

## 'We will win against India and progress'

SPORTS REPORTER

A few years ago, the thought of seeing English Premier League midfielder Hamza Choudhury don the Bangladesh national football team jersey seemed like a distant dream. However, that is no longer the case as the Sheffield United star touched down in Bangladesh yesterday to represent the red and green in the Asian Cup Qualifiers.

Bangladesh are set to kick off their campaign against hosts India in Shillong on March 25, and Hamza is poised to make his much-anticipated debut.

The 27-year-old, along with his family members, reached his ancestral village -- Snanghat of Bahubal upazila, Habiganj -- yesterday afternoon after landing at Sylhet Osmani International Airport amid huge enthusiasm among football fans and its stakeholders. Officials from Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), Sylhet DSA, Civil Aviation, and people of Sylhet greeted Hamza with flowers.

For Hamza, this was not just another quiet visit to his ancestral home. Now, with his heart set on representing Bangladesh, his return carried an added sense of purpose.

Hamza, who once played for the England U-21 team, was overwhelmed upon his arrival as many enthusiastic



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

media personnel, YouTubers, and others gathered to welcome him.

"It feels incredible. My heart is pumped," he told the media in front of Sylhet Osmani International Airport, his words barely audible over the deafening chants of his name.

The energy was electric, but with so many eager faces around him,

Hamza could only answer a handful of questions. Yet, in those brief moments, his determination and optimism shone through.

"Inshallah, we will win. I've spoken with coach Javier [Cabrera] about many things. Inshallah, we will win and progress," Hamza said in his Sylhet dialect.

As the sun set, the celebrations

continued in Snanghat, where hundreds more gathered to welcome him at his ancestral village. In a short but heartfelt address, he looked out at the sea of faces and simply said, "You all have come here to see me; Bangladesh Zindabad."

Hamza will spend some time in his village today before heading to Dhaka at night to join the national team camp at the InterContinental Hotel. There, he will meet his new teammates on Wednesday morning, take part in an official photoshoot, meet the press, and interact with captains and coaches from the proposed English medium school football tournament before getting some much-needed rest.

As Bangladesh's Spanish head coach, Javier Cabrera, mulls over training plans for Wednesday -- whether indoors or outdoors -- one thing is certain: the team will board their flight to India on Thursday morning with renewed energy and belief.



## Al Amin's dream: A goal and a celebration with Hamza

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh forward Al Amin envisions a perfect moment -- set up by Hamza Choudhury, he scores a goal, preferably a decisive one, against India in the Asian Cup Qualifier and then climbs onto the shoulders of the England-born midfielder in celebration.

Sheffield United midfielder Hamza arrived in Sylhet yesterday and is set to join the national team on March 19, poised to make his debut for Bangladesh against India in Shillong on March 25. Meanwhile, rookie forward Al Amin is focused on securing a spot in the final 23-member squad and breaking into the starting eleven.

"It's my dream to score against India because we have to win the match, and we are all optimistic about it. I want to sit on Hamza bhai's shoulders after scoring that goal from his assist," Al Amin said in a video message from the team's

training camp in Saudi Arabia.

His words reflect the aspirations of an entire nation, which is eager to reach new heights with a player like Hamza now in the squad.

Al Amin was in top form during the first leg of the Bangladesh Premier League, scoring seven goals -- an impressive performance that saw coach Javier Cabrera include him in the preliminary squad for the first time.

## IOC set to include boxing in 2028 Olympics

AFP, Costa Navarino

Boxing is set to be among the sports at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics after a new governing body was selected, IOC chief Thomas Bach said on Monday.

Bach said the IOC's Executive Board approved including boxing on the 2028 programme after his organisation recognised World Boxing to oversee the sport at the Olympics, ending years of divisions over the way the sport is run.

The decision still needs to be rubber stamped by a full IOC Session of about 100 members later this week, but that is expected to be a formality.

The IOC stepped in to organise the boxing tournaments at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and the Paris Olympics last year after breaking with the Russian-led International Boxing Association over financial, governance and ethical concerns.

Bach had warned that boxing's national federations needed to find a new and "reliable" international partner if it wanted to be included at the 2028 Games.

