

Now 4 to qualify for Asiad hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

The Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) has decided to reduce the number of qualifiers for the 15th Asian Games to be held in Doha in November.

Six teams were originally scheduled to qualify for the Games from the eight-team qualifying rounds that begin here on Thursday but the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) confirmed that four teams will now qualify for the competition in Doha.

BHF general secretary Shamsul Bari told newsmen after receiving a letter on Monday from the AHF about the issue that the decision came as the Organising Committee of 15th Asian Games informed the AHF about their inability to accommodate more than 10 teams.

Of the 10 teams, six -- India, Pakistan, South Korea, Malaysia, China and Japan -- are automatic qualifiers.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh national team managed a solitary goal victory against Bangladesh Army's youth side at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium in yesterday's warm-up game.

Chayan converted a penalty corner in the first half to score the all-important goal. The two teams meet again today at the same venue.

Casson follows Hauritz to NSW

AFP, Sydney

Leg-spinner Beau Casson Monday became the second top-line Australian spinner to defect to New South Wales announcing his move from Western Australia.

WA officials are disappointed at losing the 23-year-old left-arm spinner, but NSW coach Trevor Bayliss said Casson's signature ended a two-year recruiting effort.

He will vie with Test spinner Stuart MacGill and former Queensland off-spinner Nathan Hauritz for places in the NSW line-up in next season's Sheffield Shield, although Hauritz is yet to secure a NSW contract.

"The prospect of having left and right arm wrist spinners is exciting," Bayliss said Monday.

"Our spin bowling stocks at that level haven't been all that deep, but with Beau coming and quite possibly Nathan, it creates some competition."

Bayliss said MacGill backed the move and sees Casson as his eventual successor.

"One of the reasons we went after Beau is the SCG wicket is conducive to wrist-spin bowling," Bayliss said.

"We think Beau has got that potential to go further than just state cricket. He's the right age."

Sick leaves

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Croner is also reminding employers of the rules around granting annual leave.

Smith continues: "Even employers who decide to televise games should be prepared for a bout of annual leave requests and be ready to deal with them. In most cases it's impractical for a business to allow a large proportion of the workforce to take annual leave at one time, so employers may refuse annual leave requests on the grounds of the business's needs.

"It's essential to have a fair system in place for granting annual leave, such as random selection or on a first-come-first-served basis."

"Even though it's likely that younger males will be first in line for holiday at this time, employers must ensure it is granted fairly, otherwise they could be guilty of sex discrimination," warns Smith.

He adds: "It's worth remembering that not all staff will be interested in watching World Cup games, so we'd also suggest that employers who decide to provide TV access consider a similar perk for those staff who aren't fans, who may feel left out."

Riquelme

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picks the perfect pass to suit every one of his team-mates, and knows how quickly the ball moves across every blade of grass."

Argentine legend Diego Maradona, a personal friend of Riquelme, firmly agreed: "We've all missed penalties. I missed important penalties myself, but I don't think Riquelme's career will be defined by what happened against Arsenal. He's got a great record and it doesn't bother him in the slightest that he's missed a penalty."

The last word should go to the man at the centre of this debate, Riquelme himself. "It's not like I killed someone, I just missed a penalty. I feel fine, I'm perfectly aware that it was just a game of football and nothing more."

"If I win the title in Germany, I may well retire. I can't imagine achieving anything bigger than that," he revealed recently. Lovers of the beautiful game will hope to enjoy Riquelme's exquisite skills for a few more years yet.

Rahul eyes away win in WI



REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Test tour of West Indies starting this week is an excellent opportunity to end their 20-year run without a major series victory outside the sub-continent, captain Rahul Dravid said on Monday.

"It is always a big challenge touring West Indies," he told reporters. "It is a great opportunity for us to do well, try and correct the record of not winning outside the sub-continent for so long."

The world's third-ranked Test side last won a major series outside the Indian sub-continent in England in 1986.

Their best efforts away from familiar spin-friendly pitches were 1-1 draws in England in 2002 and in Australia in 2003-4.

The team leaves on Friday on a 47-day trip, playing five one-dayers

followed by three Tests.

India have shown terrific one-day form since Dravid took over as captain in October, drubbing Sri Lanka 6-1 and England 5-1 at home and claiming a 4-1 triumph in Pakistan.

However, the have often struggled for consistency in Tests, losing 1-0 in Pakistan early this year and allowing an injury-hit England to rally to draw a three-Test series 1-1 in March.

Dravid said the arrival of talented youngsters had boosted one-day performances, but they needed more time to replicate the efforts in Tests.

