

# SPORT

## 'I feel the team progressed immensely'

MAZHAR UDDIN FROM DUBAI

 While the media and fans are furious over Bangladesh's performance in the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup where the Tigers are virtually out of the contention for the semi-final spot followed by the three consecutive defeats in the Super 12 stage, head coach Russell Domingo is keen to focus on the positives before heading into their fourth game against South Africa in Abu Dhabi today.

Bangladesh faced narrow defeats against Sri Lanka and West Indies where the Tigers were totally outplayed against England in the second game. Despite the huge criticism over the coaching staff and the players, Domingo reminded that his charges have taken big strides in the shortest format over the last few months.

"We know it's a national sport and the results are massively important. The team has had a fantastic win-record in T20Is in the last 12 months and we won some big series. I think it'd be very harsh to judge the team based on two narrow losses against two previous world champions. We are by no means the finished

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article in this format.

"I know there's criticism about certain players and certain aspects of the coaching staff, but I feel the team has progressed immensely. From being ranked No 11 in the world to becoming ranked No 6 in eight months, is a big achievement for Bangladesh cricket. But we know we are a long way from where we need to be. But it's not going to happen overnight. There's another World Cup in a year's time so things have to be put in place.

Bangladesh is yet to register a win in the main round of the ICC T20 World Cup since 2007 and with two more games remaining in the Super

12 stage, Domingo is optimistic about rewriting history.

"Bangladesh have only won one game in the second phase of the T20 World Cup, ever. There's an opportunity to improve on that record, to try to win the two games. It'll be a big stepping stone for us," Domingo told the media during the pre-match press conference yesterday.

The 47-year-old further pointed out the fact that Bangladesh came into the World Cup with the youngest average age for the players where he added that it is normal for the youngsters to make mistakes on a big occasion.

Despite losing the first game against Australia by five wickets, the Proteas bounced back well and registered wins over West Indies and Sri Lanka. With the experience of working as the head coach of South Africa for a long time, Domingo informed that the Tigers are eyeing to exploit the weaknesses of the Proteas batters against the spinners today.

"They are playing well at the moment. Having worked in South Africa for a long time myself, we know there's always a question mark in the way they play spin. Hopefully, the conditions will help us tomorrow," Domingo concluded.



## Challenge of recovering balance without Shakib

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh face South Africa today with the Tigers' hopes all but gone following three straight losses to Sri Lanka, England and West Indies in the Super 12 stage.

With ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan ruled out of the World Cup, Bangladesh's mental resilience is hanging by the thinnest of threads ahead of the South Africa game with plenty of issues to be factored in and resolved. The team's mental stature is perhaps at an all-time low and reduced to just 13 members due to BCB's childish planning, the most pertinent question now would be how to deal with the loss of Shakib?

The Tigers have played without Shakib before but it is his cricketing mind, which will be most missed for the remaining two matches. When head coach Russell Domingo came to the press conference yesterday, he put forward the notion that they would have to make do without Shakib and his presence as a 'leader'. He talked about the difficulty of balancing the side as well.

"Shakib is obviously a big loss for the balance of the side. The team will also miss his leadership and the calmness that he brings around the environment in pressure situations.

"When he doesn't play, you go a batsman or bowler light. You might have to play a part-time bowler. It does provide

someone new to make his first World Cup appearance tomorrow," Domingo said.

Shamim Hossain is likely to make his World Cup debut while Rubel Hossain remains the only backup player in a squad with only 13 players remaining. Domingo was adamant that he did not feel the need for more backup players.

"We came here with two spare batters, two spare fast bowlers, an off-spinner and two wicketkeepers in the group. I still feel we are covered for the last two games. I don't think we needed to bring more back-up players.

"Sohan won't be fit for tomorrow. Shamim and Soumya [Sarkar], the back-up batsmen, will be in the starting eleven tomorrow," Domingo said yesterday.

Such decisions now seem almost whimsical given the current stature of decision-making but not many options are left. What is happening behind the curtains in Bangladesh team's surrounding environment remains a matter of speculation but it appears a problem is eating away at the team's mental balance since the loss to Scotland in the qualifier phase. And the resultant confrontation between key players and the board only muddied the waters further.

What remains key is how they plan to fight back under the current circumstances. Without Shakib that task now seems immensely difficult.



## TODAY'S MATCHES

South Africa Vs Bangladesh  
4pm (BST)

Pakistan Vs Namibia  
8pm (BST)

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'We are not taking anything for granted'

REUTERS

All-rounder Dwaine Pretorius says the secret to South Africa's success at the Twenty20 World Cup has been the team effort that means they are not reliant on a few individuals ahead of their vital Group 1 clash against Bangladesh in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.

South Africa have been dependent on big-name players getting them over the line in past competitions, and struggled when they did not fire. "Our whole team, batting, bowling, whatever is contributing every time. We are not relying on one or two superstars to get us over the line," he told reporters on Monday.

"We are in a very good space, but we are not taking anything for granted. We need to keep preparing well and then bring all the intensity and passion when we get onto the field."

"Bangladesh is a good side and very dangerous in these conditions."

## South Africa look to keep momentum

AGENCIES

High on confidence after two consecutive victories, a rejuvenated South Africa will now look to strengthen their semi-final hopes when they meet a struggling Bangladesh today.

