

Dhaka, Friday, November 10, 2000, e-mail: dssports@bdonline.com



THE STAGE IS THEIRS: A combo picture shows (L) Indian team members doing stretching during a training session while the Bangladesh players take a break from practice at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. —Star photo by Arman Hossain

They led the way

Al-Amin

We don't know how many captains other countries had before becoming a Test nation. But in the case of Bangladesh it is exactly nine. This figure also corresponds to membership of the elite club before Bangladesh's acceptance as the tenth Test-playing nation in June this year. Although there are a lot of factors that worked together to be a Test nation, but we feel that the yardstick in reflecting Bangladesh's elevation into that elite club was a collective effort of those nine individuals who were at the helm during our long and grueling journey. We also feel that by recalling their contributions our history can be retraced since Shamim Kabir donned the first cap in 1977. They are the pillars on which our Test foundation was laid. Even though it is a land rich in cricket heritage, nevertheless, we have been rather casual in preserving the chronology. Rather than looking behind at the past, we tend to glorify our achievements in the present. Wouldn't be fitting at the dawn of a new era in cricket, which begins at the Bangabandhu National Stadium this morning when Naimur's men take to the field against India to play their first ever five-day match, to pay tribute to those unselfish leaders? During their tenures each distinguished gentlemen experienced many lows before reaping the rewards of years of sacrifice. In recalling their contribution we have tried to be impartial in our effort.

Shamim Kabir (1977-80): The wintry morning on January 7, 1977 marked the official beginning of Bangladesh's cricket journey when Shamim Kabir led the South Asian nation in a three-day match against the MCC. The historic match at the Dhaka Stadium (presently Bangabandhu National Stadium) spoke of the passion for the game among the local fans as it drew 40 thousand spectators. The three-day 'unofficial' Test ended in a draw and Shamim retired as captain after that inspiring start.

Roquibul Hassan (1978-82): Bangladesh got the real taste of cricket at the highest level when Sri Lanka led by Tenekun came here in 1978. However, it exposed Bangladesh's inability. The tour also proved a bitter experience for Roquibul, who took over from Shamim.

He recalled that the seven

defeats against Sri Lanka eventually helped our cricketers to grow in confidence in the years ahead. And signs of improvement were evident in the next fixture against Deccan Blues of Ajit Wadekar. That was the high point during Roquibul's first of two stints as captain before wicketkeeper Shafiqul Huq Hira took over.

The technically sound right-hander regained the captaincy in 1982. But Roquibul's captaincy ended on a sour note when he led Bangladesh during the disappointing tour of Kenya. He is the first skipper to win an international trophy -- the First South Asian Championship in 1984.

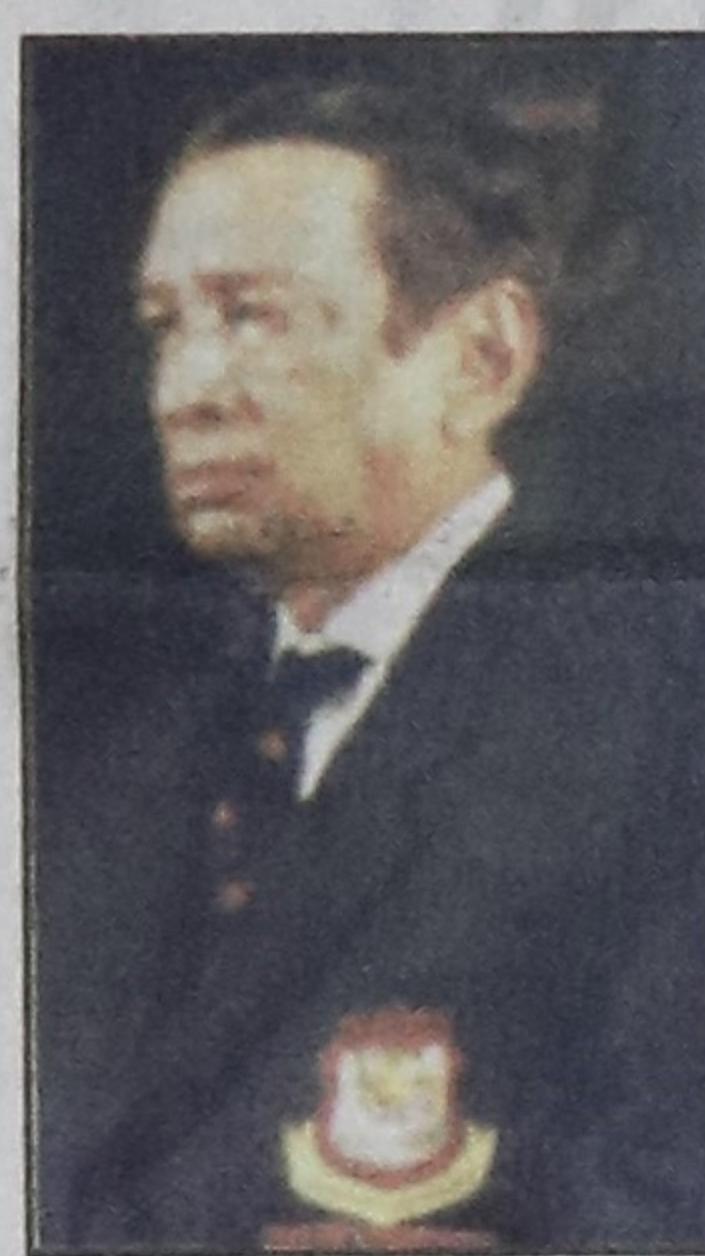
Captain's crack: Having two of our players stayed at different homes in Kenya. The only time we were together on match days.

