

Diego to stay at least until SA Games

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Team Management Committee (NTMC) is looking forward to give Argentine coach Diego Cruciani a month's extension to see him guide the Bangladesh under-23 team through to the SA (South Asian) Games, which starts in Colombo on August 18.

Cruciani, whose contract as national football coach expires on August 4, will start the residential camp at BKSP for the youth team's preparation, informed NTMC member Sayeed Hassan Kanan yesterday.

The NTMC had a meeting yesterday with chairman Kazi Salahuddin in chair.

"We are taking this tournament very seriously after recent failures. Moreover, preparing the youth team is necessary because it would be our next national team. Also, without giving Cruciani an extension, we would be without a coach during the competition," said Kanan adding that Salahuddin himself will act as team leader.

"The chairman taking over the responsibility shows how serious we are. Our decision is to make Golam Rabbani Helal the manager. He will arrange practice matches for the squad abroad.

"In the meantime, we will keep searching for sponsors so we can keep Cruciani for a long time. We are also going to discuss with the coach in all matters regarding the national team including selection," he told adding that the preliminary squad would be called between May 2-5.



Did U Know?

Michael Schumacher's victory at the San Marino Grand Prix was his 85th overall and the seventh time that he had won at Imola.

What to WATCH

ESPN

UEFA Champions League
Semifinal second leg
Villarreal v Arsenal
Live at 12:30 am (Wednesday)

ntv

AFC Cup
Mohammedan v Al Wihdat
Live at 4:00 pm



TALK TURKEY



Bryan Robson

(Former England captain)

"David Beckham would not have been my choice. He hasn't done a bad job and he has matured, but he's not a natural leader on the pitch." On his choice for the England captaincy.



Mohammedan v Al Wihdat
AFC Cup
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



Players of Al Wihdat team warm up at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Monday ahead of their AFC Cup group match against Mohammedan Sporting Club today.

MSC's mission impossible

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammedan Sporting Club will need a miracle to qualify for the AFC Cup quarter-finals when they host Jordan's Al Wihdat in today's last Group A match.

Mohammedan, who have to overcome a seven-goal deficit, will rather play for pride than go for an improbable 8-0 victory against the nine-time Jordan league champions in the return leg match.

Ntv will telecast the match, which kicks off at 4pm, live from the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Al Wihdat have already one foot in the last eight from the two-team group following their 7-0 drubbing of the Bangladesh National League champions last week in Amman and the local boys have only one point to prove. The result did not reflect the Black and Whites' real strength.

"There is no realistic chance for

us to reach the quarterfinals at this stage. But we have to prove that we are not that bad a team," said Mohammedan coach Shafiqul Islam Manik yesterday.

Mohammedan, who were trailing 1-0 at the break in the first-leg, conceded four goals inside eight minutes in the early second-half and Manik thinks that the blitz put them not only out of the game but also from the tournament.

"There was lack of concentration, coordination and understanding. You cannot cope with so many problems at one time. So we are going to play knowing we won't beat such a strong team but we want to display quality football to salvage some pride," said the former national footballer, who has Arman and Rajani in the side on loan.

Nigerian defender Peter Odaf is a doubtful starter due to injury. Despite having the upper hand, Wihdat who have six national players and four from the Jordan Under-23s, promised to field a full strength side for the match.

"We are taking this match very

seriously because there is no scope to relax in an international fixture," said coach Adel Yusuf.

Al Wihdat are playing their first AFC Cup but have already stamped their mark in the Middle East by finishing third in the Arab Champions League last season.

"The condition here is different and difficult. And our 7-0 victory was another match. So we have to concentrate about winning here," said Yusuf adding that his players have been struggling to cope with the heat and humidity since their arrival on Sunday.

"The weather is a concern for us but we hope to play well," said captain Haitham Samir.

Brothers Union, the other Bangladeshi side in the competition, will take on Lebanon's Al Ahed in a fourth round match of Group A tonight in Beirut. Brothers are bottom of the table with one point and lost 3-1 at home to Al Ahed last week.

Zim aim to turn around



AFP, St. John's

Zimbabwe are adamant they can shrug off their political problems in time to face a crisis-hit West Indies team when the two sides clash in a seven match, one-day international series.

The visitors arrived late on Saturday and open their three-week trip with back-to-back limited-overs practice matches against Antigua Barbuda on Monday and Tuesday at the Jolly Beach Resort Ground.

