

Rixon's remark irks them

DUNEDIN, New Zealand, Dec 19: The Indian cricket team's management protested Saturday to New Zealand Cricket after hosts coach Steve Rixon accused the visitors of being negative, reports AP.

Rixon, a former Australian wicketkeeper, criticised the Indians after they refused to accept a request to reschedule the Test.

Earlier India had turned down an offer to utilise the International Cricket Council's (ICC) experimental laws regarding lost time.

Under the ICC rule lost time can be made up by using floodlights or by altering the start or finish times later in the match.

Team manager S D A Drabu said he had lodged an official complaint with Chris Doig, the chief executive officer of New Zealand Cricket (NZC).

The Indians were overly offended when Rixon was quoted in the Otago Daily Times saying: "We're supposedly the underdogs. I would have thought they would have been keen to get out there and prove it. You can't win games of cricket sitting in the dressing room."

"I think it was very irresponsible of him to make comments like that," Drabu said. "We have brought it to the attention of Doig. We will have to wait and see now."

"We have three batsmen averaging over 50 in Test cricket. I don't think they could have achieved it sitting in the dressing room," Drabu in his first tour as manager said.

The Indians also privately expressed their disappointment over comments made by ICC match referee Barry Jarman.

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"I don't think I will be fit enough to play these events after my injury. I am training and I want to be fit for the British Open," he told the PSA from his base in Peshawar.

PSA executive director Jon Nimck said that assuming Jansher only came back for the British Open in Birmingham in late March he would almost certainly have to qualify or seek a wildcard.

Singh coach chides FIFA

SONGKHLA, Thailand, Dec 19 (Reuters/Internet) China's national soccer coach Bob Houghton joined a chorus of criticism on Saturday over a decision by football's top governing body to allocate Asia just four places for the 2002 World Cup finals.

But a boycott of the event to be co-hosted by Japan and South Korea over the issue was unlikely, the Englishman said.

"The calls for a boycott are a sign of how enormously disappointed Asian countries and football federations were about only getting two places apart from the hosts," Houghton told Reuters.

FIFA decided early this month that Asia would have four spots in the World Cup finals -- but two would be for the co-hosts, leaving 40 countries to compete for the other two.

The executive committee of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), decided unanimously -- including China -- this week that the Asian Football Federation was about only getting two places apart from the hosts, Houghton told Reuters.

The AFC demanded that FIFA return to the previous formula of the "third-placed Asian side playing off against the top team from Oceania, usually Australia, for a berth in the finals.

If the Asian team won the play-off, the continent would have five places in the finals instead of the four allocated by FIFA, which decided the Oceania winner would play off against the fifth placed South American side, a decision which incensed Australia.

"FIFA made the decision to have co-hosts for the World Cup for their own expediency so they shouldn't punish the host continent as a result," said Houghton, who took Sweden's Malmö to the European Cup final in 1979.

"I'm sure there won't be a boycott," Houghton said as he prepared for a play-off with Thailand for the Asian Games bronze medal in the southern Thai coastal resort of Songkhla, 1,000 km (600 miles) from Bangkok.

"But it seems west Asia is a bit more adamant than us in the east," said Houghton, assistant manager of English Premier league club Nottingham Forest before he moved to China.

Leading the calls for a boycott has been Kuwait's soccer boss Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahad al-Sabah, who is also head of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA).

Houghton said he did not know whether the Chinese Football Association would carry through the boycott threat if FIFA did not bow to the AFC demands, but he was cautiously optimistic that FIFA would reverse the decision.

"I hope the 42 countries in Asia can get more than just two places even if they have to play off for a third," he said. "But I don't think anyone understands the inner politics of the issue except those in FIFA itself," he said.

China stood a good chance of qualifying for the World Cup finals for the first time after coming fifth behind the four qualifiers for this year's finals, he said.

"I feel really confident because football is in the ascendancy in China," he said. "Having four Chinese players in Europe has been very beneficial too."

Two members of Houghton's team in Thailand play in England, another in France and a fourth in Germany.

China's five-year old professional league had the necessary standard of stadiums, refereeing, sponsorship and support to take off over the next five to 10 years, Houghton said.

"I'm not sure many people outside China realise quite how big it is," he said. "Just as long as they don't lose too many players overseas -- that would devalue the league," he said.

