

Mominul sees opportunity

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Indore

 Mominul Haque, one of Bangladesh's best performers in the Test circuit, will become Bangladesh's newest Test captain as the Indore Test against India rolls out the carpet for the start of the Tigers' Test Championship campaign today. Following the two-year ban handed to Shakib Al Hasan on the eve of the tour, Mominul was handed the Test captaincy for the challenging tour but unlike Mahmudullah Riyad's appointment as T20I captain, the decision raised a few eyebrows because the left-hander has not captained the side before in any format.

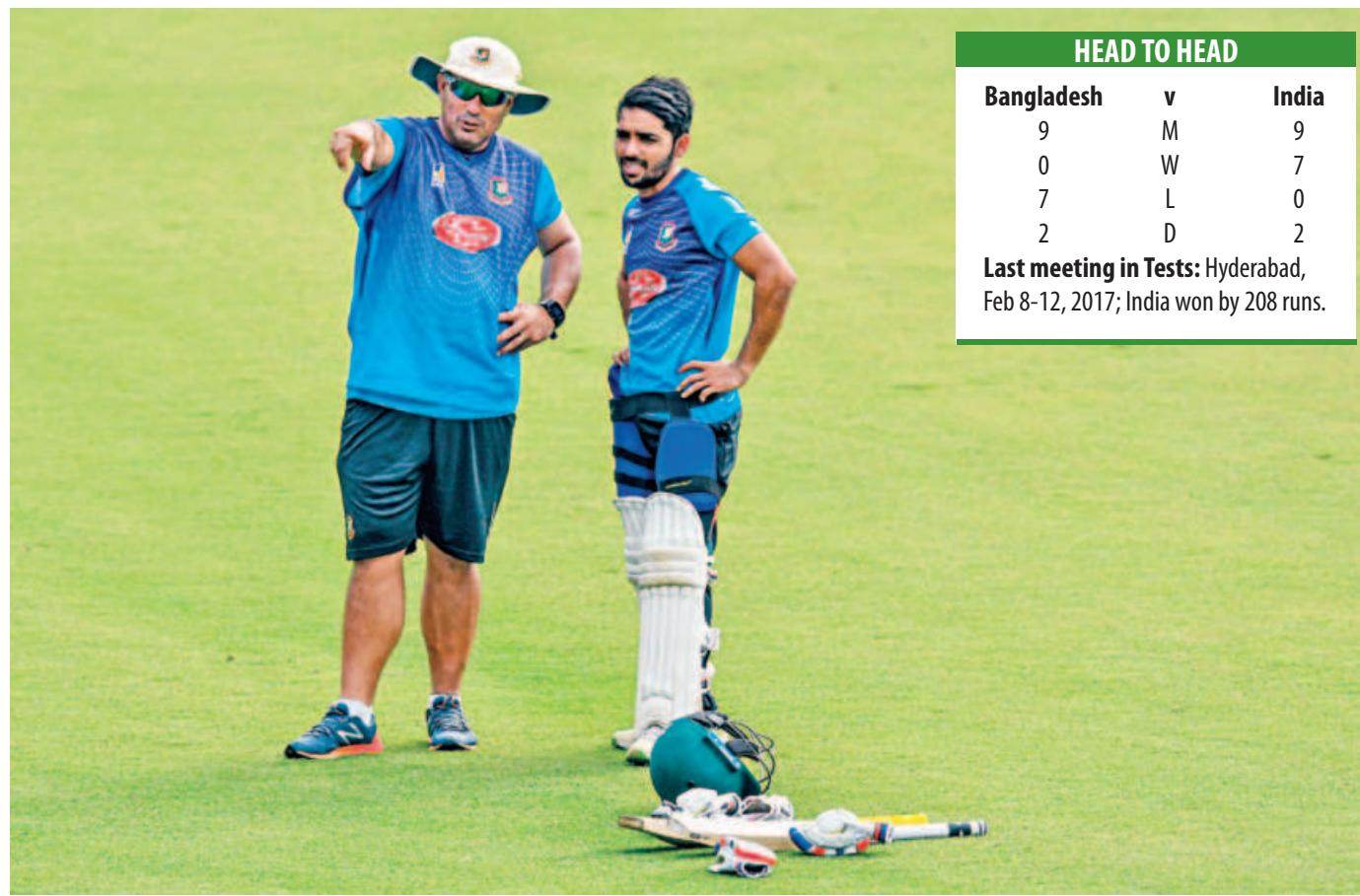
Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad and most recently Shakib -- all stalwarts in the side -- have led the side in the past few years but unlike them, Mominul does not come off as one who is influential in the dressing room. Whether the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) were eyeing him as a stopgap solution or a long-term possibility remains to be seen but ahead of an important series, it could be surmised that Mominul's task is an extremely difficult one.

