

## ASIAN CUP 2007 Co-hosts told to gear up preparation

THE-AFC.COM, Kuala Lumpur

With just under a year to go for the AFC Asian Cup 2007, AFC President Mohamed Bin Hammam has requested the four co-hosts to step up a gear to make the event a grand success.

After concerns were expressed by the AFC Asian Cup 2007 Organising Committee members over the slow progress, Bin Hammam suggested that a timeline be drawn and executed in coordination with Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand.

"We can leave nothing to chance as it is Asia's premier tournament," said Bin Hammam, echoing the views of the concerned committee members. "We have to go that extra mile and a countdown will help to tie up the loose ends."

"We have to learn from the flawless organisation of the FIFA World Cup in Germany," added the AFC chief.

The representatives of the four co-hosts made presentations on the state of readiness in their respective countries for the tournament.

"It is our biggest tournament and we will leave no stone unturned to make it a grand success," said Dali Taher of Indonesia. "The AFC can rest assured that everything will be ready well before time."

The committee approved a proposal to hold the draw for the AFC Asian Cup 2007 finals on December 19, 2006, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

## Colman leaving

FROM PAGE 17

The footballers, especially the seniors, had welcomed the arrival of a trainer and admitted that their performance had been enhanced after following the new methods.

They insisted the necessity of a trainer for a better future but much to the frustration of the football critics, Colman's contract was not renewed by the BFF.

Even Cruciani still is uncertain about his future although the BFF has given him an extended contract, which runs out after the August 16-27 SA Games in Colombo.

He is expected to meet the National Team Management Committee very soon to have a talk about his contract, which runs out today.

## Premiership refs

FROM PAGE 20

ordered and will be funded by Professional Game Match Officials Limited, of which Hackett is general manager.

Referees themselves are in favour of technology that spares them from missing off-the-ball offences. It means players will also be more aware of the likelihood of being caught in the act.

## Chirac believes

FROM PAGE 17

Zidane apologized to children in a French television interview Wednesday, but said he did not regret the incident because Materazzi had insulted his mother and sister.

Materazzi has admitted insulting Zidane, but denied that he verbally attacked his mother. The Italian player appeared before a FIFA disciplinary committee on Friday. Zidane is scheduled to appear next Thursday.

The president said an investigation by the world soccer body would show who is responsible and whether there was provocation.

"What is certain is that, for a man like Zidane -- a man balanced in all respects -- to have this type of reaction, there had to be something," Chirac said.

Chirac met Zidane on Monday at a team reception and called the French captain "a virtuoso, a genius of world football."

## Berlin's

FROM PAGE 20

Reinickendorf hours after Italy won the championship.

A press report earlier this week said Kiessling had left two suicide notes, one to his young daughter and the other to the rest of his family. It quoted the police as saying the letters had referred to "political problems".

But his son issued a statement on Thursday saying the reasons for the suicide were "personal".

Kiessling was the top sports official in the city-state of Berlin's government and was a World Cup coordinator for football's governing body FIFA.

He was responsible for the hugely successful Fan Mile in central Berlin, where giant screens showed the matches to hundreds of thousands of ticketless fans.

The tournament was seen worldwide as an organizational triumph for Germany.

# Dutch level with China



AFP, Amsterdam

Netherlands and China drew 1-1 at the women's Champions Trophy field hockey tournament here Thursday.

Hong Xia Li gave China the lead in the second half before Eefke Mulder levelled for the hosts.

China forced two penalty corners in the first six minutes without a conversion. Li hit the right post with the goal open after Ba Rong Fu made a cross from the left at the 20 minute mark.

China's defence of Yi Bo Ma, Shao Yan Mai and Shuang Li blocked three Netherlands forays into China's circle, clearing with precise passes to relieve the pressure and mount counter attacks.

China started the second half quickly with Ba Rong Fu forcing her way along the left backline, passed to Li in front of goal who hit high into the net from five metres out to have China ahead two minutes into the second half.

China lost defender Zhao Xia Chen and midfielder Ye Ren to hand injuries in the middle of the second half which tipped the balance towards Netherlands, allowing space in the backfield until she returned for the last 10 minutes.

Mulder converted Netherlands only penalty corner, flicking high inside the right post to equalise midway through the second half.

Netherlands pressed for the winner in the last 10 minutes but were repulsed by China's determination in defence and speed in the counterattack.

Meanwhile, Argentina staged a dramatic comeback to defeat Australia 3-2.

