

Religious rally for democracy Rested NZ raring to go

AFP, Bulawayo

A small group of churchmen led by Bulawayo archbishop Pius Ncube staged a protest against the government of Robert Mugabe when the World Cup match between Zimbabwe and Australia began here on Monday.

Twelve men, including Ncube, sat outside the match venue, Queens Sports Club, with a banner reading: "Christians together for justice and peace."

"We are here today to make a stand in support of Henry Olonga and Andy Flower and all who mourn the death of democracy in Zimbabwe," Ncube said.

"Our Christian faith compels us to stand in solidarity with the starving, the oppressed and suffering people of this land and to pray for our liberation from the cruel yoke of oppression."

Police did not take any action against the church group and they were not harassed by any other authority despite the tight security around the venue.

Ncube, meanwhile, also took a swipe at reigning champions Australia for agreeing to play their World Cup match in Bulawayo, accusing them of being unsympathetic to the plight of Zimbabweans.

"It must be realised that while this cricket match is being played, there is so much mismanagement of affairs and tremendous suffering in

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CRUSADE AGAINST MUGABE! Bulawayo archbishop Pius Ncube (R) protesting with his supporters against Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe during the Australia-Zimbabwe game yesterday.

REUTERS, Kimberley

New Zealand will be keen to make up for lost time when they meet Bangladesh on Wednesday in a World Cup Pool B match that looks likely to be one of the most one-sided of the tournament.

The Kiwis have not played for over a week after forfeiting their game in Kenya because of security concerns, and Stephen Fleming's men are itching to return to action.

"The break has been good for us but we're ready to go again," Fleming told the news agency. "We've had some time to rest and practise some things and really focus on what we need to do."

Having not won a game for four years and with three heavy World Cup defeats to their name already, Bangladesh have little prospect of beating New Zealand who have emerged as one of the favourites after beating West Indies and South Africa.

"I'm low on morale at the moment - and most of the guys are low," Bangladesh captain Khaled Mashud said.

"It's mainly because we lost very badly in our first game against Canada. Inshallah (God willing) we'll do well because we have a lot of talent in our side.

"I'm sure that our boys will come back before the end of this tournament."

New Zealand's decision not to go to Kenya cost them a near-certain

four points and has left them needing to win their final two games against Bangladesh and Canada to make the Super Sixes.

But even that may not be enough with the possibility that the group could be decided on run-rate, meaning the Kiwis will be chasing a quick kill against Bangladesh who have just two points from their abandoned match against West Indies.



STEPHEN FLEMING

"This is a very important game, not just because of the four points but also to improve our run-rate because that could be an issue," Fleming said.

"We have to get the balance right. We know we need to improve our run-rate but we don't want to push too hard because that's when you start making mistakes. It's a real fine line."

Fleming believes New Zealand's

victory over South Africa, in which he scored a match-winning century, has given the team the confidence to win the tournament.

"It's one thing to think it and even talk about it but it's another thing to feel now and we can definitely feel it and taste it now," he said.

"There's a real conviction in the team now and we're feeling confident."

Fleming is confident his side can star in the Super Six round.

"This was the breakthrough (victory against South Africa) we needed," said the 29-year-old after the South African win.

"The team is believing in itself, believing that we can win the World Cup."

"If you'd asked me that before the game there would have been a big sigh and a tentative 'yes'."

Rarely has Fleming's ability as a captain been questioned, having turned his team from also-rans to potential world beaters.

In fact, the Christchurch-born batsman is the only international captain to have survived from the 1999 World Cup in England.

Australia's Shane Warne hailed him as the best captain in the world, even ahead of even Steve Waugh.

Since taking over from captain Lee Gemron in 1997, Fleming has instilled in his side a growing self-confidence.

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Imran's money on India

AFP, Durban

Former Pakistan captain Imran Khan on Monday backed India to win Wednesday's key World Cup clash against England, saying they usually performed well at the crunch.

A victory in the day-night match at Kingsmead will bring Saurav Ganguly's men closer to securing a Super Six berth and put them in the right frame of mind ahead of Saturday's high-profile clash against arch-rivals Pakistan.

"It was good to see Ganguly sweeping away all the problems against Namibia," Imran wrote on BBC Online. "It shows that when it comes to the crunch India can perform."

The shaky start by the batsmen in the first two matches against the Netherlands and Australia has given way to growing confidence after successive wins over Zimbabwe and Namibia.

A team that failed to last 50 overs against the Dutch and were shot out for their lowest World Cup total of 125 by Australia, rattled up 255-7 against Zimbabwe and 311-2 versus Namibia.

Star batsman Sachin Tendulkar appeared in ominous form, making 152 against Namibia on Sunday, his 34th one-day century giving him an aggregate of 321 runs in three World Cup innings so far.

Ganguly also returned to form with an unbeaten 112 against the Namibians which, according to Imran, is a good sign for the Indians.

"It was a far cry from the performance against Australia, where he looked under-pressure and out of sorts," Imran said of the Indian captain.

"Perhaps the best thing that could have happened for them was the return to form of Tendulkar."

