



“I like the fact that Shakib is a straightforward guy. I know what he wants. The only thing that I don’t know is when he will call and say, ‘I won’t play’. The only problem with Shakib is that he says at the last moment that he won’t be a part of a tour or a series. But if he is to become the next Test captain, he cannot do any such thing. There is no other problem with Shakib.”

Nazmul Hassan Papon  
BCB president

# The question is who’s next?

SPORTS REPORTER

In a normal cricket culture, this would not be an issue. Especially when a Test captain wants to resign, it is the captain who asks for the decision to be either made public or makes the announcement himself, preferably in a press conference in an official setting.

What usually never happens is that a squad is named with a designated Test captain before an important series and then a saga begins about whether he will remain in the hot seat. However, such unprecedented events have become a regularity in Bangladesh cricket as Test skipper Mominul Haque said yesterday that he had decided to step down from captaincy to focus on his batting.

Mominul Haque was thrust into the hot seat after Shakib Al Hasan, the then Test captain, was banned by the ICC for breaching ICC Anti-Corruption Code.

His Test captaincy stint began with three innings defeat and there have been five overall during his 17 games in charge. The win over New Zealand at Mount Maunganui earlier this year remains not only the high-point of his Test captaincy, but Bangladesh cricket’s too. Bar that, there have been just two other wins, both coming against Zimbabwe.

But the ratio of success to failure does not speak to the challenge Mominul had to face. Mominul had to deal with key absences of regular stars such as Shakib and Tamim Iqbal while trying to perform as a captain throughout his tenure.

Pandemonium was created after several officials from the board remarked about the problems encircling

Mominul the batsman and the problem it created in terms of him being able to lead the side. BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon yesterday told The Daily Star that the board had no plans to take away Mominul’s captaincy.

But at the end of a pivotal meeting in the evening with the BCB president,

“The decision [about who will be the new captain] will be taken during a board meeting on June 2. I have informed them of my decision. He [Hassan] told me to continue but I don’t want that anymore.”

The BCB president had said that he intended to talk to Mominul about how

key, but that should be a separate issue altogether from the team’s point of view, especially since he is the Test captain.

Questions remain about the instability that will wound the Test team only days ahead of their departure for a tour of the West Indies.

BCB president Papon told The Daily Star following the meeting that Mominul intended to leave the role as soon as possible.

“As he was not scoring runs, he said it was hard to lead the side. He told me it would be awkward for him if the board doesn’t take a decision soon,” the BCB president told this newspaper yesterday.

The talk of a potential successor is already in the air. Will Shakib now take over? “We can decide day after tomorrow on the replacement. We have to also talk to the player first before we hand him the captaincy.”

Asked if he was being preferred, he remarked: “We have to know what he’s planning. You can make him captain of any of the formats but he has not always been available. As captain, he will have to play and he won’t be able to pick and choose. We want to linger on the decision [regarding captaincy] until after the West Indies series but hearing Mominul, it appears he wants to step down now. I told him [Mominul] that we have to see how things are and we will let you know. We will sit down and take a decision day after tomorrow on whether Mominul will be staying on in his role and for how long but he will be going to West Indies as a player.”



Mominul informed the media that he had decided to step down.

“When you are playing well, you can still motivate the team even if it doesn’t bring a result. I feel that I am not being able to play well and the team is not getting results. It’s a hard situation to captain the side in. I feel it’s better not to do it [captaincy] right now. I feel that if I can focus on my batting, it would be better,” Mominul remarked to the media following the meeting.

the batter can find his form with the bat. However, the situation leaves a bad taste in the mouth. One BCB higher-up remarked to this newspaper that the environment “has not been healthy”.

Mominul’s batting average in his 17 games in charge was 31.44, compared to the Test average of 41.47 he maintained without captaincy. He accumulated just 24 runs in his last eight innings, which appeared to be the crux of the decision. His contributions as a Test batter are

## Italy aim to break 35-year jinx in Finalissima

AGENCIES, London

Italy are aiming to beat Argentina for the first time since 1987 when the two sides meet in the Finalissima – a clash between the winners of Euro 2020 and the Copa America – tonight.

The two sides met at every World Cup from 1974 to 1990 with Argentina never registering a victory but progressing further than Italy on four of those five occasions – and the Azzurri have not beaten the South Americans since.

Italy’s last victory over Argentina was in a friendly on June 10, 1987, when they won 3-1 in Zurich. There have been five meetings since, with Argentina winning the last three outright and the ones before ending in a draw. It was most recent “draw” in that list which remains one of the most painful results in Italian football history.

