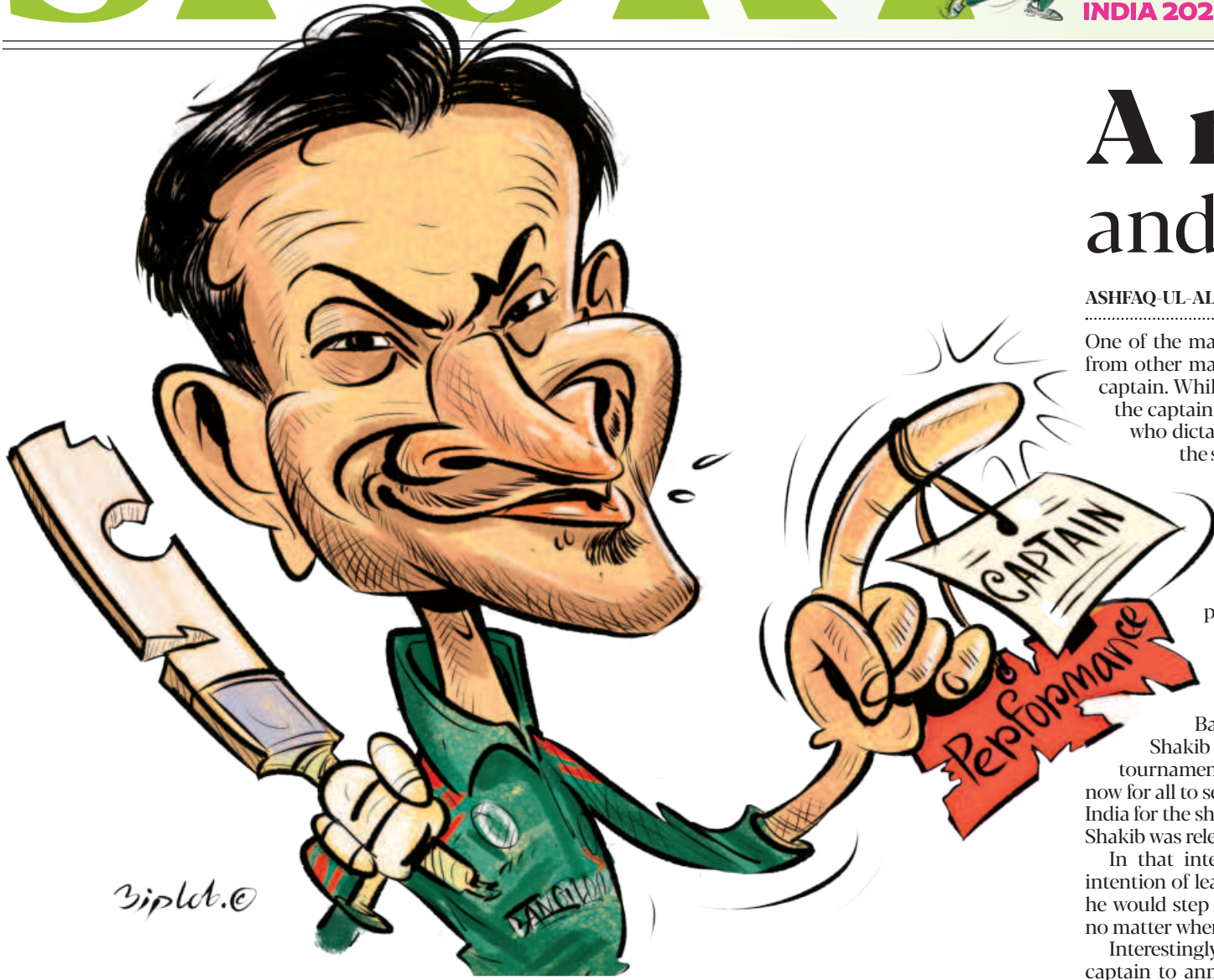




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A reluctant captain and a doomed campaign

ASHEFAQ-UL-ALAM

One of the many features that makes cricket stand out from other major team sports is the significance of the captain. While in sports like football, hockey and rugby the captain's role is more ceremonial as it's the coach who dictates the tactics, in cricket, the skipper calls the shots when the team is fielding, much like a war general on a battlefield, marshalling his troops for victory.

Now imagine right before heading to war, a general publicly announces his initial reluctance to lead the troops and says that he will step down from his position after the battle, no matter the outcome.

The battle would be lost before it even begins.