"Sachin is a match winner and I think his 152 against Namibia underlined what a great player he is."

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Hooper unhappy

REUTERS, Centurion

West Indies captain Carl Hooper was unimpressed by his frontline pace bowlers after they wilted under the pressure of Canada's flying start in the World Cup Pool B match on Sunday.

"We had our top three quicks playing in this game and yet the (Canada batting) rate was at seven or eight (runs per over) at the start with our bowling looking a little thin," Hooper told a news conference after his side's seven-wicket victory over one of the tournament minnows.

"I was very surprised they got so rattled against a team like Canada. Against seasoned Test players, you expect that sort of thing but, with respect to Canada and to John (Davison), not against a minor side."

Davison smashed the fastest century in World Cup history, reaching three figures in just 67 balls as

Canada sped to 155 for one before collapsing to 202 all out.

"They got off to a real flyer and it was very disappointing for us after the first 20 overs," Hooper said. "I felt we came back fairly well, but today's game was a good wake-up call for us."

"You'd have thought we would have reacted a bit sooner to that initial onslaught."

The 32-year-old Davison treated the West Indies attack with disdain on a perfect batting pitch, eventually falling for 111 from 76 deliveries.

"If you asked me when I woke up this morning, the last thing I would have expected would be that a Canadian batsman would have batted like that," Hooper said. "I'd played against John before in Canada in a one-day competition but he never did anything with the

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CARL HOOPER

Bad boys asked to behave

AFP, Johannesburg

New Zealand team manager Jeff Crowe has warned his World Cup squad to drastically improve their behaviour after the Durban night-club brawl which brought shame on the team and left star all-rounder Chris Cairns nursing cuts as well as his battered pride.

Crowe confirmed he has given all 15 players a note "which made mention of the fact they are high-profile sportsmen, their responsibilities in public and how they can be vulnerable in certain situations."

Crowe said he had a one-on-one meeting with Cairns, whose memories of the assault were understood to be hazy.

Cairns said he had been told his South African partner Carin was pregnant with their second child and was apparently out to celebrate, SAPA news agency reported.

The Johannesburg Star newspaper reported on Saturday that players had removed their shirts and performed the 'haka', the traditional Maori war dance, which enraged clubgoers as the Kiwis had defeated South Africa in a crucial World Cup clash four days earlier.

Crowe was to forward his review to New Zealand Cricket chief executive Martin Snedden in Christchurch who will determine what should be done next.

SAPA reported Sunday that Cairns and young wicket-keeper Brendon McCullum were asked to leave the club after taking their shirts off on the dance floor and being asked several times to put them back on.

When they left in view of their four armed close protection officers, words were apparently exchanged outside and Cairns was eventually punched, knocking him to the pavement and leaving him with facial grazes and a split lower lip.

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Benaud to retire after 2005 Ashes

INTERNET, London

Legendary Australian cricket commentator Richie Benaud intends to declare his career behind the microphone closed after the 2005 Ashes series in England.

The former Test captain and leg-spinner will see out his current contract with the Nine Network in Australia before returning to Britain to deliver his final spell in the box with Britain's Channel 4.

"I have two years of my contract with Nine to go, and I've got a three-year contract with Channel 4 in the UK to go," Benaud said in the Sydney Daily Telegraph.

"That takes me up to the 2005 Ashes series, which is when I'll call it a day. Of course, I could drop off tomorrow morning. Anything can happen."

After a successful career with NSW and Australia, Benaud began his commentary career with the BBC 26 years ago.

WI bemoan sorry bowling

AFP, Johannesburg

Even today, the mere mention of names like Michael Holding, Colin Croft, Joel Garner and Andy Roberts is enough to make batsmen of a certain age break out in a cold sweat.

But their successors in the current West Indies team are unlikely to be remembered with the same fearful awe, especially if their performance against Canada is any guide.

Mervyn Dillon, Pedro Collins and Vasbert Drakes, the three quick bowlers who played against the North Americans on Sunday, received an awful thrashing from Canada's John Davison who smashed the World Cup's fastest-ever century at the Centurion.

Although West Indies eventually won the game by seven wickets, Davison's 67-ball hundred was a worrying sight for Caribbean cricket lovers.

West Indies' captain Carl Hooper's post-match comments were a damning indictment of how far standards have fallen.

"We've got to be more accurate, more consistent. We've got to put five or six balls in the one area," Hooper said.

"I was very surprised... You'd have thought we'd have pulled it back sooner."

And West Indian great Viv Richards, now chairman of selectors, was equally unhappy.

"I'm certainly not pleased with

the length of some of those deliveries," the master blaster said.

"We've got to get back to bowling a full length. Some of those deliveries were giving the batsmen a lot of room to play cuts."

But at least Drakes, whose first two overs went for 29, came back well to finish with five for 44 - wickets taken mainly with good length balls.

"He was the only one of those guys who came back to the party," Richards said. "For the other individuals who took a hiding, hopefully they will have learned something."

