



PHOTO: AFP

DE LIGHT AND DESPAIR: (L-R) Sri Lanka off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran is beside himself with joy after snaring the wicket of Mahendra Dhoni while Indian captain Rahul Dravid is understandably distraught following his team's loss in their World Cup Group B clash at the Queen's Park Oval on Friday.

SL almost oust India

AFP, Port of Spain



Sri Lanka stormed into the World Cup Super Eights after virtually knocking India out of the tournament with an emphatic 69-run win here on Friday. Mahela Jayawardene's Sri Lankans qualified with an all-win record in the four-team group, meaning they will also carry forward two crucial points in the next round. India's batting crumbled in the must-win game as they were bowled out for 185 chasing a 255-run target on a good pitch to put in their worst performance in the event since the 1979 edition in England. They were the champions in 1983, semi-finalists in 1987 and 1996, and runners-up in 2003. This time, they could manage just one win in three matches, against debutants Bermuda. Skipper Rahul Dravid, batting with a runner in the later part of his innings due to cramp, top-scored with 60 but that not good enough for his under-performing team despite enjoying the crowd support. Bangladesh, who shocked India in their opening match, now have a chance to make it to the next round for the first time since their Cup

debut in 1999 as they face Bermuda in their last Group B game here on Sunday. Sri Lanka had more than one hero in their victory, with Upul

Tharanga (64) and Chamara Silva (59) scoring solid half-centuries and off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran and seamer Chaminda Vaas tightening the screws on India.

"I'm very happy and all credit to the boys. We batted in difficult conditions and then we bowled and fielded well," said Sri Lankan captain Jayawardene.

"Vaas and Muralidaran were brilliant. We knew we could put pressure on them by getting early wickets."

Man-of-the-match Muralidaran (3-41) also held a superb running catch at mid-off to account for Sourav Ganguly (seven).

Veteran left-arm fast bowler Vaas began it when he reacted sharply to hold a return catch to remove Robin Uthappa and then dismissed Ganguly in his disciplined opening spell.

Batting star Sachin Tendulkar also failed to sparkle as he fell for a duck, inside-edging a Dilhara Fernando delivery on to his stumps to leave his team tottering at 44-3.

Virender Sehwag sustained India's hopes with a 54-run stand for the fourth wicket with Dravid before being caught at lone slip by Jayawardene off Muralidaran.

Sehwag offered a difficult chance to wicketkeeper Kumar Sangakkara off Fernando when on 39, but failed to capitalise on it. He

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INDIA V SRI LANKA SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the World Cup Group B match between India and Sri Lanka at the Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain on Friday:

SRI LANKA	R	M	B	4s	6s
Tharanga lbw b Tendulkar	64	154	90	6	0
Jayasuriya c Agarkar b Zaheer Khan	6	33	23	0	0
Jayawardene c Dhoni b Agarkar	7	27	20	1	0
Sangakkara c Patel b Ganguly	15	50	35	2	0
Silva c Dhoni b Zaheer Khan	59	99	68	5	0
Dilshan c Dhoni b Patel	38	53	41	3	0
Arnold not out	19	21	13	3	0
Vaas not out	19	17	12	2	1
Extras: (lb-11, w-14, nb-2)	27				
Total: (For 6 wickets in 50 overs)	254				
Did not bat: Muralidaran, Malinga, Fernando.					
Fall of wickets: 1-33, 2-53, 3-92, 4-133, 5-216, 6-216.					
Bowler	O	M	R	W	Econ
Zaheer Khan	10	0	49	2	4.90
Agarkar	8	1	33	1	4.12
Patel	10	1	46	1	4.60
Harbhajan Singh	10	0	53	0	5.30

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Imran wants Aaqib as coach

REUTERS, Karachi

Former World Cup-winning captain Imran Khan says ex-test paceman Aaqib Javed should be appointed coach of Pakistan. "Pakistan have won two youth World Cups under him and he seems the ideal choice to take over as coach," Imran told a news conference on Saturday. Javed, 34, went on to play a total of 22 Tests and 163 one-day internationals after making his Test debut against New Zealand in Wellington as a 16-year-old. Imran said he was shocked to learn that Pakistan's World Cup coach Bob Woolmer had been murdered. "I thought he died from natural causes. To learn he was murdered was a surprise to me because I can't understand what motive anyone would have to murder him," said Imran, who played in 88 tests and 175 one-dayers and led the team to World Cup glory in 1992.

Former England batsman Woolmer, 58, was found unconscious in his Kingston hotel room and died later in hospital last Sunday. Jamaican police said he was strangled to death. "Only time will tell who is responsible for his death but why someone would want to kill him is a puzzle," said Imran.

