



## BAN v AFG TRIVIA

1. Shakib Al Hasan is set to play his 100th T20I today and by doing so, the Bangladesh skipper will become the 15th player in the history of the format. From Bangladesh, only Mushfiqur Rahim (100) and Mahmudullah Riyad (119) have crossed the century-landmark.
2. Bangladesh made their debut in Asia Cup in the 1986 edition while Afghanistan did the same in 2014.
3. In the 2016 Asia Cup -- the last and only time the continental tournament featured the T20 format -- runners-up Bangladesh did not meet Afghanistan as the latter could not progress beyond the qualifiers.
3. In T20Is played between the two sides, Mahmudullah Riyad leads the scoring chart from Bangladesh and Mohammad Nabi from Afghanistan. Riyad has scored 169 in seven innings while Nabi tallied 141 in the same number of outings.
4. Nabi also boasts the highest individual score, an unbeaten 54-ball 84 made in Mirpur in 2019. In that game, player-of-the-match Nabi had struck as many as seven sixes to single-handedly take the match in his side's favour. Bangladesh fell short by 25 runs in their chase of 165. 5. On the bowling front, only two bowlers have wickets in the double figures, so far. Rashid Khan tops the chart with 14 scalps, followed by Shakib Al Hasan with 10.
6. Bangladesh's highest score against Afghanistan is 155 for eight, which the Tigers put up earlier in March this year. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's 167 in Dehradun remains the highest from both sides.



Mushfiqur Rahim inspects his bat as he talks to Mahmudullah Riyad ahead of a practice session at the ICC Academy ground in Dubai. (Bottom) Spinner Nasum Ahmed shapes up to bowl at the nets during the session. Bangladesh will begin their Asia Cup campaign against Afghanistan in Sharjah today.

PHOTO: BCB

# Focus on clarity of roles as Afghanistan trial beckons

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI FROM DUBAI

Clarity of purpose is a small subject when it comes to Bangladesh cricket, but when it comes to showing that clarity, the Tigers have been found wanting in the recent past. Newly-appointed technical consultant Sridharan Sriram was appointed to change the Bangladesh's T20 approach and way of thinking and even as a big match against Afghanistan in the 2022 Asia Cup loomed, Sridharan yesterday talked about the need for clarity in certain aspects.

Sharjah has not played host to any matches in this tournament so far. Thus, there is not anything to go by in terms of what the wicket will play like. In the T20 World Cup, the Tigers' management did not always make the right call in terms of team combination. For Sriram, conditions were important but clarity of roles was more important.

"I think it's about clarity of roles. One thing we made an effort to do is be clear in communicating to the squad what to expect from everyone. Once we get there, we will assess the conditions and probably take the right call," he said.

Sriram's comment seems pretty out of place, but given Bangladesh's tendency to not pace their efforts according to match scenarios, it should be an important discussion in Bangladesh cricket. The team combination will matter greatly, but once the eleven is picked, it's about execution of roles.

Yet, oftentimes there has been confusion.

Tamim Iqbal, who had so



much experience in international cricket, did not always appear to be clear about the way the team management wanted him to approach his innings.

When Mohammad Naim came into the side, he was often called out for a slow strike-rate and trying to keep his own position in the side by scoring just enough runs. He was Bangladesh's highest run-getter in T20s last year but ended up losing his place due to poor form and an unsure approach in terms of going for his shots.

After now finding his way back into the side, what do Sriram and the team management expect from Naim? While the selection in itself lacks clarity, Sriram felt that there was clear communication

from their side about what they wanted.

"Naim is a very natural striker of the ball. The communication has been very clear with him regarding what we expect of him. I am sure he is going to go out there and play his natural game, which is to hit the ball. We're not worried too much about the numbers or anything, we just want to play according to the situation. Assess the conditions as quickly as possible, communicate with the partner and play his role," Sriram said.

A sense of direction may set Naim free, but on the other hand, any real clarity of roles in the side also brings with it accountability, a trait long missing in Bangladesh cricket.

