

Absence irks Bashar

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Like everyone the national cricketers also keenly followed the current political situation but captain Habibul Bashar wants to put aside the affair only to concentrate on the upcoming task against Zimbabwe.

"It is impossible for any citizen of the country to refrain himself from the episodes and we are no exception. Of course we have been going through anxious moments like the whole nation and hope for best. But we have to put it aside and should concentrate on our duty," said Bashar yesterday during the Tigers' first training session for the series against Zimbabwe.

The ongoing crisis had an immediate impact as only eight cricketers — Bashar, Shahriar Nafees, Javed

Omar, Mohammad Ashraful, Rajin Saleh, Shahadat Hossain, Syed Rassel and Mehrab Hossain — out of 23 probables reported on the first day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The question, however raised, was if Rajin Saleh could manage an air ticket to fly to Dhaka from his hometown Sylhet on Monday night, why the rest of the selected cricketers from outside Dhaka failed to catch any transport when the blockade was only withdrawn in the same afternoon. The absence of Mohammad Rafique especially surprised many when it was not a big task for the ace left-arm spinner to join the camp from Keraniganj.

"I'm not happy with the turnout. We had informed all about the timing well before the crisis. I think 12 days' break was good enough," said a frustrated Bashar without elaborating.

The preparation camp got underway for another mission against Zimbabwe, who are scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on November 23 to play a Twenty20 match and five one-day internationals against the home side, but Bashar's men were not ready to generate hype this time.

"Like previous occasions we don't want to make a hype with the series by saying that we are going to whitewash our opponents. Rather our main objective is to take the series match by match. We are not concerned with the margin because our ultimate goal is to win the series," cautioned Bashar.

The Tigers had visited Zimbabwe in last July-August with a high hope of making a clean sweep against their southern African opponents but only swallowed a 3-2 defeat before going to India for the ICC Champions Trophy with an

expectation of making a second round birth without any avail.

"We have learnt the lessons from last two engagements that we are not mentally strong enough to cope with high expectation. That's why it is better not to generate any hype. But we still believe that we are a far better side than Zimbabwe right at the moment," explained the Bangladesh skipper, who recalled their 101-run victory against Zimbabwe in the ICC Champions Trophy to justify his claim.

Although chief selector Faruque Ahmed hinted at making a few experiments during the series ahead of the World Cup, the 33-year-old Bashar differed the views.

"I am totally against the idea. I would rather like to play with an unchanged combination in the five-match series. The World Cup is

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

BHF picks 33 for Asiad

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday picked up a 33-member preliminary squad for the Asian Games to be held in Doha next month.

The players have been requested to report to Kamran Ashraf, the advisory coach from Pakistan, and local coaches Mahbub Harun and Abdullah Piru on Friday at 7 am.

SQUAD

Russell Khan Bappi, Issa Mia, Hedayetul Islam Razib, Musa Mia, Moududur Rahman Shuvo, Asif-e-Noor, Monirul Alam Sumon, Mahbub Ehsan Rana, Russell Mahmud Jimmy (Abahani), Mahbubullah Shakil, Mamunur Rahman Chayan, Mohammad Yamin Hossain, Mashiur Rahman Biplab, Ashiquzzaman, Maksud Alam Habul, Ariful Haque Prince (Mohammedan), Zahid Hossain, Shamsuddin Tuhin, Mustafizur Rahman, Dinar, Tabib-e-Noor, Khondoker Hasan Ahmed, Shahidullah Titu, Zahidul Islam Rajan, Krishna Kumar Das (Usha), Prashanto Kumar, Rahul Kanti Roy, Asaduzzaman Chandan, Mosharrif Hossain Kuti, Prince (Mariners), Zahid Bin Talib Shuvo, Mazharul Islam Mokshed, Hossain Mobarak Sumon (Sonali Bank) and Imran Hossain Shuvo (Ajax).

Azad end on winning note

SPORTS REPORTER

Azad Sporting Club ended their Green Delta Insurance Premier Hockey League campaign with full three points when they drubbed Sadharan Bima 4-1 at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday as the league resumed after the Eid vacation.

A brace by Moniruzzaman and one goal by Nahid helped Azad take a 3-0 lead at the break while Al Masum sealed the victory after Bima had pulled one goal back through Sumon in the second half.

Azad finished their eight matches in the 9-team fray with seven points while Bima stuck to three points after seven games.

The competition, meanwhile, gets tougher as defending champions Usha Krira Chakra look to join Abahani on top of the table beating Mariner Young Club in today's lone match.