Imran supported the appointment of Younis Khan as captain in place of Inzamamul Haq, who has resigned as skipper and retired from one-dayers after Pakistan's World Cup exit.

Former captain Imran now leads his own political party and is a member of parliament.

He said Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf was responsible for the team's disappointing recent performances on the field.

Musharraf is chief patron of the Pakistan Cricket Board and appoints the chairman in the sport's ad-hoc system.

We can improve: Mahela

AFP, Port of Spain



Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene has told teammates not to rest on their laurels after qualifying for the World Cup second round with an emphatic win over India.

"There is still room for us to improve. I think the conditions will be different at different venues and we have to make sure we don't sit back on what we have achieved now," he said.

"We now need to work much harder, improve ourselves and adapt to the other conditions. We had a set of plans for this group stage, how we wanted to play our cricket, especially in Trinidad, and

we executed them very well."

Sri Lanka marched into the next Super Eight stage with an all-win record after beating India by 69 runs in their last match here on Friday, carrying forward two crucial points in the process.

The victory tasted sweeter for Sri Lanka, especially after losing eight of their last 10 one-day internationals in India.

"Any side at home is stronger. If you take us in Sri Lanka, we are much stronger than anybody. So it is just a home advantage. You know the wickets and you have the support of the crowds," he said.

"When India are playing at home, they have 30,000-40,000 in most of the stadiums, and in Kolkata you have 80,000 shouting for you. So it is totally different.

"That is why I said when you guys asked me in India that we are playing India in the World Cup and I

said 'Yes, but not in India. We are playing in the Caribbean'."

Jayawardene said his team's good performances away from home in recent times had stood them well in this tournament.

"What we tried to do over the last year or so is that we tried to play a lot of cricket away from home. We wanted to compete away from home, improve ourselves and see where we can be," he said.

"The practice that we have been doing over the last 12 months has groomed us to compete abroad, get adjusted to wickets and conditions quickly and play some smart cricket."

Sri Lanka put in impressive performance away from home in recent times, winning in England and then sharing a one-day series

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PHOTO: STAR

Walkers participating in the walkathon rest at Inani sub-camp on Saturday after covering the second 45-km of their journey.

India fumes

REUTERS, New Delhi

Hundreds of cricket fans across India burnt effigies, defaced posters and held mock funeral processions of the national team, a day after their defeat to Sri Lanka in the World Cup match in the Caribbean.

Winners in 1983 and finalists in the last tournament, India suffered a 69-run defeat in their crunch Group B match against Sri Lanka and their slim hopes of progressing now hinge on an unlikely defeat for Bangladesh by debutants Bermuda on Sunday.

Crickets is taken very seriously in India, where players are treated as huge celebrities, paid big money to endorse major commercial brands and put on pedestals by cricket-crazy fans.

But on Saturday, television pictures showed furious cricket fans in towns and cities across India taking to the streets to show their outrage at their national team's defeat.

In the northern city of Kanpur, dozens of residents held a mock funeral procession where people dressed as the 11 cricket players were carried on stretchers through the streets.

In other places, fans burnt effigies, stamped on glossy posters of players and daubed their faces with black paint. Others lashed out at pictures with their shoes.

Security has been stepped up outside the residences of some of the cricketers, including captain Rahul Dravid's home in the southern city of Bangalore, for fears of an attack or stone-pelting by fans.

The World Cup-frenzy in the country has been fuelled by a multitude of television channels and media houses who have touted the team as favourites and are tracking the action minute-by-minute since the team's arrival in the Caribbean.

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Walkers fall ill as they reach Inani

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

The 100-km walkathon, 'Grameen-phone Activate Bangladesh -- Challenge of the Longest Beach-2007', will conclude this afternoon at the Labori Point of Cox's Bazar beach.

The participants of the longest ever walkathon in the country had their second camp at Inani yesterday, the second day of the programme, after setting off from Teknaf on Friday.

However, the challenge looked really tough as a number of walkers fell ill -- mostly men -- due to the scorching heat. Although all the 30 female participants were standing tall, most of the male performers failed to pass the test of the second leg 45-km walk from Shamlapur sub-camp.

The Activate Bangladesh and MAA Consortium are organising the event with Channel i, Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Radio Today as their strategic partners in a bid to focus a positive image of the Cox's Bazar sea beach.

Chairman of Activate Bangladesh Maj Gen (ret'd) Anwar Hossain yesterday informed that all the ailing candidates have been given proper treatment.

"It is not like a competition but we feel the long walk as a real challenge. Those who will finish the walkathon, will conquer the longest sea beach of the world," told Deepak Sharma, a participant.

The event will be rounded off with a fun 10-km walk and beach sports culminating in a cultural show on the beach on March 26.

