

Akhtar fit

FROM PAGE 17
the appointment of opener Salman Butt as vice captain.

"There has been a lot of talk about differences in the team but there is no credibility to it. I have the full backing of the seniors and there are no problems," said Malik.

Malik led Pakistan to a 2-1 win over Sri Lanka in a one-day series in Abu Dhabi in May, which he said put the team back on track after the World Cup and the death of coach Bob Woolmer in Jamaica in March.

"We did well to beat Sri Lanka as they were the losing finalists in the World Cup. The match against India will be another big test for us," said Malik.

"I hope we enter the ground with an aim to win because after this tour we must prepare for the Twenty20 World Cup and then we a hectic season awaits us," he added.

Pakistan host South Africa in September-October and tour India in November-December before hosting world champions Australia next year.

India still

scheduled to join the Test party later on the tour, were due to arrive in Belfast on Wednesday with a view to being available for selection for Friday's match.

Uncapped 28-year-old Baroda pace bowler Rakesh Patel, who has been playing club cricket in Liverpool, north-west England, was called up to India's one-day squad on Monday.

"The two quicks are quite bad, both Sreesanth and Agarkar. Dhoni should be okay for the next game but with the 'flu you never know," said Dravid.

"With Ishant Sharma and Ranaeb Bose landing on Wednesday, we'll hopefully have some cover in the fast bowling department but, then again, they would be off a flight straight away and into a game.

"It's going to be a tricky one for us."

India's one-day series with South Africa concludes at Stormont on Sunday. They then play Pakistan in a one-day international in Glasgow on July 3.

But the bulk of India's United Kingdom tour sees them facing England in three Tests and seven one-day internationals from July 19-September 8.

Henman stars

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Childs 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6), to earn himself a crack at former world number one Marat Safin.

There was also a stirring display from veteran Australian Wayne Arthurs. The oldest man in the men's singles at 36, Arthurs fought back from two sets down to eliminate an opponent half his age, last year's Wimbledon juniors champion, Thiemo De Bakker.

And in the women's singles, Indian star Sania Mirza made light of a very late start by racing to a 6-0, 6-3 win over Russian Yaroslava Shvedova in just 55 minutes. Mirza now faces 11th seed Nadia Petrova for a place in the last 32.

Nakamura

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Massoni does not represent Nakamura, who joined the Scottish champions from Reggina two years ago and completed a clean sweep of Scotland's player of the year awards last season.

Takuda confirmed: "I would like to stress that these reports about Nakamura are complete nonsense."

"Naka is currently preparing for the Asian Cup but straight after this, is very much looking forward to returning to Celtic."

"He and his family are very happy at Celtic and very happy in Glasgow. He has no reason to go anywhere else."

I'm still

FROM PAGE 20
loyalties and fashion sense than she does her game. Tuesday was no exception.

The topic of the day was not her serve or forehand, but her choice of dress, all white, as All England Club tradition demands, and based on a swan.

"I wanted it to have more pleats in the back and the end result made it look like a swan," explained Sharapova to her mostly male audience.

"On a hanger, it doesn't look as swan-ish as it does on me. I just put a reference to it because a swan is usually white, right, unless it's weird."

Another blow

FROM PAGE 17
in the rest of the stoppage time raised hopes of full three points for Muktiuddha but Kanchan nodded the ball over in what was the last real chance of the game.

TEAMS

MUKTIJODDHA: Titumir, Hassan Al Mamun, Rajani, Ghansah, Titu, Brahim (Saiful), Arman Aziz, Biddut, Munna (Parvez), Moni (Enamul) and Kanchan.

PARASHRANGA: Mamun Khan, Khaled, Faisal, Mamun Mia, Liton, Arup, Amirul (Ali), Kutub, Rony, Robin and Puma.

Referee: Abdul Hannan.



PHOTO: AFP

Bangladesh batsman Rajin Saleh about to play a drive as Sri Lanka wicketkeeper Prasanna Jayawardene looks on during the third day of the first Test match at the Sinhalese Sports Club in Colombo on Wednesday.

Gayle issue dragged

Cricket

AFP, London

Players' chief Dinanath Ramnarine has questioned the decision of the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) to reprimand Chris Gayle for a diary published on the Cricinfo website, saying the opening batsman had received clearance for the June 21 article from team manager Michael Findlay.

The WICB said Tuesday it was censuring Gayle for his "totally unacceptable" conduct in criticising the handling of his selection as one-day international captain and the late arrival of players for warm-up games ahead of the upcoming series with England.

Although he remains captain, a WICB statement warned they would "pursue this matter at the end of the tour" and would take "drastic and immediate" action if Gayle, who met with board president Kenneth Gordon in London on Monday, stepped out of line again during the England tour.

However, Ramnarine, chief executive of the West Indies Players' Association (WIPA), said Gayle had, as required, submitted his article to Findlay, who edited and approved it.

"It seems difficult to understand why Gordon and Findlay would ... demand an apology for comments

approved by Findlay," Ramnarine was quoted as saying by Cricinfo.

Gayle, 27, angered officials by writing: "First and foremost I am very disappointed with the West Indies Cricket Board for not having the guys here in England already and ready to play."

"As the captain I have to say this is disappointing and it is not at all a good start."

"I also have to mention that I was hurt and disappointed that after I was nominated as captain by the selectors, I did not initially get the support of the board," added Gayle who took over the captaincy from stand-in Test skipper Darren Ganga, appointed after Ramaresh Sarwan's tour-ending shoulder injury.

The board responded by saying: "Mr Gayle was requested to issue a public apology to the WICB for his unfortunate and ill-advised statement."

"He subsequently advised the president and team manager that he was not prepared to apologise."

"In the circumstances, the WICB has issued a very strongly-worded letter of reprimand to Mr Gayle advising him that his conduct is totally unacceptable and that the WICB will pursue this matter at the end of the tour."

Gayle, amidst the controversy, scored 73 in West Indies' 56-run Twenty20 win against the Professional Cricketers' Association Masters at Arundel on Tuesday.

He subsequently advised the president and team manager that he was not prepared to apologise.

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