

## Hong Kong draw too little too late

SPORTS REPORTER

A late goal from Rakib Hossain rescued Bangladesh as they came from behind to secure a 1-1 draw against 10-man Hong Kong in their AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers clash at Kai Tak Stadium yesterday.

A win would have kept Bangladesh's slim chances of reaching the finals alive, but the second away draw in four matches further complicated the equation for the men in red and green. However, after India's 2-1 loss to Singapore later in the evening, both Bangladesh and India were eliminated, meaning that either Hong Kong or Singapore will advance from Group C.

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera made three changes to the starting XI, bringing in Topu Barman, Shamit Shome, and Zayyan Ahmed in place of Taj Uddin, Sobel Rana Jr, and Faisal Ahmed Fahim. Cabrera seemed to prioritise possession, instructing his side to build from the back -- a tactic that backfired in the 34th minute.

Under pressure from Hong Kong's high press, a miscommunication between Topu and Tariq Kazi saw the latter lose control inside the box and foul Fernando Azevedo. The referee awarded a penalty, which captain Matt Orr converted, sending Mitul Marma the wrong way.

Bangladesh nearly equalised in first-half stoppage time through a move involving Saad Uddin, Hamza Choudhury, and Shamit Shome,



PHOTO: BFF

but the final effort was blocked. After the break, Bangladesh grew into the match. In the 51st minute, Saad latched onto a long ball from Topu and unleashed a low drive, only to be denied by Tse Ka Wing's superb save.

Cabrera introduced Jamal Bhuiyan and Fahamedul Islam to inject urgency. Fahamedul missed a golden chance in the 73rd minute, failing to connect with a waist-high cross from Saad despite losing his marker in front of goal.

Hong Kong were reduced to 10 men in the 75th minute when Oliver Benjamin received a second yellow card for a foul on Shamit. Bangladesh seized control, and finally broke through in the 89th minute. Substitute Fa-

him delivered a pinpoint cross from the left, Fahamedul headed it down, and Rakib Hossain calmly flicked the ball past Tse Ka Wing to earn a dramatic draw and silence the home crowd.

**Definitely, the feeling, as usual, is that we deserved more points but we end up this window with one point. Regardless of the points, the match was very competitive. I think we deserved a win today.**

Bangladesh coach **Javier Cabrera**

**We should have won this match. We missed a few chances. Everyone played well. It wasn't easy considering the ground and the crowd. I think we should have got four points from these two matches against Hong Kong.**

Goalscorer **Rakib Hossain**

## 'Must credit the fight shown' in Vizag

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Often, the effort a team show in a competitive match can outweigh the final result. The Tigresses' determined performances against England and South Africa in the ongoing ICC Women's World Cup, following a crucial opening win over Pakistan, highlight the significance of their fight, as it will strengthen the team for future challenges.

After a three-wicket, last-over loss to South Africa in Vizag on Monday, most players were left in tears in the dressing room, but the camp's mood had brightened by the next day following retrospection. The fight shown would help build morale.

"They gave hundred and ten percent effort... to come out of it in the very next match shows their determination. During the bad times, everyone sticks together... the way they played is of international standard and the effort will boost them going forward," batting coach Nasiruddin Faruque Shajib told The Daily Star yesterday.

The dew factor was significant against South Africa. Marufa Akter was not bowled as it became harder for the pacer to grip the ball than for some of the spinners. Fielding was where the Tigresses let themselves down, but despite the vital dropped catches, overall fielding standards have also improved.

"I can't really comment fully on the fielding... but even looking at how they coped with the dew factor, you must credit the fight shown," Shajib said.

Skipper Nigar Sultana Joty highlighted the lessons learned from a close game against a quality opponent after the match in Visakhapatnam.

"There are many things to learn... what we should do to get the result in our favour if we



find ourselves in this kind of situation in the next matches," she said.

Not only in lessons, the Tigresses are also discovering players who can establish themselves further in international cricket. Against the Proteas, Rabeya Khan's superb delivery to bowl Annerie Dercksen was a highlight, while Shorna Akter's innings shows her potential despite her youth. Shorna is just 18, while Rabeya and Marufa Akter, who dazzled in this tournament, are in their 20s.

"There is no doubt about their prospects... it will be some time before players of their quality arrive again. Shorna, Rabeya and many from their batch are players with potential and players for the future," Shajib said.

## Litton 'likely' to miss WI ODIs

SPORTS REPORTER

Litton Das is all but ruled out of Bangladesh's upcoming three-match ODI series against the West Indies, starting October 18 in Mirpur, Dhaka as the wicketkeeper-batter continues to recover from a left-side strain.

The 31-year-old has been sidelined for nearly a month after sustaining the injury during a practice session ahead of Bangladesh's Asia Cup T20 Super Four clash against India in Dubai last month. He missed two crucial Asia Cup matches against India and Pakistan, followed by the T20I and ODI series against Afghanistan.

Litton underwent an MRI scan yesterday, and selectors are awaiting the report before making a final decision. Chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu said Litton's participation "looks highly unlikely" as he has yet to start full-fledged batting. "After the scan report, the medical team will decide when he can begin. It was expected by now, given the nature of the injury, but it seems delayed."

