

## Multi-nation OK, but no bilateral

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistan's presence will not hinder India's participation in major cricket events like the World Cup, Sports Minister Uma Bharti said on Wednesday.

But she ruled out a resumption of bilateral cricket ties with Pakistan, saying "national pride and sentiments get involved" when the two teams confront each other, the Press Trust of India reported.

Bharti confirmed that India would take part in the International Cricket Council's Champions Trophy in Sri Lanka in September and the World Cup in South Africa early next year.

Doubts over India taking part in the two tournaments were voiced by an Indian newspaper earlier this month.

"If Uma Bharti has her way, India and Pakistan may never play cricket again -- anywhere, anytime and in any tournament," the Today newspaper said on May 16.

It quoted the hardline sports minister as saying: "When they (Pakistan) are playing with blood, how can we play cricket with them? The nation will not accept this."

The two cricket-mad neighbours last met on a cricket field in May 2000, just before the Indian government put a blanket ban on games against Pakistan.

India are scheduled to play a league match against Pakistan in the World Cup in February-March next year.

The two countries have, however, been drawn in separate groups in the Champions Trophy, but will have to face each other if they make the final.

War clouds hang over India and Pakistan as about a million troops are ranged on the border following increased tensions over the disputed Kashmir region.

Both countries, however, played each other in the 1999 World Cup in England even when the Kargil conflict was at its height in Kashmir.

## Inspired by Irani

AFP, London

Essex captain Ronnie Irani took three wickets to put his side into a potential match-winning position Tuesday against Derbyshire on the third day of this Division Two county championship match at Chelmsford.

Derbyshire finished a rain-affected day on 73 for five after their bowlers had dismissed Essex for 168 - Derbyshire still 10 runs behind on firstinnings.

After tea former England all-rounder Irani, a medium-pace bowler, had Dominic Hewson caught at third slip for nine.

He then had Christopher Bassano lbw for the same score.

But there was better to come, Irani claiming the prize wicket of Australian batsman Michael Di Venuto (41), caught behind by Zimbabwe wicketkeeper Andy Flower.

Essex will be without opening batsman Richard Clinton on Wednesday's final day.

He has a fractured right wrist and is expected to be out for at least six weeks.

## Costly error

REUTERS, Paris

Beaten by virtually unknown Hungarian Aniko Karplos in the first round of the French Open, sick Belgian Justine Henin said it had been a mistake for her to play.

"I made a mistake. I should not have played," fifth seed Henin, a semi-finalist in Paris last year, said.

Wimbledon finalist Henin was beaten 4-6, 6-1, 6-0 in a match twice halted by rain showers.

"I wanted to fight to the bitter end," she said.

"But physically I was just unable to play that match."

"I had fever and I couldn't breathe and I could not move as I usually do. It's sad and frustrating."

Henin was among the favourites to win the clay-court Grand Slam event after winning in Berlin and reaching the final in Rome earlier this month.

But she said she had felt sick for the last couple of days and had to be treated by a doctor.

"Maybe it's a fit of bronchitis like I had in Hamburg three weeks ago. I don't know, I felt down and without strength."

## Scud almost blew it

REUTERS, Paris

Australia's Mark Philpoussis said an ill-advised decision to go snowboarding had made his chronic knee injury even worse.

Philpoussis, who has had a knee problem for the past two years and has undergone three operations, decided to go snowboarding while on holiday in Whistler, Canada, in February.

"I hurt my knee a little again, which is completely my fault. It was really stupid," he said after coming back from two sets down to beat French qualifier Julien Varlet 1-6, 6-7, 6-4, 7-6, 6-3 in the first round of the French Open.

"That's where the immaturity comes in, I'm just a big kid. There was no fall or anything but after I finished my snowboarding session my knee felt a little sore."

## Camp for SL tour soon

About 37 cricketers to be called up

**SPORTS REPORTER**

The selectors are likely to call about 37 cricketers in the primary camp for the national squad that is to tour Sri Lanka in July.

