Facing Islamist threats, Bangladesh girls forced to cancel football matches



Asha Roy, 17, was excited to take part in a women's football tournament, but her hopes were dashed as Islamists forced the organisers to cancel the match in northern Bangladesh.

Shortly before the game began earlier this month, the Islami Andolan Bangladesh group announced a protest rally against the event in Rangpur region, saying it was un-Islamic.

Fearing trouble, local police stepped in and the women's team members were asked to return to their home for their safety.An interim administration is currently in charge but there are concerns that Islamist groups, which had been pushed to the fringes, have become emboldened again.

The women's football match was the third to be cancelled in northern Bangladesh in less than two weeks due to the objections of religious hardliners.In the Dinajpur area, roughly 70km (43 miles) west of Rangpur, Islamists protesting against a game clashed with locals who supported it, leaving four people injured For girls such as Asha Roy, who come from rural areas, football and other sports are a source of female empowerment and a way out of poverty. Those who shine can be selected to play for sponsored teams and some go on to represent Bangladesh internationally.

Many girls have been inspired to take up football thanks to the success of the national women's team, who are considered heroes after winning two consecutive South Asia Football Championships in recent years.