

Inzy doubtful for T20 clash

REUTERS, Johannesburg
Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq is doubtful for the Twenty20 international against South Africa on Friday which precedes a five-match one-day international series starting in Centurion on Sunday.

Vice-captain Younis Khan told reporters on Thursday that Inzamam was still battling the back problem which kept him off the field for most of the last day of the final Test against South Africa in Cape Town last weekend. South Africa won the series 2-1.

"Inzamam was here at training, but he is still struggling with his back problem. It's improving, but he is still only 50-50," Younis said.

South Africa will rest all-rounders Jacques Kallis and Andrew Hall, wicketkeeper Mark Boucher and pace bowlers Makhaya Ntini, Andre Nel and Charl Langeveldt.

Jhankar beat Adhunik

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Jhankar Kriya Chakra beat Adhunik Sporting Club by three wickets in the Second Division Cricket League at the Gaibandha Stadium yesterday.

Batting first, Adhunik scored 149 all out in 30 overs but Jhankar toppled the large score, losing seven wickets in 27.2 overs.

UNO take on Sapient Club today.

We were outplayed: Lara

BBC ONLINE, undated

West Indies captain Brian Lara admitted his side had been outplayed by India, as the home side sealed a 3-1 one-day series triumph in Vadodara.

"I think it was complete domination but I won't say it was a lack of fight," said Lara, who was run out for three.

"Their performance was outstanding with the bat and in the field as well.

"There was nothing wrong with the decision to field first. They just got too many runs and we in turn, when we got a chance, lost too many wickets."

Lara was unable to end his record of never scoring a one-day century in India, with 89 remaining his best score in 1994.

"It's not a great way to leave the stage in India," he said of his two-ball innings which was ended in the most unfortunate of circumstances.

Court probing

FOR PAGE 21
for seven years now and since the Indian board had promised to lift Azhar's name I too had hoped the PCB would lift my ban," Malik had said last year.

Malik played 103 Tests and 263 one-day internationals for Pakistan between 1981 to 1999. He also led Pakistan in 12 Tests and 34 one-day internationals, a period during which he was alleged to have involvement in match-fixing.

In 1995 Malik was cleared of the allegations by a one-judge commission on the grounds of lack of evidence.

Beckham

FOR PAGE 24
larger than what anyone thought could happen."

Beckham's gesture touched the heart of the determined teen and the emotional story of her courage prompted sympathy and generosity from around the globe as people reached out to offer support.

Major League Soccer, where Beckham signed a deal worth 250 million dollars to play for the Los Angeles Galaxy starting in July, called to see what they might do. Their new club in Toronto offered support.

Yale University's football team sent a pennant and autographed T-shirt.

While Beckham has been sidelined by Real Madrid, he has been busy filming television commercials.

One for Disney with Beckham on horseback begins airing in March while another for American football's National Football League Network will be shown during Sunday's Super Bowl telecast.

Liverpool secure

FOR PAGE 24
new arrival at the Reebok Stadium after Lubomir Michalik and Zoltan Harsanyi.

Bottom side Watford snapped up three new players on the final day of trading, lifting their total number of January acquisitions to eight.

French duo Johan Cavalli and Cedric Avinel, a midfielder and centreback respectively, were joined at Vicarage Road by Brazilian midfielder Douglas Rinaldi, who has agreed a six-month loan from Brazilian side Veranopolis EC.



Abahani captain Khaled Mashud (3rd from L) receives a tracksuit from Nasir Rizvi (3rd from R), director of their cricket team's new sponsor Global Beverage Limited, makers of Virgin soft drinks, at the club tent on Wednesday.

Coach doubted Akhtar

AFP, Lahore
Controversial Pakistani paceman Shoaib Akhtar on Wednesday said coach Bob Woolmer believed he had feigned injury during his short stint in South Africa.

"Woolmer thought I feigned injury which led to our altercation," Akhtar told reporters about an incident on the second day of the Port Elizabeth Test earlier this month.

The 31-year-old paceman had to return home after suffering a hamstring injury. He had taken 4-36 on the first day of the second Test, which Pakistan won by five wickets to level the series at 1-1.

South Africa, however, clinched the three-match series by winning the third Test at Cape Town by five wickets.

Akhtar, who also received a doping ban last year, was not picked for the 17-man squad initially on fitness grounds.

But he was later sent as a replacement after another paceman, Umar Gul, twisted his ankle and was ruled out of the Test series.

Ironically, Akhtar's successful return for his first Test in 12 months lasted just one day.

