

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 5
 European Qualifiers
 Armenia vs Croatia
 Live from 10:00 pm
 Portugal vs Luxembourg
 Live from 12:45 am (Tuesday)

Will sense dawn after the reality check?

NABID YEASIN

Having gone into the Asia Cup with lofty dreams, as it so often is the case with Bangladesh despite no history of success in major tournaments, skipper Shakib Al Hasan has already put it in the rearview mirror.

"Do we still have a chance?" Shakib inquired, with a dismissive laugh, at one point of the post-match press conference in Colombo on Saturday night following the Tigers' 21-run defeat in their second Super Four game against co-hosts Sri Lanka.

With two defeats at the business end of the continental championship, Bangladesh's fate is no longer in their own hands. However, seeing their Asia Cup campaign come to an apparent end is probably the least of worries for a side that was served with, according to the captain, a "reality check" ahead of the ODI World Cup.

The perceived notion that Bangladesh are a balanced ODI side now seems to be

misleading. For making such a claim, the one mandatory pre-requisite is possessing the ability to excel, or at least make a significant statement, in a major tournament.

Even Shakib admitted that. "To date, we could never excel at a major tournament," he said.

Barring a few sporadic wins against big teams, why is it that Bangladesh have failed time and again to prove their mettle when it mattered the most?

An introspection might reveal that the team depth that the Tigers have boasted for a long time never existed in the true sense. For instance, after Liton Das was initially deemed unavailable from the Asia Cup squad due to viral fever, Bangladesh team management had to go for a makeshift opening pair after just playing two regular openers - Mohammad Naim and Tanzid Hasan Tamim - in the first game.

Pairing Mehedi Hasan Miraz with Naim for the opening slot paid off against

Afghanistan in the group stage and yielded a decent result in the last game in Colombo. However, if Miraz had to be played as a makeshift opener in a big tournament like the Asia Cup, it only exposes that the team management could not rely on the young 22-year-old opener Tamim just after one game, and also not on a more experienced Anamul Haque Bijoy, who was flown in to join the squad for his specific role as an opener.

