

SPORT



Pictured with his daughter before departing with the team to Hyderabad yesterday, Shakib Al Hasan's (L) all-round exploits will be in high demand as well as Mahmudullah Riyad's (R) middle-order contributions when the one-off Test starts on February 9.



PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED

An imposing task awaits

AL-AMIN



As Bangladesh embarked on their maiden Test tour of India, which will commence in earnest at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad with the one-off Test starting on February 9, expectations among fans in this part of the world lurched from a three-day submission to an improbable victory.

Skipper Mushfiqur Rahim however was pragmatic in his opening speech where he termed the one-off Test as another one of a long list instead of branding it a 'historic' one. He also said that they wanted to use this opportunity and play good cricket to prove that they are now a better team than they were five years ago.

This is a fair statement from the Bangladesh Test captain and the onus will be on his team to back up his words -- that the Tigers have come a long way from being the whipping boys in the demanding five-day contest. Bangladesh's recent success or their home dominance for the last two years has been limited mainly to their achievements in the one-day format of the game. But in hindsight this success can be attributed to the development in skill and that is why the Tigers have also performed well across all formats in the recent past.

Bangladesh's victory in the second Test against England last year, their two recent Tests against New Zealand in completely different conditions provided ample evidence that they are increasingly becoming competitive in the five-day game. Bangladesh's defeats in both Tests in New Zealand can best be described as a result of a mental problem than a deficiency of physical skill.

So, the Test in India will test how Bangladesh apply both mentally and physically against the top-ranked Test team in the world. Things will be even tougher considering the fact that they will play India on their home turf, where they simply tore apart the likes of Australia and

New Zealand by innings margins in two of their three Tests on this batting-friendly wicket.

The biggest challenge facing Bangladesh is the twin spin attack of Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja. You can easily add a third in Amit Mishra, considering Bangladesh's weakness against quality leg-spin. While it is true that Bangladesh's batting showed character in the virtual dust-bowl in Chittagong but the English bowlers were definitely not as devastating as Ashwin can be on such wickets or even on those with less turn and bounce.

If Bangladesh can neutralise the venom of Ashwin and keep a close eye on Jadeja's arm ball they will stand a chance of putting up a fight against a famed Indian batting line-up, which has a history of scoring no less than 400 runs in an innings on this very ground.

Although Bangladesh are carrying as many as four pacers in the team, a pace-friendly wicket will be the remotest of options they are going to get. They have got three spinners in the team and among the trio, off-spinner Mehadi Hasan Miraz will probably get a wicket of his liking after his famous exploits against England at home, where he took an amazing 16 wickets in two Tests.

But if the Tigers are to make a positive impact their batting has to come to the party as a cohesive unit, which was missing in New Zealand. The team will probably be packed with seven batsmen -- Tamim Iqbal, Imrul Kayes, Mominul Haque, Mahmudullah Riyad, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Sabbir Rahman -- unless there is an injury issue. But the biggest problem is that most of them love to play in one gear and refuse to adapt to the demands of different situations. They will desperately need to sort that out if they want to learn from the mistakes they committed in New Zealand. Moreover, they need to learn how to take a few catches in the slip cordon if they are to make an impact against an imposing Indian team trooped by an imposing leader in Virat Kohli.

Tigers depart with high hopes

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim tried to suppress the hype surrounding the one-off Test against India as he was not ready to give the trip to India the 'historic' tag. Instead, he stated that they were going to Hyderabad to play just another Test match.

But one could feel the excitement surrounding the tour when talking to the players, especially the young brigade of the team, at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport before the Tigers' departure for Hyderabad yesterday. "I'm excited as we are going to play a Test in India for the first time. I will try to make it a memorable one if I get the chance. It

will be a big thing for us if we can do something there and I believe the pressure will be on India as there is only one match," said left-handed batsman Soumya Sarkar.

Young players like Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Taskin Ahmed were well aware of the fact that it would be a tough task to challenge India at home but they were very confident and eager to do well on this tour that is going to finally fulfil Bangladesh's dream of playing a Test series in India. "It's a big Test match for us and definitely I will not leave any stone unturned to make it a memorable one if I ultimately get the opportunity to play this match. The only thing I can say is that I will give my best," said Taskin.

