

'Preaching more than playing'

AFP, Islamabad

The Pakistan cricket team's media manager said some players' fixation on religious activities resulted in their dismal performance in the World Cup, reports said Saturday.

PJ Mir made the observation to reporters after submitting his statement to the evaluation committee of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) in Lahore, which is reviewing the team's performance in the Caribbean.

"I could not disclose the fact before, but today (Saturday) I informed the media that most of the members had no focus on cricket. Their fixation was on preaching, affecting the team's preparation," the English daily Dawn quoted him as telling reporters after the Friday hearing.

Mir said some members of team had "no drive for the game and were much more active in preaching and praying."

"I have video footage which will prove me right and I will handover those tapes to the Pakistan Cricket Board," he said.

"It was beyond the limit, this religious influence, and the players were even made to offer prayers during the flights," he said without naming who had forced the team members to pray.

The newspaper said Mir's bold statement was seen as an attempt to check the growing religious extremism within cricket in Pakistan amid reports that the PCB had devised a plan to rid the team of extremism.

The world number three side were dumped out of the World Cup by minnows Ireland on March 18. A day later their coach Bob Woolmer's strangled body was found in his room on the 12th floor of the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel in Kingston.

Pak players to be questioned

PTI, London

After being cleared initially, Pakistani cricketers are once again under the scanner in the Bob Woolmer murder case for "ambiguities" in their statements to Jamaican Police, which is planning to send a team of investigators to question them on the alleged inconsistencies.

A maniac's Deputy Commissioner of Police Mark Shields has said a close examination of the players' statements has revealed "inconsistencies" but denied any of the Pakistani cricketer was being viewed as a suspect.

"Having reviewed the witness statements it is probable that we will need to clear up further ambiguities. We may have to take further statements," Shields told The Daily Telegraph.

Shields, however, refused to confirm the strength of the team that would go to Pakistan and also did not specify the exact time of their leaving for the sub-continent.

The former Scotland Yard also did not elaborate on the nature of "ambiguities" in the statements but said they may just be nothing more than "innocent mistakes".

"It may be those ambiguities are cleared up by the Pakistan liaison officers (arriving in Jamaica) so it may not be necessary to travel, but I'm saying that it's probable that at some point we may have to go and take further statements," he said.

England on

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has been restricted by an arm injury -- bowling his lively medium-pacers during practice on Friday, it seems as if batsman Brad Hodge will now take Watson's place.

Sunday's fixture could be Glenn McGrath's final match against England, with the 37-year-old Australia fast bowler due to retire after the World Cup.

"It would be perfect, get a few wickets, knock them over, get the two points and move on," said McGrath, who in 32 one-dayers against England has taken 50 wickets at just over 23 apiece.

"But it's not going to be as easy as that," added McGrath, who earlier this year broke the rib of England star batsman Kevin Pietersen.

"They've played some pretty decent cricket against us in Australia. But we've got over that and at this whole tournament, no team has really got close to us so far."

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA (probable): Adam Gilchrist, Matthew Hayden, Ricky Ponting (captain), Michael Clarke, Andrew Symonds, Michael Hussey, Brad Hodge, Brad Hogg, Nathan Bracken, Shaun Tait, Glenn McGrath.

ENGLAND (probable): Michael Vaughan (captain), Andrew Strauss, Ian Bell, Kevin Pietersen, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Ravi Bopara, Paul Nixon, Sajid Mahmood, James Anderson, Monty Panesar.

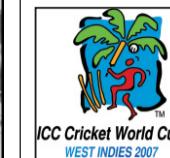
Umpires: Billy Bowden and Rudi Koertzen.



BCB vice-president Aziz Al Kaiser Tito (2nd R) shakes hands with GrameenPhone media manager Moyeen Tareq after a press conference at a local hotel yesterday.

Ex-skippers want less ads

AFP, Mumbai



ICC Cricket World Cup
WEST INDIES 2007

signing a new commercial deal.

Indian players are much sought after by companies for endorsing their products in a country where cricket is the most popular sport.

Superstar Sachin Tendulkar, widely regarded as one of the world's richest cricketers, reportedly has sponsorships worth 400 million dollars.

The former captains said the BCCI should take steps to curtail Test and one-day engagements and recommended that a pool of 30 players be rotated so that a cricketer does not play more than 80 days in a year.

India are due to play a minimum of 15 five-day Tests and at least 40 one-dayers over the next 12 months starting with a tour of Bangladesh in May.

The domestic system should be made stronger, the captains said, adding the international calendar be adjusted so that star players play six to eight weeks of domestic matches.

The captains also recommended that the slow wickets around the country be replaced by sporting pitches so that batsmen do not struggle when confronted by fast wickets abroad.

The system of appointing five honorary selectors be abolished, the captains suggested. Instead,

there should be full-time paid selectors drawn from the vast pool of former players.

