



## Leicester City's Hamza now Bangladesh's too

**"Hi everyone. It's Hamza here. So happy that everything's over the line. Can't wait to play for Bangladesh. Hopefully see you guys soon."**  
Hamza Choudhury's video message

"Hamza Choudhury has officially made the decision to represent Bangladesh at international level. The Leicester City player has been flying the flag for Bangladeshi footballers everywhere since making his Premier League debut in 2017.

"Back then, Choudhury became the first player of Bangladeshi heritage to play in the top flight of English football. But today's news marks the first time in history a Premier League footballer will play for the Bengal Tigers.

"Every step Choudhury has taken in his career has led him to this milestone moment. From annual visits to his local village back home in Bangladesh as a kid, to captaining and winning the FA Cup with his boyhood club, Leicester City. In an exclusive interview with VERSUS, the 27-year-old discusses his decision to represent Bangladesh, what can be done to make football more accessible for South Asian footballers and the responsibility that comes with being the first Bangladeshi to play in the Premier League."

HAMZA CHOUDHURY'S SOCIAL MEDIA POST

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All the players and the whole nation have been waiting for him. It is a very positive news for the national team and the nation. Hamza plays in the world's strongest league, EPL, for Leicester City and his decision to represent Bangladesh will encourage other overseas and local players.

**TOPU BARMAN**  
National team defender

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Alhamdulillah, good news. I've been waiting for more than one-and-a-half years for this news to come. He will definitely be a great addition and a big boost for the team. I'm very happy for him and Bangladesh, I think he himself is feeling honoured and even more proud to represent Bangladesh now.

JAMAL BHUIYAN, Bangladesh captain

## Champions Trophy to be in hybrid model

AFP, KARACHI

India will play next year's Champions Trophy matches on neutral ground after refusing to visit tournament host and arch-rival Pakistan, the International Cricket Council said Thursday following weeks of wrangling.

The announcement ended a month-long standoff after India told the ICC it would not send its team to Pakistan because of security fears and political tensions.

Under the agreement, Pakistan will also play in upcoming ICC tournaments hosted by India in other countries, yet to be decided.

"India and Pakistan matches hosted by either country at ICC Events during the 2024-2027 rights cycle will be played at a neutral venue, the ICC Board confirmed," said a statement released by the council.

"This will apply to the upcoming ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 (hosted by Pakistan)."

PCB had earlier refused to play the Champions Trophy on a hybrid model but backed down after settling on neutral venues for both sides.

The agreement will extend to the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 hosted by India, and the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

The Champions Trophy will also feature Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

## Denied as a player, Munna finds success as coach in Malaysia

ANISUR RAHMAN

Mohammad Moynul Islam Munna, a Bangladeshi coach who has carved out a career in Malaysia, hardly had a moment to spare as he shuffled from court to court, giving instructions to his Malaysian students who are taking part in ongoing Yonex-Sunrise Bangladesh International Challenge at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium in Paltan.

Munna, a former junior level shuttler from Bangladesh, arrived in Dhaka as a coach of the seven-member Malaysian contingent taking part in the competition. His arrival set a rare precedent in the country's badminton, as a coach from Bangladesh, a nation very much in the backwaters of the sport, training a team from Malaysia, who are a leading force in badminton globally, is unusual to say the least.

Munna's incredible journey from being a Bangladeshi shuttler to a coach in Malaysia began from a rejection he suffered around a decade ago. In 2014, he was denied participation in the National Badminton Championship held in Sylhet, a rejection that disillusioned him and made him search for opportunities overseas.

"I wasn't allowed to take part in the 2014 national championship at the eleventh hour. After that, I broke down mentally and left the country the next year," Munna told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

With the help of his coach at the Knit Concern Club Ohiduzzaman Raju, who is also a former national badminton team player, Munna left for Malaysia in 2015 to try his luck as a coach.

The going was not easy for Munna at first, he had to toil hard to establish himself as a coach in Malaysia.

But his hard-work paid off as he became the head coach of the Mauritius badminton team in 2022, a post he held till this year's June before returning to Malaysia to join a prominent academy.

"They [Malaysians] did not accept me initially because I was a coach from Bangladesh. I had to prepare myself over



one-and-half years. I am now the senior assistant coach of New Vision Badminton Academy after working there as a junior team coach," said the Level-1 badminton coach.

Even though he is no longer involved in the local badminton scene, Munna felt sad at seeing Bangladeshi shuttlers, one after another, crashing out of the competition, knowing very well from personal experience the many difficulties and challenges faced by the badminton players from Bangladesh.

"As a professional coach, I must support my players. But of course, it feels bad when you see the Bangladeshi players getting

eliminated one after another.

"Bangladeshi players like [Khandokar Abdus] Soad, [Abdul Hamid] Lukman, Gourab [Singha] and [Abdul Jahir] Tanvir are talented but they don't get proper training round the year, neither from the federation nor the government. But, if you look at other countries, they have proper training facilities, dormitories and even provide salaries.

"The Bangladeshi players bear their own costs. They play for hire in localities but don't get to play in international tournaments. Everyone just wants to play for hire. It is impossible to progress if you don't have a big aim and don't play in international tournaments."