Miraz was not only looking forward to bowling well in conditions which will most likely favour

spin but he will also try to take some bowling tips from number one bowler Ravichandran Ashwin while pacer Subhashis Roy was looking forward to the scalp of celebrated India skipper Virat Kohli, much like Kamrul Islam Rabbi.

Bangladesh's bowling attack will face a stiff challenge against the vaunted Indian batting line-up but everybody was confident that success will come against the home side if they can bowl in the right areas. "We must be consistent and bowl in the right area because they have good batsmen. I believe the pitch will favour spin bowlers and we also have some good spinners in the team," said Miraz.

"Ashwin is a world-class player. I will try to take some tips from him after the match and I will also follow his bowling in the match and I believe this experience will help in my career,"

he continued. Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam also emphasised on bowling in the right spot to bring success and he found no reason to be worried if India provides a spinning track.

"We have good spinners in the team and I hope there will be no problems if we get a spinning track. Our batsmen are also now confident and some of our key batsmen returned to the team having recovered from injury. The main thing is we will need to bowl in the right areas," said Taijul, who went wicketless in his only Test against India at Fatullah in 2015.

"Personally I am very happy as I can go with the team on this historic tour. If the team management gives me the chance and I can pick up the wicket of one of the world's best batsman Virat Kohli, nothing would be better than that," said Subhashis.

Tigresses confident

Team departs today for WC qualifiers

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh women's cricket captain Rumana Ahmed was optimistic about their chances of getting a ticket to the qualifying round in Sri Lanka to ensure a place in the 2017 ICC World Cup.

A confident Rumana talked to reporters yesterday at Mirpur prior to their departure for Sri Lanka today and she said: "Bangladesh can dream for the best in the qualifying round. It's not like we did not win any matches against the teams we are going to play in Sri Lanka. We have some weaknesses but we won matches against them earlier and that's why we are confident about doing good. I can tell you the future will be better for us than the past."

"We have specific plans for each team and we are confident that we can go ahead with our plans," she added.

SQUAD

Rumana Ahmed (captain), Fargana Hoque, Sanjida Islam, Jahanara Alam, Khadiza-Tul Kubra, Nigar Sultana (wicketkeeper), Panna Ghosh, Ritu Moni, Salma Khatun, Sarmin Sultana, Sharmin Akter, Suraya Azmin,



RUMANA AHMED

Bangladesh women's team has been placed in group B along with Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, South Africa and Scotland. They will play their first match against Papua New Guinea on February 7.

Bangladesh's main problem lies with their batting but Rumana said that they were trying to improve in their batting.

"There is no limit to learning. In this regard you can look at Sachin Tendulkar. We are trying to make improvements in our batting; now it's time to proven ourselves," she said.

The event technical committee for the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier has approved the replacement of Fahima Khatun and Lata Mondal with Shaila Sharmin and Morsheda Khatun in the Bangladesh Women's Team. Fahima and Lata have been ruled out of the tournament due to injury.

Team India's grand gift for Dhoni

AGENCIES, New Delhi

The entire Indian team that won the recently concluded T20I series against England presented former skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni with an innovative wooden plaque to serve as a memento for his services to the sport and for being a continuous source of inspiration to the Indian team.

The wooden plaque has four silver stars embossed on it to highlight Dhoni's four biggest achievements as captain of India -- the 2007 World T20, becoming the number one ranked team in Test cricket in 2009, the 2011 World Cup and the 2013 Champions Trophy.

The private programme, including players, support staff and chairman of selectors MSK Prasad, happened at the team hotel and the cricketers also gave him a 'Thank You' note. The note read: "Inspirational, Captain-par-Excellence, Thank You, -- Indian Cricket Team".

Big bucks promised to swimming's new EC

SPORTS REPORTER

The executive committee of the Bangladesh Swimming Federation (BSF) has been elected unopposed yesterday after no one withdrew their nominations against 24 posts of the game's governing body.

"As no one from the 24 candidates withdrew their nominations against 24 posts today [Thursday], which was the last day of the withdrawal of nominations, the 24-member committee of Bangladesh Swimming Federation has preliminarily been elected without contest," said returning officer SM Kabirul Islam.

BM Saif has been elected general secretary while Golam Mohammad Alamgir, Tarafder Ruhul Amin, former general secretary Rafiz Uddin and veteran organiser Abdul Mannan were elected as vice presidents of the committee, which also includes two joint secretaries, a treasurer and 16 members.