Biman emerge AB Bank TT champs

Bangladesh Biman emerged as the champions of the Metropolitan AB Bank Senior Division table tennis league with 24 points, reports UNB.

Biman confirmed the top position at the end of the league's last match at the wooden floor gymnasium on Friday night beating Armanitola JS by straight sets.

Armanitola became runners-up bagging 18 points.

In the last round matches, Hamlet of Biman defeated Tuhin of Armanitola 21-16, 21-18; Kachi beat Mushtafa 21-17, 16-21, 24-22 and Mahubb got walkover.

Meanwhile, in the men's First Division league, Engineers' Club clinched the title with 10 points while Dilkusha SC became runners-up bagging 8 points.

In the last league matches on Friday, Engineers' Club defeated Uttara Club by straight sets as Ritu triumphed Babon 21-17, 21-17; Munna beat Tuhin 21-17, 21-11 and Sagor outplayed Biplab 21-12, 21-12.

Bangladesh Biman also clinched the title of First Division women's league securing full 10 points while Mirpur TTs followed them with 8 points.

In the last league matches, Biman overpowered Biman Junior by 3-0 sets as Tumpa defeated Rumi 21-10, 21-11, 21-14; Ritu beat Ratna 21-11, 21-17 and Linu and Ritu pair outplayed Rumi and Ratna pair 21-12, 21-15.

A total of 13 First Division men's teams, six First Division women's teams and ten senior division teams took part in the twenty-day table tennis meet.

Executive Vice President of AB Bank Abu Hanif distributed prizes among the winners as chief guest.

Klos may join Rangers

BONN, Dec 19 (Reuters/Internet): Borussia Dortmund goalkeeper Stefan Klos has said he could move to Rangers during the winter break in Germany.

"Everything is pretty much settled," Klos, 27, said after his side's 3-0 victory over VfB Stuttgart on Friday.

Klos said he had received the green light from his bosses for a transfer which should take place during the Bundesliga break starting after this weekend's matches.

Last season the German club blocked a Klos deal with Rangers, using a clause in his contract to extend it for another term.

Rangers need a goalkeeper as Frenchman Lionel Charbonnier is out for the rest of the season after tearing knee ligaments.

The favourite to replace Klos at Dortmund is German Jens Lehmann, unhappy of being second choice to Sebastiano Rossi at AC Milan.

Bad news for Bosnich

BIRMINGHAM, England, Dec 19: Aston Villa's English Premiership title hopes suffered a major setback Friday when it was announced that Australian goalkeeper Mark Bosnich faces surgery and another two months on the sidelines, reports AFP.

Bosnich is to have surgery next week on the shoulder ligament injury which has kept him out of action since early October.

Villa manager John Gregory said he is to step up his search to bring in an experienced keeper to supplement current number Michael Oakes.

Gregory said "Mark will have surgery in the next day or two as a result of seeing a specialist and he will be out for another eight weeks.

"From a purely selfish point of view I would have liked him to have done rehabilitation work for three or four weeks and then tried to start playing again."

Wilkinson says change needed

LONDON, Dec 19 (Reuters/Internet) : Howard Wilkinson, the English Football Association's technical director, said on Saturday that the departure of Graham Kelly could open a new era for the organisation.

Kelly, the FA's chief executive resigned on Tuesday following a "cash for votes" scandal which also led to a vote of no-confidence in chairman Keith Wiseman.

Wilkinson, speaking on the BBC's Grandstand programme said many people within the game felt that change was needed.

"There is an opportunity now. There is a feeling the FA needs to structure itself to deal with a changed game," said Wilkinson, who managed Leeds to the league title in 1992.

"It was formed more than 100 years ago to deal with an amateur game and did that very well but there is a feeling there is a need for change.

"They need to decide what the changes are going to be that policy they are going to follow. Then get a person in to head that up, not get involved in petty detail, and drive the whole thing forward."

Wilkinson said he did not think Kelly's departure would adversely affect England's bid to host the 2006 World Cup but that the publicity surrounding it might do so.

"I don't think in the wider context it (the bid) will be affected by it... what might be affected is... what might be a fantastic asset and I think people should get behind it and support it and then argue about how we did it, whether we followed the best course, afterwards."

Wilkinson said the mood at the F.A.'s headquarters at Lancaster Gate in London was good, despite the week's upheaval.

"People are disappointed but at end of day they get on with jobs," he said.