Usha have won all five matches but for Mariners, it would be a difficult task to recover from a massive 7-0 defeat to Abahani before the Eid break. Mariners had also enjoyed a good run before the Abahani episode, having upset Mohammedan for their fourth straight win.

Leaders Abahani will take on archrivals and fourth-placed Mohammedan tomorrow.

Yuvraj blow for India

AFP, Mohali

India's dashing middle-order batsman Yuvraj Singh has been ruled out of next month's one-day series in South Africa, the cricket board said on Tuesday.

Yuvraj suffered a tear in his left knee during a warm-up ahead of Sunday's Champions Trophy clash against Australia here and was rushed to Mumbai to see the board's medical consultant Anant Joshi.

Yuvraj will be examined again in two weeks to determine if he will be

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



WELCOME BACK: Injured shooters Asif Hossain Khan (C) and Shoebuzzaman (R) arrive from Bangkok at the Zia International Airport yesterday.

Asif, Shoeb return

SPORTS REPORTER

Asif Hossain Khan returned home yesterday after having treatment in Bangkok but it was uncertain whether the Commonwealth and South Asian Games gold medalist shooter would be able to recover from brutal police torture to take part in next month's Asian Games.

The National Bangladesh Shooting Federation (NSF) sent injured shooters Asif and fellow shooter Shoebuzzaman, two of the five victims of barbaric police assault at the National Shooting Complex and further torture at the Gulshan Police Station on October 2, for better treatment to the Thai capital on October 19.

"I am happy with the treatment in Bangkok," told Asif to The Daily Star. "I am feeling much better and I can move my hand now."

Both the shooters were severely beat-up as Asif was left with a

damaged right-arm and pain in the soles of his feet.

"The pain in the feet is hardly there but I can still feel it. But there is not much problem walking like before. The doctors have told me that they have done everything possible and the recovery is as best as medical science can do."

"The rest of the healing would be done naturally and it might take two to three months," informed Asif, who was treated at the Bumrungrad Hospital.

Asif and Shoeb both underwent surgery to remove the blood clot and the champion shooter said that it helped a lot. "They operated upon my waist. Shoeb bhai's recovery is also similar to mine."

When asked about his near future, Asif told that the doctors have prescribed him to continue physiotherapy and go through different exercises for the improvement of the hands, feet and waist.

"The doctors have said that I can start practice now and shoot as long as I can bear the pain. They said to quit if my arm refuses the load."

"As starter, I'll go for 20 to 30 minutes at a stage but to be able to shoot for the regulation three-hour period, it would take time because not only the arm but also the feet have to permit me to do that. Am also taking plenty of medicines now."

When asked about his chances to participate in the Asiad in Doha, Asif said that he would only realise his condition once he takes the rifle in hand.

"I'll try my best to be fit but to go to Asiad, everything will have to fall into place," said Asif who expects to start training within a few days and join the residential camp at BKSP from November 7.

"The federation has assured me today to provide the best physio available here for my quick recovery," he added.



BACK TO WORK: Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar (C) is seen with rookie Mehrab Hossain (R), vice-captain Shahriar Nafees, pacemen Syed Rassel (2nd L) and Shahadat Hossain (face not seen) during their first day's training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.



Did U Know?

The only player to score a hatrick in a World Cup final is Geoff Hurst for England against West Germany in the 1966 FIFA World Cup final.



Anil Kumble

(Indian leg-spinner)

"Limited-overs cricket is a young man's game but there is room for experience. I will fit in well in this team."

After being recalled for South Africa tour.

Eyes already on title

Trans-Tasman rivalry on the subcontinent today



AFP, Mohali

Australian captain Ricky Ponting has urged his team to go flat out to make their first ever Champions Trophy final when they clash with New Zealand in Wednesday's semifinal.

"There are no excuses now for us," Ponting said ahead of the day-night clash against the trans-Tasman rivals at the Punjab Cricket Association stadium here.

"We've got a good team, we've got a full list of guys to pick from and we're playing a semifinal at a venue that we've just played a game on."

"We can't complain, with the way things have worked out for us."

Australia have not progressed beyond the semifinals in the four previous Champions Trophy tournaments despite being the number one side with back-to-back World

Cup victories in 1999 and 2003.

Ponting's men knocked out hosts India here on Sunday to set up a potentially absorbing semifinal against the in-form Black Caps, who defeated world number two South Africa and Pakistan in the group stage.

