



So much hinges on Bangladesh's star midfielder Hamza Choudhury as the men in red and green gear up to face higher-ranked Hong Kong, China at home today. On the eve of the AFC Asian Cup Qualifier fixture at the National Stadium, Hamza led from the front in training -- rallying teammates, lifting spirits, and even sharing a few light-hearted moments amid the intensity.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh aim for vital win against Hong Kong

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be desperate to secure all three points and keep their qualification hopes alive when they face Hong Kong, China in a crucial Asian Cup encounter tonight. The match kicks off at 8:00pm at the National Stadium in Dhaka.

Javier Cabrera's men failed to meet expectations in their previous outing against Singapore, suffering a 2-1 defeat at home despite an encouraging goalless draw away to India a few months earlier. The loss came as a blow, especially after the squad was bolstered by the inclusion of quality foreign-based players such as Hamza Choudhury, Shamit Shome, and

Fahamedul Islam.

Cabrera faced criticism for his starting eleven and tactical approach against Singapore, but the 40-year-old Spaniard is aiming to rectify that with a revised game plan tonight.

Hong Kong are known to be compact in defence, quick on the counter, and relentless in physical duels. They have been strengthened by several naturalised players from countries including Brazil, Spain, Cameroon, Nigeria, France, Japan, and Scotland, pose a different challenge.

"There was a lot of expectation, and yes, it was disappointing not to get any points against Singapore," Cabrera said

at the pre-match press conference. "We had good moments in that match. The key now is to learn from our mistakes and not repeat them if we want to beat Hong Kong."

While acknowledging the challenge posed by Hong Kong's naturalised players, Cabrera insisted that his focus remains on his own team.

"I've said before the teams in Group C are of a similar level, though with different styles of play. Hong Kong are quite similar to Singapore. The naturalised players don't change much -- we need to focus on how we play."

Cabrera has managed three wins,

two draws, and five defeats in his last 10 matches with Bangladesh, and faces further challenges in team selection. Veteran centre-back Topu Barman is unlikely to feature due to injury, forward Al Amin is nursing a calf strain and may be replaced by Arman Faisal Akash, while Shamit has only had one training session with the team.

Despite the setbacks, Cabrera remains optimistic.

"The additions of Hamza, Shamit, Fahamedul, and Zayyan (Ahmed) have increased the squad's depth. A positive result is crucial -- it's do or die. We'll be fighting with everything tomorrow."

(Hamza would've been) Probably on the bench. We're aware of his ability. Most of his football (he has played) in England at right-back as a defender. We know he can play in midfield. He can play as a defensive midfielder. But it's about a team. One player doesn't make a team.



Hong Kong coach Ashley Westwood when asked which position Hamza Choudhury would have played if he was playing for Hong Kong and if he has any specific plans for the midfielder

- The two sides have met four times previously, with Hong Kong, China unbeaten in all encounters, winning twice and drawing twice.
- Hong Kong's first victory came in 1975, when they thrashed Bangladesh 9-1 in the Merdeka Tournament. The next meeting came 28 years later, in 2003, ending in a 2-2 draw in an AFC Asian Cup Preliminary fixture in Hong Kong.
- The teams then faced off twice in 2006 in home and away fixtures in Asian Cup Qualifiers.
- Bangladesh have failed to score in their last two meetings with Hong Kong -- losing 1-0 and then playing out a goalless draw.
- Bangladesh have lost just once in seven matches this year -- a 2-1 loss to Singapore in June 2025 -- but have drawn four times.
- According to the latest FIFA World Rankings, Hong Kong sit 146th, while Bangladesh are ranked 184th.
- After four consecutive defeats, Hong Kong returned to winning ways with an 8-0 rout of Fiji in their last outing at the 2025 King's Cup.

We were all egotistical losers. So why didn't we connect when we were 20, 21, 22, 23? Was it ego? Was it rivalry? It was down to the culture within England. We weren't friendly or connected. We weren't a team. We never at any stage became a real good, strong team.

Former England and Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard



Clubs divided along election lines in boycott move

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) board of directors' election on October 6 has divided the 76 clubs in Dhaka Metropolis into two distinct camps, as while some 40 of them have called for a domestic boycott, the others have adopted compliant silence.

On Wednesday, several disgruntled club officials held a press conference at a city hotel to speak about their grievances regarding the just-concluded election. At the event, they announced a boycott of all club, division and district level cricket across the country over the irregularities in the polls.