Comparisons with the famed pace quartet of the past, possibly the most devastating world cricket has ever seen, are as unfair as stacking up a batsman's record against Don Bradman's.

Whoever they are, the other person suffers.

Raw, frightening pace - which Clive Lloyd's quartet had in abundance and which the current generation fall some way short of - is generally something that is innate and cannot be taught.

But it is inconceivable that Holding and company would have demonstrated the lack of bowling intelligence that enabled Davison, a number nine batsman for South Australia, play shots all round the wicket.

Throughout the entire 1979 World Cup, played in England, the West Indies' most expensive pace

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THE GUIDING LIGHT? Experienced West Indian paceman Vasbert Drakes celebrates one of his five wickets against Canada on Sunday.

Warne unsure of appeal

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australia leg-spinner Shane Warne said on Monday he was reconsidering his planned appeal against the



SHANE WARNE

12-month doping ban which has rocked world cricket.

"The appeal situation is something that I have to think about," Warne, who flew home from the World Cup without playing a match, wrote in Melbourne newspaper the Herald Sun.

"Do I want to go through all this again and put my mum, wife, kids and the rest of the family through another couple of weeks of heart-ache, anticipation and anxiety?"

"This is something I am giving a lot of thought to because I have seven days to decide. I have a lot of angry and disappointing thoughts at the moment but I do have to start thinking clearly."

The 33-year-old was banned for 12 months on Saturday under the Australian Cricket Board's anti-doping policy in the biggest doping scandal to hit cricket.

Warne took a fluid-reducing pill last month which contained two banned diuretics.

Diuretics can be used as masking agents for other drugs.

Warne's ban is effective from February 10 2003 although the player named as one of Wisden's five cricketers of the 20th century said on Saturday he planned to lodge a written appeal this week.

However, Australia's leading wicket-taker has been advised he may suffer the fate of other athletes

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Please explain, Pat

INTERNET, East London

South African national cricket selector Pat Symcox will be asked to explain remarks on Monday after describing the South African bowling attack as the worst in 40 years.

Symcox, a former Test spinner who was made a selector last year following the crushing defeat at the hands of the Australians, made the



PAT SYMCOX

unflattering remark in the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper Rapport.

On Sunday, national convener of selectors Omar Henry said that he will meet with Symcox to hear his views first hand.

"I haven't spoken to him yet but I'm not at all surprised (that he made

the comment)," added Henry.

"We knew from the outset that Pat wears two hats - a media hat and a selector's hat."

"When you are in that situation basically anything can happen."

Apart from selecting a national team that is struggling desperately to qualify for the next round of the World Cup, Symcox works as a television commentator and columnist.

Henry, however, did not dispute the sentiment expressed by Symcox.

"It's no secret we have a problem with our bowling. He's entitled to an opinion," pointed out Henry.

"The question is why did Pat say it and secondly is it a good thing for South African cricket that he did say it?"

"As selectors we are always dealing with different opinions and that's a good thing. What we have to do is to know how best to deal with those differences."

The selectors, it appears, are at least in agreement over Allan Donald.

Henry stated categorically that the out of sorts Donald would play against Canada in East London on Thursday.

Donald was left out of the playing XI that rode roughshod over

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Canada mean business

REUTERS, East London

Canada's players arrived in South Africa with a reputation for enjoying themselves on and off the pitch, but captain Joe Harris stresses his team are not at the World Cup just to have a good time.

"Everybody likes having a good time, and I don't know why we get labelled," Harris told Reuters on Monday, after his team arrived at East London airport for their Pool B match against tournament hosts South Africa on Thursday.

"All the teams I've seen go out at night and party a bit. For us to be labelled like that is pretty unfair."

"I think the reason we get all the attention is because we are an associate country and people expect us to be in bed at nine and disciplined."

"We're grown men, we're enjoying the country and we're friends who've been together for a long

time. We're going to have fun -- we're not going to stop that -- but we're still here to play cricket very seriously."

"We've only had three or four days off in about four weeks -- other than that we've trained," Harris added.

After Canada's upset 60-run win over Bangladesh in their first match, Harris said one of the secrets to performing above expectations was "a lot of socialising."

"We know each other well...but that does not mean we do a lot of drinking -- we go out for dinner and things like that," he added.

Canada have lost three successive matches since their victory in the cup opener, and now play Pool B heavyweights South Africa and New Zealand before exiting the tournament on March 3.

They were humbled by Sri Lanka in Pietermaritzburg, where they were skittled for 36 -- the lowest total

in one-day international history.

But they bounced back in their next outing, against West Indies on Sunday, when John Davison blasted the fastest World Cup century of all time as the Canadians reached a respectable total of 202.

"We set our sights on winning the two games against Kenya and Bangladesh and, as far as I'm concerned, this tournament is not over for us," said Harris.

"We've got one win and given the country a fair amount of exposure with that win."

"We want to be competitive and we want to put up a good fight against South Africa and New Zealand. You never know the results in the game of cricket -- if we can do a good job and post a good target and then defend it well, anything can happen."

"We're certainly not here on holiday," he added