The first and second one-day internationals in the seven-match series will be contested on Saturday and Sunday at the Antigua Recreation Ground.

"We are tired, but we are looking forward to the tour," said manager Andy Pycroft, the former Zimbabwe

batsman. "We have a very young and inexperienced team which is not used to playing one-day international cricket, but we will look to gain valuable experience on this trip."

Terry Duffin leads the side which drew a series with Kenya six weeks ago, following a settlement of the dispute between Zimbabwe Cricket and the players' union.

"This is the strongest side available, and though we have our own problems, we will focus on playing good cricket. We are not going to get involved in the politics," said Pycroft.

"The team includes a couple of decent spinners in Utseya Prosper, an off-break bowler, and our leggie Ryan Higgins is an exciting prospect."

"Our fast bowling attack relies on swing rather than pace, and our batting is inexperienced but talented."

The Zimbabweans arrived in the

Caribbean with the West Indies Cricket Board and the West Indies Players' Association again embroiled in the long-running dispute over players' contracts.

The WICB announced on Sunday that it will meet with the WIPA on Tuesday in an attempt to complete retainer contracts negotiations.

West Indies are the only side in international cricket without a retainer contract system for its players and, despite the best efforts of the WICB, have found the players' unyielding in their demands for better terms and conditions.

Last Wednesday, the WICB's Cricket Committee, under the chairmanship of former West Indies captain Clive Lloyd, had fixed last Friday as a deadline for completion of negotiations on the issue.

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PCB wants Afridi for Tests

BBC ONLINE, undated

The Pakistan Cricket Board will attempt to persuade key all-rounder Shahid Afridi to reverse his decision not to play Tests before the World Cup.

The 26-year-old said the packed international calendar added to his decision to break from the Test arena.

He is set to sit out four Tests against England this summer as well as series with Zimbabwe, India and South Africa.

"We feel it was emotional as he's been playing regularly for a year so we hope he realises his mistake," the PCB said.

It is thought that Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer tried unsuccessfully to convince Afridi to continue in Tests during the matches against India in Abu Dhabi.

Following the Champions Trophy in India later this year, Pakistan face home series against Zimbabwe and West Indies, and a tour of South Africa in February next year which precedes the World Cup.

PCB chairman Shaharyar Khan

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Players handed new deadline



AFP, St. John's

The long-running contract dispute between the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) and the West Indies Players' Association (WIPA) took another twist on Sunday when a new deadline was handed to players.

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The WICB's Cricket Committee, under the chairmanship of former West Indies captain Clive Lloyd, had fixed last Friday as a deadline for completion of negotiations on the issue.

A meeting between WICB director Deryck Murray, the former West

Indies wicketkeeper/batsman, and WIPA executive president Dinanath Ramnarine was held on Friday, discuss the matter.

"This meeting was inconclusive and a further session was arranged for Tuesday, April 25," a WICB statement said.

"If arrangements are not finalised on Tuesday, the WICB will issue retainer contracts to the selected players. These players will have until May 3 to sign their contracts. Where contracts are not signed, alternative players will be selected."

The regional governing body for the sport said the retainer contracts will be for a term of one year from May 2006 to April 2007.

The WICB is also expected to offer match/tour contracts, separate from the retainer contracts, to the players on Monday in an effort to assemble a squad in time for the first one-dayer against Zimbabwe which takes place here on Saturday.

The WICB are also expected later this week to announce a captain to replace Shivnarine Chanderpaul, who resigned two weeks ago.

Dhaka-Ctg poles apart! Ashraful may be 'rested' for final ODIs

SPORTS REPORTER



It might sound a little harsh, but the Chittagong-leg of the Australia series was all the way a forgettable experience.

The home series against the number one team got off to a remarkable start when Habibur Bashar's men stunned the world coming tantalisingly close against Ricky Ponting's men at Fatullah to recording the biggest upset in Test cricket.

The Tigers' performance was however not noteworthy in the second Test and the first one-dayer against the mighty Australians relative to their incredible first Test showing.

But what actually marred the port city party was the off-the-field affairs. Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) apathetic and mysterious role towards the police atrocities on journalists and local organisers' malfunctioning already established a bad impression over the new venue.

Of course only a roaring efforts by the Tigers could have made amends for the shameful off-field incident but it was not the case at all.

There was evidence in Chittagong that Bangladesh batting returned to its own way, which actually hindered them to be more competitive against the world champions.

Like the first Test, Bangladesh also took the second Test into the fifth day before suffering an innings and 80-run defeat but rain was actually the main reason behind it.

Bangladesh started the Chittagong-leg on the wrong foot when they were shot out for 197

unimpressive performance against lowly Kenya made many believe that he is in need of a rest.

The 21-year old Ashraful, who had smashed a hundred to make history in Cardiff and showed some consistency during the home series against Sri Lanka, was totally out of sort in the series as he made 29, 4, 6 and 29 in the four innings while scoring only five runs in the first one-dayer. The way he threw his wickets has forced the team management to think about his place for the remaining two one-dayers on April 26 and 28 at Fatullah.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed however declined to make any comment over the whisperings that Ashraful was going to miss the last two one-day matches.

"It was nice to see him perform during home series against Sri Lanka. But he was struggling since Kenya tour and his inconsistency gap widened in the series. I can't comment right at the moment weather a break will be helpful for him or not," said Faruque.

The former national skipper agreed that batsmen made the same mistakes in Chittagong but he was not ready to accept that there were no positive things in the team performance in Chittagong.

"Compared with the Fatullah Test, you will surely find a lot of loopholes in Chittagong. Our

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MOHAMMAD ASHRAFUL

runs in the first innings of the second Test and although their second innings was a little better (304), it was mainly due to a late surge by Mohammad Rafique.

On Sunday in the first one-day international, the Tigers batsmen once again showed that they were yet to learn from their old mistakes.

Mohammad Ashraful and Aftab Ahmed, two of the most talented batsmen in the team, frustrated most in the series, especially the former's poor showing after an



BITS AND BOBS

Scolari favourite for Eng job

REUTERS, London

Portugal's Brazilian coach Luis Felipe Scolari is emerging as favourite to succeed Sven-Goran Eriksson as England manager, British newspapers reported on Monday.

Middlesbrough's Steve McClaren had appeared to be the main contender but the Express said Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein had persuaded the Football Association (FA) to offer Scolari the job within the next 48 hours.

Dein was described as the man who "delivered" Eriksson when the Swede was appointed England coach in 2000, and the Express said Dein had now won over colleagues on the FA Selection Group.

The Times, under the headline McClaren v Scolari, said sources had revealed that senior FA councilors previously committed to English candidates were now open to the idea of another foreigner.

The Mail said Scolari was now "neck and neck" with McClaren. The Mirror said Scolari had emerged as the new favourite.

Scolari led Brazil to the World Cup trophy in 2002 and Portugal to the Euro 2004 final.

Australia hit by injury scare

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia's World Cup hopes were hit by a four-pronged injury scare following the weekend's FA Cup and Premier League matches in England.

First-choice goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer suffered a suspected fractured cheekbone, winger Harry Kewell a groin problem and midfielder Tim Cahill a knee injury.

Striker Mark Viduka failed to start Middlesbrough's FA Cup semifinal against West Ham United due to a thigh injury.

Kewell was in sparkling form in Liverpool's 2-1 Cup semifinal victory over champions Chelsea before limping off early.

"I don't know the full story but we'll be in touch with him as soon as possible," Australia's assistant coach Graham Arnold told reporters. "We'll keep our fingers crossed it's not too serious. Knowing Harry he'll do everything he can to get fit."

Cahill hurt his knee during Everton's 0-0 Premier League draw with Birmingham City and was substituted at halftime.

Australia begin their first World Cup finals campaign for 32 years on June 12 against Japan. Brazil and

Croatia are the other teams in Group F.

Cassano worried about his chances

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Antonio Cassano is worried about his chances of making the Italy squad for the World Cup finals in Germany.

"I haven't lost hope but I think it is going to be very difficult," Cassano told reporters after Sunday's 2-1 win over Malaga in the Bernabeu.

"I am not playing very much with my club and usually it is only those who are playing regularly who go."

The 23-year-old was given a rare start with Ronaldo out injured on Sunday, but was guilty of squandering some of his side's best chances as they laboured to overhaul a 1-0 deficit against the Primera Liga's bottom club.

It was only after he was withdrawn in the second half that Zinedine Zidane and Sergio Ramos scrambled a last minute win.

"I had some good chances today but luck wasn't with me. I played an hour and need to continue playing. I am convinced I will improve," he added.



Germany striker Lukas Podolski sprints as part of the medical and performance tests for German national team players in Dusseldorf on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP