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Pakistan want to rewrite WC record-book

LAHORE, Feb 18 (PTI) Pakistan are determined to retain the Cup and break the jinx of the hosts not becoming champions as they prepare for their first Group 'B' outing in the Willis World Cup.

This is what Pakistan's most durable cricket manager Intikhab Alam said at the Gaddafi Stadium here today after conclusion of the morning physical work-out and nets.

"We have had a quota of problems of late," conceded Alam. "But we are resolved to show the world we are still a force to reckon with in instant cricket."

"Day follows night and night follows the day. I think that our problems are over and our boys will prove to the world by winning the Cup once again."

What is most significant is that all-seasoned players and youngsters have displayed lot of togetherness and this is what counts most in international competition, he felt.

Pakistan take on UAE in their inaugural match at Gujranwala on February 24.

The Pakistan team, which starts its campaign 10 days after the start of the World Cup, played a few matches against representative teams, including Pakistan International Airlines.

Alam said chances in one-day competition have to be grabbed just as New Zealand did against England. "We are a well-balanced combination in all departments and we have got to make use of the opportunities that come our way to stay on the Everest," he added.

Old fox Javed Miandad is back to prove his identity in what will be his record sixth World Cup while Salim Malik — haunted by the bribery charges — is confidence-personified. "We have no fitness problems," reiterated Alam, adding that Inzamam-ul-Haq and leg-spinner Mushtaq Ahmed were both in good shape.

Fanie ready to roll

FAISALABAD, Pakistan, Feb 18: Jinxed South African fast bowler Fanie de Villiers beat an injury D-Day here on Sunday by declaring himself fit for World Cup action, reports AFP.

The pace bowler, desperate to play on Tuesday here against New Zealand after missing the opening win over the United Arab Emirates, revealed he had beaten an ankle injury which has been dogging him for 10 days.

But skipper Hansie Cronje took some of the gloss of his recovery by warning De Villiers he was not an automatic choice for the crunch Group B game.

The seamer, one of the most injury-prone players in the game, revealed he had bowled off his long run-up for an hour in the nets on Saturday without stiffening up.

"I was worried how it would be when I put my full weight on it," he said. "But it's fine. It hasn't even started to swell afterwards."

De Villiers, who almost missed his second World Cup in a row after being sidelined from the Test series against England with back and hamstring problems, revealed he had woken up every three hours during the first few nights after the injury for ice-pack treatment from team physiotherapist Craig Smith.

Skipper Hansie Cronje pointed out: "His bowling looked all right but it's also a matter of whether he will be 100 per cent in the field."

De Villiers, however, said: "If I'm okay for bowling, I'll be fine in the field."

Coach Bob Woolmer said the South African camp had been worried about De Villiers' fitness.

"It was a sort of D-Day for him and I'm delighted he's come through," he said.

Daddy Mike!

NEW YORK, Feb 18: Iron Mike Tyson is the proud new father of a baby girl, reports AP.

His girlfriend, Monica Turner, gave birth Wednesday to an 8-pound, 10-ounce (3.9 kilograms) daughter named Rayna, the Daily News reported Saturday.

The former heavyweight champion "is very, very proud. He's very excited and very happy," said his manager, John Horne.

Tyson visited mother and daughter at the Maryland hospital before their release on Thursday, the report said.

It wasn't known whether Tyson and Turner, both 29, planned to marry.

Both already are parents, Turner has a 6-year-old daughter, Geena, and Tyson has a 5-year-old daughter, Mickey. Tyson, who's attempting a comeback, is on four years' probation for his conviction in the 1991 rape of a beauty contestant.

Illy's boys ill at ease



PESHAWAR, Feb 18: Sickly England won their first World Cup points here today but saw their stock sink even further after all-rounder Craig White was ruled out of the rest of the tournament, reports AFP.

The easy eight-wicket Group B victory over the United Arab Emirates part-timers was dwarfed by the bad news that began with White pulling up with a pulled muscle in his left side.

The all-rounder gasped in pain and clutched his rib-cage after bowling a mere nine deliveries.

England supremo Ray Illingworth, whose outfit are already short of struggling top-order batsmen Robin Smith (groin) and Graeme Hick (thigh), said he would appeal to the Cup organisers PILCOM for an immediate replacement.

Skipper Mike Atherton, meanwhile, dropped himself down to number three but failed to recapture his form, dismissed for only 20, while England's pinch-hitting experiment with Neil Smith also failed to convince.

Smith, son of former England captain MJK who had earlier taken three wickets with his off-spin for a single run in 16 balls, looked off colour from the start, his timing asked on the low-bouncing wicket.

He looked even paler later, reaching 27 before being sick out in the middle and retiring. The 1,000-pound man of the match cheque, however, should prompt a rapid recovery.

Illingworth, commenting on White's misfortune, said: "Craig might be able to bowl

gently in four weeks but he won't be able to play again in the World Cup. Craig is very upset. He was just starting to really believe in himself."

If England's request for a replacement is granted, a decision will be made on Sunday evening, with Dermot Reeve, Mike Watkinson and Chris Lewis the likely candidates to join the squad.

England will have to look hard at the match video to find much cause for consolation today.

Opener Alec Stewart moved his feet well and produced a couple of classic off-side strokes, but that plus was cancelled out by his lazy flick off his toes into Ganesh Shrivastava's hands at short mid-wicket.

Atherton, out cheaply against the Kiwis, was dismissed as he played out side left arm Syed Azhar Saeed's arm ball. Graeme Thorpe (44 not out) and Neil Fairbrother (12 not out), however, looked untroubled as they got England home without further drama.

Illingworth will have been happier with the fielding performance against the side thrashed first time out by South Africa.

But two chances were put down — one by Smith off his own bowling, the other by Stewart going full length at mid-wicket.

England's overall mood in the field was much busier than it had been in the defeat to New Zealand, while birthday boy Phil DeFreitas bowled impressively for figures of two for ten overs.

Dominic Cork also chipped in with two wickets as the Emirates, choosing to bat, collapsed to 88 for seven before the tailenders grafted past the three-figure mark.

Mazhar Hussain top-scored for the Emirates with 33 before falling to Smith, who finished with three for 29.

England play Holland here next on Feb 22, while the Emirates travel to Gujranwala to take on Pakistan on Feb 24.

SCOREBOARD

World Cup scoreboard between England and the United Arab Emirates here on Sunday:

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Azhar Saeed lbw c Fairbrother b DeFreitas 9

Mylvaganam c Fairbrother b DeFreitas 0

Hussain b Smith 33

Mehra c Russell b Smith 1

Aslam b Gough 23

Laiq b Smith 0

Raza b Cork 10

Samarasekera run out 29

Zarwan b Cork 2

Durankwala lbw Illingworth 15

Abbas not out 1

Extras: (b-4, lb-4, w-4, nb-1) 13

Total: (48.3 overs) 136

Fall of wickets: 1-3: 2-32; 3-48; 4-49; 5-49; 6-80; 7-88; 8-100; 9-135.

Bowling:

Cork 10 1 33 2

DeFreitas 9.3 3 16 2

Gough 8 3 23 1

White 1.3 1 2 0

Smith 9.3 2 29 3

Illingworth 10 2 25 1

ENGLAND

Stewart b Laiq c Mylvaganam 23

Smith retired lb 27

Thorpe not out 44

Atherton b Saeed 20

Fairbrother not out 12

Extras: (4-b, 2-lb, 2-w, 6-nb) 14

Total: (26 wks) 140

Did not bat: Russell; White; Cork; DeFreitas; Gough; Illingworth.

Fall of wickets: 1-52; 2-109.

Bowling:

Samarasekera 7 1 35 0

Laiq 7 0 25 1

Raza 5 1 20 0

Saeed 10 1 26 1

Zarwan 6 0 28 0

Overs: 35.

Result: England won by eight wickets.

Who is the best?

CUTTACK, India, Feb 18: Sachin Tendulkar threw down the gauntlet at Brian Lara's feet today after cracking a maiden World Cup ton, reports AFP.

Tendulkar, India's champion, and Lara, in the Caribbean corner, will fight it out for the title of the world's most exciting batsman over the next month.

The former took the first round on points with a whirlwind 127 not out against Kenya, while Lara had to content himself on Saturday with an unbeaten cameo 43 against Zimbabwe.

Lara clearly has superior stamina after his 375-run Test and 501-run first-class records, but World Cups are more about high-speed, dazzling froth.

Tendulkar certainly provided plenty of that with 16 boundaries and a six to take his side past Kenya's respectable 199 for six with 49 deliveries and seven wickets to spare.

More importantly, he had the partisan 20,000 audience on their feet for much of the innings.

Minnows under microscope

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: The inclusion of minor cricket countries in the World Cup is laudable but it has reduced some early matches to a farce, India's Pioneer Today newspaper said, reports Reuter.

South Africa's Gary Kirsten had done himself proud with his record Cup score of 188 not out against the United Arab Emirates last Friday but it was doubtful whether he or anyone else would record it as evidence of greatness, the paper said in a commentary.

"Despite the devaluation of records set up in the Cup, Kirsten's knock has served a useful purpose," said the Pioneer.

"It has brought into sharp focus the manner in which the early stages of the 1996 World Cup have been reduced to a farce. Teams like the UAE, Holland and Kenya are obviously not even close to being of the same calibre as the rest of the participants."

In fact, it is doubtful whether any of these international teams would be able to put up a respectable showing against decent first-class teams in any major cricket playing countries."

The pioneer said the idea ostensibly was to let these teams get some exposure at the highest level to help them develop.

"Laudable as this objective may be, there are less farcical ways of achieving it," the paper said.

It said the sparse crowd at the South Africa-UAE game in Rawalpindi, was a "reflection of the level of spectator interest in these non-matches."

Garri's final triumph

PHILADELPHIA, Feb 18: Garri Kasparov triumphed over the IBM supercomputer 'Deep Blue' on Saturday, showing that the massive calculating power of a machine was not yet ready to beat the best of human brains in a classical chess match, reports Reuter.

The Russian chess champion won the sixth and final game of the historic match to beat 'Deep Blue' by four points to two after three wins, two draws and a stunning win for the computer programme in game one a week ago.

"I did not expect that it would be that tough," Kasparov told a news conference. "Probably I was very lucky to lose game one because that was the best warning, otherwise a disaster could have happened later."

'Deep Blue' made chess history by becoming the first computer programme to beat a reigning world champion in classical chess, in which players have hours to plan strategies. Grand Masters including Kasparov have lost to computers in games played at a much faster rate.

Kasparov, who said before the contest that he was defending humans against the onslaught of computers, later stood in front of hundreds of cheering spectators, his arms held aloft and smiling in triumph.

Kasparov told reporters he had learned even more about the game of chess during the match against a computer that calculates 50 billion positions within three minutes. He also said he would take up the challenge again in future.

"I think the games will be analysed both by chess players and scientists because we know a lot now about the way it thinks in chess and other things," he said. "I thought I saw something similar to an artificial intellect. What I do by just feeling right or wrong, the machine finds by making these billions and billions of calculations."

Sachin relives sensation



CUTTACK, India, Feb 18: Sachin Tendulkar launched India's World Cup campaign with a whirlwind 127 that sent newcomers Kenya crashing to a seven-wicket defeat in a Group A match here today, reports AFP.

The 22-year-old genius smashed 16 boundaries and a six in his maiden World Cup century as India overhauled Kenya's respectable 199 for six with 49 deliveries to spare at the Barabati Stadium here.

Fellow opener Ajay Jadhav chipped in with 53 in a first-wicket stand of 163 before an attack of cramps forced him to throw his wicket away in the 33rd over.

India also lost Navjot Sidhu and Vinod Kambli in quick succession, but Tendulkar and wicketkeeper Nayan Mongia guided India home before 20,000 excited home fans.

It was just the start India needed after a 10-week break from international cricket ahead of their second match against the West Indies in Gujralor on Wednesday.

The Kenyan bowlers could do nothing more than stare as Tendulkar ran riot from the start, racing to 50 by the 14th over and reaching 99 in the 34th.

Tendulkar, with four one-day hundreds already under his belt in 101 previous international games, grouped nervously for nine deliveries before finally controlling his nerves and reaching his ton with a single off Maurice Odumbe.

It provided the perfect celebration for captain Mohammad Azharuddin, whose 200th one-day began shakily when he sent Kenya to bat and found his bowlers being smashed around the park.

Steve Tikolo (65) and skipper Maurice Odumbe (26) took advantage of India's sloppy fielding to put on 96 for the third wicket, taking the score to 161 for two by the 41st over.

But the Indians, stung by constant jeering from the home fans, hit back with three wickets in the space of 11 balls and restricted Kenya to just 38 runs in the last nine overs.

