

INZI UNDER SCRUTINY New PCB chief talks tough

PTI, Karachi

The new chairman of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has indicated that the powers enjoyed by cricketers and some officials in the board would be cut down to ensure there is discipline all around.

Nasim Ashraf, a government advisor on human development who took over as PCB chairman last week from Shaharyar Khan, said he would not compromise on discipline.

"I have been appointed to ensure there is discipline and transparency at every level of our cricket set-up and that is my priority," he said.

He also made it clear that although Inzamamul Haq was appointed captain until the end of the year by the previous set-up, his captaincy would be reviewed after the home series against the West Indies.

"After the home series against the West Indies, we will sit down and review things and the person who has form and fitness would be named captain for the tour of South Africa and the World Cup," Ashraf said.

Speculation has been rife that the change in the board came about as the chief patron of the board President Perviz Musharraf was not happy with The Oval incident and the conduct of the players, particularly that of Inzamam.

Not fitting

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concerned fielder and then discussed the decision amongst them. But the former national captain then walked in and engaged in a discussion with the umpires -- a clear breach of player conduct.

Eventually Sharif was given out, leaving his team at 143 for eight. Masudur Rahman Mukul, a squad member of Beximco, was also involved in the whole fiasco. He was reprimanded and given a suspended suspension by match referee Raquibul Hasan, which carries on to future matches after he was found misbehaving, having questioned the decision of the umpires.

Akram received only 'a reminder of the norms of a cricket player' for an offense that is quite unprecedented and which usually sees heavy penalty.

If any player of the playing eleven walks on to the ground (barring the case of a runner for an injured batsman), it is a serious misdemeanor.

As a senior figure in Bangladesh cricket, it was most upsetting to see him questioning the umpires' decision in such a manner. Let alone breaking a law, his actions failed the young cricketers in the ground. Sometimes even the greats forget that their gestures can spark a lot of trouble.

Asif ponders

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unbearable. Still, I cannot walk properly due to pain."

Asif and Shoebuzzaman both had their first physiotherapy session yesterday at another hospital in Mohakhali. The other injured shooter, Ali Hossain Shipu, was due to have an operation on a broken finger last night.

It seemed that the National Shooting Federation (NSF), criticised for delaying in taking steps to send the injured shooters abroad, finally woke up and took the Asif's passport to make arrangements for better treatment in Bangkok.

It was learned that the NSF has sought the help of BOA regarding this matter.

Other than giving financial help, the BOA officials must have to try convince Asif not to give up one of the most prestigious medals won by a sportsman, who is not only going to miss the Asian Games in Doha next December but also unlikely to take a rifle in hand in six months.

Azzurri gather

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dividends eight minutes later.

The hosts probed away on the edge of the Italy penalty area without any until the ball was laid off to Shashiasvili, whose fierce angled drive flew past Gianluigi Buffon.

The visitors should have restored their lead in the 35th minute.

Di Natale and Gianluca Zambrotta combined to slice open the Georgian rearguard, but when the ball was worked to Toni the Fiorentina marksman screwed his shot wide with only Lomaia to beat.

Georgia almost went ahead a minute before half time when Shashiasvili's rasping left-footed shot came back off the post.

After Kankava was sent for an early bath, Italy exploited their numerical supremacy in less than a minute as Camoranesi applied the finishing touch to Di Natale's left-wing cross.

Perrotta ensured no way back for Georgia when his deflected shot wrong-footed Lomaia.

Looking for champions



AFP, Mumbai

Millions of cricket-mad Indians and the game's administrators are hoping the Champions Trophy will come to life from Saturday when the big boys join the action.

The International Cricket Council's biennial tournament has had an uninspiring start with minnows Bangladesh and Zimbabwe clearly out of place in an event meant for champions, as the name suggests.

The ICC's decision to restrict the tournament to the 10 Test-playing nations in an attempt to make it more competitive has fallen flat with Sri Lanka and the West Indies breezing past the qualifying round without breaking a sweat.

Bored spectators in empty stands have seen Zimbabwe swamped by nine wickets and 144 runs in their two matches. Bangladesh went down by 37 runs to Sri Lanka and were thrashed by 10 wickets by the West Indies.