In the semifinal of the 1990 World Cup, hosts Italy were pitted against the holders. The match went to penalties and, whereas Argentina were flawless, Roberto Donadoni and Aldo Serena missed their efforts to leave Italy in mourning.

Ahead of the game, Argentine superstar Lionel Messi told TyC Sports: “It’s crazy that they won the Euros and are not at the World Cup. That Italy are again not at a World Cup, with what that means and Italy’s relationship with the World Cup is a shame.”

But Messi is expecting a good game. He added: “It’s good test for us. They are the champions of Europe and would have been World Cup favourites had they been there.”

## Hockey team take on Pakistan today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh hockey team are looking forward to completing their Asia Cup campaign with an improved performance when they take on Pakistan in the 5th-6th place-deciding match in Jakarta, Indonesia today.

The match begins at 12:30pm Bangladesh time.

Bangladesh, who recently improved their world ranking from 29 to 27, have already achieved their initial target of finishing sixth among eight participating nations after beating handing a 4-2 defeat to hosts Indonesia in the previous match.

Bangladesh have never beaten Pakistan, who failed to qualify for the Super 4s and are fighting for the fifth place. Pakistan beat Iman Gobinathan Krishnamurthy’s charges 6-2 in Asian Champions Trophy in 2021 and 7-0 in Asia Cup in 2017, both held in Dhaka.

Asked if it was possible to finish fifth, Krishnamurthy told the Daily Star: “Not easy, but anything is possible. Pakistan are wounded tigers. They will come at us from the start. We need to be very cautious. The boys need to follow the plan. If we follow emotion, we will lose big.”

The Malaysian coach is apparently happy to have achieved the target even though they had to fight hard against Indonesia.

“As a realistic target, we wanted to beat Oman because they beat us in the Asian Games Qualifiers. We were also upset the way we gave away goals against Malaysia,” Krishnamurthy said.

## Indonesia test for Jamal and Co

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football team will try to find the right combination for the upcoming Asian Cup Qualifiers when they square off against Indonesia in a FIFA friendly match in Bandung today.

The match begins at the Si Jalak Harupat Stadium at 7:30pm Bangladesh time.

Ahead of the match against the 159th-ranked Indonesia as part of preparation for



the Asian Cup Qualifiers starting on June 8 in Malaysia, coach Javier Cabrera has been in deep trouble to pick the right combination due to injuries and suspension issues which forced top players like Tapu Barman, Tariq Kazi, Saad Uddin, Matin Mia, Suman Reza and Nabib Newaj Jibon out of the squad.

In absence of injured defenders, the biggest challenge for the coach would be to choose a suitable four-man backline. His options at centre-back positions are Tutul Hossain Badsha, Bishwanath Ghosh and Riyadul Hasan Rafi while Yeasin Arafat and Rahmat Mia are

likely to play as full-backs.

He has options available in midfield and wings but then again, the options for striking position are very thin with uncapped Sazzad Hossain and inexperienced Maraz Hossain two of the likely options.

Bangladesh will perhaps adopt a counter-attacking approach with a solid defensive organisation, a style they want to implement in Malaysia too.

“Obviously, we will take to the field to win the match but our main target is to prepare ourselves for the way we want to play in upcoming Asian Cup Qualifiers,” right-winger Mohammad Ibrahim told The Daily Star over phone.

“Though the Bashundhara Kings players got only two sessions to train, it is not a problem for us to implement the gameplan because we have already played two matches under Cabrera, so we know what our coach wants from us,” said the Bashundhara Kings midfielder.

Captain Jamal Bhuyan, at the pre-match press conference yesterday, conceded that it will be a tough challenge for the side. “All the players who are part of the team know it is going to be a tough match. Indonesia are a strong team and of course tomorrow they desire to win but we will defend ourselves and I think we can compete against them and deliver a good performance,” Jamal said.

Bangladesh, who are 29 places behind of Indonesia in FIFA rankings, are going to face them for the first time since their 1-0 defeat in Merdeka Cup in 2007. Overall, Bangladesh have won only once against the East Asian nation – in 1985 – losing four times and drawing the other occasion.



Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo controls the ball during a training session ahead of their UEFA Nations League encounter against Spain on Thursday. Real Madrid's victory in the Champions League final on Saturday did not quite bring the curtain down on the football season in Europe, with the action continuing into June as Nations League starts today with Poland taking on Wales. PHOTO: TWITTER