



India players take part in running drills during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

## Dravid wants to play Tiwari out of series

SPORTS REPORTER



India captain Rahul Dravid shrugged aside all off-field issues as he urged the world to focus on their return to international cricket whenever it has to be, said the right-handed batsman.

After a massively disappointing World Cup.

During an impromptu press conference yesterday morning after an outdoor bout with the persevering journalists was called off due to the rain at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium after a practice session, Dravid mentioned that none of the happenings over the past month would play on the players' consciousness.

"Obviously it seems that what happens off the field plays on the players' mind. But for them there is a simple formula: they love the game and want to play. That's what the guys focus on, most of the times."

"Lot of these peripheral issues which people think might affect the team but it is something that they are not weighed down by. It has been a disappointment at the World Cup but the spirit has come back to the camp where the boys are hungry and they are very keen to play good cricket," said Dravid.

Issues ranging from the resignation of former coach Greg Chappell and the ensuing controversies

surrounding alleged factions inside the team do not bother the genial batsman.

"The boys haven't had that (the contracts issue) in their mind. They have their focus on the cricket. Those things will be taken care of whenever it has to be," said the right-handed batsman.

Asked to comment on a recent disclosure where an Indian television channel had one of the selectors speak of rift and possible non-cooperation between him and senior players Sourav Ganguly and Sachin Tendulkar, he replied: "I am not going to react on this type of sting operation. To be honest, I had as much support as I needed. I was very happy with the team. I do not really know from where all these came from."

He also declined to term this series as a 'fresh start', claiming that the selectors were more focussed on correcting the mistakes made a month ago in the premier one-day event. It is not an end or beginning, claimed Dravid.

He however sounded sympathetic towards Manoj Tiwari who was forced to leave his first tour with the national side due to a shoulder injury.

"It is really sad for him and also disappointing from the team's point of view. The positive thing is he is still young and a lot of cricket is ahead of him. Manoj took the disappointment in a matured way unlike a 20-year-old."

"The decision to send him back

(to Kolkata) was because he would not have seen any action as the recovery would have taken some time but in this time he can see a specialist," said the captain who took charge back in 2005, succeeding Ganguly.

But the matter in hand -- today's match against Bangladesh -- is firmly on Dravid's mind.

"We are not focusing on any particular player. But definitely we concentrated on their whole team. We have got a bit more first-hand information about them now after the World Cup and that will surely help us," remarked Dravid.

On March 17, tyro opener Tamim Iqbal tore into the India attack with a blistering half-century and Dravid did not forget about it.

"He had a good game against us in the World Cup. We were really surprised at the way he came out and attacked our bowlers."

"He made a big impact on that game. He deserves credit for that. On a day he plays well he might come off. But we also back our selves to be able to bowl well to him," explained the captain.

Dravid however was quick to fend off any comparison between the erstwhile coach Greg Chappell and Ravi Shastri's current role as cricket manager.

"It is not possible for him to do any magic in two or three days at

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

## The new Bosman?

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Andy Webster was yesterday hailed as a pioneer by senior players' union officials after he became the first player to successfully invoke article 17 of Fifa's transfer regulations and buy out his contract in moving from Hearts to Wigan Athletic.

In what has become a test case which promises to have ramifications for players across Europe, Webster took advantage of a Fifa ruling which permits players to terminate their contract after a "protected period".

That period is three years for players who were under 28 when they signed the contract and two years for others. Webster claims Hearts induced what was technically a breach of contract by freezing him out of the first team while he refused to extend his deal.

The defender served notice to Hearts last May that he intended to leave Tynecastle almost immediately by cancelling his contract three years into its intended four-year duration.

Yet in setting compensation of £625,000, due jointly from Webster and Wigan, whom the player joined in August, Fifa insisted Webster did not have "just cause" to end his deal prematurely without a payment to Hearts.

Union representatives have hailed confirmation that players can buy out their contracts as a victory for top-level professionals. Hearts will get only 12% of the £5m they had demanded for Webster and the union believes such cases will soon be replicated across Europe. Chelsea's Frank Lampard is among players who will soon be able to buy out their contracts.

"If Andy Webster was not entitled to do as he has done, he would not have been allowed to sign for Wigan," said Fraser Wishart of the

Scottish Professional Footballers' Association. "It will have a big impact at the top level and it will bring a bit of sense to the transfer market. Some of the transfer fees are exorbitant but clubs will be easier to deal with now."

"It frustrates players that sometimes they may fancy a change but their club won't allow that. Players at the top level can now afford to take a risk, knowing roughly what they will have to pay."

It is unclear, though, what formula Fifa used to reach the £625,000 figure. FIFPro, the international players' union, believes the maximum compensation should have been the average of Webster's salary at Hearts and Wigan, multiplied by 1.5.

