

Accolades rain on him

AFP, Bangalore

Friends and rivals have joined hands to pay rich tribute to Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq, set to make his 100th Test appearance in the third and final match against India here on Thursday.

"I congratulate you on this occasion," former Pakistani batsman Zaheer Abbas said in a message to Inzamam on Wednesday.

"You are a world-class player and I pray you score a century in your 100th Test and help your team level the series."

India captain Sourav Ganguly said Inzamam's record in international cricket had proved he is a great batsman.

"Getting more than 10,000 runs in one-day cricket and over 7,000 in Tests proves he is a world-class batsman," Ganguly said.

Former batting great Javed Miandad holds Pakistan's record for

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Inzy's 100th & Bangalore Test begins today

AFP, Bangalore



secure a series-levelling victory in the third and final Test against India starting here on Thursday.

Inzamam finds himself under intense scrutiny ahead of his 100th Test with Pakistan trailing 1-0 following the 195-run defeat in the second match at Kolkata on Sunday. The opening Test at Mohali ended in a draw.

"Yes, it is a crucial match for us in a big series and we will try to win it," he said on Wednesday. "We will

have to play positive and aggressive cricket to square the series.

"But I do not think my job is on the line. People always say such things whenever we lose. I am not worried about this."

Inzamam, 35, continued as captain even after Pakistan lost both the Test and one-day series against India at home last year.

Inzamam said he expected his teammates to raise the level of their performance in his "special match".

"The 100th Test is always special but I will be happier if we win. I never thought I would play 100 matches when I started my career," he said. "It has not been an easy journey."

Inzamam wants an improved show from his batsmen, especially against leg-spinner Anil Kumble

who led India to victory with a 10-wicket match-haul in the Kolkata Test.

"The row over Harbhajan Singh's bowling action may help us a bit. He is a good bowler, but don't forget it was Kumble who did the damage in the previous match," the Pakistan captain said.

Off-spinner Harbhajan is eligible to play even after being reported for a suspect action by English match-referee Chris Broad after the second Test.

India captain Sourav Ganguly, meanwhile, is also under pressure but for different reasons.

Ganguly is struggling as a batsman, having scored just 45 in his last three innings against the tourists.

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'No negative game plan'

PTI, Bangalore

Already one-up in the series, India would not play a negative game to draw the third and final Test against Pakistan commencing here today, skipper Sourav Ganguly said on Wednesday.

"Obviously, we will try to win this game. I don't think we need to go with the mindset that win (in the second Test at Kolkata) was enough. We will try and play the way we played in the last two matches," he said at a pre-match press conference.

Ganguly described the wicket at Chinnaswamy Stadium as good and said it would help spinners.

Asked if he was "surprised" by a below par performance by Pakistani bowlers, he said he did not want to talk about the visiting side at this stage and probably make comments after the series.

"Anything can happen. They have talented players," he said.

'We'll go all out to win'

PTI, Bangalore

Describing the third and final Test against India as a "do-or-die" affair, Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq on Wednesday said his side would adopt an aggressive approach and would go all out for a win.

Trailing the series 0-1, after their loss at Kolkata, Pakistan need to win the match, beginning tomorrow, to avoid their first series loss in India in 25 years.

"It's a do-or-die battle for us. We have no other option. We will go all out for win," he said.

Pointing out that the toss would play an important role in the match, Inzamam also hinted that he would make at least two changes to the side which lost at Kolkata.

Pakistan plan two changes, bringing in opener Yasir Hameed and off-spinner Arshad Khan in place of out-of-form batsman Taufeeq Umar and paceman Mohammad Khalil.



PHOTO: STAR

Fakirerpool's Mamun Mia (L) tries to block an attempted volley by Brothers Union's Moroccan recruit Adil during their Independence Day Gold Cup football tournament clash at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Big boys thru' to semis



SPORTS REPORTER

Brothers Union and Abahani reached the semifinals of the Independence Day Gold Cup winning their respective matches at the rain-soaked Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Moroccan forward Adil, who replaced his compatriot Hicham Inani in Brothers' starting line-up, made an instant impact on his Dhaka debut by scoring on either side of the break as the men on orange emerged Group B champions with a comfortable 3-0 thrashing of Youngmen's Club Fakirerpool. They will take on Mohammedan Sporting Club in the second semi-

nal on March 28.

Abahani on the otherhand, were in a must-win situation to avoid the embarrassment of a premature exit from the tournament. They kept their supporters on the edge throughout the match against Farashganj Sporting Club before scrapping through with 1-0 win with Zahed slotting the match winner. That set the Sky Blues up for a clash against Group A champions Muktiyoddha Sangsad in the first semifinal tomorrow.

Brothers finished their group campaign with seven points while Abahani, who were thumped 4-0 by Brothers in their previous match, collected six points. Farashganj, on four points, only needed a draw to make it to the semis.

BROTHERS -

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Anil Kumble (7/63) recorded his best bowling figures in an innings at Eden Gardens, bettering his five for 62 against Australia in 1997-98. Both his five-wicket hauls at this venue have been recorded in the second innings.