Star leg-spinner Anil Kumble, who took the field despite being bed-ridden for the last three days with viral infection, claimed three for 28. Fellow spinner Venkatapathy Raju chipped in with two for 34.

Kenyan openers Deepak Chudasama and Kennedy Oteno put on 41 in the first 13 overs before Tikolo and Odumbe increased the momentum with audacious hitting and sharp singles.

The 24-year-old Tikolo, signed up by Border to play in South Africa's next domestic season, hit four boundaries and a six off Raju in his polished half-century.

Wicketkeeper Nayan Mongia broke the threatening stand with a smart stumping as Odumbe shaped to hit Kumble out of the ground. Tikolo fell in the 33rd over.

Kumble removed Hitesh Modi and 17-year-old school-boy Thomas Oduyo cheaply to help restrict Kenya's winning target to four runs a over.

Despite the win, Indian captain Mohammad Azharuddin was not impressed by his team's performance.

Azharuddin paid handsome compliments to the Kenyans. "Kenya has got an exciting edge. They have not done badly. If I was the Kenyan captain, I would have been very happy with their performance today," he said.

Kenyan skipper Maurice Odumbe said: "If we continue to play like this, we should be able to do well. At one stage we were keeping the Indian batsmen quiet."

"Our batting is our strength, but we found Kumble a very difficult bowler to face. He does not allow you to get away easily."

SCOREBOARD

World Cup Group A scoreboard between India and Kenya here today:

INDIA

Ottensama c Mongia b Prasad 27

Odumbe c Mongia b Raju 29

S Tikolo c Kumble b Raju 65

M Odumbe st Mongia b Kumble 26

Modi c Jadhav b Kumble 8

Oduyo c Prabhakar b Kumble 2

E Odumbe not out 15

Karim not out 6

Extras: (b-2, lb-11, w-7, nb-1) 21

Total: (6 wks) 199

Did not bat: M Suji; R Ali; D Tikolo.

Fall of wickets: 1-41; 2-65; 3-161; 4-161; 5-165; 6-184.

Bowling:

Prabhakar 5 1 19 0

Srinath 10 0 38 0

Prasad 10 0 41 1

Kumble 10 0 28 3

Raju 10 2 34 2

Tendulkar 5 0 26 0

Overs: 50

INDIA

Jadhav c Ali b Karim 53

Tendulkar not out 127

Sidhu c Suji b S Tikolo 1

Kambli c D Tikolo b M Odumbe 2

Mongia not out 8

Extras: (lb-5, w-6, nb-1) 12

Total: (3 wks) 203

Did not bat: Azharuddin; Prasad; Raju.

Fall of wickets: 1-163; 2-167; 3-182.

Bowling:

Ali 5 0 25 0

E Odumbe 3 0 18 0

Suji 5 0 20 0

Oduyo 3 0 22 0

Karim 10 1 27 1

D Tikolo 3 0 21 0

M Odumbe 9.5 1 39 1

S Tikolo 3 0 26 1

Overs: 41.5

Result: India won by seven wickets.

Man-of-the-match: Sachin Tendulkar.

WC STANDINGS

NEW DELHI, Feb 18

(Reuter): World Cup standings after Sunday's matches, India v Kenya in Cuttack and England v United Arab Emirates in Peshawar (tabulate under played, won, lost, points):

Group A

West Indies 1 1 0 2

India 1 1 0 2

Sri Lanka 0 0 0 2

Kenya 1 0 1 0

Zimbabwe 1 0 1 0

Australia 0 0 0 0

Note: Sri Lanka's record includes 2 pts awarded after Australia forfeited their Feb 17 match.

Group B

New Zealand 2 2 0 4

South Africa 1 1 0 2

England 2 1 1 2

Netherlands 1 0 1 0

United Arab Emirates 2 0 2 0

Pakistan 0 0 0 0

Result: India won by seven wickets.

Man-of-the-match: Sachin Tendulkar.

Bane of being celebrity



BOMBAY, Feb 18 (AFP): Shane Warne has become the victim of his own sporting celebrity.

The leg-spinner, so vocal before the World Cup, has gone quiet after the Australian team management decided to throw a ring of protective steel around him.

Not so much to guard him from those fanatical cricket followers he has been so concerned about, but rather from the besieging media.