

SPORT



'Need to stop relying on spin'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Kolkata

Bangladesh succumbed to their fifth successive Test loss as India romped to an innings-and-46-run win in the second and final Test in Kolkata yesterday. Having lost the Test series 2-0 with both matches ending in innings defeat inside three days, there were inevitable questions about Bangladesh's focus on the longest format of the game.

Asked if there was a lack of focus from the board in the importance it placed on Test cricket, newly appointed captain Mominul Haque felt that in the last two to three years the team had participated in more Tests and, so the focus was there.

"I don't think focus is lacking. In the last two to three years there have been more Test matches and there is huge focus on the Test championship," Mominul said during a press conference yesterday.

The captain mostly talked about what can be learned from the defeats in Tests and what might happen in future to improve their Test mettle. There was no concrete answer on the disappointing lack of application from the batsmen.

"We did not play well as a team," Mominul reiterated for the umpteenth time, continuing in the same vein as he has done during the series.

"We didn't bat well, although the bowlers did well. We feel that there is a lot of room from improvement. We have a lot of games coming up next year and if we can improve, we will be able to play well," he said.

However, instead of going into any detail about what areas needed improvement, he said there was no technical issue with the batsmen even after they failed to cope with the seam and bounce extracted by the Indian pacers.

"I didn't see any technical issues. There is no end to technical development. Everyone will try to improve.

He did however say that there was a level of preparation needed to face up to bowling attacks of the order India possessed. "As a team we will take the lesson of how to contend against a bowling side of this quality. It will be useful for the next series."

Having historically relied on their spin attack and being found out in away conditions, Mominul felt that the team had to come out of their spin dependency after the India pacers ran riot in both Tests.

"We need to get out of our reliance on spin. I think the pacers did very well in this series. When they can play regularly in home and away conditions, we will be able to gauge how much they have improved," he said.

However, pacers have not been given enough opportunities at home in the longer format in recent years. "When they [pacers] are given more opportunity away and also at home, they will improve. In the last two years there have been changes in the country's wickets in the domestic circuit. There are sporting wickets and the teams are playing three to four pacers. Our pacers are coming through slowly.

There is a gulf in ability and experience between the teams. Playing more matches was the solution for the captain. "We don't play Tests regularly. We have almost 10 Tests in the coming year. When we will play more, we will be able to overcome our problems," he said about improving the team if he remains for the long run.



Triumphant India skipper Virat Kohli laps up the applause after India utterly outplayed Bangladesh, with brief resistance coming from Mushfiqur Rahim (inset), and sealed a 2-0 series win with an innings-and-46-run victory early on the third day of the second Test at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Tigers need more Tests'

SPORTS REPORTER from Kolkata

India captain Virat Kohli said that while Bangladesh have the skillset required for Test cricket, they needed more exposure to the longer version in order to sort out how to play in difficult situations under pressure and improve their performances in Tests.

Bangladesh wilted under the seam and bounce of the India pacers yet again during the second Test -- a pink-ball affair -- after the same thing happened in the first Test. Asked about the gulf between the two sides, Kohli said that not having two key players in Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan undid the Tigers but that there should be more focus placed upon playing as much Test cricket as possible, something that the players cannot decide by themselves.

"They did not have two key players. They have the skillset, that's why they are playing international cricket. If they play more Tests, you get more experience. If you play two Tests then again play after a year and a half, then you won't understand how to figure out situations and play under pressure. Match situations are needed regularly," Kohli said during a press conference yesterday.

While Bangladesh have played only five Tests this year, losing each and every one of them and succumbing to four innings defeats in those five outings, there has to be a discussion on how much the Tigers are prioritising Test cricket over other formats. India have demolished both South Africa and Bangladesh at home now and none of

the series were competitive -- a facet that does not increase the appeal of the longer format. Kohli was of the opinion that the cricket board must decide on what it wants to do regarding Tests.

"Players, as I said, have a limited role. South Africa have had their issues for some time. I don't know what the discussions are in the Bangladesh Cricket Board around Test cricket. How much it is promoted or how much importance is placed on Test cricket. Eventually, the strength of Test cricket should come from financial structure," he said.

He spoke of how India got better and better in the longer version. While he cited bench strength as an issue that helped them perform, he once again stressed that Test cricketers everywhere needed to be motivated through a financial structure.

"If you don't keep Test cricketers in good financial condition, their motivation keeps going down. If a player playing for 20 overs and bowling just four overs is earning 10 times more than you, then eventually this is your livelihood. You will not see the logic after five years and want to only play T20s. This can only be corrected through a central contract.

"See the traditional countries like Australia, England and New Zealand. They are so strong because their contract structure starts from Test cricket.

"We have made similar changes and now Test cricketers feel they have a secured future too," he said about the importance of the board and the cricket financial structure.



