

## Fahim sure Mominul will return to form

SPORTS REPORTER

Just one day after his resignation as captain of the Bangladesh Test side, Mominul Haque was seen spending time in the outer nets of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday with his mentor Nazmul Abedeen, working on his batting.

Mominul has been under tremendous pressure over his poor form. The 30-year-old has averaged just 16.20 so far this year, with 162 runs in six matches. According to Fahim, the cricketer looked confident with his approach in the nets and the veteran coach believed that there was a high chance of Mominul returning to form during the upcoming West Indies tour.

"Whenever he plays next, he will play well. I felt that while he was going through the sessions. He looks confident and it seems he is enjoying his batting. It means that he is feeling better but he will be relieved once he starts to score again on the field," Fahim told The Daily Star.

Fahim, who worked with Mushfiqur Rahim ahead of the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka not so long ago, said that a fear of failure could be the biggest distraction for batters and it would be important for Mominul to stay focused.

"When you are not feeling good, distractions come into play. You face a lot of distractions brought on by fear of failure and wondering if you are good enough since you have failed. But when you are playing with confidence, it makes you feel whatever you are trying is going well. Then you wait for the next ball. But once you don't have that, the fear of failure comes in."

"When Mushfiqur played the first ball of the Test series, it looked like he was defending with supreme confidence and that confidence happened because of the work he had done before the start of the series in the training sessions. I hope the same thing will happen to Mominul as well," he said.



## MOMINUL TURNS FOCUS TO BATTING

Just a day after stepping down as Bangladesh's Test captain, Mominul Haque was seen working on his batting with his mentor Nazmul Abedeen Fahim at the outer nets of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. [Inset] Meanwhile, along with batting coach Jamie Siddons was all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who returned to training following a finger injury and is also being considered as one of the options for succeeding Mominul as the national Test captain.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



# Agenda unclear in regards to captaincy

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket board's (BCB) 'unofficial agenda' in today's board meeting is set to be its most urgent one as they look for a replacement for former Test skipper Mominul Haque, who stated officially on Tuesday that he no longer wanted to remain Test captain.

Media committee chairman Tanvir Ahmed Titu said during a briefing that the discussion may not come as an agenda when queried on whether the replacement of Mominul as Test skipper was the most important agenda in the board meeting.

One BCB official earlier remarked to the media, even before Mominul's decision came, that the board had backups in case Mominul wanted to step away. Something certainly does not add up as the BCB strolled between the pretty thick lines of not having thought of replacing Mominul as captain and

claiming it was not part of the board meeting's agenda and the other extreme of 'serving a notice' by stating they had backups.

The BCB president Nazmul Hassan had on Wednesday told this

newspaper that Mominul's replacement was to be discussed or at the very least he will have to stay on as captain for a certain period.

"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," he had said.

However, through this medley of various insinuations by the BCB, sources close to the board claim that unless something dramatic happens in the board meeting, Shakib Al Hasan is most likely to take over as captain.

The BCB president had earlier also claimed that Shakib not being available during many of the past Test series, was a major obstacle to choosing him as captain. It could be surmised from many of the BCB officials' remarks that there had been discussions with Shakib but there was the 'unpredictability' factor still at play which relates to Shakib's tendency to pick and choose series. It may very well be that BCB chooses the skipper for the tour of West Indies on an ad hoc basis.

Team director Khaled Mahmud said that the matter of Test captaincy will be discussed keeping various issues in mind. He said it was perhaps too early for the likes of Liton Das or Mehedi Hasan Miraz. He was however of the opinion that Shakib

captaining the team would be a good thing.

"I haven't talked to Shakib about captaincy but we have talked about other issues. Even yesterday we were discussing the West Indies series and match situations. He has a lot of knowledge regarding the game and it's always good to talk with him because of that. He can mix well with everyone and I think if he gets the captaincy, it will be good for the team," Mahmud told reporters yesterday.

However, that unpredictability of when Shakib may or may not be available does not speak to the BCB's plans in terms of the continuity the board wants from a captain. Mahmud said that they wanted a captain instated for at least a two-year time period. What of Shakib's tendency to skip series? Mahmud had a different take compared to media's perception.

