

# ‘High hopes’ encompass Bangladesh camp

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have had two good warm-up games against Sri Lanka and England ahead of their opening World Cup match against Afghanistan today at Dharamshala's Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium.

While batting appears to be the Tigers' biggest area of concern against an experienced Afghan spin attack, head coach Chandika Hathurusingha did not have to address questions about the creaky batting unit, which has recently blown hot and cold.

However, there was a desire to learn what Bangladesh's expectations are for the tournament. Thus, Chandika was asked about the realistic expectations the team had.

"Yeah, we all want to win the World Cup but as you rightly asked me, realistically is that if we win four-five games, we give ourselves a chance to get into the semifinal of the knockout stage - that's our first aim," the head coach said at the press conference yesterday.

He also clarified that his task was to take the pressure off players, in regards to the comments he had made in an interview where he had pointed out that people need to stop dreaming and wake up about World Cup expectations.

"People can dream, people can aim, people can have goals. Whatever the word you use, it is the same thing. We're trying to have a good World Cup and win matches. That's the main aim for me. As I just said to him, our aim is to get into the semifinal, that can be a dream or can be an aim - doesn't matter," Chandika added.

A lot will depend on the conditions for the game. Dharamshala have been known to help with swing bowling despite the weather not being too cold.

Bangladesh will put their faith in the resurgent pace unit. Skipper Shakib Al Hasan, however, demonstrated in the recent Asia Cup game against India how slower bowlers like Mahedi Hasan, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, and Nasum Ahmed can come into the equation to not only restrict runs but also pressurise opponents into playing shots.

"Yeah, it depends on the surface to be honest and the way the game is going to expand. We will tactically use our bowling resources. Sometimes we might come with a plan against the opposition and the conditions that we see before the game. Then after that, it's up to the captain to use his bowling resources," Chandika remarked about how the bowling unit may be used.

Bangladesh do have a relatively young squad with four players from the 2020 U-19 World Cup-winning squad also in the mix. While Shoriful Islam and Tawhid Hridoy have turned up with performances on a regular basis, youngsters Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Tanzim Hasan Sakib may also have important roles to play.

Chandika believes having these young players gives the team more energy.

"Yeah, we have I think four-five players that are from that World Cup. They will bring so much positivity to the group, because they have done it in the past.

"I'm excited for the whole team and even for my staff, because the World Cup for everybody is every four years and this is one of the biggest events in ICC calendar. We all have high hopes and want to enjoy it."



It will most likely be Bangladesh's pace vs Afghanistan's spin when the two sides begin their World Cup 2023 campaign in Dharamshala today. Spearheaded by Taskin Ahmed, the Tigers' pace unit will hope to continue their rich vein of form while the batters will have to guard against Rashid Khan and Co.

PHOTO: BCB/AFP

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## Will Tigers proceed with proven template?

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Bangladesh will enter the 2023 World Cup spotlight today, hoping that their tactical matchups will find merit against an Afghanistan side that have been inconsistent in the build-up to the showpiece event.

Afghanistan's spin threat may once again dictate Bangladesh's batting template, especially in countering Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

The Tigers successfully employed Mehedi Hasan Miraz in the opening slot in the last game -- an Asia Cup fixture -- between the two sides. Miraz struck a ton in that clash and managed to read the Afghan spinners from the hand.

Since then, the all-rounder had been carrying belief and form with the bat, having struck 67 and 74 in the warm-up fixtures against Sri Lanka and England, respectively.

Miraz could once again open the innings given that Afghanistan have usually bowled Mujeeb right at the start. Whether Tanzid Hasan Tamim opens the innings also remains to be seen given Mujeeb's threat with the new ball against left-handers in particular.

The Tigers' pace attack would be eying the conditions in Dharamshala where swing and seam are expected early. The presence of right-handers in the Afghanistan batting order may force Bangladesh to opt for both left-armers -- Mustalizer Rahman and Shoriful Islam -- in the lineup, with the latter being particularly

Hasan and Miraz acting as spinners, both Nasum and Mahedi could be benched.

"The wickets look really good for one day cricket, I thought; very firm wicket, nice covering of grass. I think it's a really good sporting wicket. Expecting some high-scoring on this ground," Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha had said about the wicket yesterday.

"The combination we will decide tomorrow (Saturday) morning and see the wicket again because the curator said that he will do a little bit of work today (Friday) as well on that wicket."