"There are certainly no champions playing out there... yet," said former England opener Geoffrey Boycott on television the other night.

Afridi being sensible



AFP, Jaipur

Pakistani all-rounder Shahid Afridi said Thursday that the recent turmoil at home would not affect the team's campaign in the Champions Trophy tournament in India.

"The team have settled down after what happened back at home and we all are eager to perform under new captain Younis Khan," said Afridi, an aggressive batsman and an effective leg-spinner.

Pakistani cricket has recently been in news for all the wrong

"It's time the real action starts."

A worried ICC is already thinking of revising the format of the beleaguered tournament, considered by the sport's world governing body as the second-most important event after the four-yearly World Cup.

"There is a proposal to have only eight teams at the next Champions Trophy," ICC media manager Brian Murgatroyd told AFP.

The ICC has played around with the format of the tournament which was launched in 1998 with the aim of generating revenue and popularising the game in developing countries.

The first two editions in Bangladesh in 1998 and Kenya in 2000 were knock-out events, but that was unsatisfactory since one bad match sent favoured teams, such as Australia, packing.

There were nine teams in 1998 and 11 in 2000, but the ICC increased the number to 12 in the last two tournaments in Sri Lanka (2002) and England (2004).

The 12 teams were divided into four groups of three, with the winners qualifying for the semifinals.

The competitive spirit remained elusive with the presence of Bangladesh, Kenya, Zimbabwe and the Netherlands in 2002 and the United States in 2004 ensuring plenty of mismatches.

This year's format has the top six

teams on April 1 -- Australia, South Africa, India, Pakistan, England and New Zealand -- gaining direct entry in the main tournament.

Sri Lanka and the West Indies were always expected to come back through the qualifiers, but the ease at which Zimbabwe and Bangladesh were overcome ensured a lacklustre start.

All that, however, should change from Saturday when Sri Lanka and the West Indies clash at the Brabourne Stadium here to determine the final placings in the main tournament.

The winner will join Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa in Group B. The loser goes to group A to play Australia, India and England.

"There will be a lot to play for on Saturday because neither team will want to be in group A with Australia and India," said former Australia captain Ian Chappell.

Two teams from each group will qualify for the semi-finals and the prospect of the world's best jostling for the next round is finally set to draw full houses at the four venues of Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Mohali.

"I'd love to open an innings on sub-continent pitches, but I think it will not be easy now as I have been playing down the order for quite some time," said Afridi, 26.

He smashed a 45-ball century in India last year, joint third-fastest with West Indies skipper Brian Lara in one-day internationals. He also holds the world record of a 37-ball hundred, against Sri Lanka at Nairobi in 1996.

Afridi has scored four hundreds and 26 half-centuries in 230 matches.

"I have adjusted myself according to the team's requirements. I don't know what number I will bat (in this tournament), but my job is to play for the team and contribute to its success," said Afridi.

reasons.

Younis, named captain in place of suspended Inzamamul Haq, stepped down a few days before the team's departure for India. He was later reinstated.

The Pakistan Cricket Board also appointed Nasim Ashraf as its new chairman in place of Shaharyar Khan, who stepped down in the debacle.

"In Inzamam's absence all the senior players including me have to shoulder the responsibility and rally around Younis," said Afridi, who has so far scored 4,860 runs and grabbed 192 wickets in one-day internationals.

Afridi said he was looking forward to playing on Indian pitches where he had done well both as a batsman and bowler.

after team physio and he himself cleared his position. Right at the moment Bashar's presence is very important for the team which we felt in the Africa trip where he could only play two games. We wanted to see him in the big tournament because the World Cup is not far away," explained the chairman of the selection committee.

So, there is a double challenge for Bashar to overcome in the match.

will overcome it in the last game.

"I agree that I felt uncomfortable a little bit but I think it might have happened because I was out of competitive matches for the last three months. It is not good that the captain made two ducks in such a big competition," said Bashar, who has a very poor record in the ICC Champions Trophy with 18 runs in four matches.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed also confessed that Bashar looked uncomfortable in the middle.

"I think so. But we picked him

Spotlight on Bashar

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Bashar failed to serve the team as he always tried to hide his uneasiness.