"We've lost a couple of Tests and I won't say it is very bad," he said. "For younger players getting used to it, adjusting to Tests is harder."

"We are working on becoming an all-round side which can do well in both forms of the game."

Premier batsman Sachin Tendulkar will miss the one-dayers following a shoulder surgery. Experienced spinner Anil Kumble

and batsman Vangipurappu Laxman no longer figure in the one-day squad.

Although West Indies are a shadow of the force they were until mid 1990s, Dravid felt they could not be taken lightly.

West Indies rallied to beat India 2-1 on their previous Test tour in 2002, but have managed just four series victories out of 15, three of them versus lowly Bangladesh and Zimbabwe.

Dravid said: "In some ways their team is like ours, a mix of experienced players and young and eager ones."

Few in the Indian team have played in West Indies previously, but Dravid felt that the youngsters should cash in on the opportunity to gain first hand experience of the game's rich tradition in the Caribbean, also the venue for next year's World Cup.

'Forrest Gump' banned



AFP, New Delhi

A four-year-old Indian child who ran 65 kilometres (40.3 miles) in seven hours last week was on Monday banned by worried welfare officials from running marathons.

The child welfare department of the eastern state of Orissa announced the ban following a medical report that Budhia Singh was "undernourished, anaemic and under cardiological stress".

"He will not be allowed to run long distance till all tests are completed," child welfare officer RS Mishra told reporters in the state capital of Bhubaneswar.

Mishra added that medical tests showed Budhia was not yet five years old, as suggested by his coach Biranchi Das last Tuesday when the child ran from the holy town of Puri to Bhubaneswar in stifling hot weather.

Budhia, watched over by his coach, paramilitary forces and TV crews and trailed by army doctors

and an ambulance, collapsed two kilometres short of the finish line -- the headquarters of the Central



BUDHIA SINGH

Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Bhubaneswar -- and was taken to hospital.

Budhia, almost a real life version of the fictitious Forrest Gump, and his coach found immediate fame but human rights activists attacked the state government for risking the boy's life.

Coach Das said the ban was a conspiracy to take the limelight away from the child's achievements.

"This ban will kill Budhia because he loves to run," said Das. "He has been running seven hours a day for a year now because all he knows is to run, eat and sleep."

"They always knew his capacity to run long distance, so why is a fuss being made now?"

Budhia has taken part in the Delhi half-marathon and other distance races across India but last week's outing was much longer than the official marathon distance of 42 kilometres (26 miles).

The medical report stated: "Budhia clinically appeared undernourished with anaemia and angular stomatitis. His pulse and blood pressure were on the higher side."

"It is evident that the boy's protein catabolism is more and he is under cardiological stress probably resulting from long distance running. If the boy continues to run for long distance, it may aggravate the condition, may even result in renal failure."

Proteas gain in rankings

REUTERS, Dubai

South Africa have climbed above New Zealand into fifth place in the ICC Test rankings following the Proteas' 2-0 series victory over the Black Caps.

The International Cricket Council announced the standings on Monday, one day after South Africa had defeated New Zealand by four wickets in the third and final Test in Johannesburg.

Australia remain well clear in top spot on 131 points, ahead of England (113), India (111) and Pakistan (109) with South Africa (101) moving four points clear of New Zealand.

South Africa skipper Graeme Smith also enjoyed a boost in the player rankings, rising five places to 19th in the batsmen's standings following his two half-centuries in the final New Zealand Test.

However, all-rounder Jacques Kallis paid the penalty for a poor final Test when he fell behind India's Rahul Dravid into third place.

Australia's Ricky Ponting retained top spot by a comfortable 89-point margin.

In the bowling rankings, the top 10 players were unchanged with Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan heading the list, ahead of South Africa's Makhaya Ntini and Australia's Shane Warne.

Despite taking a 200th Test wicket in the New Zealand series, Kallis also fell behind England's Andrew Flintoff at the top of the all-rounder rankings.

Flintoff will captain an injury-depleted England in the first of three Tests against Sri Lanka starting at Lord's on Thursday.

Youth cricket

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Stadium), Barisal v Bhola (Barguna Stadium), Habiganj v Moulavibazar (Habiganj Stadium), Bandarban v Khagrachari (Chittagong Divisional Stadium), Rajshahi v Natore (Bogra Stadium), Bogra v Noagaon (Natore Stadium), Sathkira v Meherpur (Magura Stadium) and Magura v Kushtia (Khulna Divisional Stadium).

Elections take

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Should only last until the team loses," he added quickly.

Mexico's fiercely nationalistic soccer commentators are predicting first-round victories in Group D, which includes Angola, Portugal and Iran. If the national team reaches the second round, it will play June 24 or 25 -- the weekend before the vote.

