

Ijaz's call to teammates, supporters



KARACHI, July 29: Barred Pakistani cricket star Ijaz Ahmed Wednesday called on teammates and fans to support the players accused of match-fixing and bribery, reports AFP. "We need the support of teammates and fans all around the world because we have done nothing wrong," Ijaz told the news agency.

The star batsman met the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board's ad hoc committee, Mujibur Rehman, on Wednesday at the board's headquarter in Lahore.

"I have told my viewpoint that I have never been involved in anything that could bring a bad name to the country and will appear before the Accountability Bureau on Thursday," Ijaz said.

Ijaz alongwith captain Wasim Akram and batsman Salim Malik has been suspended from the national team by the Pakistani anti-corruption bureau over match-fixing charges.

Ijaz put the list of my assets before the judicial commission and was cleared. This new scenario is hard to understand," Ijaz said, referring to an inquiry being conducted by Lahore High Court judge Malik Mohammad Quayum since last year.

The trio was implicated in match-fixing and betting in an interim report of a committee of the cricket board in September.

Sources said Ijaz's meeting with the chairman of the ad hoc committee lasted just 10 minutes.

The chairman of ad hoc committee sounded very supportive and told me that he liked my batting but said charges would have to be cleared before the bureau," Ijaz said.

Twelve players, including vice-captain Moin Khan and Malik met Rehman on Monday.

Captain Wasim Akram dashed from England and met Rehman and Accountability Bureau chief, Senator Saif-ur-Rehman, on Tuesday.

Pakistan's anti-corruption bureau Wednesday said its investigators would begin interrogating the three players.

"I have a clear conscience and will put before the bureau all my assets. I have always paid taxes," Ijaz said.

Ijaz said he was suffering from high blood pressure after news of suspension.

"I was in Dubai where I got the news which was shocking. What wrong have I done? It is very discouraging," Ijaz said.

Keegan hints at Gascoigne return

LONDON, July 29: England manager Kevin Keegan is considering recalling Paul Gascoigne to his squad if the troubled Middlesbrough midfielder proves his fitness early in the new season, reports Reuters.

Gascoigne has battled alcoholism and depression since he was sent home before last year's World Cup in France by Keegan's predecessor Glenn Hoddle.

"Gascoigne is in my thoughts," Keegan told a news conference on Tuesday.

"He is one of a number of players who can do things that change a game. But I think it is important for him that he will last 90 minutes so I want to see him first hand myself."

"I would like to wait a week or two in the season and have a look at him."

Keegan will name his squad next month for crucial European championship qualifying matches against Luxembourg and Poland.

Rapid coach's initiative

BUCHAREST, July 29: Rapid Bucharest's coach said today he was willing to pay personal for drug tests on teammates of Stefan Vrabioru of Astra Ploiesti who died in suspicious circumstances on the pitch last week, reports Reuters.

"I'm ready to pay 500 dollars from my own pocket for each Astra player to undergo a drugs check," Mircea Licescu, former coach of Internazionale Milan, told Reuters.

"This is not an attempt to prove my club's innocence but rather to avoid the recurrence of such a tragic event."

Astra Ploiesti officials issued a statement agreeing to Licescu's proposal, but said they were prepared to pay for similar tests on Rapid players.

Vrabioru, 23, collapsed minutes after making his first division debut away to champions Rapid and died on his way to hospital.

An initial autopsy was inconclusive but forensic experts said they would be conducting further tests for drugs or a viral infection.

Mircea Sandu, soccer federation president, has ordered the country's League of Professional Clubs to set up a commission to investigate alongside a police criminal enquiry.

But he made clear there was no money in his budget to pay for systematic drugs tests.

The Romanian Soccer Federation is saddened by the death of a young player and we stand alongside Astra and his family," Sandu said in a statement.

Meanwhile, medical officials have been asking why Rapid's board provided only a badly equipped ambulance at the ground, when supplying a proper vehicle would have cost the equivalent of only \$25.

Kiwis whack Derbyshire



DERBY, England, July 29: New Zealand, buoyed by their nine-wicket win over England in the second Test, cruised to a 130 run victory over a weakened Derbyshire side here on Wednesday in a 50-over match, reports AFP.

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Captain Stephen Fleming and Chris Harris failed to cash in, but McMillan and Nathan Astle ruthlessly demolished some very moderate bowling.

They hammered seven sixes between them, and Roger Twose briefly joined in the slaughter as 91 runs came from the last five overs.

McMillan hit four sixes and five fours, while Astle struck three sixes in his unbeaten 34 which came from only 13 deliveries.

Derbyshire's supporters voiced their displeasure during the interval at the one-sided nature of the game, and their mood was not improved when Matthew Cassar was bowled for a duck in the second over.

But Rollins, who pulled the third ball of the innings for six, provided some respectability by batting through the 50 overs to finish with 111 from 159 balls.

Pick of the New Zealand attack were McMillan and Twose, who both picked up two wickets.

Stephen Titchard shared the only substantial stand of the innings with Rollins (75 for the fifth wicket).

SCOREBOARD
NEW ZEALAND
M Horne st Griffiths 73
M Bell st Griffiths b Eagleton 70
S Fleming c Spendlove 23
b Lacey 10
C McMillan b Blackwell 86
C Harris c Spendlove

Result: New Zealand won by 130 runs.
Toss: Derbyshire.

Blewett blows Lances out



LONDON, July 29 (AFP/Reuters): Yorkshire saw off Roses rivals Lancashire on Wednesday to book a NatWest Trophy semifinal showdown with Gloucestershire while County Championship leaders Surrey will face Somerset in the other last four match.

Yorkshire looked on their way out at Old Trafford despite making 263-7 in their 50 overs, which was founded on a fourth wicket partnership of 111 between captain David Byas (72) and Anthony McGrath (60).

England outcasts Mike Atherton and Neil Fairbrother looked to be steering Lancashire towards the target but with the score on 164-2 Yorkshire's Australian star Greg Blewett turned the tie around. After Chris Silverwood had bowled Fairbrother for 54 to put an end to the partnership, Blewett knocked over the former England captain's off-stump with the next delivery. Atherton made 61.

The Australian all-rounder, who lost out on the man-of-the-match award to Yorkshire's former England all-rounder Craig White, weighed in with figures of 4-18 as well as running out Warren Hegg.

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Gloucestershire's progress was imperious. Tim Hancock, with 90, and former England Test batsman Kim Barnett with 68 laid the foundations as they accumulated 274-6 before dismissing Glamorgan for 138 - a victory margin of 136 runs.

Piran Holloway was the hero of Somerset's quarterfinal vic-

tory over Kent at Taunton. Holloway's unbeaten 75 from 92 balls saw the Cidermen overhaul Kent's 264-6 to secure a six-wicket victory and stay on course for a first Lord's final in 16 years.

He was supported well by Australian skipper Jamie Cox, who pipped him to the man-of-the-match award.

Surrey stayed on course for the County Championship and Trophy double with a comfortable win against Northamptonshire at Northampton with Pakistan spinner Saqlain Mushtaq proving the key figure.

Set only 153, they reached their target for the loss of just three wickets.

Ian Ward and Alec Stewart put on 62 for the second wicket before England A all-rounder Graeme Swann gave Northants some hope with two wickets in two overs. But Graham Thorpe (42 not out) and Ally Brown (39 not out) then saw the visitors safely home.

Earlier, Saqlain's figures of 4-28 helped skittle out Northants for 152.

LAST FOUR DRAW

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Somerset v Surrey

On August 14 at Taunton

2ND SEMIFINAL

Gloucestershire v Yorkshire

On August 15 at Bristol

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