In recent past the 33-year old right-hander had always some good contribution in the middle to build up a partnership that's why his presence was very important not only as a captain but also as a batsman but it is impossible to deliver anything if a player is not fully fit.

Bashar however admitted the fact that he felt uncomfortable with his injured hand but hoped that he

An incurable disease?

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total of four deliveries in the tournament. We could scream injury, but what would that achieve? He is supposed to have fully recovered.

And although hopes are high about Sakib Al Hasan, he really has not shown enough to suggest he might be a suitable long-term solution for the problematic number four slot. Indeed, he scored a decent half-century against the Lankans, but in all honesty it was a match that we had lost after the opposition scored 302 runs. It remains to be seen if the compact left-hander can step it up when the going gets tough.

The criticism could continue as would the defence but nothing one says can justify going from 95 for one to 161 all out. A one-off occurrence may be forgivable but we all know our track record in this regard. No wonder Bashar looked lost for

solutions in the post-match presentation.

Sadly, the problems only begin there. Every decision that the Tigers' take is scrutinized across the country. But that is the price of expectation. Talk is rife about injured players (Syed Raseel & Habibul Bashar) and of decision to leave paceman Shahadat Hossain on the bench in place of the distinctly lightweight and allegedly injured seamer Raseel. There is talk of other irregularities but lets not stir that pot yet shall we?

It's high time that we stop being optimistic and become realists. Bangladesh's sojourn in the Champions Trophy has been short and bitter and that is the lesson we should bring back from it. There is no use looking at positives that hardly help and there is a feeling of dread all around that suggests that

with a comprehensive victory against Zimbabwe, all the wrongs will be set right. It's an easy solution to fall back into and one that provides a false sense of security but we need to look at the broader picture. They are not the competition at the moment. Sri Lanka and West Indies are.

So let us call a spade a spade. We have failed miserably in this tournament and we are back with our tails between our legs.

And one match report sums it up for us best. Harsh as it may sound, if lessons learnt aren't going to be rectified, then there's no place for them (Bangladesh) among the elite.

Not yet at least.

Scots grounded in Kiev

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clear.

Ukraine had a chance to open the scoring in the 24th minute when Viacheslav Sviderskiy's cross from the right found Maxim Kalinichenko in the box but he headed over.

Two minutes later Shevchenko tested the Scotland goalkeeper for the first time with a shot from 20 yards but he failed to get a clean strike of the ball and Craig Gordon saved comfortably low to his right.

Ukraine's best chance of the first-half arrived in the 40th minute when Anatoly Tymoshchuk drove through on goal but he carried the ball too far wide and when he eventually shot from 10-yards Gordon was able to palm the ball away at the near post.

Scotland were lucky to be level at the break, having rarely threatened the home side's goalkeeper Olexander Shovkovsky and at the start of the second-half only the woodwork kept them level.

Sviderskiy's low cross from the left found Shevchenko 12 yards from goal and after his first was

blocked by Scotland defender Gary Caldwell he then poked the ball under the body of Gordon only for the ball to bounce off the post.

Celtic defender Caldwell, who scored the winner against France on Saturday, was again Scotland's hero in the 57th minute when he headed Andriy Nesmachny's goallbound shot from 20 yards over the crossbar.

But in the 60th minute Ukraine finally broke through the Scottish defences after they won a free-kick wide on the left.

Shevchenko flighted a high ball into the box and though the visitor's defender Graham Alexander got his head to the ball it deflected into the path of Kucher who rifled the ball low into the net from 10-yards.

Ukraine nearly doubled their lead in the 63rd minute when Shevchenko's powerful shot from 25 yards required Gordon to palm away.

Miller nearly pulled Scotland back on level terms in the 66th when he attempted an audacious lob from the right and though it beat keeper

Shovkovsky it rebounded off the bar.

The Celtic striker missed perhaps the best chance of the match in the 81st minute when Robbie Nielson's cross found him completely unmarked six yards from goal but Miller somehow glanced his header wide.

Scotland were reduced to 10 men in the 85th minute when Pressley was sent off when Swedish referee Martin Hansson decided he had denied Shevchenko a clear chance at goal.

And two minutes later the referee awarded Ukraine a soft looking penalty when Shevchenko went down under a challenge by Nielson.

