

With Hamza onboard, BFF gets men's team sponsor

SPORTS REPORTER

With the imminent arrival of Hamza Choudhury and an air of expectation following the swearing in of a new governing body a few months ago, Bangladesh Football Federation has snapped up a long-term sponsor for the men's senior national team.

United Commercial Bank, a first-generation private commercial bank of the country, has come forward to sponsor the men's team for the next five years, confirmed Bangladesh Football Federation's vice-president Fahad Karim.

"There is a positivity from the sponsors regarding football these days. I won't say they are very excited, but when we approach sponsors, we get a positive response. I think Hamza Choudhury is definitely a factor in this, plus the overall expectation regarding football is much higher nowadays," Karim told The Daily Star, informing that the deal would be part-cash-part-kind.

A memorandum of understanding in this regard between the two parties will be signed at the bank's head office today.

Meanwhile, the BFF vice-president elaborated on the schedule of Hamza's visit to Bangladesh for the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture against India.

The 27-year-old, who will be making his debut for Bangladesh against India in Shillong on March 25, will arrive on the morning of March 17 and spend the next two days in his ancestral home, informed Karim.

"Hamza Choudhury will land in Sylhet at 11:40am on March 17 on a Biman flight from Manchester. He will be accompanied by nine people – his family members including his mother, his wife and his three kids. Four or five of our executive committee members will be there to receive him. We will have a vehicle arranged for him; he and his entourage will travel from there to Habiganj, which is his ancestral home. He will spend the night there and also the entire day of March 18 there, which will be a completely private affair," Karim said.

The BFF vice-president said that Hamza and coach Javier Cabrera will face the media on March 19 afternoon ahead of the team's departure the following day.

"Hamza will come to Dhaka either on the night of 18th or the morning of 19th, and will join the camp straightaway. Then there will be a team photoshoot followed by a press meet, where Hamza and coach Javier Cabrera will face the media," Karim said, adding that due to the tight schedule in Dhaka, there will not be any special public appearance for Hamza.



Mehedi Hasan Miraz displayed all-round performance as Mohammedian notched their fourth successive win in the Dhaka Premier League, following a first-match defeat, during a 94-run win over Legends of Rupganj in a high-voltage clash in Mirpur yesterday. The all-rounder scored 25 runs before taking four wickets for 38 in a man-of-the-match display during the match, which also marked the return of Taskin Ahmed. The pacer, who missed the opening four rounds, registered figures of three for 33. In the day's other matches, Abahani beat Brother Union by 80 runs at the BKSP-3 while Gazi Group Cricketers registered a 94-run win over Prime Bank Cricket Club at BKSP-4.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



'It's our turn to take Tigers to the next level'

SPORTS REPORTER

The recent retirements of stalwarts Mashfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad from the white-ball formats have left a giant vacuum in the national team as it is officially without any of their five senior cricketers, all known together as the 'Big Five'.

The other three names in this group – Mashrafe bin Mortaza, Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan – are no longer active in the national team. Although of the three, only Tamim has officially retired, chances of the other two representing Bangladesh in the future seem next to nil.

Although these five cricketers demonstrated individual brilliances in many games for Bangladesh and helped them win many matches but when it came to winning a global tournament, they always fell short.

On Saturday, all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz insisted that it's now the turn of the next generation to take Bangladesh cricket to the next level and that they will aim to bring home a trophy from a major event, something their predecessor could never achieve.

"Everyone has to leave at some point. They had a big contribution in taking Bangladesh cricket to a level. Now it's our turn to take it to the next level," Miraz told reporters in Mirpur after delivering a match-winning all-round performance of 25 runs and four wickets for Mohammedian Sporting Club against Legends of Rupganj.

"We are yet to win a trophy. Our target will be to win a big tournament which I

think will be good for our generation," he added.

Miraz also said there are many players in the current side who have considerable experience in the international scene and they must take up the responsibility now.

"Those of us who are in the team now, it's crucial that we all perform. Many of us have also played 7-8 years in international cricket. There are 6-7 players who have

need of giving extended opportunities to the current cricketers keeping the 2027 ICC World Cup in mind.

"If you want to establish someone, you need to give them opportunities. We have to give them opportunities in the ODIs we have left before the World Cup. We need to take long term preparation. If we start our preparations just two to three months before the World Cup, it will be difficult.

May 2025: 3 ODIs against Pakistan (away)

June-July 2025: 3 ODIs against Sri Lanka (away)

July-August 2025: 3 ODIs against Pakistan (home, proposed)

August 2025: 3 ODIs against India (home)

October 2025: 3 ODIs against West Indies (home)

November-December 2025: 3 ODIs against Ireland (home)

March-April 2026: 3 ODIs against Pakistan (home)

April 2026: 3 ODIs against New Zealand (home)

June 2026: 3 ODIs against Australia (home)

July 2026: 5 ODIs against Zimbabwe (away)

August 2026: 3 ODIs against Ireland (away)

November-December 2026: 3 ODIs against South Africa (away)

played international cricket for 6-7 or even 10 years. You can't say that everyone in the team is new in international cricket.

"I feel there is enough experience in the team, we have played international cricket together for many years. Now it's very important for us to deliver using our experience," said Miraz, who expressed the

"We have around two and a half years left before the World Cup. We need to decide what will be the team's setup from now on. We need to start our preparations considering who will be playing in which position. Players need to be given opportunities and everyone must back each other," he concluded.

Serie A title race heats up as Inter clash with Atalanta

AGENCIES

With just ten rounds remaining in a thrilling Serie A season, leaders Inter Milan prepare for a high-stakes clash against third-placed Atalanta on Sunday.

A mere three points separate the sides, setting up a crucial encounter in Bergamo that could redefine the title race.

Inter sit atop the table with 61 points, just one ahead of reigning champions Napoli, who will be keen to capitalise when they visit relegation-threatened Venezia.

Simone Inzaghi's men, despite their European exploits, have struggled for consistency in the league, winning only three of their last seven matches.

Their latest league outing saw them scrape past bottom club Monza 3-2, but a commanding Champions League victory over Feyenoord should provide much-needed confidence.

"It's true that our Champions League numbers look different from our league form," admitted Inzaghi after his 200th game in charge. "But we're still in the mix, and we'll fight on all fronts."

Inter also have a Coppa Italia semifinal against city rivals Milan to contend with, making squad rotation a crucial factor in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, Atalanta, who exited both the Champions League and Coppa Italia last month, are solely focused on Serie A glory. Gian Piero Gasperini's side boast the joint-best attack in the league alongside Inter, having netted 63 goals, but their form has dipped. After an incredible 11-match winning streak between October and December, La Dea have won only four of their last 11 games.

Napoli, lurking in second place, ended a five-game winless run with a crucial 2-1 victory over

Florentina. They could leapfrog Inter with a win at Venezia, should the Nerazzurri falter in Bergamo.

Juventus, currently fourth with 52 points, were humiliated 4-0 by Atalanta last weekend but remain in contention for a top-four finish. They travel to eighth-placed Fiorentina, aiming to bounce back and stay ahead of Lazio, who sit just one point behind them.

Further down the table, Milan—now nine points off the top four—host Como, knowing anything less than three points will likely seal their fate outside of next season's Champions League.

As Serie A enters its final phase, every match takes on added significance. For Inter, Atalanta, and Napoli, the margin for error is razor-thin, making Sunday's showdown a true title decider.

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