

Indian hockey in trouble

NEW DELHI, Jan 13: Indian hockey was thrown into turmoil Tuesday when the coach, captain and five senior players of the triumphant Asian Games squad were axed for a Pakistan tour next month, reports AFP.

Skipper Dhanraj Pillay, coach Mahajit Kaushik and goalkeeper Ashish Ballal, key members of the squad which won India their first Asian gold in 32 years in Bangkok last month, were among those left out of next month's nine-match series.

The other top players ignored in a 22-man preliminary squad were veteran winger Mukesh Kumar, goalkeeper AB Subbiah and midfielders Sandeep Somesh and Sabu Varkey.

Indian Hockey Federation (IHF) president Kunwar Pratap Singh insisted the top players had been rested. The players believe they have been victimised for speaking out against the administration.

Ballal, whose spectacular saves in the penalty shoot-out of the Asian Games final against South Korea won India the gold, was furious.

"These guys are dictators," the 28-year-old Indian airlines officer said. "I don't need any rest, it's the IHF top brass which need to be rested."

Pillay, leading scorer in the Asian Games with 11 goals, wondered if his career was over. "I wanted to play in the Sydney Olympics, but I am not sure what will happen now," he said.

Kaushik, whose five-month tenure as coach was summarily ended despite the Asian victory, was replaced by his predecessor Vasudevan Bhaskaran — the man who wanted Pillay and other seniors out after the World Cup debacle in May.

Gill said the return of Bhaskaran and the omission of the top players was "coincidental." But he believed him.

Noted Indian hockey critics S Thyagarajan said the decisions were dictated by factors unrelated to form, skill or even to an analytical reasoning.

"The act is ungrateful to the set which has put Indian hockey back on the rails," he said.

Pillay and Ballal had termed the IHF officials as "worse than garbage" after the Asian Games victory, saying they did not have the interests of the players or the game at heart.

The Asian gold was India's first major triumph since winning the last of their eight Olympic titles in the Western-boycotted Moscow Games in 1980.

The Indo-Pakistani series begins on February 3 with four matches in India and five immediately after in Pakistan.

S American U-20 soccer roundup

TANDIL, Jan 13: Paraguay defeated Uruguay 2-0 Tuesday on goals by Salvador Cabanas and Paulo da Silva, and advanced to the final round of the South American U-20 soccer championship, reports AP.

Cabanas opened the scoring in the 19th minute and da Silva made it 2-0. In the 51st of a match completely dominated by the Paraguayan's superior teamwork.

Uruguay also advanced to the final round after Colombia and Bolivia played to a 2-2 draw.

Gustavo Victoria and Cristian Gil scored for Colombia. An own goal by Fabian Vargas narrowed the breach and Ronald Garcia scored the equalizer.

Paraguay and Brazil, who also advanced to the final round, head Group B with 7 points, followed by Uruguay with 6, Colombia and Bolivia 1.

In Group A action Wednesday, Argentina, the only team which won its first three first-round games, will face Chile, and Ecuador will play Peru.

Argentina, with 9 points, advanced to the second round. Chile have 6 points, Peru 3, Venezuela and Bolivia 0.

The three top teams of each group will play a round robin final round for four berths in the world youth championship scheduled for April in Nigeria.

Trapattoni plans return to the Bundesliga

BONN, Jan 13 (Reuters/Internet): Fiorentina coach Giovanni Trapattoni has said he would be prepared to work again in Germany despite his unhappy experience with Bayern Munich.

"If a club believes that Trapattoni can train a German team, I'll come back," the Italian said in an interview with German weekly Sport Bild released on Wednesday.

During his two spells at Bayern, Trapattoni struggled to communicate in German and had difficulty keeping his stars under control.

He left Bayern last summer for Fiorentina, who have spent most of the season top of the Italian league before being overtaken by Parma last weekend.

"Enough, I'm going back to Italy, to my world," he said at the time.

Trapattoni first coached Bayern in the 1994-1995 season. He led them again last season, hitting the headlines with a comical outburst in broken German last March.

Gesticulating wildly at a press conference, the Italian blasted his players, saying he was tired of defending them after poor performances.

Two months later, he was gone. Few imagined then that he would ever want to return to Germany.



Brigadier Saeed Rafi (C), special envoy of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), talking with Delhi Cricket Board (DCB) president Ram Babu Gupta (L) during a visit to the Ferozeshah Kotla ground in Delhi yesterday.