Shafiqul Huq Hira (1979-82): The diminutive but agile

stumper became the first Bangladeshi captain to lead the national team abroad in the First ICC trophy England in 1979. The high point of the maiden visit was Ashrafur Huq's record bowling figures of 7/23 against Fiji. The most significant part however of his tenure was a brief visit of Pakistan in 1980, which came to an abrupt end due to crowd violence in Chittagong. The visit of Pakistan also marked the first tour of a Test team in the independent Bangladesh. The sad episode in the port city on January 2 denied our cricketers to rub shoulders with the likes of Zahir Abbas, Javed Miandad and Imran Khan. Bangladesh cricket also saw the world class left-arm spinner Chandrashekhar, who led a goodwill trip from India under the banner of Hyderabad Blues in 1982. Hira then led Bangladesh to the Second Test against the Sri Lankan team.

SHAMIM KABIR

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Lenin Gani

WHAT makes a first-ever Test match so appealing? Perhaps the fascination lies in watching the home side compete on an equal footing against a more established team. A Test is the equivalent of say, a five-day battle on a miniature scale and without the side effects. Just like general uses his tactical knowledge to gain victory, so a captain uses his available 'arsenal' ranging from fast bowler to spinner to batsman, fielder and wicketkeeper to achieve his objective.

From humble beginnings Bangladesh cricket has come on in leaps and bounds. So when 25-year-old Naimur Rahman leads out his troops on to the hallowed turf of Dhaka's Bangabandhu National Stadium for their maiden five-day encounter against India, it will truly be the culmination of all those many years of dedication that the people of this proud land have put in to make November 10 a reality.

The chances of the home team that was only granted Test status by the International Cricket Council in June this year, pulling off even a draw at the first attempt seems quite remote. In fact, only Zimbabwe did so when they entered the Test arena in 1992. Also it is worth mentioning that New Zealand took 26 years to get a feel of success at the highest level.

Retrospectively, debut Tests have tended to be seen as an opportunity for players to enter the record books for various reasons. And rightly the statisticians have carefully documented these unique instances.

In essence there have been eight such august occasions. The list is as follows:

March 1876-7: England and Australia
February 1888-9: South Africa
June 1928: West Indies
January 1929-30: New Zealand
June 1932: India
October 1952-3: Pakistan
February 1982: Sri Lanka
October 1992-3: Zimbabwe

* Indicate inaugural Tests versus India. The others were against England.

Historically, the founders of the 'gentleman's game' England and Australia met in what is regarded as the first ever Test match from March 15-19, 1876-7 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. In those days there were no 90 overs per day and an over lasted four balls.

Anyway, Englishman Alfred Shaw bowled the first Test delivery to Australian Charles Bannerman, who went on to become the first Test centurion. Hill had both the first Test wicket and the first catch. Mid-

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1876-77. Clinched their first series in South Africa in 1902-03.

TEST TALK

Happy 'Testday' to you

Rabeed Imam

SOMETIMES dreams do come true. A fairytale is about to unfold and we Bangladeshis are the proud writers, actors, heroes, and even sidekicks of that story. The feeling can never be compared to anything because this is a completely unique occasion.

