girls were able to turn around by the end of the tour and beat the same team that beat them on the first match of the trip between April 20 and April 25.

This was another great opportunity to prepare the girls for what is to come later this year. The Bangladesh U16 women's team has already qualified for the U17 AFC finals scheduled in Thailand for September. The same tournament will also act as the Women's U17 World Cup qualifiers. That brings us to the next item.

AFC Final/U17 World Cup qualifiers

We knew from the onset that this would be tough but we had also hoped that the draw would not place us in such a tough group. However, the AFC final draw proved otherwise. Bangladesh has been placed with in Group B with Australia, Japan and North Korea. Group A has South Korea, China, Thailand and Laos.

The top two teams of each group will advance to the semi-finals.

As mentioned, the competition also serves as the qualifiers for the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in Uruguay 2018, with the top three teams set to represent Asia.

Bangladesh in Gazprom's Football for Friendship

For the first time ever, Bangladesh will take part in Gazprom's 5th Season of the Football for Friendship Programme which will be held in Russia from June 26 to July 3, 2017.

The tournament will promote the upcoming FIFA Confederations Cup Russia 2017.

Bangladesh is one of the 64 countries participating in the event.

One U12 boy player, has been chosen, to act as an ambassadors from Bangladesh in Gazprom's, Football for Friendship, FIFA Confederations Cup Russia 2017.

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) hosted a trial on April 16, 2017 for selecting the player.

Bangladesh Football Federation's technical and strategic director identified the player out of more than two hundred keen young promising footballers.

Sixth grader Golam Rabbi, son of Bashir Uddin Khan, of Narayanganj's Alam Chand High School was the promising youngster.

U18 National Tournament

The U18 nationals got underway at Bangabandhu National Stadium with eight zonal champions — Dhaka, BKSP, Barisal, Satkhira, Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Rangpur.

The preliminary rounds were held in 8 regions of Bangladesh from March 9 to March 18.

Academies

I would like to take this opportunity to focus on elite player development - academies given the widespread interest and questions regarding a sustained camp for footballers of age various groups. I am happy to say here that the Bangladesh Football Federation has put together detailed plans for setting up academies at all age group levels beginning with under 12 boys and girls up to U19 players and beyond, which will be starting shortly.

The plan will include comprehensive Football Development and Education programmes for young expiring gifted and talented Footballers.

U12

The U12-year olds will see their time evenly split between skill acquisition, technical development and game training education programmes. The federation plans to start the academy with 25-35 players for both boys and girls. In terms of development support, the federation proposes skill acquisition and technical coaches, medical provision, a chef and a holistic education programme. The boys and the girl's programmes will be managed separately.

U14

The U14 segment will see its primary focus switch to game training from a real focus of skill acquisition which will still have a focus. This age group academy is envisioned to take place in Khulna with about 25-30 boys along with another 25-30 boys of the U16 age group. Appropriate resources with technical staff, physical conditioning staff, goalkeeping coach, medical provision and a holistic education programmes.

U16

The Game Training Phase, Game Understanding and Physical Conditioning continues to be the focus for the next age level. With a continued emphasis on the players technical development.

Intense days for the U16 girls is planned to take place in Savar to compliment the current BFF House where they are accommodated right now.

U19

For the next three years, these players will fully concentrate on all the aspects associated to game training phase. The players will also experience high level football conditioning components, as they are prepared to enter the senior division and performance phase football.

U23 and the Senior National Team

The federation also envisions camps for preparing the U23 and senior players for the up and coming competitions. The U23's will be looking forward to the AFC U23 Tournament in Palestine in earlier July.

Goalkeeping

This programme will have all academy goalkeepers working with their age group squads. Goalkeeping will focus on the Technical, Skill Acquisition, Physical Conditioning and improving tactical proficiency in goalkeeper specific areas.

Game centred principles will be built into each team session by the coaches, to allow the goalkeepers to properly marry these techniques into the game.

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