

'This kind of fanbase doesn't exist in Canada'

Sylheti son Shamit embraces Bangladesh call-up

Canada-based midfielder **Shamit Shome** is set to make his Bangladesh debut in the Asian Cup Qualifier against Singapore on June 10. The 26-year-old, born to Sylheti parents, follows in the footsteps of Jamal Bhuiyan and Hamza Choudhury as another expatriate embracing his roots. Fluent in Bengali and raised with a strong connection to his heritage, Shome described his journey, inspirations, and emotional ties to Bangladesh in an interview with *The Daily Star's Ekush Tapader* before flying in for national duty.

DS: You're going to don Bangladesh jersey. How does it feel?

SS: I'm thrilled. There's a lot of excitement around Bangladesh football.

DS: When did the board (BFF) first approach you? **SS:** I think they messaged me late last year -- around the time of the preparations for the India game. That's when I started thinking about it. I had a great discussion with the new president [Tabith Awal]. After that conversation... I made the decision before the India match. Overall, I felt this was the right time to join. Also, as I mentioned, everyone looks like me here -- same culture, same skin tone -- that's also exciting. I never had that experience in Canada.

DS: Did seeing Hamza play here motivate you? **SS:** Absolutely. It was motivating. He's a big player... But I had already been thinking about playing for Bangladesh.

DS: Have you spoken with any Bangladesh players or coaches?

SS: I've had a great conversation talking to the coach about tactics, how he wants me to play, the game plan for Singapore.

DS: Have you been following Bangladesh football? **SS:** A little. And now that I'm joining, I follow more online -- how the local clubs are doing, how the national team have performed over the past two or three years.

DS: What do you want to achieve with Bangladesh? **SS:** Right now, we're in the Asian Cup qualifiers. If we can get through, that's the target. That's where my focus is -- to help Bangladesh do well on the Asian stage.

DS: There's already a buzz among fans about your arrival, just like there was for Hamza. Are you feeling that vibe?

SS: I'm very grateful. I feel the love -- everyone welcoming me on social media. That was a big factor in my decision. I'm getting support from the fans, and I'm thankful. This kind of passionate football fanbase doesn't exist in Canada, so I'm really looking forward to experiencing that vibe.

DS: How much support did you get from your parents about coming to Bangladesh?

SS: Yes, my parents are very excited. Even my grandparents are thrilled. They're happy that I'll be representing Bangladesh.

DS: Will any of your family be there to watch the match?

SS: Not from Canada -- everyone has work. I thought since this is my first time coming (for football), I'll come independently and stay focused. But all my relatives in Srimangal are planning to

come to watch. They're excited to see me play live for the first time.

DS: You must have many childhood memories in Bangladesh?

SS: I remember we had a pond in front of our house -- we used to play there. There was a tree behind which we played cricket and football. Srimangal is a peaceful place. You can see the stars and I've seen all the tea gardens. It's a very special place to me.

DS: How did your football journey start?

SS: I started playing football when I was four or five. Then, around eight to ten years old, I started playing at the club level more seriously. [After getting a university scholarship] I started my first



professional season at 18 and did well. I was in Edmonton, and now I'm in Calgary.

DS: You're naturally a midfielder. Have you spoken with the coach about your position?

SS: Yes, we've had a good talk. We discussed whether I'll play as a defensive or attacking midfielder. I'm comfortable in both roles, so I can be flexible. The coach will decide... what fits the game plan. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens.

DS: Do you follow any specific midfielders?

SS: I follow many. Luka Modric, Toni Kroos... and I've loved Cesc Fabregas since I was young. I try to learn from their styles.

DS: Will you stay in Bangladesh after the match?

SS: No, I have to leave quickly... We have a match in Canada just three or four days after the one in Bangladesh.



Bangladesh's star midfielder Hamza Choudhury and captain Jamal Bhuiyan vie for the ball in a training session on the eve of a FIFA friendly against Bhutan yesterday. The stage for the contest -- the National Stadium -- is set to host Hamza's home debut as the national team returns to the venue for the first time since November 2020.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

New-look Bangladesh ready for Bhutan

SPORTS REPORTER

Although today's fixture between Bangladesh and Bhutan is officially a FIFA friendly, it carries significant weight. It marks the long-awaited return of international football to the National Stadium (NS) and serves as vital preparation ahead of the high-stakes match against Singapore on June 10.