The lad from Sylhet's Baraikandi area, who once represented Bangladesh at junior international level, said, "Bangladeshi players are not just lagging behind in training, they are also lagging behind in technique, fitness and speed.

"There are good local coaches in Bangladesh and they need to be utilised. You will never get any result on the back of only one or two months' training ahead of international events."

Comparing the badminton scene in Malaysia and Bangladesh, Munna said, "Malaysians start playing badminton from childhood with their family investing a lot on them before the sponsors come in to support the players.

"Our players in Malaysia practice six days a week except Sunday. How can you expect something good from the Bangladeshi players on the back of only one month's training," said Munna, expressing desire to work in Bangladesh subject to getting a suitable offer.

## NCL T20 league phase ends with plenty of promise

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Cricket League (NCL) T20 has provided a laudable setting for Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to gauge performances in the shortest format with plenty of new names coming into focus and selectors getting to see players perform specific roles.

The tournament itself carries weight in terms of readying players for international cricket. In the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), the main goal of franchises is not to develop talents to serve the greater interest of Bangladesh cricket, but to field the team that gives them the best chances of lifting the trophy.

Even in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL), a competitive fervor overtakes everything as teams overlook young players in favour of aged stars who provide more solidity.

But young players getting sidelined in these competitions has resulted in the creation of a weak pipeline of players in the T20 format for Bangladesh, for which the Tigers have struggled plenty in international cricket.

The NCL T20 has given local players a platform to highlight their capabilities. A player like Akbar Ali for instance, who has not yet lived up to the promise he showed at the Under-19 level, batted at number five in six off his seven innings at the NCL T20 for Rangpur Division and has accumulated 201 runs averaging 50.25 and a strike close to 160.



Usually, Akbar bats at number seven in all competitions and as a result finishes lower down the run-scorer's charts. But in the NCL T20, the right-hander, like many others, has flourished.

A BCB official said, "This time a lot of players are batting higher, Akbar is batting at five. NCL is our tournament, so we can request teams to play some players in certain roles and positions. The selection panel had sought that opportunity with how players had been distributed."

A youngster like Jishan Alam has made a statement, finishing as the top-scorer in the group phase with 281 runs for Sylhet Division and even Under-19 team player Azizul Hakim Tamim has made an impression, finishing fourth in the run-getter's list, much to the delight of the selectors.

"We are overall very satisfied with how the tournament has went so far," selector Abdur Razzak told The Daily Star. "We have been able to see a lot of players... It has opened up opportunities for us to watch players and they are proving what they can do."

Yesterday, on the final day of the group stage in Sylhet, Khulna Division and Chattogram Division joined previously qualified Dhaka Metro and Rangpur Division in the knockout stage. Dhaka Division, despite a 19-run win over Barishal Division, finished fifth with Chattogram edging them in net run rate.

## 'Winning titles at Real easier than elsewhere'

AGENCIES

Carlo Ancelotti became the most decorated coach in Real Madrid's history on Wednesday, after the team's 3-0 victory over Pachuca in the FIFA Intercontinental Cup final made it 15 trophies won with the club.

In two spells in charge at Madrid -- between 2013 and 2015, and from 2021 -- Ancelotti has lifted three Champions League trophies, two LaLiga titles, two Copa del Rey, two Spanish Supercups, three UEFA Super Cups, two Club World Cups, and now the Intercontinental Cup.

The previous record was held by the legendary Madrid coach Miguel Munoz, who spent 14 years in charge between 1960 and 1974, winning two European Cups, nine league titles, two Copas del Rey and one Intercontinental Cup.

Ancelotti drew level with Munoz in August, when Madrid won the UEFA Super Cup, beating Atalanta 2-0.

He will next have the chance to add to his trophy haul in January, when Madrid will take part in the Spanish Supercopa in Jeddah,

Saudi Arabia.

The Italian reflected on a brilliant year in which the team won four trophies.

"It has been a fantastic year, and we have had different difficulties throughout the year, injuries... We have finished this year very well, to be honest, and this gives us the confidence we needed and the motivation to continue to have very good results in 2025."

AncelottiHe is the only coach to have won the league title in Europe's 'big five leagues' -- in Spain with Real Madrid, in Italy with AC Milan, in Germany with Bayern Munich, in England with Chelsea and in France with Paris Saint-Germain.

Ancelotti is also the only manager to have won five Champions Leagues, having twice won the competition as AC Milan coach in 2003 and 2007.

The Italian, though, admitted that it's easier winning titles with the Spanish giants than with any other club in the world.

"I want to be honest. Winning titles at Real Madrid is easier than elsewhere: you have a fantastic club, a fan base that pushes and a squad with the best players in the world."



PHOTO: FIRO Z AHMED

A Bangladesh Police defender catches a Fire Service & Civil Defence raider during the opening match of the Victory Day Kabaddi Competition at the Shaheed Captain M Mansur Ali handball Stadium in Paltan yesterday, with Police winning the match by 56-28 points. Six teams each are participating in both men's and women's competitions, which will come to an end on December 24.