

India pursuing Bhaji's case

PTI, New Delhi

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) was wholeheartedly backing off-spinner Harbhajan Singh who was reported for suspect action and was awaiting ICC's reply on reviewing his action, a top BCCI official said on Thursday.

"We have raised a genuine query. Harbhajan twice underwent the (review) process and we are ready that he goes through that for the third time also. But what more we have to do (for any doubts about his action to be removed)," BCCI president Ranbir Singh Mahendra told PTI here.

"The ICC is yet to get back to us," he added.

Harbhajan Singh was reported twice in three months for suspect bowling action this season. The Punjab player, who underwent corrective measures in 1998, was reported in December after the second Test against Bangladesh in Chittagong and again in March, in the second Test against Pakistan in Kolkata.

It made Harbhajan the first bowler to be reported under ICC's new regulations dealing with suspect bowling actions.

Under the revamped bowling review process, bowlers are allowed to straighten their arm upto 15 degrees while delivering.

Also, the bowler reported will be directly dealt with by the ICC and has to go through a review process within 21 days from the date of being reported. The bowler needed to receive a favourable report from a biomechanics expert so as to continue playing.

That deadline for Harbhajan is well past.

India wrap up blind cricket series 4-0

PTI, New Delhi

Spurred on by opener Ganesh Gamvit's brilliant 79, India wrapped up the Petro Cup series for blind cricketers with a seven-wicket win over world champions Pakistan in the fifth and last match here on Thursday.

India had already clinched the five-match series on Wednesday when they won the fourth game by three wickets. The third match was abandoned due to rain.

Chasing Pakistan's 294 for nine, India rode on man-of-the-match Gamvit's superb batting which saw him hit 13 boundaries as he plundered 79 off just 37 deliveries.

Subhash Boya came up with an equally flamboyant 62 off 22 balls while Rajender Verma scored 60 off 54 balls to comfortably take India to 298 for the loss of three wickets in just 27 overs.

Earlier, Tariq Samuel (51 off 36 balls), all-rounder Abbasi (39), Sultan Shah (34) and Adnan Ahmad (33) helped Pakistan to set a competitive total.

Elliott can go to Victoria

AFP, Melbourne

Former Australian Test opening batsman Matthew Elliott was Thursday cleared by a Cricket Australia tribunal to switch states and play for South Australia in next season's domestic cricket competition.

A tribunal heard telephone evidence from Elliott, who is playing English county cricket for Glamorgan, before allowing the left-hander to switch states from Victoria to South Australia for the 2005-06 season.

Victorian officials had attempted to prevent Elliott's move interstate but a three-man grievance tribunal headed by a judge upheld his appeal against Victoria's decision to deny him clearance.



PHOTO: STAR

Anjan Chowdhury Pintoo, managing director of sponsors Square Toiletries, briefs the press at the NSC conference room in connection with the Meril 27th National Table Tennis Competition on Thursday. On the left is Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation president Solaiman Chowdhury and Rafiqul Islam Tipu, the general secretary of the federation, is on the right.

Nat'l TT from today

SPORTS REPORTER

A record 53 teams will take part in the Meril 27th National Table Tennis Championships which begin today at the Shaheed Suhrawardy National Indoor Stadium in Mirpur.

This is the first time the Indoor Stadium will be used for a national TT championship instead of the NSC Woodenfloor Gymnasium.

Square Toiletries will provide 3 lakh Taka out of the estimated 4 lakh Taka budget.

About 400 paddlers from across from the country will take part in 14 events with the encouraging number of entries in the junior levels.

Defending men's singles champion Mahbub Billah, who has won four out of previous five titles, will

start as hot favourite to retain the Masud Ahmed Rumi trophy. He will also lead Bangladesh Biman's charge for team glory veteran Mosaddekul Haque Rochi, the most successful player in Bangladesh's history with 11 national titles in his career.

Biman's main rivals will be Bangladesh Ansar, featuring last year's singles runner-up Pavel Biswas Pappu and ex-national champion Nasimul Hassan Kachi.

In women's competition, Biman will struggle to hold on to their crown as Ansars -- last year's losing finalists -- will field the top three seeds in the domestic game with national champion Saleha Parveen, Sonam Sultana Soma and Farhana Parveen Tumpa.

CHAMPIONS TROPHY-2006

BCCI seeks PM's help



AFP/PTI, New Delhi

India's cricket chiefs sought Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's intervention to prevent the 2006 Champions Trophy tournament from being shifted to arch-rivals Pakistan.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) had said in March that the biennial limited-overs tournament, the second biggest after the World Cup, could be taken away from India and handed to Pakistan if the Indian government did not exempt the event from tax.

The government imposes income tax on all earnings, including gate receipts and sponsorships, for international sporting events held in the country.

President of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) Ranbir Singh Mahendra and former ICC chief Jagmohan Dalmiya met Prime Minister Singh here on Thursday in a bid to resolve the impasse.