The Argentinians snatched victory thanks to an overtime penalty corner conversion from Luciana Aymar, despite trailing 2-1 in the

second period. Karen Smith scored Australia's first field goal of the tournament after just eight minutes catching Argentina's defence in disarray, exposing the weakness exploited by China and Germany who also scored early in their matches with the South Americans.

Agustina Garcia equalised for Argentina nine minutes after the

break, but Nikki Hudson put the Aussies ahead a minute later.

Maria del la Paz Hernandez scored from a penalty corner before Aymar's dramatic late finale, after the final hooter had sounded.

The defeat leaves Australia without a win in this tournament after draws against New Zealand and Netherlands and losses to China and Argentina.



Dutchwoman Sylvia Karres (C) vies with China's Mai in a Champions Trophy match in Amstelveen on Thursday.

# Pak trio still out



CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan went into the opening Test here at Lord's without three of their key players and it remains uncertain whether the injured trio would be fit in time for the second match at Old Trafford later this month.

A Pakistan team official told The News that Younis Khan, the vice-captain and middle-order batsman, Shoaib Malik, the allrounder and Mohammad Asif, the medium pacer, were left out of the playing XI at the last minute because of fitness problems.

Zaheer Abbas, the team manager, said the management was hoping to field Younis Khan in the opening Test but since he still complained of a painful knee and it was decided to replace him with Faisal Iqbal, the talented middle-order batsman.

"Younis has been getting treatment for his knee problem for the last few days and we were all hoping he would be fit to play at Lord's," said Zaheer. "But unfortunately, he was still in pain last night and we had no choice but to leave him out."

# Cricketers to run SLC

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's World Cup winning captain Arjuna Ranatunga is among four cricketers recommended by ex-players to run the sport in the island nation, sources told AFP on Friday.

Elections to Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC), scheduled to be held on Saturday, were cancelled on the advice of the country's President Mahinda Rajapakse, who wanted former players to join an interim administration committee.

Former Test batsmen Sidat Wettimuny and Ken de Alwis, and fast bowler Pramodaya Wickramasinghe were the others besides Ranatunga to be recom-

mended to the committee.

"We met the President today and submitted the names to him," said a former cricketer, who did not wish to be identified.

Ranatunga led Sri Lanka to World Cup glory in 1996 when his team defeated Australia in the final in the Pakistani city of Lahore.

Sports minister Jeevan Kumaratunga said the rival candidates for the SLC president's post, Jayantha Dharmadasa and Mohan de Silva, had also been asked to join the new committee as co-chairmen.

Dharmadasa, the current interim head of the SLC, said he too had been confident of victory but accepted the decision to cancel the elections.

# Aussies to play Champs Trophy



CRICINFO, undated

Australia confirmed its participation in the ICC Champions Trophy in India in October, allaying fears that teams might pull out due to security reasons due to the recent bomb blasts in Mumbai.

Creagh O' Connor, Cricket Australia (CA) president, confirmed this in a letter to Sharad Pawar, the BCCI president, and expressed his condolences with the victims of the blast. Mumbai is scheduled to host five matches in the tournament, including the final. It will also host Australia's second match on October 18.

"Cricket Australia looks forward to joining the BCCI and the globe's

other cricketing nations at the ICC Champion's Trophy in a few months, to help you demonstrate that there is more to be gained by coming together to celebrate our diversity than there is in senseless violence which simply sets people apart," O'Connor wrote. "All of us at Cricket Australia were deeply shocked to hear the tragic news of shameful bombings in the cricket-loving city of Mumbai."

Earlier, Paul Marsh, chief executive of the Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA), expressed concerns over the tour after it was reported in a daily that the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade warned tourists travelling to India to be cautious. Marsh was confident that CA's pre-tour security delegation would provide the right advice for the players.

# Bangladesh A win one-day series 4-1

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A strongly bounced back to complete their Zimbabwe tour on a high note when they defeated Zimbabwe A by 58 runs in the fifth and final one-day match at the Kwekwe Sports Club ground yesterday.

The second string Bangladesh side, which drew the three-match four-day series 1-1, had confirmed their one-day series victory by winning the first three games but suffered a six-wicket loss in the fourth game.

An all-round performance by Sakib Al Hasan -- who got a senior team call-up for the upcoming Zimbabwe and Kenya tours -- powered the visitors to win the series 4-1, the left-handed batsman scoring unbeaten 55 before claiming four wickets for 44 with his left-arm spin.