When Naimur Rahman goes out to toss today with his counterpart Saurav Ganguly, he will be stepping into history along with the whole nation.

There were detractors who never wanted Bangladesh getting the Test status. Even when we were welcomed into the elite club on June 26, certain forces still projected our cricket in a disapproving manner.

Former Indian opener Navjot Singh Sidhu was and still is the most volatile critic of Bangladesh. While giving his expert opinion during the recent ICC Knockout Tournament in Nairobi, Sidhu predicted that Bangladesh were going to be swamped by the

other Test nations in the coming days and they stand no chance simply because they are not good enough.

Sidhu even went on to the extent by saying that Bangladesh's glorious victory over Pakistan in the 1999 World Cup was a questionable triumph with a 'cloud' hanging over its competitive value.

No matter how harsh those words sounded, Bangladesh's ensuing trip to South Africa — where they established an all-loss record — provided no convincing answers. The most embarrassing aspect was the national team's 50-odd totals in the last two limited-over games.

But cricket is a great leveller and days later India's much vaunted batting line-up — the best in the world, as Sidhu puts it: They fell apart like nine-pins in the Sharjah Champions Trophy final against a Sri Lankan bowling attack which is never considered threatening. India were shot out for 54 and so Bangladesh can take heart from the fact they both have had similar forgettable experiences recently!

Do we belong at this level? Are we up for it? Was the International Cricket Council (ICC) too quick in granting us the Test status? These are silly questions now. The fact of the matter is that we are the tenth member of the select group and to challenge our right to be a Test nation is to challenge the wisdom of the ICC.

It will be unwise to compare ourselves in technical, psychological or even physical terms with India. Their players are part of a Test cricket tradition that dates back to the 1930s. They have had better tutors, better role models, experienced guidance, an impressive infrastructure, and most importantly, money.

So where do we stand? It will be unrealistic to expect fireworks from the Bangladeshi batsmen and bowlers. Even if we lose after stretching the match to five or four days, to the neutral eye, it will be an achievement. If we can draw in our first outing, that should be as good as a victory. It will take a miracle to actually win.

Test cricket is a totally alien concept for Bangladesh, so it is virtually impossible to foresee how our boys are going to react to such a demanding proposition. However, there are some simple factors, which can be taken into consideration while approaching today's match.

Our team is badly out of depth in the bowling department. This means that the best chance Bangladesh have of being competitive is through their batsmen.

One thing needs to be remembered that Tests are decided on the performances during particular sessions. The likes of Javagal Srinath and Venkatesh Prasad are not going to bowl all day and it's only natural that they won't have the same edge throughout a match.

The other Indian bowlers are either very thin on Test inexperience or debutants. The scenario is rather balanced. Bowling is Bangladesh's chief cause for concern and honestly, if the Indians don't make mistakes, there is very little chance of wickets falling.

But this is not the time to chalk out formulas for a first-up success. If it comes, fine, but let's not count on it and let non-sensical anticipations spoil the flavour of the moment.

It hardly matters if Tendulkar creates a world record, we couldn't care less if India win the match in a thumping fashion, the message

today is — Bangladesh is here to stay.

For the players who will be donning their first Test caps, it is the ultimate fantasy becoming reality. We better revel and let the 'tigers' roar free for the next five days to have a feel of what it's all about in a new jungle.

Knight bucks up Test babes

LONDON, Nov 10 (Internet report): England star Nick Knight believes that Bangladesh have the right attitude to succeed in Test cricket.

Knight, speaking exclusively to Sky Sports, says that despite winning only three of their 41 one-day internationals, enthusiasm and support will see the game grow.

"Test cricket will be tough for Bangladesh. But I liked the way they went about their cricket when England beat them in the Kenya tournament," said Knight.

They seem to have some decent batsmen and a couple of promising bowlers. They went about their work with a good attitude and they should learn quickly."

Cricket is massively popular in the country with crowds of up to 40,000 not unknown for club matches, a fact Knight believes will be crucial to continual development.

"It will be a baptism of fire in their inaugural Test against India. But now they have got Test status, their enthusiasm will bring through some fine young bowlers. Hopefully in the next few years, they will progress."

Bangladesh will be well aware of the harsh reality of first-class cricket after completing a winless recent warm-up tour to South Africa and will be looking for an honourable performance in their opening Test battle.

**Warmest Greetings
on the occasion of
First Cricket Test of Bangladesh**

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