Australia have won 15 of their last 17 matches against their Tasman neighbours, but lost the most recent one in December last year when New Zealand successfully chased a target of 331 at Christchurch.

"I think New Zealand's strength over the last couple of years in one-day cricket has probably been their numerous all-rounders," said Ponting.

"They just really enjoy playing one-day cricket and they have not played much lately, so they have been gearing themselves for this sort of tournament."

"I think the conditions that we're playing in here will probably suit them a little bit as well."

"It will be a big game against

New Zealand and a great challenge for all of us."

New Zealand, who won the Champions Trophy in 2000, will miss key all-rounder Scott Styris, who has not recovered from a back injury suffered against Pakistan last week.

"He has not been able to practice, it's unlikely he will play," Black Caps captain Stephen Fleming said of Styris, whose 86 against Pakistan helped the team qualify for the semifinals.

"We will miss him because he showed the other day what he's capable of in big games. But it gives others a chance to make up for his loss."

Without Styris, whose century won the last game against Australia in Christchurch, New Zealand may struggle to cope with their rivals bowling attack of Brett Lee, Glenn McGrath, Nathan Bracken, Mitchell Johnson and Shane Watson.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Chappell days numbered?

PTI, Melbourne

Coach Greg Chappell's association with Indian cricket may be over after next year's World Cup. Australian media reported on Tuesday against the backdrop of the team's early exit from the ongoing Champions Trophy.

Chappell, who has a two-year contract with the Indian team till the World Cup, and the Indian Cricket Board have agreed to part ways after the mega event in West Indies next April, the 'Courier Mail' daily reported on Tuesday without quoting any sources.

In a similar report, 'Herald Sun' said "failure isn't an option in the cricket-obsessed country and there seems little doubt that Chappell, the 58-year-old former Australian captain, is on the way out." The end of the union seems imminent after India's exit from the Champions Trophy following its six-wicket loss to Australia in Mohali on Sunday, the report said.

The papers noted that Chappell has been under media attack for experimenting with players by promoting younger ones.



READYING FOR FIGHT: Australia all-rounder Andrew Symonds helps out teammate Mitchell Johnson (C) during a training session at the Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali on Tuesday.

SA want batters to fire



AFP, Jaipur

South Africa go into the Champions Trophy semifinal here on Thursday hoping the batting line-up will back up their fast bowlers against a resurgent West Indies.

Fast bowlers spared South Africa blishes in the last two games against Sri Lanka and Pakistan, with Makhaya Ntini and Shaun Pollock playing key roles in their team's wins.

South Africa were defending a modest total of 219 against Sri Lanka at Ahmedabad when Pollock grabbed two big wickets in an inspired 10-over spell to put his team on course for victory.

Ntini did better than his teammate in the next match, wrecking Pakistan with a five-wicket burst at Mohali to help his team advance to the semifinals with a convincing 124-run win.

He is his team's leading wicket-taker in the ongoing tournament with seven victims, followed by Pollock with five. The pair have been well supported by Jacques Kallis, Andre Nel and Charl Langeveldt in an all-pace attack.

South Africa's batting has yet to click although they have so far not played in ideal conditions. Mark Boucher, Justin Kemp and AB de Villiers are the only batsmen to defy odds with a half-century apiece.

They managed just 105 against New Zealand on a dubious Mumbai pitch, 219 against Sri Lanka and 213 against Pakistan on seamer-friendly pitches at Ahmedabad and Mohali.

Their main batsmen — skipper Graeme Smith, Herschelle Gibbs, Kallis and Boeta Dippenaar — are all averaging below 25 after three matches.

South Africa coach Mickey Arthur said on Tuesday he was confident his batsmen would deliver against the West Indies.

"I feel sorry for top-order bats-

men of all sides. I think the wickets are conducive to bowlers. But I am sure we will get it right come the semifinal. I have full confidence in the guys that they can do the job for us," he said.

"Like most teams, we came here with a preconceived plan and perception of the wickets. It certainly took away our first game at Mumbai and watching other games, we realised it was not the normal sub-continental conditions."

Arthur said it was necessary to bat better against the new ball and then go for runs in the middle overs.

"We came with a strategy of trying to attack the middle overs, but based on the pitches that we have had, we have not been able to

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



SET Max

ICC Champions Trophy
Australia v New Zealand
First Semifinal
Live at 2:45 pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India
Live at 8:30 pm

TEN Sports

UEFA Champions League
Arsenal v CSKA Moscow
Live at 12:30 am (Thursday)