Blame me: Dravid

AFP, Port of Spain



India skipper Rahul Dravid said he was willing to take full responsibility for his team's miserable World Cup campaign.

"I am not sitting here and trying to shirk responsibility. I am the first one to stand up and say that we should have done better and it starts with me," said Dravid.

India virtually bowed out of the tournament after suffering a 69-run defeat to Sri Lanka here on Friday, their second in the four-team Group B.

The loss means India are left hoping that a hapless Bermuda can beat Bangladesh here on Sunday to hand them a World Cup lifeline.

"I am not trying to put the responsibility on anyone. Until about 24 hours ago, I truly believed that we would still be in this tournament. I take full responsibility for the fact that we haven't progressed to the next round."

It was India's worst performance in the event since the 1979 World Cup in England. They were the champions in 1983, semi-finalists in

1987 and 1996, and runners-up in 2003.

Sri Lanka qualified for the next Super Eight stage with an all-win record, while Bangladesh are on the verge of making it to the next round.

Despite the loss, Dravid would not speculate on his future.

"I was appointed captain till the World Cup. So, I am not even the captain at this point of time. It's not my decision to make," said Dravid, whose side won just one of their three games, against Bermuda.

Dravid said he was hugely disappointed with his team's virtual exit from the tournament as they had prepared well.

"It's very disappointing. It's not a nice thing to lose in the early part of the World Cup. We have invested a lot of time and effort in it and it has not gone our way," he said.

"It's a big event and you really want to do well, but sports is like that. Sometimes, your best plans and all your ideas just don't work. We did not play well in this tournament and did not deserve to go into the second round."

Dravid said the players were disappointed because they had worked hard for the event.

"Nobody realises the enormity of the defeat than the players themselves. The players are the ones who put in a lot of time. They worked

really hard for this. It is an opportunity they get once in four years," he said.

"It is something that you really look forward to in your career. So no-one understands the enormity of this more than the players. Definitely, there is a lot of introspection and disappointment in the dressing-room."

"It's a lot of their dreams, a lot of their hopes that go into tournaments like this. When it doesn't work out, they feel more than anyone else."

Dravid conceded that his team's five-wicket defeat in the opening game against Bangladesh affected their chances of making it to the second round.

"We had a bad game against Bangladesh where we did not really bat well upfront. That sort of put pressure on us. Today again, we did not play well enough," he said.

"The way the tournament is structured you have one banana skin game and you can be out of the tournament quite quickly. In the first game against Bangladesh, we did not play anywhere near our potential."

"In a tournament like this, you

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PHOTO: AFP

Indian cricket fans burn posters and an effigy of the Indian cricket team in Amristar on Saturday following their loss against Sri Lanka in the World Cup on Friday.

Kapil calls 'em pathetic

AFP, New Delhi



Former India great Kapil Dev lashed out at Rahul Dravid's under-performing team on Saturday, saying they did not deserve to progress in the World Cup.

Another great Sunil Gavaskar hinted coach Greg Chappell's future was on the line after India were virtually knocked out of the World Cup following the 69-run defeat against Sri Lanka on Friday.

Only an unlikely victory by first-timers Bermuda over Bangladesh on Sunday will ensure India's backdoor entry into the Super Eights, a prospect Dev did not welcome.

"I hope that does not happen because Bangladesh deserve to go into the second round since they had also defeated India."

"All credit to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. India were pathetic and not good enough to remain in the tournament."

Gavaskar, speaking on ESPN, said he doubted if former Australian captain Chappell's contract as India coach will be renewed after the World Cup.

"I think there is a big question mark on Greg's future," said Gavaskar, who was on the panel which appointed Chappell for a two-year term in 2005.

"He was brought in with the specific aim of taking India to the top two teams in the world and that has not happened. His position will be debated."

Gavaskar urged the Indian cricket board to act quickly since India are due to tour Bangladesh for two Test matches and three one-day internationals in May.

Gavaskar, however, hoped that

Dravid would remain captain despite the World Cup debacle.

"Rahul is 34 and you do not sack captains at 34 when they are peaking," he said.

"I don't see any reason for a change because Dravid has not shown any sign of pressure. His batting has not faltered."

Disappointed Indian fans did not react violently as they had done last week after the defeat by Bangladesh when miscreants attack wicket-keeper Mahendra Dhoni's unfinished house in the eastern town of Ranchi.

"Of course I am disgusted by the way the team played, the whole lot should be sacked," said Delhi student Shaumik Bose. "But damaging homes is no way to go about it."

Dev blamed lack of commitment by the senior players for the defeat, while Gavaskar said the team did not have the temperament to deal with crunch situations.

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