

**What to WATCH**  
 Sony Sports 1 and 2  
 French Open  
 Live from 3:00 pm  
 Sony Sports 5  
 Nations League  
 Semifinal  
 Live from 1:00 am (Friday)



## SHOME IS HOME

Bangladesh midfielder Shamit Shome was unveiled in national colours ahead of the FIFA friendly between Bangladesh and Bhutan at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. Shome, who had arrived a few hours earlier, was rested for the contest but came onto the pitch during warmups and waved at fans before watching the match from the stands.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Hamza stars on home debut

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh fans got exactly what they came for at the renovated National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday: a victory to celebrate and a goal from their new icon, Hamza Choudhury, who scored on his home debut to help Bangladesh to a 2-0 win over Bhutan in a FIFA friendly, adding the perfect icing to the celebratory atmosphere.

Bhutan had threatened to spoil the occasion early, with midfielder Prema Zangmo narrowly missing the target just after kick-off, but the home side soon took control.

Coach Javier Cabrera rested key players Hamza, Jamal Bhuiyan, and Quazem Kirmancee after the break, opting for several changes to test combinations ahead of the high-stakes World Cup qualifier against Singapore at home on June 10, with tickets already sold out.

Fahamedul Islam, another expat but from the Italian diaspora, started on his preferred left wing. Although initially nervous, he grew into the game and created chances, including a cutback early in the second half that substitute Sheikh Morsalin failed to convert.

Experienced midfielder Sohel Rana eventually doubled the lead in the 48th minute with a low strike from outside the area, sealing a comfortable win.

Bangladesh goalkeeper Mitul Marma ensured the clean sheet with a brilliant stoppage-time save, denying a close-range tap-in from Bhutan substitute Jigme Namgyal.

The night ended with a heartfelt gesture as the players walked the stadium's athletic track, waving to fans in gratitude for their passionate support.



Bangladesh's heartbeat Hamza Choudhury points towards captain Jamal Bhuiyan (not in picture) in celebration after his towering header from a pinpoint Jamal corner gave the hosts a sixth-minute lead, paving the way for a 2-0 win over Bhutan in a FIFA friendly at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. Marking his home debut in style, the England-based midfielder did not take long to send the crowd into raptures at the venue, hosting its first international match in 55 months following extended renovation.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



**“This moment (the IPL win) is right up there with the best moments I’ve had in my career, but it still marks five levels under Test cricket. That’s how much I value Test cricket... I would just urge youngsters coming through to treat that format with respect. If you want to earn respect in world cricket all over, take up Test cricket, give your heart and soul to it and earn the respect from legends.”**

Virat Kohli after winning the elusive IPL title.

## ‘GIRLS ARE FANTASTIC’: Butler beaming after back-to-back draws

SPORTS REPORTER

Before facing off against higher ranked sides in the AFC Women’s Asian Cup Qualifiers in Myanmar in a few weeks’ time, the Bangladesh women’s football team recently earned back-to-back draws against two strong opponents in Jordan and Indonesia, much to the delight of head coach Peter Butler who felt the team’s hard work is starting to pay off.

“The girls are fantastic, well done, fully deserved it and it just goes to show with hard work, sometimes, you reap what you sow. So, I’m really, really proud of the girls,” Butler said in a video clip sent by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) after the match against Jordan on Tuesday.

Following a goalless draw against Indonesia, who are ranked 94th in FIFA rankings, the 133rd-ranked Bangladesh came from behind twice against the 74th-ranked Jordan to play out a 2-2 draw on Tuesday.

The positive outcomes against two strong opponents are good signs before the qualifiers, where Bangladesh will face higher ranked opponent like Myanmar (55) and Bahrain (92). Turkmenistan (141) is the other side in the four-team Group C and Bangladesh’s campaign will run from June 29 to July 5.

The results will also bring relief following a tumultuous period in the country’s women’s football.

Just months after Butler coached Bangladesh to their second successive SAFF Women’s Championship title in last year’s October, captain Sabina Khatun and 17



other senior players revolted against the coach in late January, skipped training and demanded his resignation.

But the BFF didn’t yield to the pressure of the footballers and sided with the coach. A new-look Bangladesh team, without the rebel players, played in the two-match friendly series against the UAE in February-March and lost both matches 3-1.

Butler had initially reportedly refused to call back any of the rebel footballers, but later relaxed his stance and included proven campaigners like Monika Chakma, Maria Manda, Rupna Chakma, Shamsunnahar Sr, Ritu Porna Chakma, Tahura Khatun and Shamsunnahar Jr who were part of the protests. However, he didn’t recall SAFF champions Sabina,

Sanjida Khatun and Masura Parvin.

The return of the experienced players improved the side’s strength and the team is now implementing the style of play Butler was trying to instill.