Chief selector Mainul Haq along with his two other colleagues had a meeting with new coach Mohsin Kamal and captain Khaled Mashud at the BCB's (Bangladesh Cricket Board's) management office in Gulshan yesterday to finalise the preliminary selection.

"Yes, we had a meeting today. But I can not tell you yet who is going to be selected or not. We would make an official announcement within next couple of days," said Mainul Haq to The Daily Star.

Mainul however revealed that

they have bracketed around 37 players to give the Pakistani coach Phiso (John Gloster) tomorrow," said Kamal to this correspondent yesterday. He also added that Gloster would reach Dhaka by late in the Wednesday night.

He said that after having some initial sessions in the capital he would move his camp to the BKSP for intensive training.

"The programme of the camp would also be finalised on arrival of Gloster," added the former Pakistan Test cricketer.

Bangladesh will play in two Test matches and three one-day internationals during their tour of Sri Lanka from July 9 to August 8.

Bangladesh will also play two three-day practice matches against two different selections of Sri Lanka.



PHOTO: STAR  
Action from yesterday's Green Delta Premier Division Hockey League encounter between Abahani Krira Chakra and Dhaka Railway at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium.

## Murali mystery

**Cricket**

AFP, London

Sri Lanka have kept everyone guessing over Muttiah Muralitharan's participation in the Second Test against England which starts at Edgbaston on Thursday.

Coach Darrin Whatmore said the tourists would take a "calculated decision" on the off-spinner's fitness

before deciding whether to select him for the second match of this three-Test series.

"It's a balanced view taking into consideration batting and fielding.

"We would not have been able to consider it a few weeks ago, now we have the option of playing him depending on the next 40-odd hours.

"He is not 100 per cent but there is a chance. If he does play we will need to know what his limitations are."

Even during his spell on the sidelines Muralitharan, whose unorthodox action has been an enduring source of controversy, has been under the spotlight.

Australia wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist was recently disciplined by his home board for suggesting Murali was a "chucker" but has since apologised to the bowler via a telephone call.

Ironically, Muralitharan's inclusion would help keep the lid on a straining with the tourists' attack.

In his last Test appearance in England four years ago he took 16 wickets at The Oval as Sri Lanka comfortably won the one-off Test.

But England's batsmen had better success against him during

paceman who is nevertheless eligible for Edgbaston.

"We need to get into a situation where we can do without the hassle of people questioning his (Perera's) action," said Whatmore.

"We want to ensure his re-entry into international cricket as soon as possible.

"He is a pretty bouncy character, a likeable character and a hard worker. His behaviour has been fantastic and we are helping him as much as possible."

England too have bowling problems, albeit of a different sort.

On a flat-wicket at Lord's their four-man pace attack lacked the skill to disturb Sri Lanka's strokeplay as they piled up 555 for eight declared.

Hussain berated his bowlers for their lack of discipline and also said there was a lack of "mystery" among English bowlers as a whole.

England have chosen uncapped Glamorgan quick Simon Jones or Alex Tudor who is most likely to provide an injection of extra pace into the final XI.

Dominic Cork is reportedly still struggling with a groin strain and Tudor, whose own injury problems appear to have been successfully treated at last following diagnosis of a "hot-spot" near his groin, appears to be the obvious replacement.

"He has a good chance of playing here and it's up to Alex really, said Hussain.

"Anyone who can take two five-wicket hauls in eight Test matches and against Australia can bowl and it's up to him to perform to those levels on a regular basis."

## Warne's belief

**Cricket**

REUTERS/AFP, Melbourne

Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan's bowling action will continue to create controversy with cricket fans, said Australia's Shane Warne.

"The fact with Muralitharan, I think his action will always create speculation with people, just the Joe Public saying 'does he or doesn't he?'" Warne told reporters.

"The ICC (the International Cricket Council) have cleared him to say he can play international cricket, that should be good enough for the players."

"Is he legal, yes ... so you just get on with it."

Australia vice-captain Adam Gilchrist was reprimanded by the Australian Cricket Board (ACB) on Monday after suggesting Muralitharan's bowling action was suspect.

Speaking at a football club function on Sunday, Gilchrist said he believed Sri Lanka's top wicket-taker was a chucker.