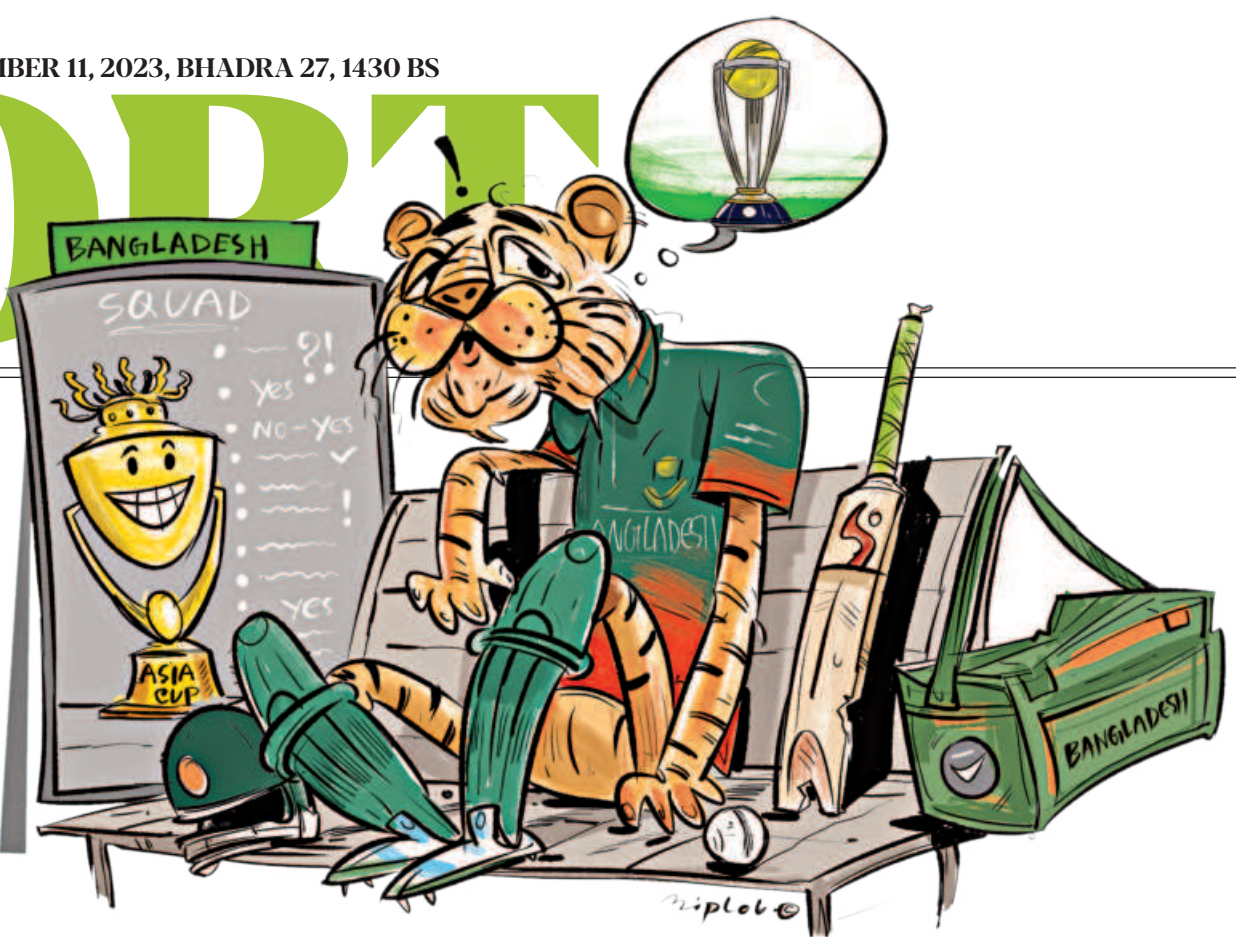
Even the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon dismissed the top-order currently playing in the Asia Cup. "Tamim [Iqbal], Liton Das, and [Najmul Hossain] Shanto... they are our regular top three. The ones who are playing are not supposed to [play], so I don't blame them for such a performance," Hassan was quoted as saying to the media in Sri Lanka after the game on Saturday night.

This, however, brings up the question: Is having proper players in the pool to cover

up for the regular starters not a norm for any side playing cricket in the world? Also, is the "rich pipeline" not something that the Hassan-led BCB has boasted about time and again?

While Hassan seemed unfazed about the Tigers' current performance as these did not come from the regular eleven, skipper Shakib's words painted the true picture of the dire state of Bangladesh cricket when he admitted that "we do not have the bench strength that could allow us to risk losing 3-4 players to injury."

Co-hosts Sri Lanka are playing without four of their regular starters in the Asia Cup. Still, in consistent with their knack for never bogging down in major tournaments, Sri Lanka remain one of the favourites in the tournament. And even if they had failed, probably the blame would not have been pinned on the absentees as it is expected of big teams to have players in their ranks who can step up and do the job even when dealt with a poor hand.



Tigers' focus turns to World Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh team management has already shifted their focus to the upcoming home series against New Zealand as the Tigers' hopes of making it to the Asia Cup final are all but over following defeat against Sri Lanka in their second Super Four match in Colombo on Saturday.

Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan already expressed his desire to rest some key players for the three-match ODI series against the Kiwis at home during the post-match press conference on Saturday in order to not risk losing players to injuries ahead of the World Cup, to be held in India from October 5.

Bangladesh team are enjoying a break after the Sri Lanka match as they will play their final Super Four match against India on September 15. Bangladesh's distant hopes of advancing in the Asia Cup are dependent on a lot of ifs and buts going in their favour.

Shakib, along with Mushfiqur Rahim, returned home and they will join the team in Colombo on September 13.

"We know the exact reason of Mushfiqur [he returned to the country to be with his wife for the birth of their second child], Shakib also took the break for personal reasons but we are not sure about those," said Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury.

Selector Habibul Bashar said that their main challenge will be to keep the players fresh ahead of the World Cup.

"We are yet to discuss the New Zealand series. But we have to think about the workload of our pace bowlers. If we consider the hectic travel schedule of the World Cup, we must think about how we can keep some of our key players fresh ahead of the mega event," Bashar said.

