

Lost in translation

Hollow excuses follow hype after yet another flop

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Islamabad

Bangladesh marched into the 2025 Champions Trophy with captain Najmul Hossain Shanto declaring that his side aimed to become champions. Yet, just two games in, their campaign lay in tatters – brushed aside by India and New Zealand. With a dead rubber against Pakistan still to play, Bangladesh's campaign was over on the sixth day of the 18-day marquee tournament.

While Pakistan's early exit as defending champions may be surprising, Bangladesh's failure is anything but. The burning question remains: why do Bangladesh keep misfiring when the eyes of the world are upon them?

Following their loss to New Zealand in Rawalpindi on Monday, Shanto admitted: "Even when we win a series, most of the time it's on home soil. We rarely win abroad. It's the same in ICC events. One day, our bowling fails; another day, it's our batting or fielding. The whole thing feels disjointed."

If anything, Shanto's admission only confirms what has long been evident: Bangladesh's problem does not boil down to mere bad days. Beyond their performances, their mindset appears "disjointed." Confidence is key to success, but the Tigers' inability to deliver when it matters suggests they talk the talk without walking the walk.

Since their 2017 Champions Trophy semifinal run, Bangladesh have repeatedly flopped on the global stage. Their two World Cup campaigns have been forgettable, and in three T20 World Cups, they have hardly troubled top-ranked sides.

Lofty expectations inevitably collapse under pressure,



leaving behind the same recycled excuses. "Tournaments are played on true wickets. We need to learn how to play on such surfaces. We must bat more and more on these true wickets," vice-captain Mehedi Hasan Miraz reflected after their elimination.

But the rot runs deeper than results. Off the field, the Tigers are rarely short of controversy; be it selection disputes or internal rifts. These distractions could be overcome with solid performances, yet, barring the occasional individual brilliance, the team never quite functioned as a unit.

Moreover, despite having a nucleus of stars over the years – the likes of Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, and Mahmudullah Riyad – the team have been found wanting on the biggest stages. The presence of veterans Mushfiqur (274 ODIs) and Mahmudullah (239 ODIs) in this Champions Trophy should have been an asset. Instead, much like Mashrafe Bin Mortaza in the 2019 World Cup, the duo appeared more of a liability than a lifeline.

Ultimately, Bangladesh remain trapped in an endless cycle: talking big to create pre-tournament hype, crumbling under pressure, and then scrambling for excuses. Until the Bangladesh think tank addresses the root causes of their faulty mentality and execution, the same script will unravel in a different year.

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Bangladesh losing convincingly to India and New Zealand and being out of contention for a spot in the semi-final in the ICC Champions Trophy may seem like the worst thing about the team's ongoing campaign in Pakistan and the UAE, but it's not.

The worst part is that hardly anyone seems to be surprised by it.

Coming into an ICC event as underdogs is nothing new for the Tigers; they have been doing so for decades now. But there was a time, during the mid to late 2010s, when some analysts would give Bangladesh at least an outside chance of creating some waves in ICC events.

Many had thought that period was the start of the rise of the Tigers, but it is now considered more like a false dawn.

Bangladesh's main problem in recent ICC events has been their batting, and this Champions Trophy has been no different. At a time when throwing caution to the wind is the norm, the Tigers remain stuck in their archaic ways, determined to anchor the innings but failing to up the ante in slog overs on most occasions.

In a situation like this, the likeliest solution may seem like injecting fresh energy. But that's where the problem lies, as even Bangladesh's new generation,



from the looks of it, is way behind the curve.

In Bangladesh's current Champions Trophy squad, Towhid Hridoy, Tanzid Tamim and Parvez Emon are the only three batters aged below 25. While Parvez is still waiting for his ODI debut, Hridoy and Tanzid are already regular starters in the 50-over format and have played the first two matches in the Champions Trophy.

Hridoy won hearts in the match against India, taking control of the innings after the team was on 35-5 and enduring cramp to make 100 off 118 balls, but his overly defensive 24 ball seven against New Zealand left everyone confused since the right-hander's strike rate stands at 82.55 after 31 ODI innings. Meanwhile, Tanzid started well in both games, making a run-a-ball 25 and 24 but the southpaw had

characteristically gifted his wicket to the opposition on both occasions, in line with his average of 21 in 22 ODIs.

Even though the ongoing Champions Trophy is their third straight ICC tournament for the Tigers, having played in the 2023 ODI World Cup and the 2024 T20 World Cup, one could argue that they are still new to the international arena and are finding their feet.

But that's just it. While Bangladesh have continually given some earmarked batters the long rope in hopes they would mature into the batters the team needs, the leading countries seemingly have an assembly line of youngsters ready to push the limits of the game.

In the same game when Hridoy struggled to pick up singles and got dismissed while trying to make up for the dot balls with a boundary, New Zealand's brightest batting star, Rachin Ravindra, expertly dealt with the pressure after his side lost early wickets, found gaps in a packed off-side field against a charged-up Taskin Ahmed and Nahid Rana, and set up the chase for the Black Caps.

Tellingly, the two most experienced batters in Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad also departed the same way as Hridoy, showing exactly how the Tigers' batting is stuck in a loop of mediocrity.

Miraz finds solace, but what about Tigers?

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Rawalpindi

Bangladesh team manager Rabeed Imam reminded all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz to check the honours board at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Saturday, as the latter was waiting to face the media in the Mixed Zone following their Champions Trophy game against New Zealand.

