

Morning will show the day

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's astrologers say the exact moment when the nation's cricketers leave their hotel for the World Cup semifinal against New Zealand will determine if they will win.

It is not only the batsmen's timing at the crease, but also their precise morning schedule that will decide the winner at Jamaica's Sabina Park later on Tuesday.

In a country where even preparing a meal is often decided by the stars, Sri Lanka's fortune-tellers are desperate to know when the team will leave for the ground.

Arisen Ahubudu, an astrologer known for deciding lucky code names for military operations, said the outcome will depend on the planetary position at the time that the Sri Lankans set out for the match.

"They will definitely win if they depart at an astrologically right time," Ahubudu said -- though he declined to say what the ideal time was.

Teams usually leave about two hours before the start of a match. The semifinal starts in Kingston at 9:30am local time (1430 GMT).

Fellow astrologer Priyantha Ratnayake, known for his controversial political predictions, said he saw a Sri Lankan win.

"(Veteran opener) Sanath Jayasuriya's stars are placed on a winning position and his luck should see Sri Lanka through," he said.

Sri Lankan leading politicians, as well as military commanders, are known to consult astrologers, and many have their own personal fortune tellers.

Younis lets Gulf trip go

AFP, Leeds

Younis Khan has pulled out of the Pakistan squad to play a three-match series against Sri Lanka in Abu Dhabi in May saying he is still suffering from the team's traumatic World Cup.

Younis, the Pakistan vice-captain, said he wants to concentrate on his career with English county Yorkshire but insists he is still available for future Pakistan series.

"I still love my country and do not see this decision as me turning my back on it. I will play for Pakistan again and play with pride, but now is not the right time," Younis said in a statement.

"The last few weeks have been a very difficult time for me. The tragic death of Bob Woolmer remains deeply upsetting. Pakistan's World Cup exit and the nature of the reception I received when I returned to Pakistan was also very tough to deal with."

Since the World Cup debacle, which saw Woolmer murdered in his Jamaica hotel room and Pakistan make a first round exit, Younis has turned down the opportunity to succeed Inzamamul Haq as skipper.

Shoaib Malik has been appointed as the new national team captain instead.

"It is great to be able to concentrate on cricket. It is important to me to maintain my fitness and form while playing for my county," said Younis who hit a winning century for Yorkshire against Nottinghamshire in a one-day game on Sunday.

"The team has had a terrific start to the season and the players and club have made me feel at home. I will stay here and do my best for my new teammates."

Ceasefire

FROM PAGE 20 to fractured nation.

Government sources said there would be no lowering of its guard during the live broadcast from Jamaica of the semifinals overnight Tuesday, even though the rest of the country will virtually shut down.

Official functions were also adjusted for the game.

The government's spokesman on defence, Keheliya Rambukwella, was to host a dinner reception Tuesday, but fearing a low turnout he arranged for a widescreen TV to show the match.

1999 is history

FROM PAGE 17 premature celebrations.

Waugh went on to score a century and win the game for his side.

Smith conceded his bowlers needed to contain the rampaging Australian top-order batsmen, especially opener Matthew Hayden who is the tournament's leading scorer with 580 runs in nine matches with three centuries.

"Certainly, it (the top order) has been one of their strengths. Their top four have got off to good starts. Hayden up front has been phenomenal throughout the tournament," he said.

"We'll look at those things and come with a game plan of how we can get into their middle order as quick as we can. But even if they do come off, they are quality players and you've got to have a game plan to cope with them."



Former Miss Universe Natalie Glebova of Canada (R) gives a Thai traditional greeting next to Thai tennis hero Paradorn Srichaphan during a press conference announcing their engagement in Bangkok, on Tuesday.

Cup farewells

AFP, Bridgetown



On top of the world, the two-time defending champions are already in the semifinals, where they face South Africa in St Lucia on Wednesday, and are odds-on to win a third title in the final here on April 28.

Coach: John Buchanan has already announced he will retire after the World Cup and will be replaced by Tim Nielsen, the head coach at the Centre of Excellence in Brisbane.

Captain: Ricky Ponting is in the runs, has won back the Ashes thanks to a 5-0 drubbing of England this winter and shows no sign of easing up.

BANGLADESH

Defeated India in the first round and beat semifinalists South Africa in the Super Eights. But horribly inconsistent and lost to Ireland.

