

# Star

DHAKA WEDNESDAY MARCH 26, 2025, CHAITRA 12, 1431 BS

# SPORT

**What to WATCH** | Sony Sports 5 and PTV  
New Zealand vs Pakistan  
5th T20I  
Live from 12:15 pm

## Bangladesh fail to earn full points despite Hamza's impressive debut

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh wasted a host of early chances in a goalless draw against India in their first AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture in Shillong on a historic night which saw Leicester City midfielder Hamza Choudhury make his debut for the men in red and green.

Hamza, who joined the team only six days ago, made his mark with a dominant display in defensive midfield, nullifying much of India's attacking threats, but it was the glaring missed chances missed that would disappoint the visitors.

Javier Cabrera, who opted for a 4-2-3-1 formation with Jamal Bhuiyan on bench, fielded Hamza and Mohammad Hridoy as double pivot in front of four defenders -- Saad Uddin, Tapu Barman, Tariq Kazi and Shakil Ahad Topu.

In front of Hamza and Hridoy were Shahriar Emon, Sheikh Morsalin and Mojibur Rahman Jonny. Rakib Hossain played as a lone striker while Mitul Marmastood between the sticks.

Bangladesh's high-pressing football helped keep control of the game to the visitors, however, glaring misses by Jonny,



Emon and Hridoy meant the men in red and green could not reap the rewards.

India goalkeeper Vishal Kaith had a terrible start as he gifted two scoring opportunities to Bangladesh -- first in the opening minute when his shot went straight to Jonny, who failed to hit the target from an acute angle.

Ten minutes later, Kaith's goal-kick came straight off the back of Shakil Ahad Topu and dropped inside the box, but Hridoy's weak attempt was cleared off the line by Subhashish Bose.

Emon then failed to keep a free header

on target from a superb cross by Sheikh Morsalin seven minutes later before Topu Barman, who was wearing the captain's armband, had to limp off following an injury after 21 minutes, with Rahmat Mia replacing him as the coach switched the four-man backline.

Bangladesh had another excellent opportunity in the 41st minute when Jonny ran on to a through-ball inside the box but his heavy first touch allowed Kaith to clear the danger.

India's only real effort of the first half came in the 30th minute when Liston

Colaco's cross was headed towards goal by Udanta Singh, cleared in front of goal by Rahmat Miah. Farukh Chowdhury's shot on the rebound was easily grasped by Mitul.

Cabrera made a double substitution on the hour mark, with Faysal Ahmed Fahim and Chandon Roy replacing Shahriar Emon and Mojibur Rahman Jonny. Later, Sohel Rana and Mohammad Sohel Rana came in for Sheikh Morsalin and Hridoy but India were the dominant force in the second half as Bangladesh players started to tire.

Hamza played the full 90 minutes and impressed with his authoritative presence in the middle of the park, helping the visitors scrape through some nervy moments.

Fahim, against the run of play, unleashed a powerful shot which was well kept out by Kaith in the 88th minute as Bangladesh had to be content with a point away from home in the first match of the Group C fixture.

Cabrera's men will host Singapore, who too were held to a goalless draw at home by Hong Kong, in their second match of the campaign in Dhaka on June 10.

## Doctors optimistic about Tamim's return to cricket

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Tamim Iqbal was transferred to Evercare Hospital in Dhaka yesterday, a day after surviving a major heart attack during a Dhaka Premier League match at the BKSP in Savar.

Doctors at KPJ Specialised Hospital in Savar, where Tamim had undergone stenting surgery, confirmed the former Bangladesh captain had passed the most critical phase and shown significant improvement over the last 36 hours. While they initially advised him to remain hospitalised for at least a day, Tamim and his family opted to shift to the capital.

According to hospital officials, Tamim may still seek further medical care abroad.

"Tamim's family would later decide whether to take him abroad or continue treatment in Dhaka," said Dr Rajib Hasan, media director at KPJ Specialised Hospital.