Miraz was quick to respond to that, leaving his seat to get a glimpse of his and his teammates' achievements at the venue.

Perhaps that was the type of escape even Miraz was waiting for, especially just minutes after Bangladesh's run in the Champions Trophy ended with a game in hand – following the five-wicket defeat against the Black Caps.

Rabeed showed Miraz his name on the honours board for a five-wicket haul he got during the second Test against hosts Pakistan in September last year. As Miraz glanced through, Rabeed reminded Miraz that he had written his name on the board with a pen – which had now turned into golden printed letters.

The effort that saw Miraz have his name on the honours board was during a historic series for Bangladesh when the Tigers had



white washed Pakistan 2-0 – the Tigers' first ever Test series win on Pakistan soil.

For a moment, Miraz probably was able to block out how their hopes of becoming winners of the Champions Trophy had fallen flat as he saw his and pacer Hasan Mahmud's names on that board.

Miraz moved on to the next board and found Mushfiqur Rahim and Liton Das' names on the board

for Test hundreds – the two other Bangladeshi who had hit centuries during that Pakistan tour.

"I had scored two 80s (77 in the first Test and 78 in the second) here. Otherwise, my name could also be there," Miraz regretted.

"We played extraordinary in that Test series. It was a massive achievement for Bangladesh," he added.

Miraz then threw a question to a few Bangladeshi journalists who were present during that time. "Why don't we have honours board in our country?" questioned the Bangladesh vice-captain.

It seemed as if Miraz took respite in the fond memories after yet another abysmal ICC event for Bangladesh.

It remains a question whether Miraz's urge to have honour boards in the country, probably at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, would be fulfilled. But before that, the question that needs an immediate answer is what can be done to bounce back from the type of cricket that Bangladesh have been playing in recent times, especially in major ICC events.



Afghans taking inspiration from World Cup win for England clash

AFP, Lahore

Afghanistan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi warned England on Tuesday that memories of their famous 2023 World Cup win over the then holders gives them the confidence to pull off a Champions Trophy surprise.

Both teams need a win on Wednesday in Lahore to keep alive their hopes of reaching the semifinals in the 50-over tournament after losing their respective openers.

Afghanistan shocked England in 2023 when they humbled the defending world champions by 69 runs in New Delhi.

Afghanistan's rise in white-ball cricket has been rapid.

"We worked hard to achieve at this level and are ready to play



ILLUSTRATION: ANWAR SOHEL

every game in a positive way," Shahidi said on the eve of the pivotal Group B clash.

"We will take that confidence with us what happened in the 2023 World Cup. But at the same time, tomorrow is a new day and we will try our best to beat them again."

Afghanistan started the eight-nation Champions Trophy with a 107-run hammering by South Africa in Karachi.

Their bowlers took a beating in South Africa's impressive total of 315-6. In turn, Afghanistan were bowled out

for a meagre 208.

Shahidi, however, expects a much better show from his side at the Gaddafi Stadium and believes the Afghan spinners could be the difference.

"When we bat first that gives us more chance. At the same time in the last World Cup we beat teams batting second," Shahidi told reporters.

"The world knows we have quality spinners. Hopefully, we have some support for our spinners tomorrow."

England came under

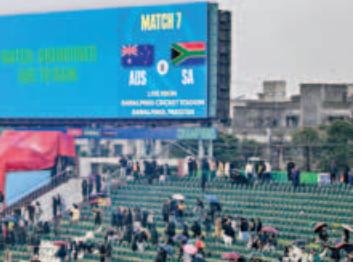
pressure from British politicians to boycott Wednesday's game over the treatment of Afghan women by the ruling Taliban. The England and Wales Cricket Board resisted the demand but said they would not schedule a bilateral series against Afghanistan.

Shahidi batted away questions about it on the eve of the match.

"What we control is what we do on the ground, we don't worry what is happening off the ground," said Shahidi.

Afghanistan and England have faced each other only three times in ODIs, with England winning twice and Afghanistan securing a memorable 69-run victory in their last meeting in the format during the 2023 ODI World Cup in India.

Making their debut in the Champions Trophy, Afghanistan face England in the competition for the first time.



"The equation is pretty simple now, on to the next one against Afghanistan and if we win, we are locked into top four."

Australia captain Steve Smith after their Champions Trophy Group B game against South Africa in Rawalpindi was washed out yesterday.

It is time for a major shake-up. We need to improve our system of domestic cricket so that we can produce quality cricketers, not ordinary ones.

Former Pakistan captain Wasim Akram

"It is time for a major shake-up. We need to improve our system of domestic cricket so that we can produce quality cricketers, not ordinary ones."

A lack of competitiveness in domestic cricket and low-quality pitches have been blamed for not preparing players for the international stage.

The sport in Pakistan is also held back by frequent changes to the cricket board, coaching teams and selection panels, critics say.

Such changes are driven by politics and not merit, according to observers.

"I feel very despondent with the state of Pakistan cricket," former captain Rashid Latif told AFP.

"We have to follow merit and bring in professionals in the administration of the game and not people on a political basis," he added.

The early elimination stings for a country that had relished hosting its first major cricket tournament in 29 years, after significant improvements in security.

"We were thrilled that an international event had finally returned to our country, but the joy was short-lived," said 26-year-old Umar Siraj, a pharmacist in Rawalpindi.

Asma Batool, a 52-year-old housewife, underlined just what cricket means to people in Pakistan.

"Cricket is the only source of entertainment for our youth. Our nation finds solace in this game."