Coach: Dav Whatmore, the man who led Sri Lanka to the 1996 World Cup, has resigned but has agreed to oversee the Test and one-day series against India on home soil next month. Whatmore has been linked with the India hot-seat.

Captain: Habibul Bashar endured a miserable World Cup making just 105 runs in eight innings. "Every captain faces the same kinds of pressures in international cricket," he said. "The truth is that I have not batted well."

BERMUDA

Humiliated on their debut appearance losing by 243 runs to Sri Lanka, 257 runs to India and by seven wickets to Bangladesh. Their competitive ungainliness was illustrated by the 255-pound (116kg) spinner Dwayne Leverock.

Coach: Former West Indies Test star Gus Logie faced down a player revolt on the eve of the tournament in a row over payments and then saw his team overhauled.

Logie's next assignment will be to lead the team on tours to Ireland and Holland in August.

Captain: Irvine Romaine expected to carry on

CANADA

First round exit after losing all three matches to New Zealand, England and Kenya. After the tournament, George Codrington and Anderson Cummins, the former West Indies Test paceman, announced their retirement.

Coach: Andy Pick was on a sabbatical and returns to resume his former role as coach of the England Under-19 side. His final task is to take charge of the Canadian team at the four-day Intercontinental Cup final against Ireland in May.

Captain: Veteran John Davison, who hit the fastest ever World Cup century in 2003, was unable to repeat the magic this time. Fast approaching his 37th birthday, his time at the helm could be running out. Wants to see domestic cricket in Canada become semi-professional.

ENGLAND

Lost to New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Australia and South Africa with only one two wins over Test playing nations, a laboured affair against Bangladesh and a one-wicket winning finale against West Indies. Their hopes had already ended with a whimper when South Africa cruised to a nine-wicket win with 30 overs to spare.

Coach: Duncan Fletcher quit after

eight years in charge to be succeeded by highly-respected Academy head Peter Moores. Fletcher had been widely praised in 2005 for masterminding the capture of the Ashes. But a 5-0 drubbing against the Aussies in the winter, as the Ashes were handed back, put him under severe stress.

Captain: Michael Vaughan had a miserable World Cup before making 79 against West Indies. Will remain in charge for the Test series against the West Indies in May but whether or not he leads the side for the one-dayers remains to be seen.

INDIA

Vying with Pakistan for the unwanted title of biggest disappointment in the Caribbean. Defeats to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka condemned them to a first round exit and dealt a huge blow to the World Cup's credibility as the game's financial powerhouse beat a retreat.

Coach: Greg Chappell jumped before he was pushed amidst allegations of splits in the squad and fallout with senior players. Ravi Shastri has been put in temporary charge for the trip to Bangladesh in May.

Captain: Rahul Dravid survived the bloodletting but there is a hint of change in the air with Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly both axed from the one-day squad near the series in Bangladesh as selectors begin their planning for the 2011 World Cup which India will co-host.

IRELAND

Stunned the cricket world with their win over Pakistan in the first round which helped send the 1992 champions crashing out of the tournament and gave the debutants an unlikely place in the Super Eights where they also beat Bangladesh.

Coach: Adrian Birrell always intended to step down after the World Cup but success came at a slight cost -- their surprise passage to the second round meant he had to cancel a family holiday. Will be succeeded by Phil Simmons.

Captain: Australian-born Trent Johnston hit the winning six against Pakistan and has decided to carry on playing. He will lead Ireland in the English limited overs competition next week.

KENYA

Semifinalists in 2003 but failed to get beyond the first round this time. Managed to beat Canada but had the same complaint of all the minnows in the Caribbean -- "we need more games".

Coach: Roger Harper took over in January 2006 and is expected to be offered a new deal ahead of the World Twenty20 Cup in South Africa in September.

Captain: Steve Tikolo maybe 36 years old but has no intention of retiring. "I want to play for Kenya for the next few years to see this team develop into a fine unit," said Tikolo.

NETHERLANDS

Trounced by 221 runs and 229 runs by South Africa and Australia respectively, the Dutch at least had the consolation of beating fellow Group A makeweights Scotland by eight wickets.

Coach: Peter Cantrell stepped down despite the national board wanting him to remain in charge. He said he found it increasingly hard to combine his duties with his job as a golf instructor.

Captain: Luuk van Troost retired and it was a low-key farewell. He dropped himself from the match with Scotland because of his poor form and acting-skipper Jeroen Smits seized his chance by leading the team to a win.

NEW ZEALAND

Play Sri Lanka in Tuesday's semifinal in Jamaica and are still looking for a first World Cup title.

Coach: John Bracewell, a former Black Caps Test off-spinner, is a highly-respected coach having enjoyed a successful spell at Gloucestershire ahead of moving back to New Zealand in 2003.

Captain: Stephen Fleming, the longest-serving and most successful New Zealand skipper, gets his chance this week to become the first man to captain a Kiwi World Cup winning team.

PAKISTAN

World Cup forever associated with the murder of coach Bob Woolmer on March 18.

Coach: Hunt for Woolmer's killer is still ongoing with the inquest, scheduled for April 23, postponed. In the meantime, former India coach John Wright has been linked with the job of coach, one of the most demanding and unforgiving in world cricket.

Captain: Inzamamul Haq's tearful Sabina Park farewell was one of the abiding images of the World Cup as he brought the curtain down on his international one-day career. Shoaib Malik has been put in charge after vice-captain Younis Khan turned down the job.

SCOTLAND

Three defeats in three Group A games with the eight-wicket loss to fellow outsiders the Netherlands particularly disappointing.

Coach: Peter Drinnen is still at the helm with the brief to guide the team to respectability at the World Twenty20 Cup in South Africa in September.

Captain: Ryan Watson, an international player since 1996, has replaced Craig Wright who resigned after the loss to the Dutch.

SOUTH AFRICA

In the semifinals where they face Australia on Wednesday.

Coach: 38-year-old Mickey Arthur was a surprise choice to take over from Ray Jennings in May 2005 and had a baptism of fire losing to Australia at home amid away. Grabbed revenge with one-day series win over Aussies at home in 2006 with the famous record-breaking run chase in Johannesburg the perfect end.

Captain: Graeme Smith took over from Shaun Pollock when South Africa were knocked out of the World Cup they were hosting in 2003. At 22, he was his country's youngest skipper.

SRI LANKA

Facing New Zealand in the semifinals in Jamaica on Tuesday.

Coach: Tom Moody won two World Cups as a player with Australia and has since carved out a respected career as a coach working with Worcestershire before moving to Sri Lanka in May 2005 after being pipped for the India job by Greg Chappell. Speculation that he will leave after the World Cup to take charge of Western Australia.

Captain: Mahela Jayawardene took over from Marvan Atapattu in 2006, led Sri Lanka to a 5-0 one-day whitewash over England and then scored a Sri Lankan record 374 against South Africa in Colombo. He added 624 for the third wicket with Kumar Sangakkara.

WEST INDIES

A team in a seemingly continuous cycle of decline and finished in sixth place in the World Cup Super Eights just above Bangladesh and Ireland.

Coach: Australian Bennett King, who took over from Gus Logie in 2004, resigned on Monday and has recommended his assistant David Moore lead the team to England in

May.

Captain: Brian Lara bid a tearful farewell from international cricket at a packed Kensington Oval on Saturday. Lara set world records throughout his career but even in his third spell as captain, he was unable to arrest the decline of a once-feared cricket machine. Long-time vice-captain Ramnaresh Sarwan tipped to take over.

ZIMBABWE

In complete turmoil, scratched a draw with Ireland but lost to West Indies and Pakistan.

Coach: Kevin Curran, who replaced Phil Simmons in August 2005, is in a precarious position and was under pressure even before the World Cup when his team lost 30 of 40 matches played under him.

Captain: Prosper Utseya was unexpectedly thrust into the Zimbabwe national team against Sri Lanka at the age of 19 when all the rebel players withdrew. He looked out of his depth in the Caribbean and since returning home has lost the services of promising opener Vusi Sibanda, who has left to play in Sydney, as well as seamer Anthony Ireland who has quit international cricket and now has a two-year deal with Gloucestershire.

Moody talking straight over Malinga

AFP, Kingston

Sri Lanka coach Tom Moody claims that unorthodox fast bowler Lasith Malinga has one of the straightest arms in cricket and said it's ridiculous to suggest the 23-year-old's action is illegal.

