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A changed order on cards

AFP, Beijing

Australia will be one of the last countries to enter the Olympic stadium at the opening ceremony because the use of Chinese characters has scrambled the traditional order, the team's chief said Tuesday.

"It has been confirmed that we will be nation number 203 in for the opening ceremony, followed just by Zambia and China," John Coates, head of the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC), told reporters in Beijing.

"So we will be at the tail and not at the front," he said.

Australia is used to being one of the first teams to enter the stadium at Olympic opening ceremonies, as the order is normally determined by the Roman alphabet.

However, Coates said that Australia's position would this time be determined by the number of strokes in the first character of its Chinese name -- 15.

Only Zambia, with 16, has more strokes in its first character, while China as host nation would enter the stadium last.

In the Chinese system, Guinea and Japan are likely to be among the first countries to enter the National Stadium.

Traditionally, Greece, the host of the original Olympics, is the first country in the parade, with the host nation bringing up the rear.

The announcement by Coates appeared to give away one of the secrets for the opening ceremony, details of which have been kept secret by organisers.

A spokeswoman for the Beijing organising committee would not confirm the order to AFP, saying she had not been told how it would be decided.

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Did U Know?

Larissa Latynina, a gymnast from the former Soviet Union, finished her Summer Olympic Games career with 18 total medals -- the most in history.



Arjuna Ranatunga
(Former Sri Lanka captain)
"The way the Indians have played this [first] Test is an eye-opener not just for us but for all cricket-playing countries. They dealt with this like a Twenty20 game. I think they were not prepared for Test cricket."



What to WATCH

STAR Cricket
England v South Africa
Third Test, Day One
Live from 4:00pm

ESPN
AFC Challenge Cup
Tajikistan v Turkmenistan
Live from 4:25pm

Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 9:00pm

Knee troubles him again

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza stayed in the dressing room while his teammates were involved in a practice match yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur as part of their preparation for the three-match one-day series in Australia.

The reason was nothing new. The pace spearhead has been having pain in his left knee, which



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (R), accompanied by national team physio Darryn Lifson, leaves the Bangladesh Cricket Board's Gulshan office for Apollo Hospitals for a check-up yesterday.

was operated on, for the last three days.

The injury remains a big problem in the career of the 'Narail Express', who has so far had operations on both knees to continue his international career.

Since making his international debut in 2001, Mashrafe had been out of cricket several times in his torrid career and it was not only because of his knees but also for his persistent back pain. And the braveheart cricketer always made his comeback keeping his head and shoulders above everything.

But the main problem is that everybody is kept in riddle whenever the paceman complains about injury. The main question remains on how serious his injury is?

There was no exception this time. If you take it from the bowler himself, then things look serious ahead of a very tough series next month but different opinions come from the team management.

National team physio Darryn Lifson could have been the right person to clear everything but he was not ready to comment anything on the issue.

"I would not say anything," was the response of Lifson.

Chief selector Rafiqul Alam, who was present at the ground to watch the Tigers practice match, said that there was nothing serious with the leading paceman's injury.

"Our physio (Lifson) informed that there is nothing serious with the injury and the bowler (Mashrafe) just needs a few days rest," said Rafiq.

Many of his teammates were always scrupulous about his injury complaints as he had earlier nipped several times of the back pain or anything like that but dramatically recovered the following day only to show his true character as a born fighter.

"There is pain in my left knee which I felt during practice three days back. I had MRI yesterday and will be doing another today (Tuesday). What my physician told me was that everything would depend on how much pain I can absorb to play international cricket because I will never be cured hundred per cent," said Mashrafe.

"The main problem is that it is my landing foot and the condition of the knee is not good after the operation (in 2003). Actually I am not sure about how long I can tolerate this pain to continue my international career," the dejected bowler added.

Mashrafe also believe that the injury scare always slows down his progress.

"You must practice hard to stay alive in international cricket but it is not always easy for me because I have to consider my injury first," he observed.

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PHOTO: AFP

HAIRDO BEIJING 2008: Two kids are having fun with their new hairstyle resembling emblems of the Beijing Olympics while the other one is having his haircut at a school in the Chinese capital yesterday.

Victoria sail on Ripon's brace

SPORTS REPORTER

Ripon's double strike gave Victoria Sporting Club the perfect start of having a comprehensive 4-1 win over Bangladesh Air Force in their Citycell Federation Cup qualifiers campaign at the Army Stadium yesterday.

But it was Arafat and Milon who gave Victoria a 2-0 lead within the first 27 minutes. Arafat nicked the first one into the Air Force net in the 24th minute and then three minutes later, Milon doubled the margin.

But Air Force forced their way back into the game, thanks to a fine strike from Ramjan in the 37th minute to restore some pride.

A minute after the restart, Ripon began his work as he made it 3-1 in favour of Victoria and then wrapped up the game as early as the 44th minute when he sunk in his second goal.

The day's other match was a 1-1 draw between BKSP and Rajshahi's

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A team face Lancs today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A start their one-day campaign in England when they take on Lancashire today in the first one-day match at the picturesque Alderley Edge ground.

The visitors have so far remained unbeaten in the England leg of the tour, having already played five three-day matches.

Bangladesh beat Derbyshire by one-wicket and drew with England Under-19 team, Warwickshire, Leicestershire and fellow tourists South Africa in their last three-dayers.

But they will be up against a formidable side as Lancashire cricket manager Mike Watkinson named a strong 13-man squad led by former Australian batsman Stuart Law.

The second string Bangladesh side will take on Marylebone Cricket Club at Durham on August 1 and face Durham on August 3 at Chester-le-Street in their last match of the tour.

BFF forms 2 committees

UNB, Dhaka

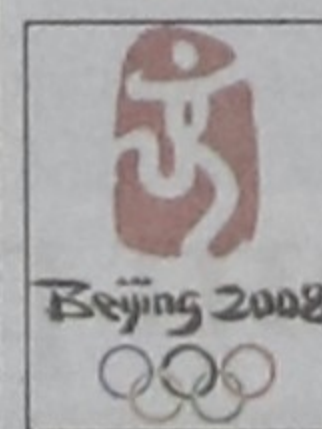
Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday formed two more standing committees with its vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed heading the development committee and Sirajul Islam Bachchu remaining as chairman of the women's committee.

The other members on the development committee are Golam Rabbani Helal (deputy chairman) and Anwarul Haque Helal, Mohammad Shafiquzzaman, Shamsul Haque Chowdhury, Satyajit Das Rupu and Mohammad Mohsin (members).

Mahfuz Akhter Kiran has been named as deputy chairman of the women's committee while Hamida Begum, ASM Alam, Shamima Saitar Mino, Mahbuba Karim Mini, Farhad Jesmin Lily, Nasrin Akhter Baby and Rashida Afzalunessa are the members.

The Chinese philosophy

AFP, Beijing



China's former Olympic shooting gold medalist Zhang Shan struggled to explain why she sacrificed large chunks of her life in brutal training regimes in a bid for sporting glory.

"Fengxian" she said triumphantly after a pause, a word loosely translated as "devotion."

"You have to give your time for the country -- you can go and ask every Chinese athlete -- they're all like this," she said.

And when it comes to giving up your life for the Olympic Games, Zhang, a slight and smiling 40-year-old is better placed than most to know.

After seven years of intense training in skeet shooting -- where athletes try to hit clay disks catapulted into the air from different angles -- she won the gold medal in the Barcelona Olympics in 1992.

Not only that, Zhang also broke the Olympic record in the competition in which she eclipsed 54 men and four other women, at the age of 24.

Sixteen years on, as Chinese athletes prepared to compete in the most important event of their career -- an Olympics Games on home turf -- Zhang, who did not qualify for the Games, gave an insight into their training and motivation.

"For many years, Chinese people have been very good at enduring pressures and suffering," she said.

"For Chinese athletes, for all these years, what we talked about most was getting honour for the country."

She said athletes like herself, and coaches, were told to group together for training at least one year before big sporting events, and were only able to see their loved ones a few times in the year.

"In the West, they might not

understand, you're not with your wife, you're not with your husband, how can you do that?" she said.

"But if you've been in China for a while, you would know that Chinese people can."

Zhang, who still competes, said that even now her own personal life was sacrificed to the idea of "fengxian", and her husband, an Australian former shooter who lives in Melbourne, understood it.

"When we have time, we meet up. When I have a competition, he'll come to see me," she said. "My

husband knows Chinese people are like this."

Zhang herself was feeling particularly bullish about the Games, and suggested China could top the medal table for the first time.

"This time round, in China, there shouldn't be that much of a problem," she said with a cheeky smile.