The second-string 'A' teams should tour Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the West Indies on a regular basis so that younger players get a chance to play on good wickets before being drafted into the national side.

The recommendations were ratified by the influential working committee of the BCCI on Saturday.

Akhtar, Asif advised to rest more

CRICKINFO, undated

Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammed Asif have been advised further rest for two weeks to allow time for their injuries respective injuries to heal properly.

Shoaib's knee troubles and Asif's elbow injury forced their withdrawals from the World Cup and they have been advised to rest for a couple more weeks before they can return to training.

"They need at least two more weeks of rest before they are examined again by our medical panel," Zakir Khan, the board's director of cricket operations, told Reuters.

"The medical panel will decide when they can resume training," he added.

The bowlers tested positive for a banned steroid last October in out-of-competition tests conducted by the board. They were initially banned but then cleared by an appeals panel a month later.

At the time there was intense speculation that they were pulled out of the tournament because of fears that they may still be carrying traces of the steroid Nandrolone in their bodies and thus may have tested positive in the Caribbean. The PCB has consistently rubbed the speculation.

In the absence of the new-ball duo, Pakistan crashed out of the World Cup after successive losses to West Indies and Ireland.

LOCAL SNIPPET

SPORTS REPORTER

India all-rounder Andre Botha is doubtful for Monday's World Cup Super 8 game against New Zealand after inuring a hamstring in training.

Botha was taking part in a game of touch rugby in Georgetown when he felt his right hamstring tighten.

He missed the practice session which followed and Ireland are now waiting to learn the extent of the problem in the hope that he will recover quickly.

"The next 48 hours are crucial," said team physio Iain Knox.

Botha's steadiness with bat and, especially, ball has been a big factor in the team's success so far in the Caribbean.

He took 2-5 from eight overs as they stunned Pakistan in the first round and although they have not won a game since then, they have remained competitive in their most recent matches against England and South Africa.

If Botha misses the New Zealand game, it could mean a first World Cup outing for Dubliner Kenny Carroll, who has not played since the warm-up win over Canada in Trinidad on March 8.

Meanwhile, the team have been sent a good luck message by the Duke of York, who met team officials during a visit to Guyana.

"I've been following the competition on the television, and like everyone else I'm delighted that you have reached the Super 8s phase," he said.

"You have certainly enhanced the Cup with your spirit, and it's great to see a team with a smile on their faces.

"I wish you every success in the rest of your games, and hopefully you'll pull off another memorable victory."

Dravid stays

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Announcing these decisions, Srinivasan said the Board had also decided to do away with the zonal system of selection in a year's time; they will be replaced by fulltime selectors chosen on the basis of their eligibility based on factors including stature as a player.

The subject of player earnings appeared to be the main focus of the meeting, and it was decided to replace the system of graded contracts with a standard fee for all, and additional bonuses for series wins. However, no figures were mentioned in this regard. This effectively means that seniors and juniors all earn the same, the difference being in what they earn from endorsements.

There, too, the board has cracked down: Each player will be allowed a maximum of three endorsements a year but will not be allowed to shoot any commercials up to two weeks prior to any series. Also, not more than two players can endorse the same product. However, Srinivasan stressed that these were decisions taken looking ahead, as a plan for the future.

With a view to improving domestic cricket, it was decided that all international players would play a specified number of domestic games every season; the Ranji Trophy Elite group would be reduced from 15 teams to 10 by 2008-09; all state associations have asked to prepare "fast and lively" wickets; the home and away rotation system has been scrapped for all tournament semifinals and finals; these venues will be chosen by the Board.

"We have instructed the selection committee to send a young team to Bangladesh with an experienced captain," Srinivasan told reporters at the end of a two-day review of the World Cup performance.

Fixing part of Bob's book

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Bob was murdered because of match-fixing, but as coach he was totally irrelevant.

"Match-fixers kill match-fixers and the fact that his computer was not taken from his room does not add up. So it has to be something else," Noakes told The Times.

"My point is that the ICC (International Cricket Council) should be looking at matches in the past which could have been fixed."

"In horse racing, you back the horse which is heavily favoured in the last hour before the race."

"If it is the case that, as reported, the odds on Ireland beating Pakistan last month changed from 500-1 to 8-1 shortly before the start, then that match was probably fixed."

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq has denied any of their World Cup games were fixed.

"I can assure you that there is no truth at all in such allegations," he commented.

Kim, Lim take golf titles

SPORTS REPORTER

JH Kim clinched the men's event while MH Lim won in the women's group in the Korean Cup golf tournament held at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

KM Kwon and H Kwon both finished second in their respective events among the 567 golfers who took part in the competition that began on Friday.

Director General of Forces Intelligence Major General Sadique Hasan and president of the Korean community in Bangladesh Yoon Lee distributed prizes among the winners.



Winners of the Korean Cup Golf tournament pose with chief guest Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Major General Md Jahangir Alam Choudhury during the prize giving ceremony at the Kurmitola Golf Club on Friday.