This reaction from the clubs was not unexpected given that their control over the country's richest sporting body has been greatly diminished after the polls. Even prestigious clubs like Abahani Ltd and Mohammedan Sporting Club, who have remained influential in the BCB's power structure for as long as memory serves, don't have any representation in the newly elected 25-member board of directors.

Last year, all 76 clubs had unitedly boycotted against BCB constitution reforms and successfully nipped it in the bud. Even 48 hours before the election, 48 protesting clubs had come out threatening a boycott.

"I can guarantee that had I contested in the elections, no matter who the opposition is or what my support base is... I would have passed easily,"

Tamim Iqbal, former Bangladesh captain, councillor of Old DOHS Sports Club



But after the polls, the number of protesting clubs have shrunk. There is some ambiguity over exactly how many clubs are part of the protests right now, with the number fluctuating around 38-40.

Even within the protesting organisers, there had been differences. Some organisers had put forth a three-point request to the Sports Advisor Asif Mahmud regarding the polls on October 2, when Tamim Iqbal, the face of the protests, was out of the country.

"Let me clarify. We want the best for cricket, and we don't want to harm cricket. That is why we all collectively

submitted an application that the election be postponed and that a re-scheduled date for a proper election be announced... There is nothing wrong with this," Rafiqul Islam Babu, one of the organisers who gave the proposal, said on the matter.

Rafiqul also hoped that the divide among clubs would soon end.

"Sides were taken surrounding the circumstances in the elections... But it's temporary and for the good of country you will see reconciliation," Rafiqul said.

During the press conference, questions were asked over why councillors, who could have sent their votes through postal voting, were instead asked to do it through e-voting. It was also claimed that when new ballots were printed after a candidate was added, some voters had requested for e-votes but later found that their votes had already been cast.

"We are not accepting the election itself. We are boycotting the election," Masuduzzaman, Mohammedan's councillor and cricket committee chairman, said during the event.

In the evening, the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) reaffirmed that it was wholly committed to hold the leagues. It remains to be seen how the boycott pans out eventually, but in terms of reconciliations, the clubs have never appeared more divided.

Proving a point when it matters most

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh have been the surprise packages of the ongoing ICC Women's World Cup, showing consistency despite limited preparation and minimal international exposure beforehand.

The Tigresses began their campaign with a memorable victory over Pakistan in Colombo before putting up a spirited fight against four-time champions England in Guwahati, drawing widespread praise for their skillful and spirited display.

Before departing for the World Cup, expectations surrounding Nigar Sultana Joty's side were relatively modest. Bangladesh had not played any international match since the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers in Pakistan in April, with their preparation largely restricted to fitness drills, skill camps, and a few practice matches against a men's Under-15 side.

Concerns also surrounded Bangladesh's fragile batting lineup, with much of the responsibility appearing to rest on skipper Joty. However, the team's performances since their warm-up fixtures have defied those assumptions, as several new and emerging players have stepped up to share the responsibility.

In their campaign opener, debutant Rubya Haider Jhelik struck an unbeaten fifty to steer Bangladesh to a seven-wicket win over Pakistan after Marufa Akter's incisive spell had restricted them to 129.

Building on that start, Sobhana Mostary hit her maiden fifty, with Rabeya Khan adding an unbeaten 43 off 27 to lift Bangladesh to 178 on a testing surface against title aspirants England, who then were reduced to 103 for six through Marufa and Fahima Khatun's breakthroughs. However, Heather Knight's unbeaten 79 denied Bangladesh a famous victory.

Despite the narrow defeat, batting coach Nasiruddin Faruque was encouraged by what he saw. "So far, the batters are delivering very well-organized batting," Faruque told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Since the warm-up game against Sri Lanka, where we scored over 240 [242] and won by one run, the players have maintained the same process and clarity of roles."

Faruque was particularly impressed by the improvement shown by Mostary and Rabeya, noting that the pair now understood their roles better.

"Mostary can anchor if Joty fails, just like Jhelik did in the first match," he said, adding that Rabeya's batting had become "much more complete."

Looking ahead, Faruque urged the team to stay grounded as tougher challenges await, starting with New Zealand in Guwahati on Friday.

"They'll be under pressure after losing two games," he said, adding that if Bangladesh "execute their plans well," another upset could be on the cards. He also confirmed that Marufa has recovered from the cramps that restricted her bowling in the previous match.