But as the event draws nearer, athletes and officials have spoken of huge pressure at having to perform in front of a home crowd of

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PHOTO: STAR

THIS IS MY UMBRELLA! A Rajshahi player (L) shelters herself from the sun with a chair while the other seems to be in agony during their Spectra Group National Women's Kabaddi Championship semifinal against Narail at the kabaddi court yesterday.

Harmison dropped

Third Eng-SA Test from today

Cricket

AFP, Birmingham

Fast bowler Steve Harmison's return to the England team was put on hold Tuesday when he was left out of the starting eleven for the third Test against South Africa starting at Edgbaston Wednesday.

Harmison and fellow fast bowler Stuart Broad were the two men to miss out from a 13-man squad when captain Michael Vaughan announced the team during his pre-match captain's press conference.

Left-arm swing bowler Ryan Sidebottom returns from injury together with all-rounder Paul Collingwood, who was dropped for the second Test at Leeds, where South Africa won by ten wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the four-match

series. Broad and Darren Pattinson are the players dropped.

Vaughan said Harmison missed out when it was decided to go into the match with four specialist bowlers instead of five.

"We felt that on this ground the depth in batting would help," said Vaughan.

"We have three strong seamers in Sidebottom, (James) Anderson and Freddie (Flintoff). We feel (left-arm spinner) Monty (Panesar) will do a lot more bowling here, while Collingwood's style of bowling could be useful at Edgbaston."

Collingwood will bat at number six, with Flintoff at seven and wicketkeeper Tim Ambrose, who went in at number six in Leeds, dropping down to eight.

Harmison was close to selection, according to Vaughan.

"That's why we brought him back into the squad. That's a sign

for him that we think he's got a chance of getting back in. He's not in the eleven this week but who's to say he won't be in the eleven at the Oval the week after."

Vaughan said he expected England to hit back after their defeat in Leeds.

"I'm confident we can produce a performance to get the result we want," he said.

"The key to Headingley was getting 200 in the first innings. We didn't get anywhere near giving ourselves a chance of winning that game. What we've got to do in this Test is start well and try to get ahead of the South Africans as quickly as we can."

He said he did not feel under any undue pressure after scoring only 23 runs in his first three innings in the series.

"I've had these blips in form and

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Lanka's luck extended

Cricket

AFP, Galle

India's batting reputation will be at stake when they attempt to solve Sri Lanka's spin puzzle in the second Test starting here on Thursday.

The tourists collapsed twice in the opening match of the three-Test series in Colombo, losing by an innings and 239 runs on Saturday.

Sri Lankan spinners Muttiah Muralidaran and Ajantha Mendis did the damage, sharing 19 wickets.

Muralidaran's wizardry has always shone especially bright at the Galle International Stadium, where he has taken 91 of his world-record 746 wickets in 12 Tests.

This time out there will be no respite for the visitors as he has found an able partner in Mendis, an unorthodox spinner.

Mendis made an impressive debut in Colombo, grabbing eight wickets, and the pair is expected to make merry again.

"The pitch here is basically spin-friendly," said curator and former Sri Lankan bowler Jayananda Warnaweera.

"Murali has always bowled well here and I think Mendis will also succeed because he has variations. It has always been a lucky ground for Sri Lanka."

Sri Lanka have lost just one of their last nine Tests at Galle since July 2000, the lone defeat coming against Australia four years ago.

While India have talented batsmen in Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly,

Virender Sehwag and Venkatsai Laxman, but failed to match Sri Lanka's batting prowess in the first match.

Four Sri Lankan batsmen -- skipper Mahela Jayawardene, Malinda Warnapura, Thilan Samaraweera and Tillakaratne Dilshan -- scored centuries, while Laxman was India's top-scorer with 56.

Opener Gautam Gambhir said India were confident of putting in an improved batting performance in the second Test.

"We will look to be more positive against Mendis and Murali as both of them are quality spinners. But we are going to put up a much

better show as the guys are really positive," he said.

Muralidaran troubled the Indian batsmen in the lone Test played between the two countries at Galle, taking eight wickets to fashion his team's 10-wicket win in 2001.

He has bagged five or more wickets in a Test innings 10 times here and 10 or more in a match on four occasions, his best being 13-171 against South Africa eight years ago.

No Test was held at this venue for nearly three years after it was devastated by the 2004 tsunami. Test cricket resumed in 2007 with a visit from England.



PHOTO: AFP

TAKING NOTES: Ajantha Mendis delivers one of his mystery deliveries at training in Galle yesterday as South African umpire Rudi Koertzen tries to decipher ahead of Sri Lanka's second Test against India tomorrow.