There are no games scheduled for the Sunday of the election, though it's possible Mexico could play in quarterfinals that Friday or Saturday. Mexico has never won a World Cup.

"Mexicans are already used to the national team not getting it done," said Ulises Beltran, who advised former presidents Carlos Salinas and Ernesto Zedillo. "The people can get really excited, but history should have taught them better."

Bernabeu bids

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Country which included the 1998 World Cup and the European Championship in 2000.

He helped Real to win the league title in 2003, the club's last trophy, but his powers have been on the wane since then and at the end of April he announced his intention to retire after the World Cup in Germany.

"I've really enjoyed these five years," Zidane was quoted as saying in the programme for the Villarreal match.

"There have been some bad times, but it will be the good ones I will always remember. I came here hoping to win the European Cup and I can leave happy as I have done that."

"I've got great memories of that game and I also had the good luck to score that goal in Glasgow. I'll never forget that moment."

"My departure forms part of football, I'm not afraid of retirement. I'm proud of my career because I've played with two of the biggest teams, Real Madrid and Juventus, and I've won a lot of trophies."

"I've always been a very competitive player and done all I can to win and I haven't been doing that recently. I'm retiring because I can no longer offer Real Madrid Zidane at 100 percent."

Zidane and former Real Madrid great Alfredo Di Stefano will be given a joint tribute on Tuesday.

Real will play Stade Reims, the side they beat to win the first of their nine European Cups in 1956, at the reserve team ground in Valdebebas which has been named after the Argentine.

Zidane will play his last match for Real in next week's league match at Sevilla before hooking up with the France squad for the World Cup, which starts on June 9.



PHOTO: AFP

Argentina's David Nalbandian is elated after winning the Estoril Open in Lisbon on Sunday.

Nalbandian's double



AFP, Estoril

Top seed David Nalbandian of Argentina clinched the Estoril Open for the second time on Sunday with a comfortable 6-3, 6-4 win over Russian second seed Nikolay Davydenko.

The world number four also won here in 2002 for his first career title.

Sunday's win was also the third in a row for an Argentinian at the Estadio Nacional.

The trophy was the first of the season for Nalbandian, but the fifth of his career. He last clinched a title by beating Roger Federer at the

season-ending Masters Cup in Shanghai last year.

"It's great to come back and win another time here, it's where things started for me," said Nalbandian who has booked a full clay court schedule through the French Open at Roland Garros which starts in three weeks' time.

"I may be playing a lot on clay, but I want to be ready for Paris. I hope to peak for Roland Garros."

"But you cannot predict how you will do every week. I suppose that if I play finals every week, I might get tired."

"My goal is to arrive in Paris in perfect condition."

Davydenko was fortunate to have taken to the court after requiring intensive treatment for back pain

before his semifinal win over Carlos Moya.

The Russian world number six had hinted that he was unsure of playing the final, but fronted up to face his fate.

He gave his all, coming form 0-4 down in the second set to make a match of it.

He broke Nalbandian as the top seed served for victory leading 5-2, forcing the South American to come through for the title on his next attempt.

The 24-year-old Nalbandian now stands five-for-12 in career finals and improved to 20-5 on the season.

Davydenko remains stuck on one career trophy, which he lifted last may on clay in St Poelten.

A walk for Windies

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First ball of the chase, when he had Rinke comprehensively beaten and bowled for pace, and Duffin caught behind touching a rising ball angled across him.

Justice Chibhabha, who has emerged as a player for the future for Zimbabwe on this trip, and Brendon Taylor added 55 for the third wicket to settle the nerves of the visitors.

They were just beginning to get into the swing of things, when Taylor was adjudged lbw to Dwayne Smith for 26 in the 12th over.

This was another setback that Zimbabwe could ill-afford, and though Chibhabha, Chigumbura, and Sibanda all carried the fight to the West Indies attack, the visitors found the mountain to steep to climb.

Earlier, Chanderpaul added a vital 83 for the fourth wicket with compatriot Ramnaresh Sarwan, who got 40, before he was the last batsman dismissed in the 48th over bowled by Edward Rainsford.

Morton and Lara had paved the way for the later batsmen with some early ball-beating in a second wicket stand of 109 from 122 balls, after newcomer Sewnarine Chattergeon was run out for nine in the eighth over.

Lara was caught behind off Tawanda Mupariwa in the 22nd over and Morton was caught at long-off off Prosper Utseya to leave West Indies 166 for three.

This brought Sarwan to the wicket and he consolidated West Indies' position with Chanderpaul before he was caught at long-on off Rinke in the 41st over.