The man in command of the Bangladesh brigade in the ODI World Cup, Shakib Al Hasan, did exactly that right before the tournament, and the ramifications of his actions are now for all to see. The day the Bangladesh team landed in India for the showpiece event, a pre-recorded interview of Shakib was released on a local sports channel.

In that interview, Shakib revealed that he had no intention of leading the team in the World Cup and that he would step down immediately after the tournament, no matter where Bangladesh finish in the competition.

Interestingly enough, Shakib is not the first Bangladesh captain to announce he would step down immediately after the World Cup before the campaign.

In 2003, skipper Khaled Mashud announced in the final press conference that the team left for South Africa for the World Cup that that would be his final assignment as the leader of the Tigers.

The campaign in 2003 is widely regarded as the team's worst ever outing in World Cups, as they went winless in the entire tournament and even lost to

associate nation Canada.

Shakib's Bangladesh at least ensured they won't go winless with a win against Afghanistan in their opening fixture. But since then, the Tigers have been playing more like scaredy-cats, suffering five defeats on the trot where they put up little to no resistance.

The worst of the defeats came on Saturday against the only associate nation in the tournament, the Netherlands – a defeat that has forced the usually defiant Shakib to accept in the post-match press conference that his pre-tournament actions might have affected the team's performance.

Although Shakib looked devastated by the defeat against the Dutch, his pre-tournament actions indicate that he had premonitions of a disaster in the making.

In that same pre-tournament interview, the all-rounder had said he had nothing left to achieve as the leader of the ODI team and also indirectly revealed this would be his final appearance in the showpiece event when he said he plans to retire after the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy.

Greats of the past like Pakistan's Imran Khan and India's Sachin Tendulkar have marked their World Cup swansong with the coveted trophy in hand.

Shakib is not part of a team which has the calibre to go all the way but as the greatest player this country has ever produced, Shakib could have aimed to end his World Cup journey by becoming the captain that led Bangladesh to their first ever World Cup semifinal.

Instead, the 36-year-old had already resigned to the impending disaster while Australia's David Warner and South Africa's Quinton de Kock are looking hellbent on making the final World Cup a special one.

After the defeat to the Dutch, Shakib talked about finishing the tournament on a high but provided no explanation on how his team would go about achieving that.

Shakib's attitude pre-tournament has mirrored the lack of ambition that exists overall in Bangladesh cricket, and had doomed the team's campaign before it even began.

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- Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have met 11 times in ODIs, with the former world champions winning seven of those against three by Afghanistan. One of those matches yielded no result.
- The two teams have met four times this year alone, with Sri Lanka winning three of those including a thrilling two-run victory in their Asia Cup match in Lahore.
- The two teams have met twice in World Cups – 2015 and 2019 – with Sri Lanka winning by four wickets and 34 runs respectively in those two contests.

Familiar foes meet with semifinals still within reach

AGENCIES

Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi has insisted his side's World Cup wins have been the product of sustained effort, however much they have surprised the rest of the global cricket community.

Shahidi's men have produced two of the standout displays of the 10-team tournament in India, thrashing reigning champions England by 69 runs and defeating 1992 title-winners Pakistan by eight wickets last time out in Chennai.

Now, following a week's break, they will go in search of a third win over a World Cup champion when they take on 1996 winners Sri Lanka in Pune on Monday.

Afghanistan's defeats of England and Pakistan have, unsurprisingly, been labelled "upsets" and "shocks".

But Shahidi said they had not come out of the blue for an Afghanistan side coached by former England batsman Jonathan Trott.

"This team, it's not started from the World Cup," he told a pre-match press conference in Pune on Sunday.

"We were working on this team for the last two years and we had series against teams like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh consistently."

The 28-year-old batsman added: "We were

playing a lot of domestic 50 overs cricket and we stick with our plan; we stick with the same team. When we were not doing good, we still had a belief in this team and these players. We gave them a lot of chances.

"In our good times and in our bad times, we believed in this team. That's the reason I think we are playing good cricket in the World Cup."

lot of ODIs (one-day internationals) against each other," said Shahidi.

"We all know about them and they know all about us."

Sri Lanka's push for a semi-final berth, however, has taken another turn with inform quick Lahiru Kumara ruled out for the rest of the tournament.

Kumara hurt his left thigh during training at MCA International Stadium on Monday and has been replaced in the squad by fellow pacer Dushmantha Chameera.

Chameera's inclusion was approved by the Event Technical Committee on Sunday and the experienced right arm could come into contention to replace Kumara for that pivotal match against Afghanistan.