"Shakib always wants to play Tests now, I don't know how this thing came about that he doesn't want to play Tests. Whenever I talk to him, Shakib says: 'I enjoy Tests more than other formats and I want to play Tests'. If he wants captaincy, maybe once given a responsibility, it will bring a change in him. I am not saying that Shakib will definitely be the captain. Tamim [Iqbal] is also there since [Mahmudullah] Riyad has left the format. Mushy [Mushfiqur Rahim] is there too but if he wants to accept it is a big factor," he remarked.

## Neymar doubtful for Korea friendly

AFP, Seoul

Brazil superstar Neymar could miss his side's friendly match against South Korea on Thursday after injuring his foot during training on the eve of the game.

Neymar grabbed his right foot and fell to the turf after colliding with a teammate during the session at Seoul World Cup Stadium on Wednesday. He was quickly attended to by a trainer and limped off the field, but did not return.

During a pre-match press conference, team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar said Neymar's right foot had swollen and it was too early to determine his status for Thursday's match.

"We'll have to keep an eye on his foot until tomorrow morning," the doctor said through an interpreter. "Right now, it's difficult to say with any certainty whether he'll be able to play. We'll have to see tomorrow morning."

Neymar posted an image of his bruised foot on Instagram, showing what appeared to be visible swelling.



## Stokes wants England to feel 'free' against NZ

AFP, London

New England captain Ben Stokes said he wanted everyone in the side to "feel free" under his leadership as James Anderson and Stuart Broad were recalled for the first Test against New Zealand at Lord's starting Thursday.

Stokes has taken over as skipper from Joe Root, with England on a woeful run of one win in 17 Tests.

But the all-rounder told reporters at Lord's on Wednesday: "There's been a lot of talk about a 'reset', which is a word I don't like. "I just see it as a completely blank canvas."

"I just want everyone to feel free under my captaincy. This is our time and we are going to dictate how things go forward. Everyone is starting fresh."

Anderson, 39 and Broad, 35, England's two most successful bowlers of all time, with a combined 1,177 wickets between them, were both controversially left out of the squad for a 1-0 series loss in the West Indies earlier this year.



Poland's Iga Swiatek clenches her fist after winning the quarterfinal match against Jessica Pegula of the USA in the French Open at the Court Philippe-Chatrier in Paris on Wednesday. The Polish star cruised to a 6-3, 6-2 win to set up a last-four meeting with Daria Kasatkina.

PHOTO: AFP



# Beaten Djokovic hails 'champion' Nadal

REUTERS, Paris

World number one Novak Djokovic said he was proud of the fight he put up in another vintage contest against his great rival Rafa Nadal in the French Open quarterfinal, admitting on Tuesday that he lost to a better player.

Djokovic, the 35-year-old winner of 20 Grand Slam titles, conceded an early break to Nadal in each of the first three sets and had two set points in the fourth. But the Spaniard clinched the four-hour, 12-minute contest in the tiebreaker.

"I gave my best," Djokovic told reporters after his 6-2, 4-6, 6-2, 7-6(4) defeat. "I know I could have played better. I'm proud of fighting and staying till the last shot."

"I lost to a better player today. Had my chances. Didn't use them. That's it. You know, over four hours' battle, and I have to accept this defeat."

Djokovic defeated Nadal, who has won 13 of his men's record 21 Grand Slam titles on the Parisian clay, in last year's

semifinals at Roland Garros before lifting the Musketeers' Cup for a second time in his career.

Nadal arrived in Paris this year after two injuries that had hampered his preparations and came into Tuesday's contest following a



tough five-set win in his last match. But he still found the stamina to beat Djokovic in their 59th career meeting.

In contrast, Djokovic picked up an ATP 1000 title in Rome before arriving at Roland Garros and had not lost a set in his

previous rounds at the clay-court Grand Slam.

The Serb congratulated Nadal for the victory and said he was not surprised by his opponent's physical fitness during the long battle under the lights of Court Philippe-Chatrier.

"He was a better player I think in important moments," Djokovic said. "Started very well. I didn't start so great ... I was gaining momentum as I was coming back in the second set, managed to win the second set, and I thought, 'Okay, I'm back in the game.'"

"But then he had another two, three fantastic games at the beginning of the third. He was just able to take his tennis to another level in those, particularly moments at the beginning of

all sets, actually, except the fourth. "I had my chances. Just one or two shots. Could have taken me into a fifth. Then it's really anybody's match. But again, he showed why he's a great champion. Staying there mentally tough and finishing the match the way he did. Congrats to him and his team. No doubt he deserved it."