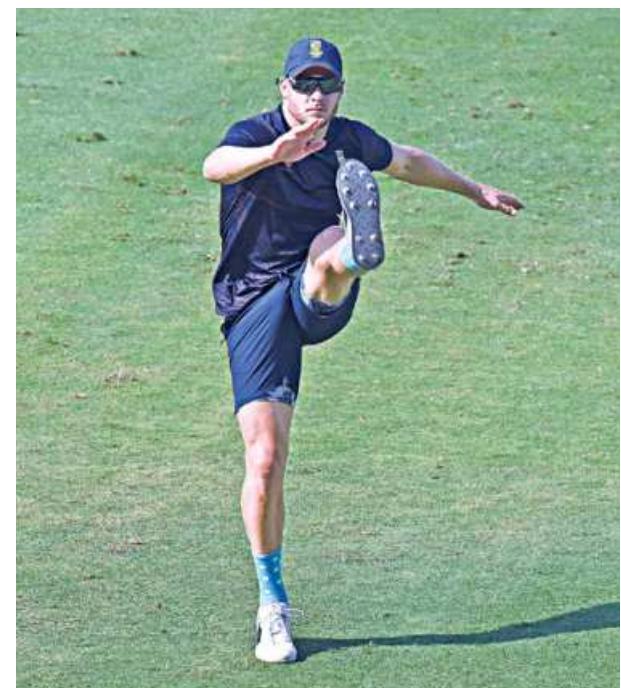
South Africa have emerged as strong contenders to qualify for the semifinals after the wins over West Indies and Sri Lanka. They sit second in the group, ahead of Australia on net run rate (both teams have 4 points).

Bangladesh and South Africa have met six times in T20Is, with the Proteas winning on every occasion.

South Africa ticked most of their boxes in the four-wicket victory against Sri Lanka. The potent bowling unit, that covers all bases including good spin options and world class pacers, executed their plans well, putting pressure on the opposition.

The top-ranked T20I bowler Tabraiz Shamsi showed why he is so highly rated, while the likes of Anrich Nortje and Dwaine Pretorius have also delivered.

The Proteas were then able to stitch a solid partnership between skipper Temba Bavuma and the in-form Aiden Markram. And finally, the big-hitting David Miller found his mojo back at the right time as he smashed a 13-ball 23 runs, including two massive sixes in the last over to steer his side to victory.



## Problems mount for faltering India



"I don't know if it is a fear of failure but I know that whatever changes they made to the batting order today did not work"

FORMER INDIA CAPTAIN SUNIL GAVASKAR

AGENCIES

Virat Kohli's India started the Twenty20 World Cup as favourites but their semi-final hopes are hanging by a thread after two losses, the latest an eight-wicket defeat to New Zealand.

The business end of the mega event risks becoming a party without a host. India are only just mathematically alive in the tournament of which they remain the official hosts despite having to shift it out of the coronavirus-battered country.

Where it is all going wrong for India, who suffered a 10-wicket humiliation to arch-rivals Pakistan in their first match

## BATTING FLOP

India's famed batting line-up limped to a modest 110-7 against New Zealand on Sunday, a week after they managed 151-7 while facing an equally good Pakistan attack.

Top Indian batsmen including KL Rahul and Rohit Sharma have shown little application after being invited to bat first in both their outings.

Against New Zealand, Rahul fell to Tim Southee for 18 and Sharma -- who was dropped on nought -- was out to Ish Sodhi after making 14. Kohli managed nine off 17 balls before being caught off Sodhi's leg spin.

"Tentative with the bat, their shot selection was questionable," batting great VVS Laxman wrote on Twitter. "New Zealand bowled superbly, but India made their task easier."

## BAD TREND

India made two changes from their opening loss, including one forced, and flipped the batting line-up to accommodate Ishan Kishan as an opener against New Zealand.

But the left-hander fell to left-arm quick Trent Boult's accurate line and length while trying to go for a big shot and got caught at deep square leg.

It was the double blow by Sodhi to take down Sharma and then Kohli that set India back in their ploy to get some crucial and quick runs inside the six overs of powerplay.

Tottering at 48-4, the Indian batting survived their 20 overs but came back with an apparent fallen spirit as New Zealand overhauled the modest target with 33 balls to spare.

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar said: "I don't know if it is a fear of failure but I know that whatever changes they made to the batting order today did not work."

Pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah said "bubble fatigue, mental fatigue" creeps in after days

on the road, but former players remain unforgiving, with Gautam Gambhir saying India lacked "mental toughness".

"Talent is one thing... You can do really well in bilateral (series) but when it comes to these kinds of tournaments, this is when you have to stand up and perform," he told the ESPNCricinfo website.

"It's been a trend, it's been happening at most ICC (International Cricket Council) tournaments."

## WEIGHT OF EXPECTATION?

MS Dhoni, now with the team as a mentor, led India to the T20 World Cup crown in 2007 and then lifted the 50-over World Cup four years later.

Kohli, who will step down as T20 captain after this tournament, has taken the team to historic Test triumphs in Australia and England. But he has failed to win India a World Cup title and India lost to New Zealand in the semi-finals of the 2019 ODI World Cup. They also bowed out in the final four of the previous T20 World Cup, in 2016, under Dhoni.

There is growing belief that India falter in big-ticket tournaments, a charge that Kohli vehemently denies.

