

Dhaka, June 2: Former national midfielder Arif Khan Joy retired from football after a 17-year domestic career today when he played his last match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Joy, the robust defensive midfielder who earned fame for his strong tackling and distribution, captained this year's champions Abahani against archrivals Mohammedan in both side's last match in the Bangladesh League and was substituted shortly before the break.

Joy, who has played for both clubs, was given a flowery farewell beside the pitch with other clubs joining.

Bangladesh Football Federation also presented him a crest and flower bouquet with vice president Badal Roy, members Harunur Rashid, Fazlur Rahman Babul, Hasanuzzaman Khan Babloo and Sheikh Mohammed Aslam being present.

Joy, who started his Premier League career for PWD SC in 1993, joined Abahani in 1995 but left for Mohammedan next season. He moved onto Muktijoddha and Brothers Union before returning to the sky-blues.

He first played for the national team in 2003 under Austrian coach George Kottan and played a pivotal role in Bangladesh's SAFF Championship triumph in the same year.

Joy, who captained the national team in 2005-06, retired from international football in 2008.

"It's a natural process that every footballer will retire. So it's not wondering. I am very happy with the things I have got from football," told an emotional Joy after kicking the ball for the last time.

"I led the national side and this year, I am particularly happy for Abahani's hat-trick title in the professional league. These are my achievements. But my dream remains that one day, Bangladesh will play in the World Cup and like other countries, the Bangladeshi flag will also be hoisted in the country," said Joy, who is planning on starting a football academy for kids.