Excitement for the Singapore fixture is building at an exponential rate. Fans are eager to witness Hamza Choudhury play on home soil for the first time, alongside the debuts of fellow expats Fahamedul Islam and Shamit Shome. However, the latter is most likely to be rested today since he is set to land in the capital on matchday.

Adding to the buzz is the unveiling of the newly renovated National Stadium -- formerly known as Bangabandhu National Stadium, and long considered the home of the sport in Bangladesh -- refurbished at a cost of Tk 158 crore. The venue will host its first international fixture in over four years. The last was a pair of FIFA friendlies against Nepal in November 2020.

At the Bangladesh-Bhutan pre-

match press conference held yesterday at the BFF House, the growing hype was evident. Sports journalists, social media content creators, and YouTubers crowded the space, with some even sitting on the floor to cover the briefing.

Aiming for a victory, head coach Javier Cabrera also sees the match



as a chance to assess his players, test combinations, and fine-tune tactics for the upcoming Singapore game.

"Matches against Bhutan and Singapore are going to be interesting challenges. We believe playing against Bhutan will be perfect preparation for the Singapore match," Cabrera said during the press conference, adding Hamza is available and Fahamedul will be given game time.

The Spaniard acknowledged the energy and anticipation surrounding the Singapore fixture. "Well, it's extremely exciting and the huge expectation is good... we want to fulfill the expectations of fans," Cabrera said.

Last September, Bangladesh played two matches in Bhutan, winning one and losing the other, but captain Jamal Bhuiyan believes circumstances have improved.

"Compared to the last matches we played against Bhutan, the situation is now different because that time we went to play against Bhutan on the back of only two to three months of domestic competition. But this time... everyone is match fit," Jamal opined.

Bhutan head coach Atsushi Nakamura remains hopeful despite having termed Bangladesh as the best team in South Asia, possessing a player of Hamza's calibre with experience of playing in top-tier English leagues.

"Our players are going to get a good experience playing against him (Hamza)," said Nakamura, noting that Bhutan face the challenge of playing in Bangladesh's heat and humidity, in contrast to the high-altitude advantage they enjoyed back in September.

Nations League contenders target bigger prizes

AGENCIES

With the World Cup just a year away, four European heavyweights -- Germany, Spain, France and Portugal -- are eyeing the UEFA Nations League semifinals.

Tournament hosts Germany face Portugal in Munich on Wednesday, followed by defending champions Spain taking on 2021 winners France in Stuttgart on Thursday. The winners will meet in Sunday's final in the Bavarian capital.

Though the Nations League, launched in 2018, lacks the prestige of the World Cup or Euros, it has become a springboard to greater success. France's 2021 title preceded their run to the 2022 World Cup final, while Spain followed up their 2023 Nations League triumph by lifting Euro 2024.

Germany, the only semifinalist yet to win the tournament, will look to change that. Midfielder Joshua Kimmich is set to earn his 100th cap, becoming the 14th German to reach the milestone -- and the

first without a World Cup title. The Bayern star sees the tournament as a marker of Germany's progress after years of underachievement.

"If it's enough for the really big titles, we don't know yet," Kimmich said, highlighting the need for early preparation ahead of next year's World Cup.

Germany are without several key players, including Jamal Musiala and Antonio Rudiger. France are also depleted, missing key defenders and midfielder Eduardo Camavinga, while Spain have rested Ballon d'Or winner Rodri. Portugal, meanwhile, have recalled Cristiano Ronaldo despite his recent injury issues.

Yet, the ambition remains high. Portugal's Ruben Neves summed it up: "Tiredness takes a back seat. Our main focus is to win both games and lift the Nations League trophy."

As the semifinals kick off, each team carries the weight of expectations and the hope that this "small" title may pave the way to the biggest one.