"As he is doing well, it will be wise not to move him much," he suggested.

With Tamim recovering, the question arises: will he return to the field? Although he retired from international cricket earlier this year, the 36-year-old remains active in domestic competitions, recently leading Fortune Barishal to the Bangladesh Premier League title and



captaining Mohammedan SC in the ongoing DPL. Dr Rajib, who has been monitoring Tamim's condition since his admission, believes a return to cricket is possible but contingent on medical clearance.

"Usually, everyone returns to normal activities after such surgery... But if he wants to return to sporting activities, he must take consultation from a medical board after three months. If everything goes accordingly, then there is no reason for him not making a return to the field.

"If there is damage to his heart, then there can be a concern regarding his comeback. But several tests have shown he has no heart damage," he further informed.

Dr Rajib also noted that Tamim's fitness played a key role in his resilience.

"He is very strong. It's an advantage of being a sportsman. If the same happened to me, my bones could be broken into pieces," he explained.

Tamim earlier in the day shared his gratitude in an emotional social media post, reflecting on the fragility of life and the support he received.

"I was fortunate to have some incredible people around me during this crisis. Because of their prudence and endless efforts, I have overcome this danger and come back," he wrote.

"Some incidents remind us of reality, remind us of how short life really is. In this brief life, if nothing else, we should all stand by each other during crises -- that is my request to you all," he added.

For now, Tamim's health remains the priority, with his future in cricket resting in the hands of time and medical assessments.

## BCB extends Simmons' contract till 2027

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced that it has retained the services of former West Indies batter Phil Simmons as their head coach until the ICC ODI World Cup in October-November 2027.

Simmons, who had been under contract with the BCB up to the end of the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy, had his initial stint with the Bangladesh team between October 2024 and February 2025.

"I am delighted to be given the opportunity to work with Bangladesh cricket on a long-term basis. The talent within this team is undeniable, and I believe we have the potential to achieve great things together," Simmons was quoted in a press release.

"Having worked with some exceptional players already, I can see the immense promise in this squad. Their skill and passion for the game inspire me daily.

"My time with the Bangladesh team over the past few months has been incredibly rewarding. The energy, commitment, and ability within this group have been nothing short of impressive. I'm excited to continue helping these players reach their full potential," he added.

Other than the Champions Trophy where Bangladesh went winless, Simmons served as Bangladesh's head coach in series against South Africa, Afghanistan, the West Indies in his first stint with his most notable triumph being winning an away Test against the Caribbean side and winning the T20I series 3-0 against the same opponents.



## 'The team have taken two steps forward'

ANISUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera expressed satisfaction with his team's goalless draw against India in the Asian Cup qualifiers in Shillong yesterday, hailing debutant Hamza Choudhury as the standout performer.

Reflecting on the match, Cabrera felt Bangladesh could have taken the lead in the first half but he remained upbeat despite missed chances.

"There were 4-5 clear chances we had. But unfortunately, we could not take those. However, we have to stay positive that we created this many chances against India away from home. India is the strongest team in the group. But we have to believe that we are contenders to qualify for the Asian Cup; that is what we have to believe now," said the 40-year-old Spaniard.

English Premier League-bred Hamza's much anticipated debut for Bangladesh had naturally generated significant excitement, and the 27-year-old defensive midfielder made his presence felt in the high-voltage encounter. Cabrera praised Hamza's influence, highlighting his composure and intelligence on the field.

"More than his quality as a player, his quality as a team player and as a person is what gives confidence to the rest of the team... We have never felt at any moment that we were not on par with India. We even felt that we could have won the game. And for me, someone watching the game from



**"From the moment we saw the group, we realised that we would have to battle till the end... Now with Hamza, the way he played and the mentality we had today [yesterday], we should target winning the next game against Singapore."**

Bangladesh coach  
Javier Cabrera

outside, I felt Hamza's influence was huge," Cabrera said.

"Having him play next to you makes you more confident and feel safe... Sometimes he drops in between the centre-backs -- he has that quality to make such decisions."