Moody has even challenged those who doubt the legality of Malinga's slinky, round-arm action, which he developed when playing beach cricket with a soft ball, to test it out.

"He is so far from being someone who throws the ball it is ridiculous," Moody told Sky Sports.

"Bowling from the position he bowls from, it is virtually impossible to flex the elbow. In terms of most fast bowlers in the world I think he would have the least amount of flexion.

"We welcome anyone to analyse it. I'd be interested to see if he has one percent flexion, let alone the 15 that is allowed."

Malinga, nicknamed 'The Slinger' for his distinctive action, has missed the last three World Cup matches because of an ankle injury but will reclaim his place in the side for Tuesday's semifinal against New Zealand at Sabina Park.

Moody, who won two World Cups as a player with Australia, has steadfastly refused to get Malinga to alter an action that has given him 15 wickets in six matches in the Caribbean, including a hattrick against South Africa.

"No, definitely not," Moody said when asked if he'd tried to change Malinga's action.

"We have monitored it basically. He was brought up doing that on the beaches.

"If we suddenly went to the MCC coaching manual and tried to get him over the top and side on, he'd be playing third grade in some competition in Sri Lanka and not being an impact bowler in international cricket."

Proteas cross fingers

AFP, Gros Islet



South Africa have reasons to believe that they deserve better than just two semifinal finishes in the World Cup since their maiden appearance in 1992.

They are now in the semifinals for the third time, with skipper Graeme Smith hoping to do better than his predecessors Kepler Wessels and Hansie Cronje who were unlucky not to lead their sides into the final.

Misfortune has become synonymous with South Africa ever since they were asked to score an absurd 21 off just one delivery in the 1992 semifinal against England in a rain-hit match in Sydney.

They were also involved in a pair of tied matches in 1999 and 2003, which eventually led to their ouster before the final.

Wessels's South Africans did remarkably well when they qualified for the semifinals on their first Cup appearance after more than two decades of isolation due to apartheid.

The tournament was jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand and had all the trappings of a modern event -- coloured clothing, floodlights, white balls and black sightcreens.

But Wessels's team were not amused because it also had a ridiculous 'rain rule'.

Rain interrupted South Africa's chase when they required 22 to win off 13 balls. The target was revised

to 21 off just one ball when the game resumed.

In 1996 they realised that talent alone was not enough to win an important match and that a team needed both luck and pluck to claim the coveted prize.

Cronje was the captain of a squad of skilful cricketers when the Cup arrived in the sub-continent for the second time in 1996 and his team were strong favourites till they ran into Brian Lara.

South Africa had looked menacing before their campaign ended suddenly at Karachi in the quarterfinal against the West Indies, courtesy of Lara's brilliance.

The left-hander smashed a blistering century as the West Indies set a challenging 265-run target off 50 overs before restricting South Africa to 245 to win a close match.

They were eliminated in 1999 without losing their semifinal which finished in a tie with Australia. They were to bow out on inferior net run-rate.

Australia had advanced to the Super Six without a point and one more defeat could have sent them back home.

It nearly came in their last Super Six match against South Africa when chasing a stiff 272-run target at Headingley, but luck was with them.

Australia captain Steve Waugh was on 56 when he offered a simple catch to South African century-maker Herschelle Gibbs, who held the ball before dropping it in premature celebrations.

Waugh needed just that slice of fortune to steer his team to a crucial

win with an unbeaten century.

South Africa had lost an opportunity to knock Australia out of the competition. Instead, they themselves went out of the tournament after the tied semifinal against the same opposition at Edgbaston.

They required nine to win off the last over, with Lance Klusener at the crease. It soon became one to win off the last four balls after Klusener smashed paceman Damien Fleming for two successive fours.

No run came off the third ball after Waugh had set a single-saving field. Klusener connected the fourth and charged for a single, but Allan Donald apparently did not hear the call.

Donald responded late, dropped his bat on the way and was yards out of the crease when wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist broke the stumps and South African hearts.

It was a miscalculation in a rain-hit match against Sri Lanka that led to South Africa's elimination before the Super Six stage at home in 2003.

When South African wicketkeeper Mark Boucher hit the penultimate ball of what turned out to be the final over for a six to level the scores against Sri Lanka he thought the job had been completed.

But his team still needed one more run to win.