High Court questions legality of Faruque's removal

SPORTS REPORTER

The High Court (HC) yesterday issued a rule questioning the legality of the National Sports Council's (NSC) decision to remove Faruque Ahmed as president of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and to appoint Aminul Islam Bulbul in his place.

The court has asked the government and NSC authorities to explain why the decisions should not be declared unlawful. Also, the HC ordered a status quo on the BCB's operations, meaning the current board, led by Bulbul, will continue functioning as usual, informed Additional Attorney General Aneek R Haque and BCB lawyer Barrister Mahin M Rahman to *The Daily Star*.

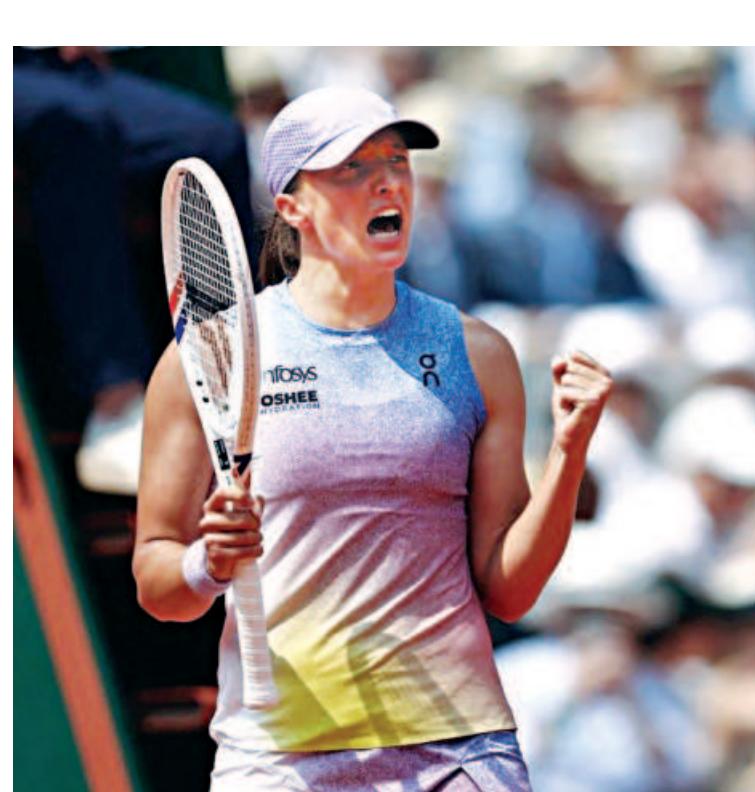
The bench of Justice Razik-Al-Jalil and Justice Shathika Hossain passed the order and issued the rule after hearing a writ petition filed by Faruque Ahmed. The petition challenges the legality of his removal and Bulbul's appointment.

This development comes after another HC bench, on June 2, declined to issue an order on the same petition and removed it from its cause list following arguments from the involved parties.

Barrister Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal represented Faruque, while Additional Attorney General Aneek R Haque appeared for the NSC. Meanwhile, BCB and Bulbul were represented by Barristers Nasir Uddin Ahmed Ashim, Mahin M Rahman, and Saleh Akram Samrat during the hearing.

Previously, Faruque had filed the writ petition on June 1, seeking both a legal review of the NSC's decision and a stay order on Bulbul's appointment.

On May 30, Bulbul was elected as BCB president -- a day after NSC revoked Faruque's directorship. The decision followed a vote of no confidence from the majority of the board's directors and a review of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) fact-finding committee's report. With his appointment, Bulbul became the 17th BCB president and only the second former cricketer, after Faruque, to hold the post.



Defending champion Iga Swiatek powered past Elina Svitolina 6-1, 7-5 on a blustery Tuesday at Roland Garros, securing her place in the French Open semifinals and moving one step closer to a historic fourth straight title. The 24-year-old Pole, undeterred by a challenging start to the season and a brief doping suspension, rediscovered her dominant claycourt form to keep her Paris reign alive. Swiatek will now face world number one Aryna Sabalenka in a high-stakes semi-final clash that promises fireworks, as the two stars battle for supremacy on the red clay of Roland Garros.