— AFP photo

India confirms the swap



NEW DELHI, Jan 13 (Reuters/Internet): Indian cricket authorities said on Wednesday they had decided to switch the venues of the first two Test matches during Pakistan's upcoming tour, hit by threats of disruption by Hindu rightwing activists.

They decided late on Tuesday that an earlier media report had said on Monday, the reports of the Delhi and Madras Tests of the two-Test series would be swapped.

The first Test will now take place in Madras from January 28 and the second in Delhi from February 4, J.Y. Lele, honorary secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), said.

He said there were no changes in the rest of the tour schedule or in the dates of the two Tests.

Cricket officials said the change of venues was done to ensure adequate security in Delhi, as the original dates for the first Test clashed with a

busy period in the Indian capital.

India observes its Republic Day on January 26 and the anniversary of the assassination of independence leader Mahatma Gandhi on January 30.

The opening Test will be the first for Pakistan on Indian soil in more than a decade.

They have played one-day matches in tournaments during the long interval, but no Test.

BUET cricket, hockey camps

In preparation for National and Inter-varsity cricket, BUET will start its camp from January 25. Interested students

have been asked to report with kits on that day at 3 pm, says a press release.

Also, to participate in the Inter-university hockey championship in the second week of February, the hockey camp will commence from January 25. Players should report in proper kits on that day at 3 pm.

The tourists, whose visit starts on January 23 with a three-day match, are also

scheduled to play a third Test in Calcutta, which would be treated as the first match of an Asian Test championship that involves Sri Lanka as the third team.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Cricket Board official Brigadier Saeed Rafi has been inspecting security arrangements in India and his report to Pakistan's authorities is expected to determine the fate of the tour, over which there still hangs a question mark.

Hindu right-wing Shiv Sena

activists vandalised the Delhi Test pitch last week. The party says India must not play sports or enjoy cultural ties with their neighbour while their soldiers were dying in border skirmishes with Pakistan.

Pakistani tours to India have been called off in the past decade after threats by Shiv Sena. In 1991, the party's workers dug up a pitch in Bombay to sabotage a tour.

Big guns stall Spanish bourse



MADRID, Jan 13 (Reuters/Internet): Star names from Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, South America and even Spain have been touted as targets for Real Madrid and Barcelona ahead of Friday's Spanish soccer deadline for new signings.

But in typical fashion not a single deal had been confirmed by Wednesday and both clubs are likely to wait until the eleventh hour before getting round to completing the paperwork.

Barcelona's on-off bid to bring Dutch international Crvena Zvezda (Red Star) Belgrade midfielder Perica

Ognjenovic finally seems set to complete a move that had been in danger of falling through because of a break in a "chain of foreigners" at the club.

Real, who were strongly linked earlier in the season with a move for Liverpool's

Steve McManaman, settled instead on Ognjenovic only to realise that they had no more room in their squad for a non-European Union player.

Curiously, the club appeared ready to sell Croatian international Davor Suker -- capable of winning the golden boot in France '98 but not a place in the Real first team -- before a proposed move to Panathinaikos fell through.

Coach Guus Hiddink then tried to persuade Cameroon youngster Samuel Eto'o to go on to second division Malaga.

Eto'o refused to leave -- despite the fact he had never once made the starting line-up under Hiddink -- but now appears to have been persuaded into joining first division Espanyol until the end of the season.

That, in theory, leaves the way clear for Ognjenovic to sign, with an announcement from Real expected on Wednesday or Thursday.

Atletico Madrid have been relatively quiet on the transfer front, which may have something to do with the fact that their president is currently being held by police on fraud charges.

Argentine midfieler Santiago Solari who is a cousin of Real Madrid star Fernando Redondo.

Kaiser fancies SA's chances



CANNES, France, Jan 13: Franz Beckenbauer hinted on Tuesday that South Africa was still leading the race to stage the 2006 World Cup finals despite mounting opposition from England and Germany, reports Reuters.

The next logical step, after Asia, is for the World Cup to go to Africa," said Beckenbauer. "The question is, is Africa ready?"

Beckenbauer, president of Germany's campaign team, is in Cannes at the Football Expo world trade fair to promote his country's 2006 bid.

The Germans, English and South Africans have all taken prominent space at the conference in order to seek early support ahead of the crucial vote in 14 months' time.