“We play good football. We’ve got a clear identity of actually how we want to play and how I want the team to play.”

But for the English coach, the biggest gain from the two draws was the character his team showed on the field.

“I think the most important ingredient which has come off this week is character... I’m just really proud of like everybody. The staff, the technical team, everyone’s put a shift in, worked really hard. I just thought we showed lots and lots character.”

“It’s been a wonderful learning week. Playing against higher opposition is not easy, but I think we’ve come a long way.”

## Ebadot returns, Shanto retained as skipper for SL Tests

SPORTS REPORTER

Pacer Ebadot Hossain returned to the national side for the first time in almost two years while Najmul Hossain Shanto was retained as Test captain for another year as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 16-member squad for the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka this month.

Ebadot suffered an ACL injury during an ODI series against Afghanistan in July 2023. He went under the knife and then endured a lengthy rehabilitation process before finally returning to action in November last year in the National Cricket League.

Alongside Ebadot, Hasan Murad, Nahid Rana and Liton Das returned to the Test side, while Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Tanzim Sakib and Tanvir Islam, who were part of the Bangladesh squad for their second Test against Zimbabwe last month, were dropped.

The series marks the start of the 2025-27 cycle of the ICC World Test Championship. The first Test will be played in Galle from June 17. The second match will commence in Colombo on June 25.



**SQUAD:** Najmul Hossain Shanto (Captain), Shadman Islam, Anamul Haque Bijoy, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Litton Das, Mahidul Islam, Jaker Ali, Mehidy Hasan Miraz (vice-captain), Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Hasan Murad, Ebadot Hossain, Hasan Mahmud, Nahid Rana and Khaled Ahmed.



The Real Madrid-Barcelona rivalry will be reignited on the international stage in national colours as French superstar Kylian Mbappe -- who leads the line for Los Blancos -- faces off against Barca’s young sensation Lamine Yamal, who is set to headline Spain’s XI, in the UEFA Nations League semifinal in Stuttgart on Friday. Defending champions Spain, who won the trophy under Luis de la Fuente in 2023, are aiming to make history by becoming the first team to retain the Nations League title.

PHOTOS: AFP/FACEBOOK



## Ancelotti’s tactical trial with Brazil begins

AGENCIES

Carlo Ancelotti arrives in Brazil not just as a coach, but as a figure of hope and repair. The 65-year-old Italian is the Selecao’s first foreign manager in over 50 years, and he steps into a role layered with both expectation and urgency.

His first match—against Ecuador on Friday (5am Bangladesh Time) in a World Cup qualifier—marks the start of a critical mission: to rescue a faltering campaign and reignite a connection with disillusioned fans.

Brazil’s qualifying journey has been turbulent. A historic 1-0 home defeat to Argentina and three straight losses in 2023 ended Fernando Diniz’s reign. Dorival Junior’s short-lived tenure concluded with a 4-1 thrashing in Argentina. Yet despite the setbacks, Brazil sits fourth in the South American standings.

The format remains forgiving—six of ten teams qualify directly for the 2026 World Cup—and Brazil holds a six-point lead over seventh-placed Venezuela with four matches left.

The talent remains, but the structure is fragile. Ancelotti inherits a side bursting with attacking



**Argentina head coach Lionel Scaloni and star forward Lionel Messi, and Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti with winger Raphinha, take part in training sessions ahead of their FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifiers. Argentina face Chile in Santiago on Friday (7am Bangladesh Time), while Brazil take on Ecuador in Sao Paulo (5am Bangladesh Time).**

PHOTO: AFP

wingers, but lacking a true centre-forward. The legendary pipeline of No. 9s—from Romario to Ronaldo—has dried up. Richarlison is the

closest option, and Ancelotti knows how to work around this, having won the 2024 Champions League with a Madrid side led by Vinicius Jr. and

Rodrygo, though the latter hasn’t made this squad. Raphinha, co-top scorer in this season’s Champions League, offers another threat, but the bigger question lies in midfield creativity.

Brazil’s current generation lacks a classic playmaker. At Madrid, Ancelotti had Toni Kroos feeding Vinicius. Brazil, however, has no Kroos. Casemiro has been recalled to bring experience and leadership, but he’s no creator. Recent experiments with Bruno Guimaraes, Gerson, and Joelson have offered little in terms of imagination. The famed fullback tradition—once embodied by Cafu and Roberto Carlos—also seems in decline, with Ancelotti turning to names like Carlos Augusto, Wesley Franca, and Alex Sandro.

Off the pitch, Ancelotti faces another challenge: mending the bond between the team and the nation. The iconic yellow jersey, long a symbol of joy, has been politicized and now divides as much as it unites. Ancelotti has already called for unity. For Brazil, qualifying may still be likely—but rediscovering its identity is the real goal. The journey begins in Ecuador.