He could not bowl in the second innings due to the injury. To add to Akhtar's woes television footage showed him pushing coach Woolmer and exchanging heated words.

He was later fined 2,500 dollars after a disciplinary hearing by the team manager Talat Ali.

Akhtar said he later apologised to Woolmer.

"I apologised to Woolmer and he also said few soft words with me and the matter was closed," he said.

"Whenever someone doubts my commitment my soul gets hurt, it's worse than any physical injury," Akhtar added.

This was not the first time Akhtar has been accused of feigning injury. He had to undergo medical tests after he suffered a hamstring injury during Pakistan's third Test defeat to arch rivals India three years ago.

The Pakistan team's management, including captain Inzamamul Haq and the then coach Javed Miandad, alleged Akhtar had feigned the injury.

It prompted the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to launch a medical inquiry into the fast bowler.

No Mexican waves!

AFP, Melbourne
Australian cricket chiefs on Thursday banned spectators from launching a "Mexican wave" at all remaining one-day international matches in the country.

Crickets Australia announced that the practice, in which spectators choreograph a wave effect in the grandstands by standing up in sections and raising their arms in the air, would be outlawed immediately.

The new policy, in effect at all international venues across Australia, was implemented after spectators threw objects in the air during the wave at some matches.

"While the wave itself is harmless, unfortunately the associated throwing of objects in the air is not," Cricket Australia chief executive James Sutherland said in a statement.

"At best, thrown objects cause discomfort such as being drenched with beer or plastic cups full of urine. But at worst they cause injuries to other spectators, and that's not a risk we're prepared to take anymore."

He said the behaviour of fans at the cricket this summer had improved, but there were still people ruining the day for others.

Shahjada savages

FOR PAGE 21
ensured that his side won. The portly middle-order batsman cracked 82 off 85 balls and was well-supported by half-centuries from Pakistani hard-hitter Shahbaz Butt, Mahbubul Karim and Salahuddin.

Kalabagan tailenders kept their cool as they won the match with one ball remaining after Sharif bowled a fine spell picking up four wickets for Pegasus to add to his 64 earlier.

PARTEX v INDIRA ROAD
Put into bat first, Partex rode on Rajin Saleh's 89 to post 176 for 9 in 33 overs. But their innings war rocked throughout by Tariqul Islam who picked up five wickets.

But Indira's innings also lost impetus as seamer Mahfuzur Rahman ripped them apart taking five for 16 as well. His effort bore fruit as Indira were restricted to 139 for eight.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SONARGAON: 59 all out in 17.4 overs (Shahrijal 0, Ejaz 0, Jayantha 0, Elias 0, Alok 0, Marshall 0, Ghosh 17, Salim 0, Ashiqur 7, Mahbubul 16, Obaidul 2, extras 7, Ziaur 1-20, Shahjada 6-9, Talha 1-24, Shuvo 2-6).

ABAHANI: 60-2 in 16.4 overs (Jahurul 9, Kuntal 19, Nazim 9, Naeem 14, extras 9, Mahbubul 1-19, Ashiqur 1-19).

Result: Abahani won by 8 wickets.

PEGASUS: 295-8 in 45 overs (Rabiul 55, Monir 20, Lal 85, Sunny 1, Sharif 64, Saif 3, Raisul 12, Delwar 14, Jubair 3\*, Sajid 1\*, extras 37, Arafat 3-47, Rashedul 2-41, Imtiaz 2-64).

KALABAGAN: 296-8 in 44.5 overs (Uttam 30, Golam 9, Shahbaz 50, Karim 56, Nahidul 82, Arafat 58, Monirul 3, Imtiaz 4, Rashedul 3\*, Mahmud 0\*, extras 7, Sharifullah 4-51, Delwar 1-39, Lal 1-65, Jubair 1-37).

Result: Kalabagan won by 2 wickets.

PARTEX: 176-9 in 33 overs (Rajin 89, Rahman 46, Hanif 1, Tariq 4, Hasan 1, Raqibul 3, Rafiqul 4, Rahul 2, Rezaul 3\*, Dey 3, Mahfuzur 1, extras 19, Tariqul 5-26, Tushar 2-26, Murad 1-32).

INDIRA: 139-8 in 33 overs (Arif 23, Ashiqur 4, Rasel 0, Mehdi 16, Murad 6, Tushar 0, Islam 8\*, Ariful 16, Sajidul 14, Shumon 1\*, extras 11, Mahfuzur 5-16, Hanif 1-15, Rajin 1-12, Tariq 1-11).