While Chameera has plenty of experience for Sri Lanka with more than 100 appearances for his country, the loss of Kumara will be felt after he played a huge part in their upset victory over England in Bengaluru on Thursday.

Kumara picked up the key wickets of England skipper Jos Buttler and all-rounders Ben Stokes and Liam Livingstone during Sri Lanka's eight-wicket triumph and has collected five scalps for his country through four appearances at the tournament.

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Nigar sees positives in defeat in final Pak T20I

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Women's team slumped to a 31-run loss against visiting Pakistan at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram but won the three-match series 2-1, their maiden Twenty20 series win at home.

Put to bat, Pakistan opener Muneeba Ali played some magnificent shots during a 49-ball 61. Muneeba and number three Bismah Maroof put up 106 runs in 82 deliveries for the second wicket with the latter scoring 48 as Pakistan posted 134 for four.

Fariha Trisna picked up two for 21 while Nahida Akter scalped one to become the highest wicket-taker in Women's T20Is for Bangladesh with 85 wickets, going past Salma Khatun.

Despite opener Shamima Sultana's 26 off 38, the Tigresses faced a batting slump after the powerplay and eventually managed 101 for 9.

"We played good cricket in the first two matches and I have to give credit to the Pakistan team today [Sunday]. They played better than us but there are many positives for us here that we can carry to the ODI series," captain Nigar Sultana said at the post-match ceremony.

"I think we had good starts but couldn't continue. We need to rectify that and come back stronger," she added.

The three-match ODI series will begin on November 4 at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.



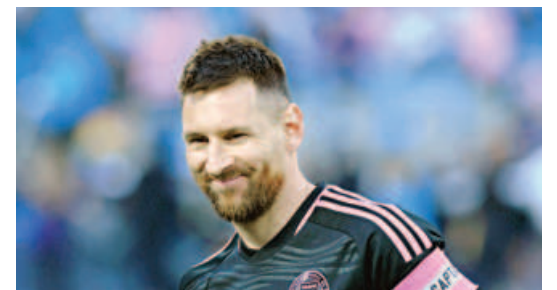
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India skipper Rohit Sharma missed out a century as he departed after a 101-ball 87 laced with 10 fours and three sixes before being dismissed by Adil Rashid having helped his side post 229 for nine against England in their ICC World Cup encounter in Lucknow yesterday. He reached his fifty in 66 deliveries and put together a 91-run stand with KL Rahul for the fourth wicket which steadied India before they slumped to 229 for nine.

PHOTO: AFP



Messi eyes 8th Ballon d'Or

AFP, Paris

Lionel Messi is the favourite to win the eighth Ballon d'Or of his remarkable career when this year's ceremony to crown the planet's best footballer takes place in Paris on Monday.

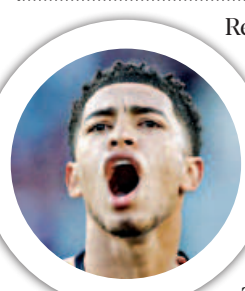
The prestigious award has been dominated over the last 15 years by Messi and his old adversary Cristiano Ronaldo, who have won it 12 times between them.

Only two other players have won the Ballon d'Or since Ronaldo claimed his first in 2008 – Luka Modric won it in 2018 and Karim Benzema was crowned last year following a brilliant season with Real Madrid. Messi is set to benefit from a recent change which means the award is now based on a player's record over the last season, rather than over the course of the calendar year.

Last season saw Messi lead Argentina to glory at the World Cup in Qatar, where he scored seven times and was named the tournament's best player. It was the crowning moment of his astonishing career, and is likely to mean Messi sees off the considerable competition elsewhere among the 30 nominees.

Real surprised with Bellingham's 'vein of form'

REUTERS, Barcelona



Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti hailed Jude Bellingham as 'stupendous' after the midfielder scored twice to earn his side a 2-1 fightback win at Barcelona in Saturday's LaLiga 'El Clasico'.

Ancelotti said the 20-year-old Englishman kept surprising him with his maturity and that he gave Real the spark they needed to recover against a Barcelona side who dominated proceedings before succumbing due to two late stunners.

"(Bellingham) looks like a veteran out there because of his attitude. His first goal changed the dynamic completely of what was a difficult game for us," Ancelotti told a press conference.

"I can't deny that we are all surprised with his vein of form, especially with his level and his effectiveness. He is everywhere on the field.

"Today he was stupendous and shocked everyone with his wonderful goal from the edge of the area."