

Atherton warns of England gamble

LONDON, July 30 (Internet report): Michael Atherton has hinted England would be taking a major gamble if they handed him a third Test recall as he admitted he is yet to make a complete recovery from his long-standing back problem.

Atherton has been tipped not only for a return but also to captain the side if Nasser Hussain fails to recover from the fractured middle finger he sustained during the nine-wicket second Test defeat by New Zealand at Lord's.

Despite scoring a career-best 268no against Glamorgan a fortnight ago and an unbeaten 95 in Lancashire's National League victory over Hampshire, he admits he will need plenty more cricket before both he and the specialists are convinced his rehabilitation is complete.

"I was told by the chairman of selectors that I would have to play a lot of cricket and to have no reaction to my back problems before they would consider me again -- I thought that was fair enough," said Atherton.

"I've not heard anything different from him and at the moment I have only played two or three matches. But I have not suffered any reaction so far and I feel good about my form."

After making his comeback against Surrey at The Oval in June, Atherton was forced on to the sidelines again for a fortnight with a slight recurrence before making his return against Sri Lanka A.

But his recent form -- and his freedom of movement -- has convinced the former England captain he may be finally on the road to a complete recovery, having missed both the World Cup and the final Ashes Test at Sydney because of the complaint.

Atherton said: "All I've been concerned with is going out into the middle and batting without any fitness problems -- it's just nice to play again without the pain and the possibility of going into spasm that the pain brings."

"We seem to have found the root of the problem -- basically it was an inflamed disc -- and hopefully I can go on from here enjoying my cricket."

"But there is a long way to go before I am absolutely sure of being free of injury problems. I'm fine at the moment, and that is all I can go on. I feel 100 per cent."

Australia's tour of Lanka on

SYDNEY, July 30: The Australian Cricket Board has no plans to cancel the upcoming tour of Sri Lanka despite a bomb blast in Colombo which killed one of the country's politicians on Thursday, reports AFP.

During the 1996 World Cup, Australian cricketers refused to play in Sri Lanka because of security fears after 100 people were killed when a bank building in Colombo was blown up.

The rebel Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) were responsible for that attack and have also been blamed for Thursday's suicide blast, in which moderate Tamil politician Neelan Thiruchelvam was killed.

However, ACB chief executive Malcolm Speed said he had been in contact with the Australian High Commission in Colombo and his counterparts on the Sri Lankan board and the tour, scheduled to begin next month, will go ahead.

Their advice is that we proceed subject to the usual security precautions," Speed told.

"The current situation is quite different from the previous one and the advice we've had from the High Commission is the tour should go ahead."

Speed said the players selected for the tour were not concerned by the news of the bomb blast and accepted it as "part and parcel" of being a professional cricketer.

Australia's tour of Sri Lanka begins on August 22 with a triangular one-day tournament also involving India. The Australians will also play three test matches there in September and early October.

Miller ponders Victoria return

MELBOURNE, July 30: Australian cricket's versatile international bowler Colin Miller is considering a surprise return to play Sheffield Shield with Victoria where his career began, reports AFP.

Miller, who has been a revelation at Test level since breaking into the Australian team on the Pakistan tour last year, wants to return to Victoria where he began his first-class career in 1985 from Tasmania.

Victorian cricket operations manager Shaun Graf said Friday the Victorian Cricket Association had offered 34-year-old Miller the chance to play for the state after learning of his desire to return to Melbourne.

"We know he is definitely buying a house here but whether he returns this year or after that we're not sure," Graf said.

"But we have spoken to him and we are hoping for a decision from him soon."

Miller began his career in Victoria at the same district club as Merv Hughes and Tony Dodemaide but left for South Australia due to lack of opportunities.

After four years in Adelaide he joined Tasmania for the 1992-93 season and was a consistent contributor with his seamers.

But his decision to take up off-spin as well transformed his career and in the 1997-98 season he broke the Sheffield Shield record for most wickets in a season as he constantly switched between seam and spin bowling.

Cloud over Akram's career

KARACHI, July 30: Pakistan cricket captain Wasim Akram will remain excluded from the national team until he can prove his innocence of match-fixing charges, reports AFP.

Pakistan's new cricket boss said on Thursday there was no timeframe for how long Wasim, Salim Malik and Ijaz Ahmed would be kept out of the team or for how long the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) would be suspended.

"It would be done when everything is sorted out" said Mujibur Rehman.

Rehman was appointed as the head of an ad hoc committee of the PCB after the board was suspended two weeks ago by President Rafiq Tarrar in the wake of Pakistan's humiliating World Cup final defeat to Australia. Tarrar is the patron of the PCB.

Akram, Pakistan's captain in the World Cup, former captain Malik and Ijaz were last Sunday barred from selection until the completion of a judicial probe into allegations of match-fixing. Rehman said that ban stood even though the

three, who deny the charges, have not been found guilty.

"I don't want any controversies on the team, so I told them 'until you are released or relaxed by the court I won't be

reached by the court I won't be