MU prepare to give Bryan a tough welcome back

LONDON, Dec 19 (Reuters/Internet) : Manchester United welcome their old hero Bryan Robson back to Old Trafford on Saturday hoping to beat his under-strength Middlesbrough side and knock Aston Villa off the top of the English Premier league.

United, in second place two points behind Villa despite drawing their last three league matches, have only lost once in their last 24 league games against Boro but will be without striker Dwight Yorke.

The 12.6 million pounds (21 million dollars) summer signing from Villa injured his groin in the midweek 1-1 draw with Chelsea.

But United, who face Middlesbrough again in the F.A. Cup third round at Old Trafford in two weeks time, can call on a wealth of international talent and should now pair England striker Teddy Sheringham with the ever-present Andy Cole.

Manager Alex Ferguson's other option is Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. The Norwegian marksman bagged both United's goals in their 2-2 draw with Tottenham last weekend.

While Ferguson has few selection problems, his former captain at United and now Middlesbrough boss Bryan Robson is struggling.

Influential midfielder Paul Gascoigne is suspended and fifth-placed Boro have doubts over the injured Curtis Fleming, Gianluca Festa, Brian Deane, Phils Stamp and Mark Summerbell.

Chelsea, though, also have a chance to top the table. Gianluca Vialli's men face fellow Londoners Tottenham at Stamford Bridge and the omens look good.

Chelsea have not lost since the first day of the season when they went down to Coventry, 16 matches ago. And they have not lost to Tottenham in their last 16 encounters.

Liverpool quit Helmer bid

LIVERPOOL, Dec 19 (Reuters/Internet): Liverpool have given up in their bid to sign Bayern Munich's German international defender Thomas Helmer.

Gerard Houllier decided to end his interest in the 33-year-old after the club and player failed to agree terms.

The Frenchman has also let Dynamo Kiev's Oleksandr Golovko return home after he failed to impress during a week's trial at Anfield.

A Liverpool spokesman said: "We have decided to pull out of the Helmer deal and not the other way round."

"We wanted to sign him on a six month contract with the option of another year but his advisers wanted an 18-month contract."

"We have also ended Golovko's trial period and we will not be following that one up."

But Liverpool are hoping to strike a deal with struggling Serie A side Salernitana over Cameroon international Rigobert Song, who is currently training with the Reds.

The Italian side want 3 million pounds (5.06 million dollars) for the defender but the fact he will need a work permit to play in English football could prove a sticking point.



Abu Hanif Khan (C), executive vice-president of AB Bank Limited, handing over the champions' trophy to the victorious Biman team. Biman won the AB Bank Senior Division table tennis league title defeating Armanitola JS 3-0 on Friday.

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The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Sunday 20th December (All programmes are in local time. The Daily Star will not be responsible for any change in the programme).

BTV

3:00 Opening announcement, Al-Quran, Programme summary 3:10 Recitation from the Bible 3:15 Patriotic song 3:20 Animation film: Bananas in Pajamas 3:45 Programme on Nutrition 4:00 Khabar 4:05 Methor 4:30 Open University 5:25 National TV Debate 6:05 Sopan 6:30 Khabar 6:40 Programme of Chittagong 7:05 Health programme 7:25 Mati O Manu 8:00 News in Bangla 8:30 Poriprakkhiti 8:55 Package drama serial 9:30 Film: The latest economic and financial news from across India, plus interviews with personalities from the worlds of finance and industry, presented by Raghav Bhal 12:00 BBC World News Followed by Weather 7:30 World Focus: Correspondent: In a special programme Jeremy Bowen exposes the role that political mayhem and corruption inside the Palestinian Authority has played in undermining the prospects for peace in the Middle East followed by World City Guides 8:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 8:30 Simpson's World: The BBC's world affairs editor, John Simpson, takes a personal look at global issues 9:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 9:30 Hardtalk: Tim Sebastian talks to newsmakers and personalities from across the globe 10:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 10:30 This Week: A weekly showcase for reports from the BBC's network of over 250 global correspondents 11:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 11:30 India Business Report: The latest economic and financial news from across India, plus interviews with personalities from the worlds of finance and industry, presented by Raghav Bhal 12:00 BBC World News Followed by Weather 12:30 World Living: The Net: Can the web come to the rescue of the world's heritage by providing 3D models which allow the user to fly through the landscape and view it from any angle? 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