Ranbir Singh Mahendra
(BCCI president)
"They have made it a joke, and what kind of joke is this?"
While reacting to Harbhajan Singh's doosra being reported once again.



DD Sports & TEN Sports

India vs Pakistan
Third Test, Day One
Live at 10:30 am

ESPN

Football Crazy
Live at 5:00 pm

Sportscentre
Live at 8:30 pm

STAR Sports

Sportline

Live at 8:00 pm

India vs Pakistan

Third Test, Day One

Highlights at 8:30 pm

Bashar signs off century round



SPORTS REPORTER

The sixth round of the Ispahani Sixth National Cricket League ended with a flourish when Bangladesh skipper Habibul Bashar hammered the ninth ton of this round on the final day yesterday.

Although Bashar's swashbuckling 141 was not enough for his side Khulna to enforce a result against Chittagong, this round of the first-class competition will be best remembered for an astonishing number of centuries being scored in the last four days.

Mohammad Ashraful hit 114, his second successive century, for Dhaka against Rajshahi at the Fatullah Stadium. Moniruzzaman of

Sylhet also achieved the same feat with 123 against Barisal at the Sylhet Stadium. National left-arm spinner and Khulna's Manzarul Islam cracked highest 151 among the centurions after Rahshahi's Naeem started it all with 110.

Chittagong might have played without their six front-line batsmen, but they saw two maiden first-class centurions in young wicketkeeper Dhiman Gosh (115) and off-spinner Sabbir Khan (103).

Sylhet also produced two unlikely centurions in Golam Mabud (114) and Rezaul Haq (107).

However, despite all these individual achievements the pattern in the race for title remained unchanged with holders Dhaka taking a 10-point lead after the matches between Khulna-Chittagong and Sylhet-Barisal ended in draws.

Dhaka, who won their game against Rajshahi on the third day, raised their tally to 30 points from six games. Chittagong, despite conceding first-innings lead against Khulna, improved their points to 20.

Rajshahi slipped to third position as they remained glued to their previous collection of 18 points.

Khulna have 16 points and Sylhet followed them with 14 while Barisal remained at the bottom of the six-team table with 10 points.

KHULNA-CHITTAGONG

Bashar hit a blazing 141 off 178 balls, his first first-class ton this season, as Khulna, resuming the day on 114-3, rattled up 355 in their second innings.

The dashing right-hander clubbed 20 fours and a six before being the last batsman out just

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Wright makes up his mind?



AFP, Bangalore

New Zealander John Wright will quit as India's first foreign cricket coach in May, sources told AFP on Wednesday, adding a search had already begun to find his successor.

The third and final Test against Pakistan starting here on Thursday will be Wright's last Test in charge of the Indian team, but he will remain on the job until the subsequent one-day series against Pakistan and Sri Lanka in April-May, the sources said.

"The process has begun to find his replacement," an official said, but declined to name any candidates.

Wright, a former New Zealand captain, had last month spoken of his intention to quit, saying he was unwilling to commit himself for another two years.

"My contract ends in May and there is always a lot of speculation about what will happen in the future," Wright told reporters on February 23 in the southern city of Hyderabad during a domestic

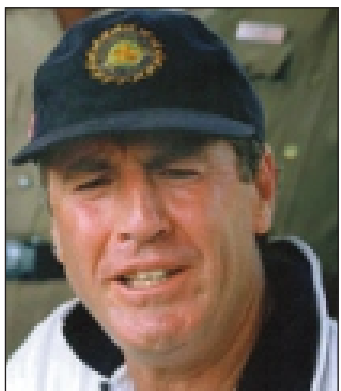
match.

"I assume the next contract will be till the 2007 World Cup (in the West Indies). I don't think I am ready to commit myself till then."

Wright on Wednesday declined to confirm his resignation, but said his "stand had not changed over the past month".

"As I have indicated before, I want to spend more time with my children back home."

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JOHN WRIGHT

Prasad retires

CRICINFO, undated

Former India seam bowler Venkatesh Prasad has announced his retirement from cricket.

Fittingly, Prasad made the announcement at the Chinnaswamy Stadium, his homeground, and spent the evening recounting his playing days in a get together with Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid and Anil Kumble on Tuesday.

Prasad, 35, played 33 Tests and 161 one-day internationals for India in a five-year career, in which he took 96 Test wickets and formed a regular opening bowling partnership with Javagal Srinath.

He made his Test debut against England at Edgbaston in 1996, where he took 4 for 71 in the first innings, including Graeme Hick for 8 -- his first Test victim.

Prasad was also a regular in the Indian one-day side and made a mark with his fast leg-cutters when the pressure was on. The moment when he tore through the rising tension and shattered Aamir Sohail's stumps, in the World Cup quarterfinal at Bangalore, will always live in the memory.

He is now a qualified coach and was put in charge of India's under-19 side in January this year. He was also mentioned as a candidate for the bowling coach of the national side.