He appeared to be 'unsure' of the expectations of the side, saying 'there was no such expectation' on his side during a press conference yesterday.

Asked if he meant that he did not envision his side winning, he retorted: "I didn't say we don't want to win. The way you guys mentioned expectations, it's nothing like that. A player takes the field to win but when you talk about expectations too much, the pressure can get to you."

The pressure of leading against the number one Test team in the world is understandably considerable. Mominul, however, said that having previous captains in the side was a big help after he took charge.

"It's a great achievement for me to get the help of the two seniors [Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah]."



Playing against India at their home will be a big challenge for Mominul Haque who will be leading the Tigers for the first time in Tests in Indore today. It will be important for him to keep a clear head and follow the instructions of the head coach Russell Domingo. PHOTO: AFP

He said that the experience in the side meant that his instructions are just apt. "Everyone in the side is inspired and established. I don't say more than I have to," he said.

While Mominul may have been thrust into the hot seat with an important challenge on the horizon, he is not new to the captaincy role, having led Chattogram Division side in the National Cricket League for the past two

years and the 'A' team recently during their tour of Sri Lanka. For him, the challenge was more an opportunity.

"The positive aspect here is that this is an opportunity for me. When you play against the best team in the world, who are good in all three departments, it's a good thing to be able to do well against them," a more determined Mominul said.

Appearing calm, Mominul may not

HEAD TO HEAD		
Bangladesh	v	India
9	M	9
0	W	7
7	L	0
2	D	2

Last meeting in Tests: Hyderabad, Feb 8-12, 2017; India won by 208 runs.

TEST TRIVIA

- The Indore Test will be Bangladesh's first of the World Test Championship (WTC). A total of 120 points are up for grabs from the two-match series against India. A win in the Test will net a team 60 points, a tie 30 points and a draw 20 points.
- India are the runaway leaders in the WTC so far, having won all their five matches. They have so far collected 240 points while the next best, New Zealand and Sri Lanka, have 60 points each.
- Since January 2013, India have won 26, drawn five and lost one of their 32 home matches. Their last home defeat came at the hands of Australia in February 2017. They have since won nine and drawn three matches at home.
- Bangladesh played their inaugural Test against India in Dhaka on November 10, 2000. They will start their first Test series (apart from a one-off Test in February 2017 in Hyderabad) in India 19 years and four days since their first ever Test.
- Over the past five years, India have played 55 Tests while Bangladesh have played 27.
- India's last series was the three-match home series against South Africa in October, which the hosts won 3-0.
- Bangladesh's last Test was the home game against Afghanistan in September 2019, which they lost by 224 runs. Their last away series was the three-match series in New Zealand in February-March 2019, which they lost 2-0 before the third Test was cancelled due to the Christchurch mosque shootings.

'Absolute respect for the process'

SPORTS REPORTER from Indore

 "Yeah he [Mustafizur Rahman] is a very good bowler. We've played against him quite a bit. But red ball... I think any left-arm seamer is a very different kind of bowler that we're not used to playing a lot," India skipper Virat Kohli -- calmness and professionalism personified -- said yesterday during a press conference.

One may wonder why Kohli mentioned a bowler who has been out of form and could even be omitted from the Bangladesh team for the first Test beginning in Indore today. Kohli reiterated that purely because Fizz is a left-arm, it is a different prospect that his side needs to focus on.

"Not that we get bundled out against left-arm seam, but we've found it more difficult purely because we don't play them on a regular basis. So, he's going to be a threat; he's going

to be a key player for Bangladesh."

However, there was no room for complacency in Kohli's mind and Bangladesh should be well aware of the threat posed by an extremely professional Test side because of their experience and ability. Kohli insisted that his side never lacks 'respect' for the game of cricket.

"We have absolute respect for the game and in that process, the opposition we play against. The intent and respect towards the game of cricket cannot change."

He put forward the notion that his team's journey to the top of the rankings and indeed the Test Championship had given them enough cohesion and motivation to fight.

"With a group of young guys trying to take the team on top and then when you achieve it, you realise the importance of that journey and hard work. All of us have been part of taking the team from the stage that

we were in 2014-15 to number one in Test cricket. We all have a lot of respect and love for the process and that's why we love playing Test cricket the way we do."

Having clinched a maiden Test series win in Australia earlier this year and thrashing South Africa 3-0 at home recently, India are a side that can now play well in any conditions. Will Bangladesh be able to compete? Kohli's answer brought to mind the professionalism of the India side which does not give an inch.

"They are used to playing in similar conditions, so we definitely think that they will know their game plan and what they need to do. We'll have to play well to get a result, like we have in the past. We'll not take anyone lightly from Bangladesh. When they play well, they can be a very skilful team and they have the ability to play some really good cricket. We'll have respect for them but more than that we'll have belief in our own team," Kohli said.