The squad for the West Indies series is expected to be announced today, though Litton's absence is almost certain. His participation

in the T20I series -- set to begin on October 27 in Chattogram -- is also doubtful.

Litton's ODI form has been poor, failing to reach double figures in his last eight innings and last scoring a fifty against India in the 2023 World Cup, which earlier saw him dropped from the ICC Champions Trophy squad. However, he has shown revival in T20Is, winning Player of the Series awards against Sri Lanka and the Netherlands after being handed the captaincy role in the format in May this year.

Selectors had hoped to recall him for the West Indies series to inject experience, but will now plan without him. The West Indies are set to arrive in Dhaka today.

Amid criticism over the national team's decline in the 50-over format, Ashraf acknowledged the limited options: "We don't have enough available players. I have to work with what's in my basket."

"There is only one domestic league for the ODI format. Foreign players don't play there anymore. How many national team players get a chance to play? If we can't increase the 'A' team's matches simultaneously, what can you expect from the team in the 2027 World Cup?"



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

**Brazil defender Paulo Henrique was left frustrated as hosts Japan celebrate scoring during a come-from-behind 3-2 win in a friendly fixture at the Ajinomoto Stadium in Tokyo yesterday, earning their first win over the five-time world champions in 14 attempts.**



PHOTO: AFP

**Senuran Muthusamy starred with a maiden 10-wicket haul, dismantling Pakistan for 167 in their second innings and giving South Africa a target of 277. But Noman Ali struck again, removing Aiden Markram and Wiaan Mulder, leaving the Proteas at 51-2 at stumps. With both spinners in full swing, the first Test in Lahore is now evenly poised for a thrilling finale.**

## Cape Verde: From tiny shores to the world stage

AGENCIES

Cape Verde has made history. On Monday, the Blue Sharks secured their first-ever FIFA World Cup appearance with a 3-0 win over Eswatini in Praia, topping Group D ahead of African powerhouse Cameroon. Goals from Dailon Livramento, Willy Semedo, and veteran Stopira sparked celebrations across the archipelago.

For a nation of just 550,000 people, football is a unifying force. Streets in Praia overflowed with dancing fans, honking cars, and bursts of fireworks. Music filled the air -- the upbeat rhythms of funana and reggae accompanying waves of joy. "I've been dreaming of this moment since I was a child," said goalkeeper Vozinha, 39, his voice trembling.

The triumph is especially poignant as it coincides with 50 years of independence from Portugal. Coach Pedro 'Bubista' Brito called it "a victory for everyone who fought for our freedom." FIFA President Gianni Infantino congratulated the team, calling the achievement "a historic moment likely to power a new generation of football lovers" across

the nation.

Cape Verde's journey has been remarkable. Once rarely seen in international football, they now join Africa's nine World Cup representatives. The team finished Group D with 23 points, four ahead of Cameroon, recording seven clean sheets in ten matches. Their campaign included a famous 1-0 home win against Cameroon last month, signaling their potential to challenge Africa's traditional powers.

Stopira, 37, scored the final goal after coming on as a substitute, symbolizing his long service since 2008 and years of collective effort. Fans like Jorge Junior Livramento described the scene as unforgettable: "I shouted until I lost my voice. It's a dream -- for the first time, the world will hear our anthem at the World Cup."

Cape Verde becomes the second-least populous nation to reach a World Cup, after Iceland, and the smallest by land area, at just over 4,000 km<sup>2</sup>. From their islands in the Atlantic to North America 2026, the Blue Sharks prove that even the smallest nations can achieve monumental dreams.



### KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Population: 550,000 (smallest African nation ever to qualify)

Area: 4,033 km<sup>2</sup> (smallest nation by land area to reach a World Cup)

FIFA Ranking: 70th in the world (as of October 2025)

Top of Group D: 23 points (4 ahead of Cameroon)

Record: 7 wins, 2 draws, 1 loss

Clean Sheets: 7 in 10 matches

Historic Wins: 1-0 vs Cameroon, 3-0 vs Eswatini

Founded: 1975 (50 years of independence in 2025)

Previous best achievement: AFCON quarterfinals (2013, 2023)

## Gill wins first series as India captain

AFP, New delhi

Shubman Gill on Tuesday won his first Test series since becoming India captain as his side beat the West Indies by seven wickets at Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium for a 2-0 sweep.

Chasing 121 for victory in the second Test, India resumed on day five at 63-1 and reached their target in the first session with KL Rahul unbeaten on 58.

India are a team in transition under 26-year-old Gill, after the retirements of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

They won the opening Test by an innings and 140 runs after a thrilling 2-2 draw in their five-Test series in England from June to August, Gill's first in charge.

"It's a really big honour and I would say I'm getting used to it," Gill said at the post-

match presentation.

"Managing all the players and leading this team is a great honour."

India head coach Gautam Gambhir said the young leader was marching on after having passed his "toughest test as a Test captain" in England.

"No one has done him a favour by appointing him the Test and one-day captain," the former batsman told reporters.

"I think he deserves every bit of it. I think he's worked hard, and he ticks all the boxes."

Gill has been in the form of his life after being named Test captain in May, scoring 754 runs in the five England Tests and then a half century and a hundred in the two West Indies matches.



PHOTO: AFP