India skipper Virat Kohli speaks to his consummately outplayed counterpart, Bangladesh's Mominul Haque, after their innings-and-46-run win in Kolkata yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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BANGLADESH: First innings 106
INDIA: First innings 347 for 9 declared (Pujara 55, Kohli 136, Rahane 51; Al-Amin 3-85, Jayed 2-77, Ebadat 3-91)
BANGLADESH: 2nd innings R/B 45/6s (overnight 152 for 6)

Shadman lbw b I Sharma	0/5	0/0
Imrul c Kohli b I Sharma	5/15	0/0
Mominul c Saha b I Sharma	0/6	0/0
Mithun c Shami b Yadav	6/12	0/0
Mushfiqur c Jadeja		
b Yadav	74/96	13/0
Mahmudullah		
retired hurt	39/41	7/0
Mehedi c Kohli b I Sharma	15/22	2/1
Tajjul c Rahane b Yadav	11/24	1/0
Ebadat c Kohli b Yadav	0/4	0/0
Al-Amin c Saha b Yadav	21/20	5/0
Jayed not out	2/2	0/0
Extras: (b-8, lb-9, w-5)	22	
Total: (All out in 41.1 overs)	195	
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-2, 3-9, 4-13, 4-82*, 5-133, 6-152, 7-152, 8-184, 9-195.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
I Sharma	13	2	56	4
Yadav	14.1	1	53	5
Shami	8	0	42	0
Ashwin	5	0	19	0
Jadeja	1	0	8	0

Result: India won by an innings and 46 runs and clinched the two-match series 2-0.
Player-of-the-match: Ishant Sharma.
Player-of-the-series: Ishant Sharma.



India pacers (from L-R) Ishant Sharma, Mohammad Shami and Umesh Yadav.

PHOTO: BCB

Indian pacers decorate the series

An innings and 46-run victory over Bangladesh at Eden Gardens yesterday was India's seventh straight Test win, their best-ever winning streak. The fast bowlers have taken all wickets in the maiden pink-ball Test after taking 14 wickets in the first Test at Indore. It's only the first time at home India have won a Test without a wicket from their spinners - the last time was in Johannesburg last year, when they played four fast bowlers.

We're bowling as a unit, seeing men bowling at such a professional manner. They've played a lot of cricket in the last 15 months in foreign territory and that's how they learn. The discipline and the hunger to win...they know they're arguably the best side in the world. They've been that for some time and they know there's no short cut. Individuals will not win it and they know it.

Ravi Shastri
India head coach

They do hunt as a pack and they do take pride in others' performances and that's the real secret behind the pack. That's what has given them all the success. We're an experienced bowling attack and the beauty of the attack is how quickly they adapt to situations.

Bharat Arun
India bowling coach

Hassan's evasion not the solution

AL-AMIN

Bangladesh lost their first-ever Test series in India 2-0. It was not unexpected. They lost both games inside three days, each by an innings. That too was not unexpected.

The Tigers were subjected to an Indian pace bowling masterclass in both the games, which was a tad different considering India's traditional home dominance on tailor-made spinning tracks. The trial by pace is something of a new treat for touring teams in India and it has been built around a well-laid plan from the Indian cricket establishment. The reward of focusing on what used to be weak link is now paying dividends and India are not only the top-ranked Test team, but also fiercely competitive away from home.

This is a lesson to learn for lesser teams like Bangladesh in order to be competitive in the cut-throat Test format. Unfortunately, this is also an area that Bangladesh's cricket establishment has hardly focused on since their elevation to Test status 19 years ago in 2000.

Excuses have recently become a well-worn crutch after every punishing defeat, and it was no exception after the Tigers' meek surrender in the second Test at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) all-encompassing president Nazmul Hassan was quick to shift the blame on the team management and also blast the application of the players.

He said he was surprised at the team management's decision to bat first after winning the toss. The decision can be argued.

But can our so-called expert cricket chief explain the rationale of agreeing to play a pink-ball Test against India without any of the cricketers playing it in domestic cricket?

Isn't it a crime to push his charges into the deep end, knowing that it might cause physical harm? One could argue that the situation was also the same for India. But India's deep-rooted cricket culture and the strong domestic structure it was built on is far more capable of facing any unforeseen adversity, compared to the ill-structured Bangladesh cricket.

Hassan came up with the same rhetoric when Bangladesh suffered a chastening defeat against Afghanistan in the one-off Test at home. He blamed Shakib Al Hasan for not endorsing a spinning wicket that Bangladesh

had successfully employed against Australia and England. He even suggested that some of the players were not mentally tough enough or were reluctant to play Test cricket.

But when asked if it was a shame that Bangladesh lost a match against a team who were playing only their second Test, Hassan's response was that he "was hurt".

The BCB boss then said he was more disappointed for losing the World Twenty20 game in 2016, the Nidahas Trophy final (in Sri Lanka in 2018), the Asia Cup final (in Shahjahan in 2019) against India.



Evading the issue and redirecting blame was also the theme after the defeat in the first Test against India in Indore. Hassan then focused more on how Bangladesh lost the final T20I game after winning the first match of the three-match series.

Hassan is nearing the completion of a second term at the most coveted BCB post. In nearly seven years in office, he deserved to be credited for handling a few on- and off-field crises. But unfortunately, his main focus has been on the national team and the shorter formats of the game.

It appears that while Hassan and his troops have been happily operating on an annual ICC

financial windfall, they are oblivious of the fact that it was only guaranteed after becoming a Test-playing nation.

You can be happy with some success in the shorter formats, but if you ignore the Test format you might one day find yourself facing a fund crisis and still sitting on a poor domestic structure not capable of producing quality players to pull you out of the grave.

Hassan has promised two things when he was elected for a second term in 2016 -- decentralising cricket and building sporting that reward pace as well as spin. He also said that they would

immediately start the decentralisation process with a pilot project in Chattogram.

Three years on, you can find only one sporting wicket in Rajshahi. And regarding decentralisation, which was meant to empower the division headquarters to nurture talent from the grassroots, what happened till date is anybody's guess.

The Dhaka Premier League is a pale shadow of its glorious self, the lower tier is riddled with systematic fixing and first-class cricket is a seasonal affair with little purpose. And unless the board looks at the root of the problem instead of diverting blame, the Tigers will continue suffering on cricket's real front.