The 25-year-old was paid £150,000 per year in Edinburgh and FIFPro's lawyer, Wil van Megen, said the average wage had been multiplied by a far greater figure.

Fifa has refused to disclose how

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

## Fergie certain of Milan triumph

APP, London

Sir Alex Ferguson, whose Manchester United side lost to Champions League finalists AC Milan in the semi-finals, said in comments published Wednesday he is "absolutely certain" the Italian side will defeat Liverpool in the Athens final in two weeks.

"I'd bet for sure that Milan will win the Champions League," Ferguson said in The Sun tabloid.

"I'm absolutely certain of it."

Milan and Liverpool will clash in a repeat of the 2005 Champions League final which the English side won on penalties, after overcoming a 3-0 deficit at half-time.

Ferguson said that he plans to acknowledge Milan's victory with a bottle of wine presented to him by Milan manager Carlo Ancelotti after Ferguson's side was defeated in the semi-finals.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 7

## 'Give, don't take, from Asia'

Football

APP, Kuala Lumpur

Top European clubs that tour the lucrative emerging markets of Asia need to do more to develop the game here instead of just turning up, taking the money and running.

That's the message from FIFA president Sepp Blatter and his counterpart at the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Mohammed bin Hammam as controversy rages over Manchester United's regional trip in July.

Blatter said that he plans to acknowledge Milan's victory with a bottle of wine presented to him by Milan manager Carlo Ancelotti after Ferguson's side was defeated in the semi-finals.

said teams like United should ensure any tour includes clinics for Asian players, contributions to charities and help for young footballers.

"We have to know where they want to go -- if football shall only be a business or football shall continue to bring hope, entertainment, passion, emotions, but not only for the rich," he said.

Asked by AFP if clubs should be doing more to help Asian football, Blatter said: "Definitely. It's good if the big clubs come but they should give something and not just take away."

"They have already taken a lot of money through television rights in Asia. If they are coming personally it is good to expose the stars but make sure you hold activities around the football."

"Invite youngsters, help some charities or do humanitarian activities, conduct clinics with the

players.

"This would be good instead of just coming in and training, sleeping, playing and leaving. It should be more, to give and take -- that's life."

United, the newly-crowned Premier League champions, have been criticised by Blatter and bin Hammam this week for scheduling an Asian tour in July to Macau, Japan, South Korea and Malaysia during the Asian Cup finals.

Bin Hammam accused United of "disrespect" to Asian football, fearing their presence will overshadow the flagship regional tournament.

While he welcomes European clubs touring Asia at the right time, he is adamant, like Blatter, that they need to put more back into developing Asian football.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

## Abu Dhabi series on

CRICINFO, undated

The three-match ODI series between Pakistan and Sri Lanka has finally been confirmed after the organisers secured sponsors and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), according to one of its officials. The series was originally scheduled for May 9 but was postponed till May 18 due to Sri Lanka's delayed arrival from the Caribbean and lack of interest from sponsors and television channels.

"The Abu Dhabi cricket officials have informed us that there are no financial issues anymore and the series would go ahead as planned," Zakir Khan, PCB's Director of Cricket Operations, told The News.

Zakir also rejected reports that Sri Lanka was set to receive a bigger amount or their participation in the desert series. "It is absurd. Both Pakistan and Sri Lanka would be paid the same amount to feature in the series," he said without disclosing

SEE PAGE 18 COL 3

## Ballack settles rift

Football

TIMES ONLINE

Sir Alex Ferguson yesterday took a swipe at José Mourinho by saying that he knew Manchester United could win the Barclays Premiership title the moment Chelsea signed Michael Ballack and Andriy Shevchenko last summer. It is a provocative statement that the continuing deliberations at Stamford Bridge over the contributions of the Germany midfield player and the Ukraine forward are doing little to dispel the fallout from Ballack's unauthorised ankle operation continues to rage and could have implications for Dr Bryan English, the widely respected head of Chelsea's medical department.

Ballack was given reassurances over his future by Mourinho at the club's training ground yesterday, although the Chelsea manager remains furious at being denied the services of one of his key players at such a crucial stage of the season. The 30-year-old flew to Germany for surgery to remove a piece of chipped bone in his ankle without the club's permission on April 27, ruling him out of Chelsea's Champions League semi-final against Liverpool and the remainder of their Premiership fixtures.

Mourinho has finally accepted

that an operation was necessary but his anger has moved on to his medical team, who initially judged that Ballack's injury was not serious after he was substituted 18 minutes into the goalless draw with Newcastle United on April 22. The Germany player insists that the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



Diego Maradona (C) enjoys the Tristan Suarez v Central Cordoba match in Tristan Suarez, Argentina on Tuesday. Maradona left a Buenos Aires clinic on Sunday after a two-week stay to recover from his latest bout with alcohol abuse, media reported.