Beckenbauer said the so-called "gentleman's agreement" brokered by UEFA, the European governing body, to support the German 2006 World Cup bid in exchange for England hosting Euro '96 was still valid.

"We did not count on the candidature of the English," said Germany's former World Cup captain and coach. "We supported England to get the European Championship in 1996 so we expected support from them for the World Cup, we were a little disappointed."

Beckenbauer was photographed alongside Sir Bobby Charlton, his rival ambassador to the English camp. The Bayern Munich president said he and Charlton, Wembley foes 33 years ago, remained good friends despite their respective tasks in bidding for the 2006 World Cup.

Despite the gentleman's agreement, which the English FA only grudgingly acknowledge in contrast with the rest of Europe, Beckenbauer, respected throughout the game, played up

England's qualifications to stage the World Cup.

"In my opinion, England and Germany has an equal chance," he said. "We like them, can offer everything. I can't say which is the best because ultimately

it's not up to me. It's for the FIFA executive committee to decide."

The fourth major candidate, Brazil, received a strong knockout from one of its leading officials.



NO HARD FEELINGS: Germany's 2006 World Cup bidding committee chief Franz Beckenbauer (L) exchanging pleasantries with his counterpart in the England 2006 bidding committee Sir Bobby Charlton in Cannes on January 12.

— AP/UNB photo

Sport

NZ-Ind 3rd ODI today

WELLINGTON, Jan 13: New Zealand cricket coach Steve Rixon says he'll continue to promote positive running between the wickets despite a bewildering five runouts against India on Tuesday, reports AP.

New Zealand and India play the third match in the limited over series at the Basin Reserve on Thursday and the running will be the centre of attention for what is expected to a capacity crowd of 12,500.

Rixon said running had been the main point of discussion at Wednesday's training session but there was never a question of settling for a more conservative approach.

The issue needed to be addressed because it was diabolical in Napier," Rixon said. "But so often our running has been so good, so one bad day is not anything to panic about."

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming rejoined the side in Wellington on Wednesday after having an ultrasound scan on his troublesome groin in Christchurch on Tuesday.

The Tests revealed a slight tear and Fleming will not play Thursday but is a likely starter in Auckland on Saturday.

Dion Nash will captain the side again.

India are expected to retain the same playing XI and captain Mohammad Azharuddin believes the two-wicket win in Napier was the perfect springboard for his team to start performing.

TEAMS

NEW ZEALAND: Dion Nash (captain), Matthew Horne, Bryan Young, Craig McMillan, Roger Twose, Chris Cairns, Adam Parore, Chris Harris, Daniel Vettori, Gavin Larsen, Simon Dool, Chris Dunn (one to be omitted).

INDIA: Mohammad Azharuddin (captain), Sachin Tendulkar, Saurav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, Ajay Jadeja, Robin Singh, Nayan Mongia, Jayasri Srinath, Anil Kumble, Nikhil Chopra, Venkatesh Prasad, Harishkesh Kanitkar (two to be omitted).

UMPIRES: Dave Quested, Evan Watkin.

THIRD UMPIRE: Steve Dunne.

Huge profit from France '98

PARIS, Jan 13: The World Cup made a provisional profit before tax of 505 million French francs (88.8 million dollars). French organising committee president (CFO) Michel Platini said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Revenue had been 2.9 billion French francs (510 million dollars) which Platini described as "very satisfying."

He felt the profits should go to the 10 host cities with some of the money used to build sports grounds in the suburbs.

But French federation chairman Claude Simonet argued the profits should be handed over to the federation and kept within football.

"All the benefits came from soccer matches and must be returned to soccer," he said. "The federation has appointed a committee to work out a plan to improve soccer's situation."

Despite the controversy, Platini said the CFO had achieved their aim. "The stadiums were full for all the 64 games of the World Cup finals and that was what we have worked for," he said.

Atletico Madrid have been

relatively quiet on the transfer front, which may have something to do with the fact that their president is currently being held by police on fraud charges.

Real Madrid's president, instead on Ognjenovic only to realise that they had no more room in their squad for a non-European Union player.

Argentine midfieler Santiago Solari who is a cousin of Real Madrid star Fernando Redondo.

At the end of the day, the

Spanish bourse has been

stalled by the lack of a deal between the two clubs.

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