Warne, 32, is the second-leading wicket-taker in test cricket history

with 450 wickets in 101 matches, trailing retired West Indies pace bowler Courtney Walsh on 519.

Muralitharan, 30, with 412 from 73 tests, is widely expected to overhaul both of them in the next few years.

The world's top-ranked bowler, Muralitharan, has been called for throwing in Australia but the ICC has since cleared his action.

"I don't want to get involved in whether Gilly is right or wrong," Warne said.

"It's a matter between the ACB and Gilly and I'm sure they'll sort it out."

Warne was promoting next month's three-match one-day series between Australia and Pakistan, to be played in Melbourne (indoors) and Brisbane.

Australia's tour of Pakistan, scheduled for September and October, remains in doubt because of security fears.

Warne said he was concerned with events in Pakistan but happy that the ACB had already stated player safety was the priority.

"A lot of us have got families and that is one of the considerations obviously for us," he said.

"We've got full confidence in the board and I'm sure they'll use common sense, which they have done in the past."

"It's three or four months away, things can change. We'll just have to wait and see."

Several other senior players,

including former Indian skipper Bishen Bedi, have queried the legality of his action too.

SHANE WARNE

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## Green Delta hockey Abahani rout Railway

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Abahani Krira Chakra defeated Dhaka Railway 6-1 in a Green Delta Premier Division Hockey League return leg clash at the Maulana Bhasani Stadium yesterday.

The winners led the first half 2-0.

Winger Ramijuddin struck thrice while Shamim scored two goals for the winners. Rajib netted the other goal for Abahani.

On the other hand, Nabi Sheikh pulled back one for Dhaka Railway.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Sporting Club blanked Farashganj Sporting Club 6-0 in the day's other match.

Anil and Zahid Biswas netted twice each while Rubel and Tito scored apiece for the winners, who led the first half 4-0.

## JVC badminton from June 3

**BSS, Dhaka**

The JVC Bangladesh Asian Satellite Badminton Championship will be held from June 3 to 7 at Shaheed Suhrawardy Indoor Stadium.

Bangladesh Badminton Federation (BBF) will organise the tournament under the supervision of Asian Badminton Confederation.

India, Iran, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives, Bhutan and hosts Bangladesh will take part in the meet.

## India don't need Laxman

**AFP, Bridgetown**

Prolific Indian middle-order batsman Venkatesh Laxman has been dropped for the third one-day international against the West Indies that started at the Kensington Oval here on Wednesday.

The 27-year-old stylish batsman was India's highest run-getter in a recent five-Test series against the West Indies, scoring 474 in eight innings with 104 half-centuries.

"It was really a tough decision to drop Laxman for one-dayers, but it was necessary for the balance of the team," India captain Sourav Ganguly said on Tuesday.

India lost the five-Test series 2-1, while the first two one-day internationals in Jamaica were rained off without a ball being bowled.

Laxman, who has scored 857 runs in 37 one-dayers with one century and six half-centuries, has been replaced with Mohammad Kaif, one of the five players to join the team after the Test series.

"I think Kaif deserves a chance as he has been batting very well in one-day matches. He's also a very good fielder," said Ganguly.

England too have bowling problems, albeit of a different sort.

On a flat-wicket at Lord's their four-man pace attack lacked the skill to disturb Sri Lanka's strokeplay as they piled up 555 for eight declared.

India sprang one more surprise, omitting specialist wicket-keeper Ajay Ratra in order to strengthen their batting.

Batting let the tourists down in the third Test at this venue early this month as they were shot out for 102 on a lively track in their first innings before losing the match by 10 wickets.

India have lost both of their one-dayers here, including a 10-wicket defeat in their last match in 1997.

"Rahul Dravid will keep wickets," said Ganguly. "I'm sure Dravid will do a good job as he has kept wickets before. It'll also give us more options."

India go into the match with seven specialist batsmen, three fast bowlers and one spinner.

"Anyone who can take two five-wicket hauls in eight Test matches and against Australia can bowl and it's up to him to perform to those levels on a regular basis."