With Hamza in the squad, Cabrera believes Bangladesh have grown stronger and must build on their performance, step by step.

"From the moment we saw the group, we realised that we would have to battle till the end... I think the team have taken two more steps forward. Now, we have to go ahead step by step. But we need to become very strong at home -- we have been very strong at home from before we had Hamza. Now, with Hamza, the way he played and the mentality we had today [yesterday], we should target winning the next game against Singapore," Cabrera said.

Despite the positive outlook, Cabrera acknowledged Bangladesh's struggles in front of goal. "We need to be more clinical... If we want to win, we have to improve our finishing. Singapore, Hong Kong, and India are all similar in quality, so converting our chances will be key."

Addressing the exclusion of Jamal Bhuiyan from the starting eleven, Cabrera explained it was a tactical decision. "His personality and quality as a captain -- even though Jamal did not play, he is crucial for us. But as we needed more strength and physicality, we decided to put [Sohel] Rana in that position."

With their home clash against Singapore approaching on June 10, Cabrera remains focused on sharpening the team's attacking edge while preserving the defensive resilience that ensured a clean sheet against India.

## Scantily run DPL still churning out performances

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Liton Das raged with a 62-ball 83 for Gulshan Cricket Club but his knock was trumped by Gazi Group Cricketers' skipper Anamul Haque Bijoy who hit a 144 off 142 balls to help Gazi to a four-wicket win at BKSP as the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) goes into a break before Eid festivities.

This year's DPL has been competitive so far with Gazi and Mohammedan Sporting Club just one win behind league toppers Abahani while Prime Bank Cricket Club and Agrani Bank Cricket Club having five wins each, positioning themselves at fourth and fifth respectively.

There have also been some high scores this season with Prime Bank breaching the 400-run mark and the top five run-getters striking at more than 90.

Yet, the current DPL is being played under a cloud of concerns regarding reduced salaries. Players have had to unwillingly remain content with the developments as clubs talked about economic downturn. Some national team players have cut adjusted deals, reducing the number of games they feature in to match the reduced budget.

"Payment is a big issue since in Bangladesh this [DPL] is the biggest tournament," Dhanmondi Sports Club's Nurul Hasan Sohan,



fifth amongst the highest run-getters, told The Daily Star.

"Salaries were cut by around 50-60 percent. Obviously, it doesn't affect the players in terms of performance but it's a big issue for the players considering everything. Then again, from another point of view, the more mentally

fresh you are, without having to think about other things, the better your performances will get," he added.

After the break, the league will commence in April when heat will also become another worrying factor.

In the last few years, playing under the April heat has been particularly difficult for the players. With some players nursing injuries, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is also trying to manage the workload of national team players and in this year's reduced budget DPL, players of higher categories are likely to seek breaks enabled by workload management.

"Premier League's second phase will be more challenging due to heat. We are going to provide CDM a guideline on managing through extreme heat. If the heat index is in the red zone then playing is difficult. But right now, although heat is there, the humidity is not prominent," BCB chief physician Dr. Debashish Chowdhury said on DPL's heat issue.

Yet performances are being carved out, as youngster Samiun Basir Ratul, making his DPL debut, picked up a fiver for 27 runs in Legends of Rupganj's 172-run win over Rupganj Tigers in Mirpur yesterday. Meanwhile, Brothers Union carved out a 29-run win over Partex Sporting Club at BKSP.



Jackson Irvine celebrates with teammates after he curled home in the 16th minute to give Australia the lead in their 2026 World Cup qualifier against China in Hangzhou on Tuesday. Another first-half goal from Nishan Velupillay ensured Australia a step closer to automatic Cup qualification with a comfortable 2-0 victory in the contest. The away win, hot on the heels of their 5-1 win over Indonesia last week, leaves the Socceroos second in Group C on 13 points with two to play, three points ahead of Saudi Arabia with a much better goal difference.

PHOTO: AFP