Result: Partex won by 37 runs.

Styris joins Kiwis

AFP, Sydney
Versatile New Zealand batsman Scott Styris has only just arrived in Australia, but he says he has immediately sensed a growing confidence among his teammates.

Styris is the latest player to augment the Black Caps triangular one-day series squad and hopes he can emulate the efforts of Jacob Oram and Lou Vincent, both of whom have been key contributors since joining the side.

Speaking in Melbourne on Thursday, Styris was asked whether there was a strong belief among the New Zealanders that they could upset the unbeaten Australians, starting with their clash at the MCG on Friday.

"Absolutely, and I think the Australians think that as well," he said in Melbourne on Thursday.

"But we have to play well... I think if we continue to build like we have done over the past seven days then it should be a good few games."

Styris, 31, is expected to play in Sunday's game at the expense of Craig McMillan, although the latter has been a contributor during the tri-series with both bat and ball.

If selected, Styris said he needed to play to the level established by his teammates in their last four games, which have produced two wins and two narrow losses to Australia.

"The boys have put three good performances in a row and I'm sure they're looking for four, five and beyond," he said.

England facing disaster

FOR PAGE 21
The right-arm paceman had been in good form in the series, taking eight wickets at 20.62, but now follows batsman Kevin Pietersen home in another injury blow for the tourists.

However, seamer Jon Lewis may return for England after an ankle injury, while Vaughan was touted as a possible starter in their final match against New Zealand.

England have won only one of their six matches and need to win their last two with New Zealand losing twice to be sure of making the finals.

Meanwhile Ponting will be assessed early on Friday after injuring a hip during Thursday's training, with Victorian batsman Brad Hodge called up as a late replacement.

"Ricky suffered a slight strain in the hip region during training this afternoon and will be reviewed Friday morning before play, where a final decision will be made on his availability," Australian physiotherapist Alex Kountouris said.

If Ponting is unfit, wicketkeeper-batsman Adam Gilchrist would again take over the captaincy, as was the case when he was rested earlier in the series.

Brett Lee was set to make way for the talented Tait and Stuart Clark was recalled at the expense of Mitchell Johnson, as Australia juggled their embarrassment of quick bowling riches.

Tait, whose slinging action is reminiscent of former Australian quick Jeff Thomson, played two Tests in 2005 and vies for the mantle of Australia's fastest bowler with Lee.

Captain Ponting said the national selectors were keen to blood Tait before they choose their final World Cup squad, adding the 23-year-old was also likely to play against New Zealand on Sunday.

"I would probably imagine that he would play both games," Ponting said in Sydney on Thursday. "It's more than likely, I'd suggest."

Moody eyes England job

BBC ONLINE, undated
Sri Lanka coach Tom Moody would be "very interested" in taking on the same role with England if it became available, says his former county boss.

England's current coach Duncan Fletcher has said he will reconsider his position when the World Cup finishes.

Worcestershire chief executive Mark Newton told BBC Sport the Australian would make an excellent successor.

He said: "He is very knowledgeable about English cricket and (as a player) was a World Cup winner twice."

Moody's existing contract with Sri Lanka runs out after the World Cup.

His family are settled in Malvern, near Worcester, and the 41-year-old has already said he will not pursue the vacancy to coach Australia.

Newton said: "My gut feeling is that Tom would be very, very interested in the England coaching job, if it became available."

"He has clearly turned around Sri Lanka's one-day fortunes and realistically they go into the World Cup with as good a chance as any team - apart from Australia - of winning the thing."

Sehwag set for return

AFP, New Delhi
Virender Sehwag is being tipped to play in the upcoming home series against Sri Lanka as the selectors explore all options before naming their World Cup squad.

Sehwag, one of the most destructive batsmen in world cricket, would normally have been considered an automatic selection for the showpiece event starting in the Caribbean on March 13.

But the 28-year-old was axed for the West Indies series following his poor form on the South African tour with the chief selector Dilip Vengsarkar advising him to "sort out his batting."

As his Indian teammates played and won a four-match series against the West Indies 3-1, Sehwag returned to the nets in Delhi and scored 106 in the only first-class game available to him.

With the World Cup squad to be named on February 12, the selectors need to play Sehwag in the first two of four matches against Sri Lanka on February 8 and 11 to judge his form.

"We will consider all options before the World Cup and Sehwag is certainly an option," said Vengsarkar, who will name the team for the Sri Lanka series on Saturday.