The Chelsea star stepped up to take the kick himself and side-footed the ball low into the right-hand corner sending Gordon the wrong way.

Will Freddie bowl in CT?

REUTERS, Jaipur

England skipper Andrew Flintoff is unsure whether he will be able to bowl in the Champions Trophy (CT) as he continues to make his comeback following ankle surgery.

"I'm not certain I'll bowl in the Champions Trophy, though I'm feeling stronger in the nets," Flintoff told reporters on Thursday.

England's inspirational all rounder is in a race against time to regain his form with bat and ball with the Ashes tour in Australia starting in November.

However, Flintoff scored 59 in a warm-up game on Thursday.

He batted at number three, after a long batting stint at Wednesday's nets, to strengthen speculation he could open the innings during the Champions Trophy to cash in on fielding restrictions.

Babloo prefers

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would be under 23. It is certain that we will not choose a senior goalkeeper for Asiad as I feel I will need senior players more in other departments. That is why there are three young keepers in the side and not Biplab. Aminul is there because we can't play an international match with a rookie. He is also the national captain," explained Babloo.

"The seniors for the Asiad would be chosen on the basis of their performance in Hong Kong," he added.

The players have been requested to report to Babloo at the BFF Bhaban tomorrow noon.

THE SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Aminul, Shakil, Himel, Zia; defenders: Titu, Jahirul, Rony, Rajani, Ariful, Waly, Siraji, Nazrul, Parvez Babu; midfielders: Arman Aziz, Abul, Faisal Mahmud, Zahed Parvez, Kashem, Sharif, Ujjal, Mithun, Emily, Zahid, Alfaz and Farhad.

Gibbs names

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a letter rogatory (to South Africa) to seek their presence to question them in India."

Narayan noted that India had sent a first letter rogatory to South Africa in 2000 to which no reply has been received. "Gibbs lawyers described that as a huge mistake," the police chief said.

"Gibbs came to us like an ordinary accused... He has given us a lot of leads but no undertaking has been given by us that he will not be arrested," Narayan said.

The player will not be questioned again during the course of the Champions Trophy , which ends November 5, he added.

Gibbs has admitted accepting money from disgraced former captain Hansie Cronje to score fewer than 20 runs against India in a one-dayer during a 2000 March-April tour.

He subsequently scored 74 runs and said he had "forgotten" about the deal, but was suspended and fined by the South African authorities.

Narayan said the whole South African team had received a match-fixing offer in 1996 but had turned it down.

India was also shaken by a betting scandal that rocked the national team in the late 1990s, but Narayan said Gibbs did not name any Indians.

Gibbs, who has played 79 Tests, has refused to tour India since 2000 after failing to obtain assurances he would not be detained.

Implicated in the same scandal was Cronje, who admitted involvement and was served with a life ban before dying in a plane crash in 2002.

South Africa, winners of the maiden Champions Trophy in 1998 in Bangladesh, are scheduled to play their first match against New Zealand in Mumbai on Monday.

Croatia outfox

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there were no complaints from the fans delighted at seeing their team's unbeaten home run in competitive games stretch to 30.

Croatia now have seven points from three games, the same as Israel. England have seven from four, as do Macedonia, who won 3-0 away to Andorra.

The top two from each group qualify automatically for the 2008 finals.

Despite their toothless display, England coach Steve McClaren somehow claimed his team were in control for long periods.

"The second goal was the killer," he told Sky Sports.

"Once we'd got over that first 15 minutes, when Robbo kept us in it, I felt as if we'd controlled it.

"A lot of things have gone wrong, people get injured, a bobble like that...unexplainable.

"We tried to get the balance right, unfortunately it didn't work. The last 15-20 minutes dictate how you feel about the game overall.

"We said at halftime we coming away to a difficult team, in the end it wasn't to be.

"But there's still a long way to go in this group. We play Croatia last and let's hope we reverse the result.

"We've had two disappointing games, collected one point, and that's not good enough.

Lefties reign supreme



AFP, Jaipur

Sri Lankan Upul Tharanga and West Indian Chris Gayle have one thing in common -- both are left-handed openers giving nightmares to bowlers in the ongoing Champions Trophy.