Despite the shortcomings of the Afghanistan batting order against top quality pace, Bangladesh would be aware of the solidity and firepower the Afghan opening pair of Ibrahim Zadran and Rahmanullah Gurbaz provide at the top.

Bangladesh themselves would be banking on the middle-order solidity of Shakib Al Hasan, Tawhid Hridoy, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad. Thus, Bangladesh's pace attack and the middle order's contribution could be key areas to grab early World Cup points.

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successful against Afghanistan recently.

Left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed may also be asked to do a job in the spin department but he could face stiff competition from in-form Sheikh Mahedi Hasan. Although unlikely but it remains to be seen whether the Tigers field four quicks from five options at their disposal. Even with three pacers and skipper Shakib Al

- Bangladesh and Afghanistan have squared off 15 times in ODIs, with the Tigers claiming nine victories and the rest going the Afghans' way.
- In World Cups, Bangladesh have a perfect record against Afghanistan. The Tigers won by 105 runs in the 2015 edition and followed it up with another 62-run victory in 2019.
- Three Afghanistan spinners are among the top 10 in the ICC ODI bowling rankings. Mystery spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman is third and closely followed by fourth-placed star leggie Rashid Khan. All-rounder Mohammad Nabi is number 10 on the list.
- Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan goes into the tournament as the top ODI all-rounder.
- Both Shakib and Mushfiqur Rahim will be surpassing Tamim Iqbal as players with the most appearances in the World Cup for Bangladesh when they take the field today. Currently, all three of them have played 29 World Cup matches each.
- Shakib needs 62 more runs to surpass South Africa's AB De Villiers and become the fifth-highest run-getter in ODI World Cup history.
- Afghanistan are yet to beat a full-member nation in the ODI World Cup.



## Shahidi banks on IPL experience

AFP, DHARAMSALA

Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi hopes his players' Indian Premier League (IPL) experience and knowledge of local conditions will stand them in good stead during the ICC World Cup in India.

Given the security situation in their country, the Afghan team has been based in Noida, near Delhi, for several years.

Afghanistan, who have won just one of their 15 World Cup matches since they joined the tournament in 2015, begin their involvement at this year's edition against Bangladesh today.

Shahidi believes the fact that several Afghanistan cricketers have experience of competing in the IPL will help them cope with the strains of a World Cup.

"Our players played a lot in IPL and also other players who didn't play IPL, we also played in these conditions because India was our home," Shahidi said at a pre-match press conference on Friday.

"So, we know about the conditions and we will take that advantage with us throughout the tournament."

Two of Afghanistan's six ODI wins over Bangladesh came in successive games in July, including a stunning 142-run success where openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz (145) and Ibrahim Zadran (100) both scored centuries.



## SA begin accepting the 'choker' tag

AFP, New Delhi

South Africa skipper Temba Bavuma admitted Friday that his country's reputation for being World Cup "chokers" will only be shed when they capture an elusive maiden international trophy.

The Proteas have often been undone by the weather as well as losing their nerve at key moments with victory within their clutches.

In their eight World Cup appearances since returning from the wilderness of the apartheid era, South Africa have made four semifinals but never the championship match.

"As a South African team, we know we're going to have that chip on our block, or that narrative that we have to get over," said Bavuma.

"That's always going to be there until we win a trophy."

Bavuma admits that he has occasionally used

the word "choker".

But his team should be buoyed by being free of the baggage of past self destruction -- seven members of the 15-man squad in India have never played in a World Cup.

That figure includes the 33-year-old Bavuma.

"It's that acceptance that it would always be there within the team, within this group, within guys who are to come. Hopefully, they don't have to experience that."

The Proteas begin their World Cup against 1996 champions Sri Lanka in New Delhi on Saturday at the Arun Jaitley Stadium where they were bowled out for a paltry 99 on their most recent visit last October.

Bavuma missed the game through illness but said the performance that day illustrates the tricky nature posed by the challenges of playing in India.



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Netherlands' Bas de Leede (L) stole the show, striking fear into the hearts of the 1992 champions Pakistan in the two sides' first ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 encounter at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad yesterday. De Leede led the charge for the Dutch both with the bat and ball in hand, standing out with bowling figures of four for 62 in nine overs before scoring a team-high 67 off 68 deliveries with the willow. De Leede's exploits kept the Netherlands ahead in the game for a while, but Pakistan still managed to get a convincing 81-run win.

PHOTO: AFP