Sriram was positive about the work ethic of the seniors, but opined that everyone has to play their roles.

Asked about Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad, who had both been rested on the tour to Zimbabwe, Sriram said: "I think their work ethic has been very good. The way they set an example, even showing up for optional training, they are really keen to contribute. All we ask of them is that they work hard and play their role. Once they do that, they are good enough players to succeed."

Sriram's mantra for success does not seem indecisive, but it is now left to the players to ingrain those ideas ahead of the Tigers' clash against Afghanistan today in what should be a very difficult prospect. Whether or not they find that clarity, going into the World Cup, it should provide plenty of structure to steady the dwindling mindset of both players and management.

## Time to roar as Tigers take on Afghans

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will begin their Asia Cup campaign when they take on Afghanistan at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium today.

The Tigers will be wary of the threat posed by a high-flying Afghan side that crushed Sri Lanka by eight wickets in their opening fixture.

Bangladesh had an optional training session yesterday, which skipper Shakib Al Hasan and some other members of the team opted to skip.

Shakib also did not attend the official pre-match press conference. Instead, journalists were greeted by Bangladesh's technical consultant Sridhar Sriram.

But although Shakib did not attend the press conference, Bangladesh's captain posted a message of encouragement on Facebook, writing: "It's time to roar. The Tigers are battle-ready in the desert for their first match of the Asia Cup 2022 against the Afghans."

## Shakib again ahead of the curve?

SPORTS REPORTER



Both India and Pakistan were fined for slow over rates during the Asia Cup 2022 game in Dubai on Saturday. Both teams failed to complete their overs in

the stipulated time and were forced to field an extra fielder inside the 30 yard circle.

The ICC recently implemented changes to their T20 playing conditions to combat slow over rates and that had an impact on the game amidst the sweltering heat in Dubai.

Bangladesh could face similar challenges, but it was learned that newly-appointed T20 captain Shakib Al Hasan was quite vigilant about the issue.

During the two practice matches in Mirpur before the team departed for Dubai, Shakib ensured that his side finished the first practice game seven minutes ahead of time. In the second game, the team Shakib led finished their quota of overs six minutes before the stipulated time.

Overall, Bangladesh have fared well at managing over rates given their spinning options.

While Pakistan had Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan discussing field settings, it might work in Bangladesh's favour that Shakib usually is quick to act about field settings. The all-rounder even quipped in a recent press conference before the team's departure for UAE that he relied on Mushfiqur Rahim's judgement.

Bangladesh were fined for slow over rate in the second ODI against Zimbabwe recently but amidst the heat, overcoming the risk of slow over rate could be decisive.

## Kemon achen, asks Shaheen

SPORTS REPORTER FROM DUBAI

'Kemon achen' is a phrase that is part and parcel of everyday Bangla, translating to 'how are you'. But it can be quite surprising to hear those words from someone who is expected to possess little knowledge of Bangla, that too from an international superstar who has amassed 208 international wickets across formats in a pretty short period of time.

Bangladesh were in a team meeting on Monday, leaving a slew of reporters waiting in the lobby. Suddenly, a tall, lanky fellow appeared and it turned out to be none other than Pakistan pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi, who is recuperating from a knee injury that has ruled him out of the Asia Cup. Pakistan chose to undertake Shaheen's recuperation by allowing him to stay with the team.

When this reporter greeted him in the lobby and introduced himself as a Bangladeshi, Shaheen went straight onto the front foot, asking: "Kemon achen?"

Asked how he knew what to say, a wry smile spread across his face. But he was unwilling to divulge too much, saying: "I am not part of the Asia Cup squad, yeah?"

## INFO

## ZONE

### BANGLADESH

### AFGHANISTAN

M W L NR  
3 1 2 0

HEAD TO HEAD  
IN ASIA CUP

M W L NR  
3 2 1 0

M W L NR  
9 3 5 1

HEAD TO HEAD  
IN T20IS

M W L NR  
9 5 3 1

Last meeting in Asia Cup: Abu Dhabi, September 23, 2018. Bangladesh won by 3 runs. Last meeting in T20Is: Mirpur, March 5, 2022. Afghanistan won by 8 wickets.