Last month, the IOC provisionally recognised World Boxing as the body to oversee the sport at future Games.

"I am very confident that the session will approve it so that all the boxers of the world then have certainty that they can participate in the Olympic Games LA 2028 if their national federation is recognised by World Boxing," Bach said on Monday.

Meanwhile, IOC members will elect Bach's successor on Thursday.

SPORTS REPORTER

An opportunity to play in the upcoming Pakistan Super League (PSL) beckons for young sensation Nahid Rana but before issuing him a No Objection Certificate (NOC), the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is pondering about Rana's workload management and the national team's upcoming Zimbabwe series.

PSL franchise Peshwar Zalmi picked Rana up from the draft ahead of this year's PSL, slated to begin on April 11. Rana has also applied for a NOC for the tournament, BCB sources confirmed yesterday.

While BCB is awaiting PSL's supporting letter before issuing the NOC, there are some other factors that board is considering.

Zalmi play their last league game on May 7 before the qualifier and eliminator rounds. The final of the PSL is slated to be played on May 18. Meanwhile, Zimbabwe arrive on April 15 with the first Test slated to begin on April 20 and the second one on April 28 in Sylhet and Chattogram respectively.

Even though the Test series is not part of the World Test Championship cycle, due to the schedule clash with PSL, the board is pondering whether to give Rana NOC for one phase of the



PSL instead of the entire tournament.

How the PSL franchise would manage Rana's workload is also an important issue. The speedster has so far played two out of Abahani's five matches in the Dhaka Premier League

as part of a workload management scheme.

BCB high-ups had previously confirmed after the last board meeting that they would be more selective about handing out NOCs, prioritising growth and benefit for the player. While PSL has those positive traits, the board remains hesitant in Rana's case.

Rana is not the only Bangladeshi picked up for the next PSL as Zalmi also drafted in Rishad Hossain while Karachi Kings roped in Liton Das.

When the matter of Rana, Liton and Rishad's PSL appearance was brought up, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was in favour of them taking part and gaining experience from foreign franchise tournaments.

"I think they should of course play in these kinds of franchise cricket but it will wholly depend on the cricket board, coach and captain and other factors. But I think that if our players start featuring in these kinds of franchise tournaments, they will gather experience and learn to take that sort of responsibility," Shanto said.

For now, a PSL stint remains on the horizon for Rana, but it is an important decision for the board to maintain the bowler's agencies.



## Newcastle end 'years of hurt'

AFP, London

Eddie Howe hailed his Newcastle history makers as they ended 56 "years of hurt" with a 2-1 win against Liverpool in the League Cup final on Sunday.

Goals from Dan Burn and Alexander Isak put Newcastle in dreamland at Wembley, with Federico Chiesa's strike in the closing minutes coming too late to save the Premier League leaders.

It was Newcastle's first major trophy since the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup and their first significant domestic prize since lifting the FA Cup 70 years ago.

"I've been emotional all day to be honest, which is very unlike me around the game day," he said. "But we just knew what was at stake today for all the people here, all the people back in Newcastle and we just wanted to do them proud."

"We were desperate to try and win the trophy after all the years of hurt. We are breaking new ground, I thought we were magnificent today."



## BARCA 'HAPPY' TO RECLAIM LALIGA TOP SPOT

Barcelona battled back from two goals down to beat Atletico Madrid 4-2 and land an important blow in the Spanish title race on Sunday. Lamine Yamal struck in the 92nd minute and Ferran Torres scored his second goal in the 98th to help take the Catalans back to the top of the table. Barca have 60 points and a game in hand after last week's postponement of their home game with Osasuna. They are level on points with Real Madrid, who won 2-1 at Villarreal on Saturday. "I am happy and proud of this team," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick told a press conference. "They never give up... It's a great three points and we are happy to be top." Atletico remain third on 56 points from 28 games. With goals from Julian Alvarez on the stroke of halftime and substitute Alexander Sorloth's brilliant close-range finish in the 70th minute, Atletico went 2-0 up in the contest before Robert Lewandowski and Torres struck late in the game sparked a fightback at the Metropolitano stadium.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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