Sehwag's favourite opening position appears to have been taken by back-in-form Sourav Ganguly and young Robin Uthappa following their fine display against the West Indies.

The 21-year-old Uthappa hit 70 off 42 balls and 28 off 17 in the two matches he played to provide India rollicking starts in true Sehwag style.

One of the current middle-order batsmen - skipper Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, Yuvraj Singh, Dinesh Karthik or Mahendra Dhoni - will have to be rested against Sri Lanka to accommodate Sehwag.

An unnamed selector was quoted in the local media on Thursday as saying that Sehwag was certain to be named in the World Cup squad even if he did not perform against Sri Lanka.

The four-match series against Sri Lanka opens in Kolkata on February 8 with the remaining games in Rajkot (February 11), Goa (February 14) and Visakhapatnam (February 17).

He is also the only Indian to compile a triple century in Test cricket where he has 4,155 runs from 52 matches at a creditable average of 49.46.

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Ponting slams Vincent

AFP, Sydney
Australian captain Ricky Ponting on Thursday hit back at Lou Vincent's sledging claims and accused the New Zealand opener of "yapping" in the field.

In his weekly newspaper column, Ponting backed Australia's "ultra-competitive" approach and denied claims they had gone too far.

"I think that's just part of the game at the highest level," Ponting wrote in The Australian newspaper.

"There was nothing over the top that went on the other night, and what he is saying merely highlights how tough our two sides go at it out in the middle."

"I want the guys in my team to be ultra-competitive."

"That's what it is to play cricket for Australia, and I'm sure New Zealand are exactly the same."

Vincent this week accused the Australians of arrogance and said they "hunt like a pack of dogs" when trying to unsettle batsmen through criticism.

But Ponting said Vincent was also a vocal player who was "always yapping" on the field.

"Lou is a player who is always yapping up a bit and chirping when he is out on the field, trying to get an advantage for his team," he wrote.

Separately, Ponting said pre-World Cup competition for places had resulted in Australia's sizzling form with six wins out of six in the tri-series.

Matthew Hayden, Mitchell Johnson, Cameron White, Brad Hodge, Ben Hilfenhaus and Brad Hogg have already been given the chance to press their claims, with pace bowler Shaun Tait making his debut on Friday.

"I don't think there are too many places in our squad at all that are guaranteed for the World Cup," he said in Sydney on Thursday.

"We've still got possibly eight games to play (before the World Cup) and lots of things can happen in that period of time."

"I think the competition that we've got around the team at the moment is fantastic."

Australia has been able to showcase its depth during the tri-series, particularly in the fast-bowling ranks where Glenn McGrath, Brett Lee, Nathan Bracken, Stuart Clark, Johnson, Hilfenhaus and now Tait have all been rotated.

Ponting was certain Australia were well-placed to win its third successive World Cup.

"By the time the World Cup squad is announced I'm sure that we're going to have a very good match today," said the 21-year-old.

"I had quite a tough opponent who brings a lot of ball back, but I was playing really aggressive and I tried to dictate big points, and I also served well, so it helped me a lot," said the Serbian.

In the quarterfinals, Jankovic will play her compatriot and fifth seed Ana Ivanovic, who outclassed Mara Santangelo of Italy 4-6, 6-1, 6-2.

Dementieva will take on Roberta Vinci of Italy, the winner over France's Severine Bremond 6-3, 6-0.

Earlier, defending champion Elena Dementieva breezed past fellow Russian Elena Likhovtseva 6-4, 7-5 to join Sharapova, former world number one Martina Hingis and Jelena Jankovic of Serbia into the quarterfinals.

But China's Beijing Olympics hopeful Li Na, sixth seed, fell victim to Samantha Stosur of Australia 6-2, 6-4.

"She (Likhovtseva) started to play well like she has nothing to lose and she was going for the winners down the line and she did it very good, but it's important to finish in two sets and save some energy for the next round," said Dementieva, seeded third.

"I think it's going to be very difficult to defend my title this time, but I'll try to play my best. I'm really enjoying playing here in Tokyo, it's great to be back as the defending champion," added the 25-year-old.

Jankovic needed only 62 minutes to beat China's Zheng Jie 6-4, 6-0 for her first win in three Tokyo



VIRENDER SEHWAG

AFP, Sydney
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Russian tennis star Maria Kirilenko makes a double-feasted return against Ai Sugiyama of Japan during their second round match at the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo on Thursday. Kirilenko was beaten 3-6, 6-1, 6-3.