India team, who whitewashed South Africa at home in a three-match Test series in October, seemed in a relaxed mood during their practice session in Indore yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Bangladesh will be hoping that Mahmudullah Riyad remains in good touch to negotiate an Indian side who might field three frontline pacers today. PHOTO: BCB

Pitch to aid seamers early

SPORTS REPORTER from Indore

 The pitch at the Holkar Stadium in Indore stayed under cover for most of the day. In the afternoon yesterday, Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque had a look at the surface, which is supposedly very hard. Quite a bit of grass was left on the surface, a serious facet for the fast men from both sides to consider. India are likely to play three seamers in Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav and Ishant Sharma.

Bangladesh also have three pacers in the squad but it will all come down to assessing the wicket. India skipper Virat Kohli said after looking at the pitch that playing three seamers was the way to go.

Curator Samandar Singh Chauhan however informed that the pitch would be

a 'sporting wicket'. However, while most wickets deteriorate, this will likely become easier for batsmen. It would also mean that the initial period could be that much more difficult due to the bounce.

"It's a good, sporting track. Initially it will have some help for the seamers but later on, it will be batting friendly," Samandar said.

India spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja are almost certain to feature. The decision for Bangladesh will likely surround whether to play three spinners and two pacers or vice versa. Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, off-spinners Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nayeem Hasan are the slow bowlers while Mustafizur Rahman, Ebabot Hossain, Al-Amin Hossain and Abu Jayed are the pacers in the Bangladesh squad.

Bangladesh also have three pacers in the squad but it will all come down to assessing the wicket. India skipper Virat Kohli said after looking at the pitch that playing three seamers was the way to go.

Curator Samandar Singh Chauhan however informed that the pitch would be

EMERGING TEAMS ASIA CUP

Hosts to take on HK in opener

SPORTS REPORTER

The fourth edition of the eight-nation ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup will kick off across four venues in Bangladesh from today.

Bangladesh, hosting the fifty-over tournament for the second time after the 2017 edition, will take on Hong Kong at BKSP-3 while India face Nepal at the BKSP-4 in Savar in the Group B matches.

In Group A, defending champion Sri Lanka will lock horns against Oman at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium Academy Ground in Cox's Bazar while Pakistan will square off Afghanistan at the main stadium of the coastal city.

The selectors announced a strong Bangladesh squad with skipper Nazmul Hossain Shanto to lead an outfit including cricketers who have just returned from the T20I tour of India like in opener Mohammad Naim, Soumya Sarkar, all-rounder Afif Hossain, leg-spinner Aminul Islam and pacer Abu Hider.

Yet to lift the Emerging Teams Asia Cup title in three attempts, Bangladesh will surely be hoping to clinch the title this time around at home.

The top two teams from each group will battle it out in the semifinals, which will be held on November 20 and 21 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, where the final will also be held on November 23.

India clinched the title in the first edition of the tournament in 2013 and after a break, the tournament resumed again in 2017, when Bangladesh hosted for the first time and Sri Lanka lifted the trophy.

The Lankans retained their title in the next edition last year, beating India in a tight final.

SHORT CORNER

D/N Test to start at 1pm

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) agreed to the Cricket Association of Bengal's (CAB) request to start the second day-night Test between Bangladesh and India, starting on November 22, at 1:00pm, half an hour earlier than originally scheduled, and to end each day's play by 8:00pm, keeping in mind the dew factor.

"Keeping in mind the dew factor, the BCCI approved CAB's request to change the playing hours in the second Test. Play will start at 1:00pm and the first session will end at 3:00pm. The second session will start from 3:40pm and continue till 5:40pm. The final session will be played from 6:00pm till 8:00pm," the official told IANS.

-- STAR SPORTS DESK

'Maxwell has set the right example'

India skipper Virat Kohli Wednesday lauded Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell's courage to take a break from cricket because of mental health issues and said international players should be looked after.

Maxwell, one of the world's best batsmen in the shortest format, left Australia's Twenty20 squad last month during a series against touring Sri Lanka. Kohli praised Maxwell for putting his health before the game.

"I am absolutely for it," Kohli said ahead of India's first Test against Bangladesh in Indore starting Thursday.

Pooran banned for 4 T20Is for ball tampering

West Indies batsman Nicholas Pooran has been banned for four T20 internationals for tampering with the ball in a one-day match against Afghanistan, cricket's world body announced Wednesday.

Pooran admitted to "changing the condition of the ball" after video showed him scratching the surface of the white ball with his thumbnail in Lucknow on Monday.

"He will now miss the next four T20I games for the West Indies and will have five demerit points added to his record," said an International Cricket Council statement.

-- AFP