

# Bend it like Murali

## Cricket

### AGENCIES

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday rubbished Australian media reports that it had drawn up a list of bowlers with suspect actions even as officials moved to put a lid on the controversy.

Media reports down under said the sport's governing body planned to target bowlers like Shoaib Akhtar of Pakistan, Harbhajan Singh of India and Muttiah Muralitharan and Chaminda Vaas of Sri Lanka for their bowling actions.

But ICC general manager David Richardson, a former South African wicket-keeper, said in a statement the reports were "completely untrue."

"To say that the ICC has a specific list of bowlers under scrutiny is completely untrue," said Richardson, who earlier this month chaired an expert sub-committee in Dubai on the issue of illegal deliveries.

The sub-committee was convened to look at the overall picture of the current regulations for dealing with potentially flawed bowling actions.

"It dealt with principles and processes, not personalities. It had no mandate or responsibilities to report on specific players or their bowling actions and at no stage did it do so."

"It is disappointing that this report has appeared without any attempt to discuss this issue with the ICC. One phone call prior to publication could have dealt with this."

The committee, which includes former Test stars like Sunil Gavaskar,

Aravinda de Silva, Angus Fraser and Michael Holding, recommended a new rule allowing bowlers to straighten their arms by up to 15 degrees.

If the proposed new ruling is accepted by the ICC chief executives' committee of the 10 Test-playing countries at Melbourne in February, Muralitharan will be allowed to bowl his controversial "doosra" delivery which turns the other way from his normal off-break.

Tests showed that his elbow straightened by 14 degrees, nine degrees more than the current limit for spinners, when bowling this delivery.

Muralitharan, meanwhile, was barred by his home authorities from making statements on the bowling actions of other players following a row over his reported comments on Australia's pace trio of Glenn McGrath, Jason Gillespie and Brett Lee.

The off-spinner was quoted in Australian media reports as questioning the legality of the trio's action in the wake of the ICC's assertion that research revealed that almost every bowler straightened his arm on the verge of delivery.

Muralitharan said during an interview with Melbourne's Radio Sport 927 that Gillespie, McGrath and Lee flexed their arms by 12, 13 and 14-15 degrees respectively.

At present, spinners are permitted five degrees of bend, medium pacers 7.5 and fast bowlers 10, although last week an ICC committee recommended all bowlers be allowed to straighten their arms by up to 15 degrees.

"I think they're (Aussie bowlers) probably a little bit disappointed with the reactions," he added.

Australian players association boss Tim May also went into bat for the Australian quicks.

May, who has seen ultra slow-motion footage and data of the vast majority of international bowlers' actions, indicated Muralitharan's claims bordered on defamatory.

"Sticks and stones kind of stuff from Murali in the papers is not going to get him any favours in world cricket," May said.

"I think they're Aussies bowlers probably a little bit disappointed with the reactions," he added.

"Our bowlers will be disappointed

and rightly so.

"On one of those bowlers, I won't mention his name, I'm unaware of any footage of his bowing action at all."

"Murali is a contracted player of the SLC and we have told him not to make statements without our approval," Illangakoon said.

Muralitharan, who has been sent a letter by the board, has said his comments were misrepresented. "I never called anyone a chucker," Muralitharan told the Sydney Morning Herald.

"All I said is that if you are accusing me of going over the level of tolerance, you have to look at your own bowlers too," he said.

Muralitharan's remarks, however, were like waving a red flag before a bull.

Australian opening batsman Matthew Hayden sprang to the defence of his team-mates, claiming the controversial off-spinner's remarks bordered on defamatory.

"There's a lot of emotion out there about it and I've watched with interest the various characters who've popped their heads up but I would like some more information to understand what exactly they (ICC) have in store and what exactly what they are looking for."

Fleming said elite players or Test captains should be able to view the evidence that has led to the sub-committee making its recommendation.

"It shouldn't be secretive," he said.

"What we have to be careful of is the knee-jerk reactions when a statement comes out and we get this emotive type reporting that starts throwing players names up without basis."

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