

PARTHIV BACK-UP FOR INJURED DHONI

India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni suffered a muscle spasm in his back during the team's first training session in Dhaka yesterday, just two days ahead of the Asia Cup Twenty20 tournament, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said in a media statement. The national selectors have named Parthiv Patel, the former India stumper, as backup wicketkeeper for the tournament. Patel last represented India in an ODI against Sri Lanka four years ago at Brisbane. Dhoni, 34, has a history of back trouble, but he has in the past played despite discomfort. In the group phase, India face Pakistan



(Clockwise from left) The unmistakable image from the final of the 2012 edition which still haunts every Bangladesh cricketer and cricket fan; the Sri Lankans, the most successful team in the competition's history along with India, celebrating their triumph in the last edition in 2014; and the victorious India team which clinched the title of the first edition in UAE in 1984.

PHOTOS: STAR FILE

The regional rivalry is on again

ASIA CUP 2016 FIXTURES

Date	Match	Venue	Time
Feb 24	India v Bangladesh	SBNS	7:30pm
Feb 25	Sri Lanka v UAE	SBNS	7:30pm
Feb 26	Bangladesh v UAE	SBNS	7:30pm
Feb 27	India v Pakistan	SBNS	7:30pm
Feb 28	Bangladesh v Sri Lanka	SBNS	7:30pm
Feb 29	Pakistan v UAE	SBNS	7:30pm
Mar 1	India v Sri Lanka	SBNS	7:30pm
Mar 2	Bangladesh v Pakistan	SBNS	7:30pm
Mar 3	India v UAE	SBNS	7:30pm
Mar 4	Pakistan v Sri Lanka	SBNS	7:30pm
Mar 6	Final-TBC	TBC	7:30pm

SPORTS REPORTER



It is probably no coincidence that the ongoing Asia Cup marks the third consecutive time, and fifth overall, that Bangladesh is hosting the tournament. As much as the regional tournament means to India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, for Bangladesh the Asia Cup is the vehicle that carried the emergence of Bangladesh in the upper echelons of cricket. It was in the second edition in 1986, the John Player Asia Cup in Sri Lanka, that Bangladesh played its first ODI. It was in the next edition of the same tournament in 1988 that Bangladesh achieved the honour of hosting a multi-nation cricket tournament for the first time.

It is not just a series of Bangladesh firsts for which the Asia Cup is special on these shores. Before Bangladesh became an active player in cricket's top table in 2000 there was undoubtedly much admiration for distant cricketing nations like Australia, England and of course the once-mighty West Indies -- but none captured nascent cricketing imaginations like our neighbours India and Pakistan, and to a lesser extent Sri Lanka.

Cricket was always a passion in Bangladesh, but with a national team yet to be seen as a 'big boy' in international cricket in the 1990s, cricket lovers looked beyond borders to our closest neighbours. So it was that an India-Pakistan match in pre-Test era Dhaka was always played out in front

of a bi-partisan capacity crowd cheering their preferred neighbour and baying for the blood of the opponents. With a generation bred on this kind of passion, it is no surprise that the most feted Bangladesh victories have been against our neighbours, regardless of where they were placed on the ranking tables at the time. Think the 1999 World Cup win over Pakistan, or the 2007 World Cup elimination of India.

Even with all this context, the Asia Cup 2016 held in Dhaka brought the tournament even closer to Bangladeshi hearts. That was a tournament the country believes it should have won, and it would have too if not for the lack of two heart-breaking runs in the final against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. The Tigers beat Sri Lanka and

India -- World Cup finalists less than a year ago -- in rousing and confident fashion, and the tournament worked as a springboard for resounding success in 2012, winning five of their nine matches against the top eight since the start of the Asia Cup.

Conversely, a winless run in the following edition in 2014, also in Bangladesh, set in motion one of the worst years in Bangladesh cricket.

This time, the Asia Cup is being held in the T20 format for the first time, and it is a format in which the Tigers have been at their weakest. But they have been working hard to improve, and this being the tournament that marks new beginnings in Bangladesh cricket, 2016 may be the year that sees the Tigers solve the T20 riddle.



The Bangladesh team will look to these young speedsters to end their long wait for regional supremacy.

PHOTO: STAR

ASIA CUP TRIVIA

This is the fifth time that Bangladesh is hosting the regional tournament, having earlier hosted it in 1988, 2000, 2012 and 2014. Bangladesh are

Bangladesh made their Asia Cup debut in 1986 in Sri Lanka, the second

Bangladesh's best finish was in 2012 when they lost the final to Pakistan.

The Asia Cup has not been without political turmoil. In 1986 India withdrew from the event because of controversy surrounding their tour of Sri Lanka the year before. In 1990-91, Pakistan pulled out of the tournament being held in

This is the first time that the Asia Cup will be played in T20 format, in its 13th edition. The form team in this format is India, who have won six of their 10 matches in the format since the start of 2015. Sri Lanka is worst placed on

India and Sri Lanka lead the honours with five wins each, with Sri Lanka winning the last edition in Bangladesh in 2014.

Sri Lanka's master blaster Sanath Jayasuriya has scored the most runs in Asia Cup matches, scoring 1220 runs in 25 games at an average of 53.04 and a strike rate of 102.52, including three 50s and six 100s. Of players involved in the current tournament, India's Virat Kohli tops the charts with 613 runs

Kohli also leads the way in the highest individual score category with his

Sri Lanka's spin wizard Muttiah Muralidaran leads the wickets charts with 30 wickets at an average of 28.83, including one four-wicket haul and a five-wicket haul. Among players involved in the current tournament, Sri

Sri Lanka's mystery spinner Ajantha Mendis recorded the best bowling figures in the Asia Cup with six for 13 against India at Karachi in July 2008. It is again Malinga who leads the current crop with a spell of five for 34

Jayasuriya scored the most runs in a single edition when he hammered 378 of them in the 2008 edition in Pakistan. Mendis takes the bowling honours

ASIA CUP ROLL OF HONOUR

Year	Venue	Champions	Runners-up
1984	Sharjah	India	Sri Lanka
1986	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Pakistan
1988	Bangladesh	India	Sri Lanka
1990-91	India	India	Sri Lanka
1995	Sharjah	India	Sri Lanka
1997	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	India
2000	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
2004	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	India
2008	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	India
2010	Sri Lanka	India	Sri Lanka
2012	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Bangladesh
2014	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka	Pakistan
2016*	Bangladesh	??	??

* The 2016 edition is the first time that the regional competition is being held in Twenty20 format.

BANGLADESH

MUSHFIQR RAHIM
Bangladesh's batting hasn't lived up to its expectations in this format of the game.

Tamim Iqbal's absence in the Asia Cup, in addition, is bound to put on pressure. During these times, Bangladesh will look towards the cleanest hitter in their team and that's where Mushfiqur Rahim comes in. Many feel that Mushfiqur should bat higher up the order, considering his ability to rotate the strike and smack the ball quite a distance after spending



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN
Here's the one bowler who everyone will have their eyes on. Apart from merely being cautious against the left-arm pacer, teams will no doubt try to decipher him as well, considering that he has caused plenty of harm in the recent past.

He surprised Pakistan and dominated India in 2015 and he has only gotten better with time. Apart from his cutters and slower deliveries he has also learnt the ability to swing the ball, something that has made him more dangerous. He is the high-



INDIA

Virat Kohli
With a staggering average of 89.71 and a strike-rate of above 140 in T20Is since 2014, the 27-year-old has been a nightmare for bowlers around the world.

He has been hitting the ball quite well lately and is bound to play a key role in the Asia Cup in Mirpur. In addition, Kohli averages 106.33 in Mirpur alone. In the six T20Is that he has played here he has scored 319 runs with four half-centuries. The only landmark missing among these extravagant stats is a



R Ashwin
The off-spinner has been a class apart for India in this format. With 42 wickets in 34 matches he is by far the highest wicket-taker for his side.

He boasts an average of 21.61 and an economy rate of 6.93. What should make him a lot more dangerous is the fact that he has been performing a lot better than his career numbers in the last two years. He has scalped 28 wickets in 15 games in the last two years -- the highest among full-member nations during this period -- and has



PAKISTAN

Umar Akmal
Not only has this aggressive top-order batsman topped the runs chart in the Pakistan Super League, he has also been Pakistan's highest run-scorer in the last two years.

In his last three matches for the Lahore Qalandars he hammered three half-centuries. He was by far the best performing batsman in the PSL, scoring 335 runs in seven matches at an astounding average of 83.75. At the international level too he fared well, scoring 413 runs in 19



Shahid Afridi
A T20 wizard, a wily old fox or Boom Boom; Shahid Afridi has several nicknames in this format of the game and really one can never count him out.

The captain has already given a stern warning to his players and has indicated that he is very serious about the next two mega events -- the Asia Cup and the ICC World Twenty20. With 91 T20I wickets, he is Pakistan's highest wicket-taker in this format and also has been their most consistent bowler in the



SRI LANKA

Angelo Mathews
The Sri Lankans have plenty of good memories from 2014 here. Mirpur after all, is the arena where they lifted the World Twenty20.

However, with legends Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene having retired, it seems as though there's plenty of weight on Angelo Mathews' shoulders. With 276 runs in the last 12 innings at an average of 30.66, Mathews has been their most consistent batsman. In his last match, he smashed an unbeaten 81 off 49 balls



Lasith Malinga
The 'slinga' may not be as feared as before, but Lasith Malinga continues to churn in the good numbers as far as his bowling is concerned.

With 18 wickets at an average of 17.38 in the last two years, he has been Sri Lanka's best bet when it comes to the bowling department. Apart from firing in those yorkers towards the end of the innings he will also lead the side. It was under his captaincy that Sri Lanka lifted the ICC World T20 in Bangladesh in 2014, and that's a fact that will



UAE

Rohan Mustafa
The 27-year-old's 50-ball 77 against Afghanistan is the reason why the UAE have made it through to the big league.

It was an early attack against the Afghans and from there on the men from the Gulf took the initiative and successfully made it through. An aggressive opener, Rohan's still new in the circuit, but there's no doubt that he can hit the ball quite the distance. In addition he can churn in some vital turners as well. Apart from scoring a half-century he also scalped



Mohammad Naveed
A brutal pace bowler, Mohammad Naveed has been successful in every match so far. Aside from scalping five wickets in the first two games, he also ran through Oman's top order in their crucial fixture yesterday.

He finished as the highest wicket-taker amongst the qualifying teams and there's no doubt that on a bouncy track at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, he will be a lot more effective for the UAE. A good start is what is required in a T20 game and