The newly elected committee has been assured approximately Tk 2 crore per year from two sponsors who are also part of the committee, while another Tk 1 crore is expected to be deposited to the BSF account to run the federation smoothly throughout the year.

"As far as I know, two sponsors have promised our honourable president [Navy Chief admiral Nizamuddin Ahmed] to provide Tk 16 lakh per month and they have been included in the committee," said general secretary elect BM Saif, adding that BSF have also gotten promises of getting Tk 1 crore a year.

It has been learnt that Max Group chairman, Alamgir will provide Tk 10 lakh per month while Saif PowerTec's managing director Tarafder will provide Tk 6 lakh per month.

"No doubt, we have lagged behind the standard that we had after Liberation," said Saif, who was the joint secretary of the previous committee. "However, we are trying to lift swimming by appointing foreign coaches and we got results in the last South Asian Games."

"I have a plan to introduce a school swimming championship in the latter part of this year and will give special emphasis on places like Nikli of Kishoreganj, Kushtia from where a lot of swimmers are coming through," said Saif.

The general secretary-elect also informed that they would take responsibility of the swimmers who would come through the talent hunt programme, organised by Bangladesh Navy.

Tigers reach Hyderabad

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA from New Delhi

The 15-member Bangladesh team led by Mushfiqur Rahim reached the southern Indian city of Hyderabad for the one-off Test match against India starting there on February 9.

The visiting team landed at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport at 7:30pm and travelled to the Taj Deccan Hotel, Hyderabad Cricket Association media manager Vikram Mansingh told The Daily Star over phone.

As per the joint itinerary released by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), the Bangladesh team will train on February 3 and 4 ahead of the two-day warm-up match against an India A side on February 5-6 to be played at the Gymkhana Ground in Secunderabad.

Vikram informed that after the warm-up match, the Bangladesh team will shift to the Taj Krishna Hotel, which is closer to the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium -- the venue of the Test.

The visitors will train at the Test venue on February 7 and 8 but on a different pitch from the one on which the Test will be played.

The Bangladesh team will return to Dhaka on February 14.

This is the first time Bangladesh will play a Test in India since getting Test status 16 years ago.

While India has already named a 16-member squad for the Test, Bangladesh announced a 15-member side which does not have their lethal weapon in pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman.

Bangladesh beat Windies

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh blind cricket team defeated their West Indian counterparts by eight wickets in a thrilling match to move up to fourth place in the standings in the 2nd T20 World Cup Cricket Tournament for the Blind yesterday.

After electing to bat first, Kevin Andrew Douglas plundered 112 runs off just 65 balls to lead his team to 195. He struck 17 fours and found support from Gregory Lee Stewart, who made 57.

In reply, Bangladesh won in 19.4 overs courtesy of Tanzilur Rahman (90 not out) and Mahbulul Hasan Emon's (52 not out) 145-run partnership.

Bolt rules out 2018 C'wealth Games

REUTERS, Melbourne



Jamaican sprint great Usain Bolt has no plans to extend his career beyond this year's World Championships in London and has ruled out a return to Australia for the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Bolt, who completed a 'treble treble' of 100m, 200m and 4x100m Olympic titles at the 2016 Rio Games, had his 2008 relay gold stripped last month after teammate Nesta Carter's re-tested sample showed traces of a banned substance.

The 30-year-old Bolt also anchored the Jamaican relay team to his only Commonwealth Games gold in Glasgow in 2014 and organisers had hoped that he might extend his career to the next edition

on the Gold Coast in April 2018.

"To come out here next season, to really train as hard as I need to get to the level I need to win, it's not going to happen," Bolt told reporters in Melbourne on Thursday.

Bolt will lead an international team of "All Stars" in the Nitro Athletics series in the Australian city against four other teams representing England, China, New Zealand and Japan. The first meeting is on Saturday, with a further two on Feb. 9 and 11.

"It is going to be great, going to be something different. Like cricket and Twenty20, it's going to be different," Bolt added. "I feel it will catch on -- it's going to bring a lot of excitement to the sport."

"It is going to be something different, not going to be normal -- a lot more exciting. I feel personally it is a great idea. This is why I am a part of it."



Jamaican sprint great Usain Bolt strikes his signature pose at the launch of the Nitro Athletic series in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED