

# Can the others 'step up'?

SAKEB SUBHAN from Dubai



Having made the finals in two of the last three editions of the Asia Cup, Bangladesh must now be considered one of the serious contenders for the title of the regional cricket extravaganza starting today at the Dubai International Stadium. Their place in their group -- ranked above both groupmates Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, who they take on today -- justifies that billing.

But, as always with the Tigers, the hidden factor that goes beyond rankings and results is that the team's fortunes rise and fall with how much the five pillars of the team -- skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mashfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad -- can make up for the underperformance of the rest.

It has been a common refrain in the recent past, but it bears repeating because the pattern has not changed apart from the competence of off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz and the continuing return to form of pacer Mustafizur Rahman.

When asked the question for the ump-

teenth time during practice yesterday ahead of the tournament opener, Mashrafe -- who has usually cast a protective arm over his young teammates -- seemed to betray a bit of frustration.

"Of course, I believe in the juniors and I believe that given enough opportunities they will do well. We haven't played international cricket for a while after the West Indies tour, but there are players who did well in practice matches and we have faith in them," was how Mashrafe set out what he perhaps thinks should be the ideal, but then he focused on the less than ideal reality.

"You cannot win tournaments on the back of three or four players performing. There are players other than us [the five seniors] who have played for three, five, 10 years and in international cricket three, four years is a long time. I think they too have to step up and perform."

The numbers do paint a bleak picture. Since Bangladesh cricket's renaissance -- at least in ODIs -- from the beginning of 2015, Tamim averages 77.47 in wins with six centuries and 10 fifties; the corresponding number for Shakib is 52.25

with one century and eight fifties, for Mashfiqur 46.26 with two hundreds and five fifties and for Mahmudullah 54 with two hundreds and six fifties.

With the ball Shakib averaged 27.1 at an economy rate of 4.49 in wins, and Mashrafe averaged an excellent 21.95 at an economy of 4.45. Needless to say, apart from Mustafizur's wonder start, no one else comes close to matching those statistics.

"I would also like to say that the matches we have won, we won playing as a team. So that is very important," Mashrafe said.

History does bear that out. Tamim talked wistfully on Thursday about the 2012 Asia Cup when Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka and India and lost by two runs to Pakistan in the final. He said that 2012 was the first time that they felt, as a team, that they could beat the big boys on a consistent basis. It is noteworthy that apart from the Big Five's performances, there were also stellar showings from juniors like Nasir Hossain and Jahurul Islam, both of whom are players of the past.

There is a new batch of 'non-juniors' now, and as Mashrafe said, it is high time that they step up.



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

## FIXTURES

**GROUP A:**  
India, Pakistan and Hong Kong

**GROUP B:**  
Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan

### GROUP STAGE

DATE	MATCH	TIME
Sep 15	BD v SL	5:30pm
Sep 16	PAK v HK	5:30pm
Sep 17	SL v AFG	5:30pm
Sep 18	IND v HK	5:30pm
Sep 19	IND v PAK	5:30pm
Sep 20	BD v AFG	5:30pm

### SUPER FOUR

DATE	MATCH	TIME
Sep 21	A1 v B2	5:30pm
Sep 21	B1 v A2	5:30pm
Sep 23	A1 v A2	5:30pm
Sep 23	B1 v B2	5:30pm
Sep 25	A1 v B1	5:30pm
Sep 26	A2 v B2	5:30pm

### FINAL

DATE	MATCH	TIME
Sep 28	Final	5:30pm

ALL TIMES BST

## HK's Ganguly moment

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai

The scene was set at the media room of the Dubai International Stadium yesterday for the pre-tournament press briefing. There were six chairs on the dais waiting for the six captains to lead their countries in the Asia Cup.

A casual fan would probably be able to name five participants in a heartbeat but the sixth is harder as some may find it surprising that Hong Kong even play cricket.

Five of the captains were seated but the press conference could not start because Hong Kong skipper Anshuman Rath did not show up. Three minutes passed before he arrived with a sheepish grin.

In 2001, India captain Sourav Ganguly famously made Australian counterpart Steve Waugh wait at the toss of the first Test, firing a counter missile to Waugh's 'mental disintegration'. What followed was one of the best recent series that India won 2-1.

If anything even remotely similar happens with Hong Kong, 2001 will be chump change in comparison.

## INFO-ZONE

BANGLADESH V SRI LANKA

### HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
12	1	11	0	12	11	1	0

### IN ALL ODIS

M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
52	6	44	2	52	44	6	2

Last meeting in ODIs: Dhaka, January 27, 2018. Bangladesh lost by 79 runs.

### KEY PLAYERS



Shakib Al Hasan



Thisara Perera

Batting	35.50	Bowling	237
Average	177	Wickets	185
Innings	5433	Innings	29.77
Runs	134*	Average	4.55
HS	81.02	Economy	5/47
SR	7	Best Bowling	6/44
100s	0		

### AGENCIES, Dubai



Lasith Malinga, 35 and not quite at his quickest any more, is back in the Sri Lanka 50-over squad for the Asia Cup 2018, and the team expect great things from him as usual.

Malinga played the last of his 204 one-day internationals in September 2017. Injuries, in the main, have kept him out of international cricket for long stretches both before and after that appearance, but he has been active in the Sri Lankan domestic circuit, and is now back in the national ODI side.

A total of 301 ODI wickets at an average of 28.92 and an economy rate of 5.31 marks Malinga out as one of the best in the game when at his peak.

Now, though, with Malinga returning to the squad around the time most teams are trying to get their ICC Cricket World Cup 2019 plans in place, it would seem that the veteran might be in the fray for one last splash at the marquee event -- his fourth, if he makes it -- and get a chance to add to his 43 wickets in 22 games, at a stunning average of 21.11.

"I believe that Malinga fits into our equation for this tournament," said Chandika Hathurusingha, the Sri Lanka coach, before the team open their campaign against Bangladesh on Saturday.

"He is one of the best death bowlers in the world. In the last few matches, he has performed well and his fitness is up to the mark."

The team's plans have been hampered somewhat, with Dinesh Chandimal, the senior batsman, and



Sri Lanka coach Chandika Hathurusingha (C) speaks to Dasun Shanaka and Lasith Malinga (R) in training session yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

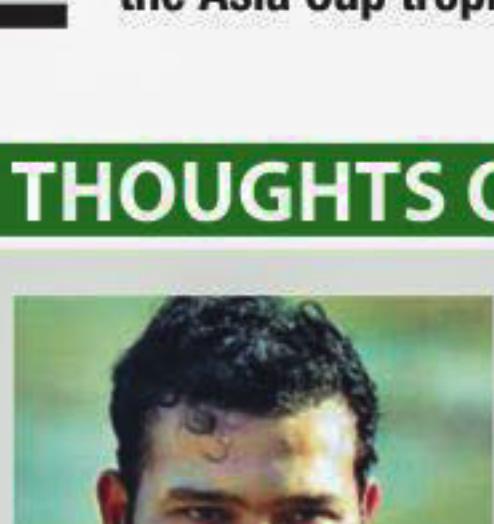
## THOUGHTS ON THE ASIA CUP



We have some great recent memories of the Asia Cup. We have been finalists on two of the last three occasions and on rankings we are the third best ODI team in the tournament. That will inspire us and give us some confidence as we get ready to play against some very tough sides in this tournament.

MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

BANGLADESH CAPTAIN



In a way you can say that [the Asia Cup is a build-up] because every team wants to go to the World Cup knowing their combination. It's important to focus on the job at hand rather than thinking too far ahead. All players have a great opportunity to stake claims for the World Cup squad.

ROHIT SHARMA

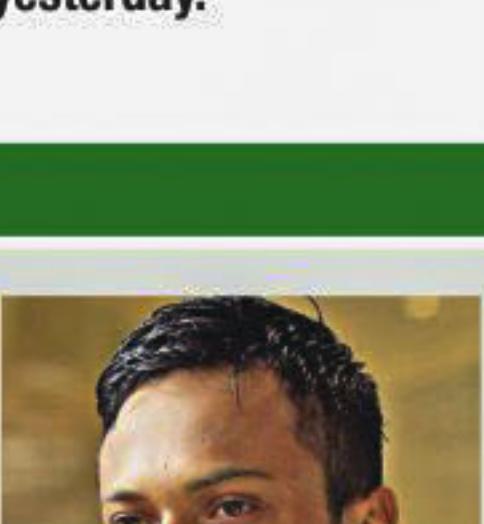
INDIA CAPTAIN



This continental tournament gives us a chance to test ourselves against some good sides and also prepare for the 2019 ICC Cricket World Cup in the process. There are three higher ranked oppositions [than Sri Lanka] in the fray and it is a good chance to also move up in the ICC ODI rankings.

ANGELO MATHEWS

SRI LANKA CAPTAIN



This continental tournament pits leading players against each other and I'm sure fans will be hoping for top-class action. It's an honour to be the top-ranked all-rounder in ODIs and I am hoping to be at my best. I have some extra incentive to perform in my individual ranking.

SHAKIB AL HASAN

BANGLADESH ALL-ROUNDER



We deserve to be here. India and Pakistan are a tough group but we're going to go out there and enjoy. We're just going to embrace every moment of it. I grew up watching them play so it's going to be hard not to smile, but I'll have to show professionalism and get out there and do the job.

ANSHUMAN RATH

HONG KONG CAPTAIN



This tournament is a great chance for us to rise up in the ICC ODI team rankings, especially since the ICC Cricket World Cup is not very far away. Half the teams who will feature in the World Cup are participating in the Asia Cup so it is a great chance for us to see where we stand.

SARFRAZ AHMED

PAKISTAN CAPTAIN



The Asia Cup in the UAE is going to be huge and I'm really looking forward to doing my best here. Being at the top of the ICC rankings is a matter of great pride for me. We will be going up against some of the world's leading players and I know the conditions [in Dubai] can be challenging.

JASPIT BUMRAH

INDIA BOWLER



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