Tushar Imran led from the front with team highest 66 as the tourists piled up a towering 331 for six in the stipulated 50 overs in the tour finale. Nafees Iqbal contributed 54 runs while another young southpaw Mehrah Hossain Jr contributed an unbeaten 38.

Piet Rinke hit 107 but it was not good enough for the home side to topple the huge total as they were restricted to 273 for eight in allotted 50 overs.

The Bangladesh team are expected to return home on Sunday.

# AFC chief concerned

THE-AFC.COM, Kuala Lumpur

The AFC Technical Committee expressed its concern on Thursday over the poor performance of Asian teams in the recently concluded FIFA World Cup 2006 in Germany and acknowledged the urgent need to improve the standard of leagues as a step towards raising the overall level of football in Asia.

Australia, who joined AFC at the beginning of this year, were the only team to reach the last 16, while Asian champions Japan, 2002 semi-finalists Korea Republic, Iran and Saudi Arabia bowed out early.

In his opening remarks, AFC President Mohamed Bin Hammam said he was extremely disappointed.

"Undeniably, we are still far behind the international level that we aspire to. We must work hard to close the gap with the big guns. I must say that I am very disappointed with our results in Germany," said Bin Hammam.

"All national associations and clubs should play their role to improve the overall standard of Asian football. Restructuring and improving the standard in our clubs and in our leagues is the only way for us to head into professionalism."

The AFC chief said the key to success lies in the vigorous implementation of Vision Asia.

"I can see our future through the long-term Vision Asia project. Youth and grassroots are the foundation of the future and in order to achieve this, we have to implement the Vision Asia projects in different countries as soon as possible."

Technical Committee Chairman Mr. Zhang Jilong echoed the AFC President's and committee members' views.

"The challenge starts now. We must start our work now to close down the gap between the Asian teams and the powers of world football."

"There is a long way to go and a big task ahead of us. In the next four years, we have to make a vast improvement. In simple words, we need to buck up."

# Donadoni

FROM PAGE 20

career at the age of 37 in the United Arab Emirates with Al-Ittihad.

His Milan background will add to speculation that the Federation is looking to appoint ex-Milan and Italy coach Sacchi as an overall director of footballing affairs as part of a post-scandal restructuring of the game.

Currently football affairs at the Federation are being handled by Donadoni's former Milan team mate Albertini.

Donadoni began his coaching career in 2001 with Lecco in the third division Serie C but quit the club midway through his debut season after a dispute before rejoining to save them from relegation near the end of the season.

The following season he took Livorno to 10th place in Serie B and then he moved to Genoa for a brief spell before rejoining Livorno for the 2004-05 season.

Donadoni took Livorno to a highly credible ninth place but the following campaign, with the Tuscan club flying high in an unprecedented sixth place, he left after a row with the club president.

The coach was linked with a possible move to Juventus before the club, who face relegation if found guilty in the match-fixing trial, opted for Frenchman Didier Deschamps.

# Waqar points at Lord's effect



AFP, London

Pakistan bowling coach Waqar Younis put his side's poor catching down to first-day nerves after England batsmen Alastair Cook and Paul Collingwood were both dropped on the way to making hundreds on the opening day of the first Test at Lord's.

Essex left-hander Cook was dropped by Imran Farhat on nought and 81, as well as surviving an easy return catch to leg-spinner Danish Kaneria on 45, while Durham all-rounder Collingwood escaped when on 79.

"It was not the best of days for Pakistan," admitted Waqar.

"If you look at the bowling performance, apart from the first spell,

I thought the bowlers bowled extremely well," the Pakistan great, a thorn in England's side during the 1990s, added.

"They created the chances for the team but unfortunately the team could not hold on to the catches."

Waqar though had some sympathy for Pakistan's fielders, despite their failure to support an attack missing injured fast bowlers Shoaib Akhtar (ankle), Naved-ul-Hasan (groin) and Mohammad Asif (elbow).

"The first time here at Lord's its not easy. There's a tense atmosphere and a different atmosphere from any other ground."

"It's beautiful here but it does tense you up - our bowlers were a little tense in the morning, that's why they bowled both sides of the pitch."

"But they got more relaxed and

then bowled beautifully."

Waqar also blamed his side's missed chances on the poor visibility at Lord's, especially when conditions were cloudy.

"It's not easy to sight the ball here at Lord's," said Waqar. "It does get difficult when there are over-cast conditions."

