

BISHWAJIT ROY

If it is a question of form then India will be in pole position. It will not be unwise in the least if one sees the former champions as favourites in this evening's semifinal of the ICC World Twenty20 against South Africa at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Things have been going very efficiently for MS Dhoni; his entire bowling department has so far done an excellent job -- Amit Mishra's craftsmanship in reigniting the art of leg spin bowling has only been the brightest spot in a glittering ensemble. A lot has been said about the dominance of

spinners in the tournament, though a lot actually depends on the batting, and the conditions are undoubtedly suited to the Indian side. But it's a T20 game and a good spell from even a pace bowler can turn the tables on them -- the memory of Dale Steyn's fiery spell against New Zealand at Chittagong is still fresh in many minds. South Africa's pace spearhead bowling in the death overs simply turned snatched the game away from New Zealand's grip.

India are fine-tuned and South Africa's progress might not have been as smooth as the Indians' but they also have the weapons in their arsenal to win the game and they

proved it during the group stage when they won all close matches except the defeat against Sri Lanka. They also survived a scare from the Netherlands. It is very difficult to predict who can seize the momentum, very important in the shortest version of the game.

A pivotal point in the match may well be how well South Africa handle India's spinners and without any doubt Mishra will be a big threat. But they have batsmen in their side who have the experience of playing the IPL and the big guns must step up to make sure that they do not add another chapter of choking in the big match. Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers' and

Duminy are there besides the dashing Quinton de Kock and David Miller, though they have been known to be troubled by the spinning ball.

On the other hand the vaunted Indian batting has hardly been tested in the first three games but against Australia they have fulfilled the demands as the damage caused by the loss of four quick wickets was brilliantly managed by Dhoni and Yuvraj Singh.

Whether South Africa, one of the strongest teams across formats, can go a step further and claim the elusive global title or India can continue with their sublime form

## Seeking to end the jinx

NAIMUL KARIM

When Imran Tahir was asked if he enjoyed bowling on the wickets in Chittagong, his reply-- considering the fact that he went on to take eleven scalps in four games there -- was contradictory to his key performances.

"Not really, there's no turn. I have had to vary my pace to get the wickets. The wickets in Dhaka are different to the ones here," is what Tahir had said after rescuing his side against the Netherlands in a nail-biting finish.

After a series of close wins, South Africa -- against the odds -- have managed to reach the semis; something that will allow the likes of Tahir to have a go on the kind of wickets that a number of spinners from the Chittagong leg had been looking forward to.

While it may be a positive for the leg-spinner, who was seen taking tips from Shane Warne during practice on Wednesday, the fact that the Proteas will be in unfamiliar surrounds for the crucial encounter is at the back of their minds.

As skipper Faf du Plessis put it, "The wicket in Dhaka is completely different to Chittagong, we played all our games there and India have played all their games here. So definitely from a conditions point of view, they are much more used to it than we are."

"But we put in some hard practices this week on surfaces in order to get used to the spin. But I don't think the wicket will be that bad. In the previous game it looked like a good cricket wicket," said du Plessis.

South Africa's journey to the semis has witnessed a series of last-minute turnarounds, with different match-winners emerging everyday. Against the Netherlands, it was an implosion in the

Dutch batting line-up towards the end, courtesy of some good spin bowling from Tahir that helped them scrape through. Against New Zealand the dual effort of Dale Steyn and JP Duminy helped them edge past, while against England, a thunderous half-century from AB de Villiers made the difference.

While there have been individual performances in different games, they are yet to get off the blocks as a complete package. There is also the question regarding de Villiers' batting

not have won, but our resilience and never-say die attitude has put us in a good state," said du Plessis, adding that South Africa have been the underdogs throughout the tournament.

A fresh mindset is something that they will no doubt be counting on, for a number of reasons. That they will be going up against an unbeaten side in this tournament is the first. The second is the added pressure of not being able to win a semi-final in any major



For South Africa captain Faf du Plessis (L) it would be sticking to basics against his unconventional yet highly effective Indian counterpart Mahendra Singh Dhoni (R) in today's ICC World T20 second semifinal at Mirpur.

position and whether slow-left armer Aaron Phangiso should get an opportunity on a turning track.

The close finishes however have given them a renewed sense of confidence.

"It's really important for me as a team that we go in with a fresh mindset. We have been through some tough situations when we probably should

competition since the mini-World Cup in 1998 in Dhaka, a tournament they ended up winning. The key for the Proteas will be to stand up against pressure, an aspect with which du Plessis summed up in the pre-match press conference.

"We are expecting pressure. There is always pressure when you play for your

SPORTS REPORTER

Current form, records, past experience and conditions give India an advantage in today's crucial semifinal match of the ICC World Twenty20 and that is the reason there was no fear factor for the Indian side.

"Most of these guys were involved in the ICC Champions Trophy, so that is one experience everybody can draw from. Apart from that, the one thing that the young side will have an



advantage having played so many games here. We know what to expect," he explained.

Spinnners have emerged as key performers in the tournament, which is why South Africa invited legendary leg-spinner turned commentator Shane Warne to their tent to help Imran Tahir but Ashwin was not too worried about any impact the assistance may have.