Skipper Shaun Pollock was seen in the Durban dressing room with his head in his hands completely inconsolable.

He resigned paving the way for Smith to try his luck instead.

Hayden worries 'em most

AFP, Gros Islet



If South Africa were asked what would be the most pleasing sight in the World Cup semifinal against Australia here on Wednesday, they wouldn't hesitate with their reply: "Matthew Hayden's back".

"The sooner, the better," they would promptly add, because the Australian left-hander has been batting in the tournament as if he only knows how to score explosive hundreds and half-centuries.

Hayden is the tournament's leading scorer with 580 runs in nine matches with three hundreds and one half-century, but what is more important than the statistics is the manner in which he has been scoring runs.

He is only the third batsman after compatriot Mark Vaughn and Indian Sourav Ganguly to score three centuries in one World Cup.

The 35-year-old is a nightmare for opposing bowlers with his consistent big-hitting, having the shots to exploit the powerplays with fielding restrictions and then building an innings in the middle overs.

Who knows it better than South Africa, who were condemned to retrieve the ball from various parts of the ground during their first encounter with defending champi-

ons Australia in a group match at St Kitts last month.

Hayden flayed the South African attack as he smashed the fastest Cup century off 66 balls, surpassing Canadian John Davison's 67-ball hundred against the West Indies in a league match of the 2003 edition in South Africa.

It has been a remarkable change of fortune for Hayden.

He had been struggling to become a regular feature in a strong Australian one-day side since making his debut more than a decade ago. He was in and out of the team after his mediocre Ashes campaign in England in 2005.

"He has got to be in the form of his career as far as the one-day version of the game goes and it's nice to have him back in the side," said Australia captain Ricky Ponting.

"He has worked hard to do that and it has been a treat for everyone to watch and he's dragging a few of us along with him. Hopefully, with two more games the big fella can keep churning out runs."

But Hayden believes his runs will mean little if Australia fail to complete a hattrick, having won the Cup in 1999 in England and 2003 in South Africa.

"It has been a great tournament so far, but we have got two more games to go and the first one is in St Lucia, so it'll be worth absolutely zero if we don't go all the way now," said Hayden.

"I've put in a lot of hard work. To be part of this great team you need to work very hard. You can never take anything for granted. When I was out of the side I certainly didn't do that. I was always looking for an opportunity."

Hayden grabbed the opportunity with both hands when he was included in the side for a triangular one-day series at home also involving England and New Zealand before the World Cup.

He then hammered an unbeaten 181 with 10 sixes in New Zealand in his last match before the Caribbean tournament, both records by an Australian batsman in one-day internationals.

Hayden became an important part of the team after a successful tour of India in 2001 under Steve Waugh's captaincy. His side lost the Test series, but he left a mark with 549 runs in three matches with two centuries.

He found a place in one-dayers against India following his impressive Test form and scored his maiden century in the shorter version of the game during the series.

Hayden is now enjoying batting on Caribbean pitches and he only hopes he continues in the same vein.

"There have been good wickets throughout the Caribbean and hopefully that will continue," he said.

Bob's body to be released

AFP, Kingston

The body of murdered Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer has been ordered by a coroner to be released to his family in South Africa, the Daily Gleaner newspaper reported Tuesday.

The body of the 58-year-old former England international has been in judicial limbo since March 18 when he was found dead in his Kingston hotel room the day after Pakistan had lost a World Cup game to Ireland.

Detectives launched a murder investigation after an autopsy indicated that the former England Test player had been strangled, but they have yet to name any suspects and expect the case to be a long, drawn-out affair.

The Kingston coroner in charge of the case meanwhile had ruled that the body could not be released until after an inquest had been completed.

That inquest had been scheduled to open on Monday, but this was postponed by the Jamaican justice ministry following advice from the Coroner Patrick Murphy. No reason was given for the delay.

The Gleaner said on its website that the police officer in charge of the murder investigation, Mark Shields was called to Murphy's office on Monday and he was informed that orders had been given for the body to be repatriated.

Woolmer's wife Gill and family are resident in Cape Town, South Africa and have been asking for his body to be sent home to them.

Around 30 police investigators are working full-time on the Woolmer investigation with over 100 witness statements taken. Two Pakistan police are also working on the case as are four officers from Scotland Yard in London.