Waqar also bemoaned the absence of experienced slip fielder Younis Khan (knee) after Farhat dropped two catches at second slip, where the Pakistan vice-captain usually fields.

"He is probably the best slip fielder we've got," said Waqar.

"Imran Farhat has been a very regular slip fielder but when it's a bad day you drop one, then you drop everything."

"Younis is normally second and Imran Farhat is normally in third (slip)."

# Few stars for Fed Cup



AFP, Paris

Belgium and France face crucial Fed Cup ties this weekend stripped of Wimbledon finalists Justine Henin-Hardenne and Amelie Mauresmo who have withdrawn after their All England Club exploits.

Henin-Hardenne will miss Belgium's semi-final with the United States in Ostend after declaring herself "not 100-percent fit" while Mauresmo, France's first Wimbledon champion in 81 years, skips the play-off with the Czech Republic due to an injured groin.

Triple French Open champion Henin-Hardenne had been key to her country's hopes of making the final alongside Kim Clijsters, with whom she has enjoyed a frosty relationship.

Although the duo claim they have a professional relationship, there were still signs of the coolness between them after their Wimbledon semi-final which Henin-Hardenne won.

"It's a big disappointment," said Belgian skipper Carl Maes of Henin-Hardenne's withdrawal.

"With Justine, we had the best

two players in the world in the last two or three months. Now the tie against the United States will be a little more equal.

"It's understandable that she doesn't want to play if she is not 100-percent."

Henin-Hardenne will be replaced in the squad by Leslie Butkiewicz, the world number 509, with Clijsters, the world number two, Kirsten Flipkens (122) and Caroline Maes (399) making up the team.

Belgium had defeated reigning champions Russia in the last eight to make the semi-finals.

USA skipper Zina Garrison is also without her best players with Serena and Venus Williams as well as Lindsay Davenport all out of action.

Their leading player is Jamea Jackson (world ranked 67) who is accompanied by Jill Craybas (70), Vania King (79) and Mashona Washington (134).

France go into their World Group play-off against the Czechs without Mauresmo who suffered a tear in her groin.

Severine Bremond, a surprise Wimbledon semi-finalist, takes Mauresmo's place in a squad made up of Nathalie Dechy, Tatiana Golovin and Emilie Loit.

# FORMULA 1

# Alonso fires out a warning

REUTERS, Magny-Cours, France

Renault's world champion Fernando Alonso fired off a warning to his Formula One rivals on Friday by lapping comfortably quicker than them in French Grand Prix free practice.

BMW Sauber's Robert Kubica topped the timesheets in both sessions but the young Polish test driver will not race on Sunday.

Alonso, winner of six of the 10 races to date and 19 points clear of Ferrari's Michael Schumacher in the standings, was second quickest in the afternoon session after sitting out the morning.

His time of one minute 17.498 seconds was the fastest by a race driver on a day dominated by the unsung testers.

Of the 22 drivers who will be on the starting grid at Magny-Cours, only four made the top 10 in the

second session -- Renault's Italian Giancarlo Fisichella the fifth quickest with a lap of 1:17.916, ahead of sixth-placed Schumacher's 1:17.938.

Toyota's Ralf Schumacher was ninth.

Briton Jenson Button had shown promise with the third best time in the opening session as most of the leading drivers saved their engines on a hot and cloudless Bastille Day at the circuit in the heart of rural France.

"We have made a step forward in the engine department and also in the aerodynamics. There's a lot of interesting stuff on the car," Button had said the day before.

"We won't win this weekend, you don't gain a second a lap through some small changes, but I think that we are going to carry on from Indianapolis and probably be

a little bit more competitive."

Honda's reserve driver Anthony Davidson was second and third fastest in the two sessions but Brazilian team mate Rubens Barrichello crashed in the afternoon.

American Scott Speed also wrecked his Toro Rosso with a similar slide into the barriers while McLaren's Kimi Raikkonen parked up on the grass runoff seconds after the chequered flag.

The main talking point of a low-key opening session was the vertical aerodynamic fins on the nose of Kubica's car.

The winglets, first tested in Spain last week, have been dubbed the "Twin Towers" by some within the team as a nod to the Kuala Lumpur skyscrapers owned by Malaysian oil giant and sponsor Petronas.



Current Formula 1 world champion Fernando Alonso of Renault walks past a bus on the racetrack in Magny-Cours, France during the first qualifying session on Friday.