A board official, on condition of anonymity, informed that they will allow the leading players to take breaks if they want in the home series. "We are not sure whether Shakib will also take a break. But ideally, we may follow a rotation policy which means one may skip one or two matches," he said.

The ODI matches against the Kiwis will take place in Mirpur on September 21, 23 and 26.

Flick sacking a first for Germany

AFP, Berlin

Germany have sacked coach Hansi Flick just nine months from hosting Euro 2024 after Saturday's humiliating 4-1 defeat by Japan, the German FA (DFB) announced on Sunday.

Flick became the first and only Germany head coach to be sacked since the position was created in 1926.

Sporting director Rudi Voeller, who coached the side to a 2002 World Cup final against Brazil, will take over on an interim basis, with a successor to be announced at a later date.

German FA boss Bernd Neundorff said the sacking was "unavoidable" after the team's recent run of "disappointing" results.

Germany have now lost four of their six matches since their early exit from the World Cup in December.

Euro 2024 kicks off in Germany in June 2024. The home fans booed the German team at half-time, with some chanting "Hansi out" at the end of the match.

Appointed in May 2021 after Joachim Loew's 15-year tenure ended, Flick was Germany's 10th head coach since World War II.

Fresh off taking Bayern Munich to seven trophies in just 18 months in charge, Flick was victorious in his first eight matches as Germany boss.

Since then he has won just four of 17 matches and presided over a group stage exit at the Qatar World Cup.



Bangladesh in Asian Games with 'best possible team'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are set to take part in the upcoming 19th Asian Games in China with 'their best possible team' even though there is no guarantee from the Bangladesh officials of a medal from Asia's biggest multi-sports extravaganza, scheduled for September 23 to October 8 in Hangzhou, China.

A total of 180 athletes and 60 officials will take part in 17 disciplines, three more than the last edition in Jakarta in 2018 where the men in red and green had to return empty-handed. The disciplines are: football, cricket, bridge, kabaddi, swimming, weightlifting, gymnastics, karate, fencing, taekwondo, golf, shooting, archery, boxing and athletics.

Past history shows Bangladesh's chances are skewed towards only two disciplines - cricket and kabaddi - which won 11 out of 12 medals in the country's 11 appearances in the games, with the other medal coming in boxing.

Bangladesh Olympic Association's secretary general Syed Shahed Reza talked about his hopes from the games during a press conference at the BOA auditorium yesterday.



"I can't ensure a medal but I can tell you that we are going to take part in the Games with the best possible team compared to the past. Archery and shooting athletes have been training under foreign coaches and taking part in different international competitions round the year. So we can expect some good results from them," Reza said.

Reza also has hopes with England-based sprinter Imranur Rahman and New York-based boxer Zinnat Ferdous, both of whom will represent Bangladesh for the first time.

"We have included our first Grandmaster Niaz Murshed and Siddiqur Rahman, who is the country's top golfer. So, we have formed our squad with the best available

players and hope to get better results than the past," added Reza.

However, the reality doesn't evoke much optimism with archery and shooting as athletes from these two disciplines participated in some international tournaments in recent past with no remarkable achievement. Furthermore, they will have to compete against strong athletes from China, India, South Korea and Japan in these two disciplines.

The last-moment inclusion of archer Ruman Sana, though, may give the rest of the archers a boost in mixed or team events while Bangladesh shooting sports federation is expecting a medal from women's team event, depending on the performance of Kamrun Nahar Koly.

If Imranur can match his season's best of 10.11 seconds, which he recently clocked in an event in the UK, the sprinter can hope to qualify for the semifinals. Boxer Zinnat, meanwhile, is an unproven campaigner in Bangladesh context and will be in focus in the Asian Games.

Chef De Mission AK Sarker informed that footballer Sabina Khatun and GM Niaz Murshed would carry Bangladesh's flag during the opening ceremony.



U-16s go down in SAFF final

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's bid to regain the title of the SAFF U-16 Championship remained a distant dream as they suffered a 2-0 defeat against India in the final at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu yesterday.