"The Prime Minister has assured us he will look into the matter," Dalmiya told reporters after the 15-minute meeting at Parliament House.

"It was a very positive meeting. We are hopeful of getting the tax exemption."

"We are quite satisfied with the meeting and are hopeful that we will get the tax exemption," he said.

The ICC has given India a June deadline to confirm the tax waiver.

India was originally scheduled to

host the Champions Trophy in 2004, but the event was shifted to England and India was made provisional hosts for 2006 after the Indian government dithered on the tax waiver.

The tournament, which raises funds for the ICC's development programme, is contested by all the 10 Test-playing nations and two qualifiers from associate members of the ICC.

India, with millions of cricket-mad viewers, is the world's biggest market for the sport. At least four of the ICC's six global sponsors are India-specific.

The ICC's tax waiver policy was not enforced when India co-hosted two World Cups in the past, in 1987 with Pakistan and in 1996 with both Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

India also wants to host the World Cup in 2011, provided the government grants a tax waiver.

ICC president Ehsan Mani and top BCCI officials had earlier met Finance Minister P Chidambaram and Sports Minister Sunil Dutt to pursue their case.

The last ICC Champions Trophy was held in England in 2004.

Milan survive

FROM PAGE 16

With time ticking away, Milan pushed forward down the left and with the PSV defence asleep for the first time, Ambrosini ghosted in to meet Kaka's left-wing cross and put Milan into next month's final.

Cocu briefly raised PSV's hopes in injury time with another cool finish but it was not enough.

Zagallo in hospital

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil's 1970 World Cup winning coach Mario Zagallo has been admitted to hospital suffering from nausea, vomiting and abdominal pains, a hospital spokesman said on Wednesday.

The 74-year-old, who also led Brazil to fourth place in 1974 and second in 1998 and is currently technical director, has been kept at the Hospital Samaritano in Rio de Janeiro since Tuesday night.

The spokesman said Zagallo would probably undergo a biopsy later on Wednesday and added that his illness was not related to the irregular heart rhythm he has suffered in the past.

Zagallo also won the World Cup as a player in 1958 and 1962.

Gerrard linked to Real

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid are reportedly putting together a bid topping 30 million euros (40 million dollars) for Liverpool captain and England star Steven Gerrard, despite signs the player is set to stay on Merseyside, media reports said Thursday.

Newly-crowned English Premiership champions Chelsea have also been in the frame for Gerrard, but he indicated Wednesday he sees his future at Anfield, buoyed by the Reds' Champions League semi-final win over the Londoners to make up for a League Cup final loss to the same rivals.

According to Spanish sports daily AS, "negotiations are under way" for Gerrard at Real, who are set to lose out to Barcelona in the Spanish league race to end a second straight season without a trophy.

"Madrid will go to 30 million for Gerrard," according to AS, while stressing that Liverpool would want around ten million more if they are to lose the fulcrum of their side.

After Wednesday's win over Chelsea at Anfield Gerrard hinted he would stay put under Spanish coach Rafael Benitez, as Liverpool seek to win their fifth European title on May 25 at the expense of AC Milan.

"I've said all along all I wanted was to see the club going in the right direction and this shows we are," he told the Liverpool Echo.

Another booter's mom kidnapped in Brazil

AFP, Sao Paulo

The mother of Brazilian defender Marinho, who plays for first division side Corinthians, has been kidnapped, local television reported on Wednesday.

Marinho's mother is reported to have been taken forcibly from her home in the neighbourhood of Santos by two armed men who posed as florists.

It is the fifth kidnapping of the mother of a top player in the past six months in Sao Paulo.

In January the mother of Grafite, who plays for Sao Paulo's first division side, was taken but was found the next day when police who were working a different case discovered her whereabouts by surprise.

On November 7, 2004 Santos' star striker Robinho stopped playing for his first division side as his mother was held captive for 41 days before being released.

In that case, his mother was kidnapped the day after the press announced that the 20-year-old Robinho would be signing for Real Madrid. The first contact the kidnappers made was after 72 hours.

The mother of FC Porto striker Luis Fabiano has still not been freed after being kidnapped last March.

Laporta's Chinese mission

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona president Joan Laporta has flown to China to try and close the club's first ever shirt sponsorship deal with Chinese authorities, Spanish media reported on Thursday.

A delegation from the club is expected to meet Chinese officials in order to put the finishing touches to an agreement that would see the Primera Liga side promote the 2008 Beijing Olympics from next season.

Barcelona-based sports paper El Mundo Deportivo said that if the five-year deal was successfully concluded it would be worth at least 19 million euros (\$24.65 million) a season with additional bonuses based on results.

After the Olympics the club would then promote the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou.

Barcelona made a short pre-season tour of China last year and are expected to make a return visit in August. If the shirt deal goes through, it would help boost the club's profile in the lucrative Asian market.