Shakib Al Hasan (Bangladesh)

**BOWLING**  
MATCHES: 99  
WICKETS: 121  
AVERAGE: 19.95  
ECONOMY: 6.69  
BEST BOWLING: 5/20

**BATTING**  
MATCHES: 99  
RUNS: 2010  
AVERAGE: 23.10  
HS: 84  
SR: 120.86  
50S: 10



Rashid Khan (Afghanistan)

**BOWLING**  
MATCHES: 67  
WICKETS: 112  
AVERAGE: 13.91  
ECONOMY: 6.17  
BEST BOWLING: 5/3

**BATTING**  
MATCHES: 67  
RUNS: 229  
AVERAGE: 12.05  
HS: 33  
SR: 124.45  
50S: 0

# A three-fold predicament

NABID YEASIN

Bangladesh went to the UAE for the Asia Cup following a lot of chaos and drama and with a number of unresolved issues.

Aside from the challenge of starting the continental championship under new leadership -- with changes made both in captaincy and coaching panel -- and with an unsettled squad, the prime concern for the Tigers remains their lack of power hitters in the eleven.

Even though opener Anamul Haque Bijoy was overly optimistic regarding the matter, saying that everyone in the side has the ability to clear the boundary whenever needed, the case is the exact opposite -- at least that's what the recent trend says.

It was understandable that Anamul eventually tried to establish that 'planning and execution are more important than power-hitting in T20s'. While there should be no question regarding the emphasis put on planning and execution by Anamul, it is the execution part where things get really fuzzy for Bangladesh cricketers.

And that's what makes Bangladesh dearly miss not having an x-factor in the side who could turn the tide of the game and disrupt the opposition's plans with some lusty blows when needed, just like Hardik Pandya did in their Asia Cup opener against Pakistan on Sunday.

Bangladesh have lost four of their last five T20Is, and if scrutinised closely, three factors would come to the fore: Bangladesh's batting order usually crumbles when asked to



chase anything over 150-run mark and that's because of the second and third reason which is a lack of power-hitters in the rank and their inability to utilise the Powerplay.

In their last T20I against Zimbabwe, chasing a mediocre 157-run target, Bangladesh needed 58 runs from the last five overs with four wickets in hand. However, despite Afif Hossain staying unbeaten on 39, the Tigers eventually fell short by 10 runs.

Afif, despite looking to be in fine touch, ran out of partners at the other end and the root of the problem could be traced back to when Bangladesh lost as many as three wickets

while amassing 45 runs in the Powerplay.

In fact, more or less, that has been the case for most of their recent T20I encounters. In the last five T20Is, Bangladesh scored at a rate of a mediocre 7.53 in the Powerplay. That does not seem so bad, right?

The figure, however, becomes a major area of concern for the team management when factored in the fact that in trying to maintain a scoring rate that is only considered mediocre in modern T20Is, the Tigers had lost as many as 11 wickets at the top.

The only time in that period that Bangladesh had a scoring rate above 10 was when Liton Das' quick-fire knock at the top saw the Tigers score 60 for the loss of one wicket in the Powerplay against Zimbabwe in the first T20I in July. But Bangladesh still lost the game as the platform made by Liton could not be capitalised by a fragile middle order in chase of a 200-plus target.

As Bangladesh are set to play Afghanistan today in their opening game of the Asia Cup, the concerns for Bangladesh only deepen. Due to injury, Liton's role has been reduced to cheering for the side from his living room. All he, and the entire nation, can hope for is that the brand-new combination of openers that the team management had talked about employing in the continental tournament clicks for Bangladesh.

And if it doesn't, the middle order would have to compensate for which the six-hitting ability of everyone in the side, as so proudly mentioned by Anamul, will definitely need to be portrayed on the big stage.