He also said that they were not in a mood to think about the chance of a third trophy after the 50-over World Cup in 2011 and the Champions Trophy last year.

"We've never been a team that's believed in talking about all these things, because it's only going to make things tougher for you. I'm not a firm believer in it, but four teams in the semifinal, everybody has a 25 per cent chance. That's the numbers game," he said when asked about the third trophy.

Many might have given an edge when it comes to compare the spin bowling of India and South Africa, which many believe can separate the teams in the semifinal. Ashwin however thought that there is a very small margin between the quality of spinners.

"When it comes to international cricket, there's a very small margin between the qualities of spinners. Everybody's bound to have a certain amount of quality in them. It's all about the mental makeup of the spinner and what amount of guts he has in that particular scenario. It'll be handling pressure that makes the difference, because Imran Tahir has been in top form. And I expect Phangiso to play. When that happens, you're pretty much evened out on the amount of spinners both teams will play. It comes down to how well your

South Africa played all their group matches at Chittagong. "We know what to expect from this ground and the pitch, but of course when it comes down to the semifinals it's anybody's game. You can't really say we hold a majority; whoever plays well on that particular day will have the advantage. But yes, we do hold an

"We've not lost many big competi-

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## REVERSE SWING

WASIM AKRAM

It was a bitter end to the first semifinal. All of us were thinking of a sensational finish but the West Indies were left to rue their luck. They must have been singing a sad song, "Rain, rain go away, brave Windies want to play."

But when it did, the puddles of water made no chance of a resumption.

Congrats to Sri Lanka. The way they have been playing this year is phenomenal. They won the Asia Cup after playing brilliant cricket. They are playing some very good cricket in this World Twenty20 and they deserved to be in the final.

Sri Lanka dug themselves out of the hole after they lost three wickets in the space of 15 odd balls. Mahela Jayawardene and Kumar Sangakkara went cheaply but there were Thirimanne, Dilshan and Mathews who ensured their team reach a challenging total. It is always nice to see Mathews bat like this. He is an intelligent cricketer who plays sensibly. He has a wise head on his broad shoulders and the coolness with which he batted was superb. He used the final overs to perfection and his 40 odd runs made the total from paltry to challenging. I think young players, from Pakistan and Bangladesh, must learn from Mathews. Cricket is a game of nerves and if you control those wayward nerves you are a hero.

Then the West Indies struggled. Gayle has not been a force in this tournament. He hurt his ankle once again and was seen limping off the field in Sri Lankan innings. That hampered his feet movement when he batted and although Dwayne Bravo tried to lift the tempo it was not as big as the West Indies had liked. As they also lost three wickets they were in a process of building without realising that there was a forecast of rain. It came at a time when they were short on Duckworth-Lewis method.

I will give full marks to Sri Lanka. They have played systematic cricket, game with plans. They always stick to it and do the basics right. I am sure they will be the team to beat in the final.



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## MR. EFFICIENT



**LASITH MALINGA**

Lasith Malinga is revered as a man for the occasion for Sri Lanka. And the pace bowler with a slinging action lived up to his reputation in the first semifinal against West Indies at Mirpur yesterday. He removed both West Indies openers Dwayne Smith and Chris Gayle in one over that not only effectively doused any early fireworks but more importantly pegged back the Windies run-rate that proved crucial before the hail-storm took

## HERO & VILLAIN

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**ANGELO MATHEWS HERO**

When Angelo Mathews walked in the middle Sri Lanka were struggling at 91-4. But when he left the field his team were in a position of strength. The powerfully built right-hander first played second fiddle to Lahiru Thirimanne. But as the Lankan innings reached the last three overs Mathews set the Mirpur stadium alight, hitting anything that was hurled at him by the West Indies bowlers out of the park. He struck a 23-ball 40 laced with three

**CHRIS GAYLE VILLAIN**

West Indies opener Chris Gayle was the hero of the fourth edition of the ICC World Twenty20 in Sri Lanka with tons of runs. But in the fifth edition in Bangladesh the dashing left-hander was nowhere near his best. It was expected that the Gayle force will come to the party in a big way against Sri Lanka in the first semifinal at Mirpur yesterday. However, the big left-hander signed off in forgettable fashion. He scored a painstaking 3 off 13

## World Twenty20 WHACK-OMETER

Total 6s hit: **281**

Total 4s hit: **799**

Most 6s hit by a player: **13, Stephan Myburgh, the Netherlands**

Most 4s hit by a player: **26, Stephan Myburgh, the Netherlands**

## TODAY'S MATCHES

Women's ICC World T20  
England v South Africa  
Second Semifinal

Time: 2:30pm  
ICC World Twenty20  
India v South Africa

Venue: SBNS, Mirpur

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## THE STAR CAST

**AMIT MISHRA**, India  
Matches played: 5  
Bowling average: 10.00  
Strike rate: 11.4  
Economy rate: 5.26  
Best bowling: 3/26  
Wkts: 10

**DALE STEYN**, South Africa  
Matches played: 37  
Bowling average: 15.32  
Strike rate: 14.5  
Economy rate: 6.33  
Best bowling: 4/9  
Wkts: 55

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