The Sri Lankan has been batting in what in tennis parlance is known as 'the zone' where a player can do nothing wrong. He has already hit four hundreds and two half-centuries in his last nine one-day internationals since June.

Tharanga upstaged his more illustrious teammates, scoring 105 against Bangladesh at Mohali and following it up with 110 against Zimbabwe at Ahmedabad in qualifying rounds to help his team move into the main draw.

"When I get 30 or 40, I'd like to convert it into a big one. At present, things are going my way and I'd like to build on this," said the 21-year-old Sri Lankan, named man-of-the-match in successive games.

Gayle also is on song, putting in an impressive all-round show against Zimbabwe (41 and three wickets) before an explosive hundred against Bangladesh under

lights here to help his side storm into the next round.

Tharanga and Gayle are not the only southpaws making waves in early rounds, as Sri Lankan wicketkeeper-batsman Kumar Sangakkara and West Indian Shivnarine Chanderpaul also warmed up for the main tournament with a half-century apiece.

Tharanga made his international debut eight months after his home in Sri Lanka's west coast fishing town of Ambalangoda was swept away by the deadly tsunami which killed thousands across Asia on December 26, 2004.

He then shifted base to Colombo where Sangakkara sheltered the talented youngster and gave him his entire cricket kit.

"I don't worry about it (the tsunami) anymore," he said.

"I was not the only one affected. Fortunately, my family survived and I decided to concentrate on my cricket."

Tharanga is not an all-rounder, like Gayle. Nor is he as free-stroking a batsman as his West Indian counterpart, but is second to none when it comes to building an innings.

"He worked hard and showed character to come back. He is learning fast and working hard," said Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene.

Tharanga said batting with veteran Sanath Jayasuriya had

always eased the pressure on him.

"I learn a lot from Sanath. I can play my natural game when he is at the other end. The way he bats, I am under no pressure at all," he said.

Gayle is more aggressive than Tharanga, having already established himself as a destroyer of bowlers' line and length with his breathtaking shots on any surface. He has already scored 5,247 runs with 13 centuries.

"Chris is a tremendous player. We know that and he knows the players have great respect for him. He is a very important player of our team," said West Indies captain Brian Lara.

Gayle hopes he maintains his form in the next round.

"Hopefully, I can carry on (in the same vein) in the tournament. I always try to assess a one-day game and be consistent. It is something I am working on consistently," said the Jamaican.

Gayle is also a tidy off-spinner, having bagged 122 wickets.

"There are batting wickets in India, but good spinners can also create a lot of chances," he said.

"I don't concentrate on my bowling, to be honest. My main objective is to bat. I won't really do a lot of work on my bowling, but I am capable enough with the ball whenever my captain asks me to do the job."

Johansson stuns Nadal



AFP, Stockholm

Swede Joachim Johansson made a stunning return to top tennis after a year of injury, hammering home a 6-4, 7-6 upset win over Rafael Nadal in a Stockholm Open shock Wednesday.

The 24-year-old "Jackhammer," his ranking languishing at 690 after shoulder surgery in summer, 2005, and subsequent elbow problems, rained down 17 aces against the Spanish world No. 2, following up his bombs with charging attacks on the net.

He reached his first quarterfinal since Marseille in February of last year.

Johansson advanced as Nadal slammed a service return into the net to lose after one hour, 51 minutes.

"I played a decent match, but he attacked in the right moments. The crowd was not a factor, but his serve was. It's never easy coming from injury," said Nadal.

"He played very aggressive in the important moments. He had a lot of confidence and no pressure."

Johansson last competed on the ATP in San Jose in February, losing in the first round. His last events were in the Swedish Futures series last month.

Nadal, the top seed and Stockholm debutant, found himself on the back foot from the start as his opponent served notice with four aces in his opening service game.

The Swede kept up the fierce pressure, breaking for 2-1 in the opening set and claiming the opener on his third opportunity when an off-balance Nadal netted.

The momentum stayed with the challenger in the second set, Johansson breaking to start but losing it for 2-all.

He quickly made up for lost ground to produce the popular upset.

Nadal paid the price as he played on the ATP for the first time since the US Open quarterfinals.

Earlier holder James Blake thrashed two-time champion Thomas Johansson 6-3, 6-2.</