The wicket of Marlon Samuels, bowled by Chibhabha for nine in the 46th over, slowed the West Indies down, but Chanderpaul blossomed late and helped to beef up the total before his dismissal.

West Indies also won the first two matches last weekend by five wickets and 98 runs at the Antigua Recreation Ground, but the third match scheduled for Saturday here was cancelled because of rain.

The series continues on Wednesday, when the two sides contest the first day/night ODI in the Caribbean at St. Lucia's Beausejour Stadium, followed by back-to-back matches next weekend at Trinidad Tobago's Queen's Park Oval.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the fourth one-day international between West Indies and Zimbabwe at Bourda Oval on Sunday:

WEST INDIES

Chattergeon run out (Sibanda) 9
Morton c Rainsford b Utseya 79
Lara c Taylor b Mupariwa 56
Chanderpaul b Rainsford 93
Sarwan c Coventry b Rinke 40
Samuels c Chibhabha 9
Smith not out 23
Ramdin not out 3

Extras: (b-5, lb-1, w-6, nb-9) 21
Total: (For 6 wickets in 50 overs) 333

Fall of wickets: 1-36, 2-145, 3-166, 4-251, 5-280, 6-312

Did not bat: Best, Edwards, Collimore

Bowler

	O	M	R	W
Rainsford	10	0	56	1
Mahwre	8	0	67	0
Mupariwa	10	0	61	1

BITS AND BOBS

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Cup teams to arrive in Germany -- more than three weeks before the tournament begins on June 9.

Togo are due to touch down in Germany on May 15, World Cup organisers said on Monday. The squad will have their base camp in Wangen in the south of the country.

Hosts Germany will not convene at their base hotel in Berlin until June 4, although the squad will be together for camps in Sardinia and Geneva from May 16.

Holders Brazil will also be arriving on June 4 but Ukraine do not arrive until the opening day of the tournament.

Germany play the first match in Group A against Costa Rica in Munich on June 9. The final is in Berlin on July 9.

Investigators probe ticket gifts

AFP, Berlin

German investigators said on Monday they had opened a probe into the head of one of the World Cup sponsors who is accused of giving match tickets to politicians or government employees.

Utz Claassen, the chief executive of the EnBW energy group, is under suspicion of giving away tickets allocated to his company in its role as an official backer of the June 9-July 9 finals.

Fifteen German politicians or government employees said to have received tickets are also being investigated, a spokesman for the prosecutor's office in the

southwestern city of Karlsruhe said, without identifying them.

Prosecutors are also considering investigating another eight people.

Under German law, government employees or politicians are not permitted to accept gifts.

But the Vice-President of the World Cup organising committee, Wolfgang Niersbach, dismissed the suggestion that by giving politicians tickets, companies may be accused of attempting to buy favours.

"It is grotesque and absurd that anyone who invites guests to World Cup matches or who receives an invitation is accused of having dishonest intentions," Niersbach said in Monday's edition of the Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper.

Weah calls for unity

BBC ONLINE, undated

George Weah, the 1995 World and African Footballer of the Year, has urged Africans to back the continent's five representatives at next month's World Cup in Germany.

Weah, who contested the Liberian presidential election last October, was commenting on fears that Africa might not perform well at the tournament.

Ghana, Togo, Angola and the Ivory Coast will be making their World Cup debuts where Tunisia are Africa's other representative.

At the recent African Nations Cup in Egypt, only Ivory Coast and Tunisia progressed beyond the group stage out of Africa's five

finalists.

"Everybody has their own views but first of all let me congratulate the teams who have qualified, I hope we give them our moral support," Weah told BBC Sport.

The Liberian idol defended the four newcomers and suggested their fortunes could be different in Germany.

"The Nations Cup has nothing to do with the World Cup and the mistake they made in Egypt, these teams will correct in Germany."

"Since they played the Nations Cup, may be they have been preparing themselves."

"But no matter what happened at the Nations Cup, we must not pull our teams down."

"Those teams we think are great teams have been to the World Cup and did not perform well."

Cameroon got the quarter-finals of the 1990 World Cup in Italy with Senegal achieving a similar feat at their maiden tournament appearance four years ago in Japan and South Korea.

Weah added that it is his hope that an African side wins the World Cup or at least to do as well as Cameroon and Senegal did previously.

"Africa must be proud of African teams and we hope they come out like Cameroon did in 1990."

"Now some people think those who performed badly at the Nations Cup will not do well."

"But as a former professional player I know why some teams you expect to do well fall and the others who are unrated cause upsets, and this can happen at the World Cup."