Bharat Lairenjam and Lewis Zangminlum scored one goal apiece to steer India to their third title in a row and fifth overall in the age-group competition.

India, who beat Bangladesh 1-0 in group stage, dominated proceedings and left the pitch with a deserved victory, even though the defending and goalkeeping from Bangladesh left a lot to be desired.

Avaling a defence-splitting through pass from Zangminlum, Bharat darted into the box to send the ball under the legs of advancing goalkeeper Nahidul Islam home to give India an eighth-minute lead. Zangminlum then shrugged off his marker Siam Omit to drive a left footer into the near post in the 73rd minute to wrap up the victory.

Bangladesh created a couple of chances in the stoppage time of the second half but could not take those chances home and left the ground with a consolation runners-up trophy.

'We love cricket but cannot pay so much to watch'

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka Cricket slashed ticket prices for the Asia Cup by up to 95 percent on Sunday after costs were hiked 40-fold and matches were played in near-empty stadiums.

Tickets for one-day internationals in crisis-hit Sri Lanka have generally cost around 250 rupees (\$0.78) previously.

That was hiked to 10,000 rupees for the Asia Cup, which is being organised by the Pakistan Cricket Board despite largely taking place in Sri Lanka, and fans in the cricket-mad island country have stayed away in droves.

Barely 7,000 home supporters turned out for Sri Lanka's Super Four clash against Bangladesh on Saturday at the 35,000-capacity R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo, leaving the hosts facing the

embarrassing sight of ranks of empty seats. In an attempt to lure them, back Sri Lanka Cricket announced a price cut of up to 95 percent Sunday for all remaining Super Four games.

"Pakistan have kept the ticket pricing too high and that has kept fans away from the stadiums," a local Sri Lankan official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"This is bizarre. We tried to reason with the PCB but they had their reasons as they have lost out on money, maybe."

And fans were not amused. "This is not good. We love cricket but cannot pay so much to watch a match," Supun Vijayarathnam, a tea seller outside the Colombo stadium, told AFP.

A street vendor selling India and Pakistan jerseys and flags said that despite the game being a blockbuster, there were "fewer fans and the buzz is less".



Williams sisters paved way, says Gauff

AFP, New York

Coco Gauff said tennis icons Serena and Venus Williams paved the way for her breakthrough US Open triumph on Saturday after the American teenager captured her first Grand Slam title.

The 19-year-old from Florida battled to a 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 defeat of Aryna Sabalenka at the Arthur Ashe Stadium - where as a child she had watched the Williams sisters dominate.

The win ensured Gauff will have her name etched into tennis history alongside other Black American women to lift the title such as the Williams sisters, Althea Gibson and Sloane Stephens.

"It's crazy. I mean, they're the reason why I have this trophy today, to be honest," Gauff said of the Williams sisters.

"They have allowed me to believe in this dream growing up. You know, there wasn't too many just Black tennis players dominating the sport. It was literally just them that I can remember when I was younger."

"Obviously more came because of their

legacy. So it made the dream more believable. But all the things that they had to go through, they made it easier for someone like me to do this."

Gauff referenced the Williams sisters' 14-year boycott of the prestigious Indian Wells tournament - due to alleged racist heckling and Venus Williams' push for equal pay for women at major championships.

"You look back at the history with Indian Wells, with Serena, all she had to go through,

Venus fighting for equal pay," Gauff said.

"Words can't describe what (Serena and Venus Williams) meant to me. I hope another girl can see this and believe they can do it and hopefully their name can be on this trophy too."

Gauff's breakthrough victory will catapult her to a new level in the hierarchy of American sport.

Hollywood celebrities and sports stars such as NBA greats Kevin Durant and Jimmy Butler were on hand to witness Saturday's triumph.

She was soon bombarded with congratulatory messages from former US President Barack Obama and current President Joe Biden.

"Congratulations to US Open champion, @CocoGauff," Obama wrote on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. "We couldn't be prouder of you on and off the court - and we know the best is yet to come."

As the dust settled on Saturday's victory, video footage of Gauff dancing in the crowd as a fan at the US Open rapidly went viral.