Athletic Bilbao and Barcelona are the only Primera Liga sides who do not carry advertising on their shirts, although Bilbao did promote the Basque regional government during some of their matches in the UEFA Cup this season.

'We are very lucky'



REUTERS, Eindhoven

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said his side were very lucky to reach the Champions League final after surviving an onslaught from PSV Eindhoven on Wednesday.

Milan, who lifted the trophy in 2003, won the semi-final on the away goals rule after losing the second leg 3-1 to PSV.

"There is no point analysing this match and being ironic. We are very lucky to be in the final and we have to look forward now," Ancelotti told reporters after the tie finished 3-3 on aggregate.

"We were planning to start with a high rhythm, keep possession and go for an early goal. We only started playing when we were 2-0 down. Then we really came into the match."

"We are very tired and it was a huge battle for us against a good team."

A pulsating game at the Philips Stadium was heading for extra time

after goals from South Korean Park Ji-Sung and Philip Cocu cancelled out the Italian side's 2-0 victory from the first leg at the San Siro.

Six-times European champions Milan had buckled under intense pressure orchestrated by the inspirational Park.

Milan's much-vaunted defence, which had not conceded a goal in seven previous Champions League games, was breaking.

But they broke PSV hearts when Massimo Ambrosini headed home in injury time. The away strike ensured the hosts needed two more goals and, despite another Cocu effort in stoppage time, PSV were out.

Milan's Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf said: "We didn't deserve this result. PSV can hold their heads high and look to the future."

PSV coach Guus Hiddink said the defeat was hard to swallow.

"It was a beautiful night but we let it slip out of our hands in the final minutes," said Hiddink, who guided PSV to European Cup glory in 1988 and also masterminded Italy's

demise in the 2002 World Cup when coach of South Korea.

"It is very disappointing that you have a world class team like Milan on the ropes but you end up empty handed. The law of football says that you have to concentrate until the final whistle."

"We came so close but a typical Milan moment in the final minute made it not close enough," said PSV midfielder Cocu.

"Today we were the only team that played to win and outclassed Milan ... (but) one moment of sloppiness in our defensive organisation proved fatal."

For PSV skipper Van Bommel, Wednesday's defeat ended his chances of claiming any European honours before switching his allegiance to Barcelona at the end of the season.

"We played a good match and scored the wanted early goal" said Van Bommel. "But in the final minute, we let Kaka cross the pitch from right to left and we shouldn't have let that happen."



AFP, London

Chelsea's League Cup win and first Premiership title in 50 years are only the foundations for greater success at Stamford Bridge, manager Jose Mourinho claimed on Thursday.

"I know what the club want for the future and we want the same. We all know that this season was a good start - not the end, but the start," the 42-year-old said after signing a fresh five-year contract.

Mourinho's new deal, which replaces the three-year contract he signed when joining Chelsea from Porto last year, is reported to be worth up to five million pounds before bonuses or commercial deals.

Even though Chelsea were knocked out of the Champions League in the semi-finals by Liverpool on Tuesday Mourinho's new deal has restored optimism for next season ahead of this weekend's title celebrations at Stamford Bridge.

"We want to win more titles and my players are the same. We were very happy with this season but we

want more for our lives and our careers. The club and the owner are the same too."

His future was called into question only a few weeks ago when he was understood to have been upset by what he perceived as a lack of support over his two-match touchline ban from UEFA.

But he insisted: "I am delighted to be signing this new contract. My heart is with Chelsea and the fantastic group of players that I have. They have done a great job this season."

"The vision of the owner and the board for the future of Chelsea is also one I want to be part of."

"I am totally behind this project and their support in achieving it means Chelsea is the place where I will be happiest in my work. I cannot imagine another club or situation where I would be happier."

Mourinho explained the real importance of a new five-year deal - just 12 months after signing a three-year contract - was to seal his commitment to settling in London.

"To have a five-year contract is very good in family terms," he told Chelsea TV.

"There is now no doubt that our lives are in London and that is

important for my children.

"When my family situation is stable, then that is better for my professional situation so I can be completely focused towards Chelsea. With the title in our pocket, we can look forward to getting more."

"I think my players will be happy with the news as they will be with me for the next five years."

"It is also good for the fans as I feel we have established a good relationship and they are happy with what I have brought here."

Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon added: "This is great news for everybody concerned. Both the club and Jose share a long-term vision for the future, that was clear from the moment we first met."

"We talked then about a 10-year plan for Chelsea and Jose wanted to be an integral part of building that."

"The outstanding success of the team this season is a great platform for that building process. As soon as the Carling (League) Cup was won, talks over a new deal began as it was apparent to all sides that a longer commitment was the way forward."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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R A G R ' L A N C D G L A !

Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A SPRINTER WAS ENTERING THE WORLD OF POLITICS, I GUESS HE WOULD RUN FOR OFFICE.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: R equals T

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.