

Axe hangs on Ash

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is likely to sack under-performing Mohammad Ashraful from captaincy after the heartbreaking performance of the Tigers in the ICC World Twenty20 in England.

Bangladesh crashed out of the tournament from the first round after conceding a stunning defeat against Ireland.

The Board will take a decision on the captaincy in the next couple of days. And if the Board takes such decision then Ashraful will be at the mercy of the selectors for a place in the West Indies-bound team as a player.

"I don't find any reason to continue him [Mohammad Ashraful] as the captain when even his position as a player in the team is not certain. He got a 'bonus' time when we extended his tenure despite the fact that he was not performing. But he failed to capitalise on the chances," said BCB director Gazi Ashraf Hossain yesterday.

"Just forget what his performances are as a batsman since he has taken over the captaincy but the way he got out in the crucial match against Ireland is good enough to send him to a rehabilitation programme," the former national skipper fumed.

The game's administrators are also thinking on bringing wholesale changes in the team management including the selectors, coaches and the manager.

BCB's another director and spokesman Jalal Yunus also echoed the sentiment of Gazi Ashraf

and said that time has come to evaluate everything including the performances of coaches, other team officials and selectors to save cricket in the country.

"I think more or less everybody's [directors] feeling the same regarding the captaincy issue. No way can we continue him as the captain. Hope a decision would be on its way about the captaincy soon. Not only captain we are also looking forward to give a long look at everybody's performance because nobody has the right to jeopardise Bangladesh cricket," said Yunus adding that the downward trend in the national team performance also decreased the market value.

The 24-year-old Ashraful was appointed captain in June 2007 and the job was extended in February this year until the conclusion of the tour of West Indies in July-August but now there are slim chances for him to complete his extended tenure. Bangladesh cricket team will fly for the Caribbean on June 29 to play one T20, three ODIs and two Tests.

Gazi Ashraf also said that time has come to assess the performance of coach Jamie Siddons, whose two-year tenure will end in November this year, as he found hardly any improvement in the Tigers batting under the Aussie's guidance.

"My personal opinion is that we can send someone to West Indies instead of Jamie [who is now in Australia and expected to join the team in West Indies] and I believe the performance of the team will not get any worse than what we are at the moment," said Ashraf.

"Time has come to evaluate his [Siddons] performance because we are paying huge money. Improving the batting was the main

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LEARNED THAT THERE COULD BE VACANCY AT THE TOP: Bangladesh vice-captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L), star all-rounder Shabbir Ali-Hasan (R) and left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak have a chat during a practice session at the indoor facilities of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Pepsi makes Al-Fahad's dream come true

SPORTS REPORTER

"Pepsi First Ball er Captain" Abdullah-Al-Fahad will bowl the ceremonial first ball to former West Indies captain and living legend Clive Lloyd before the start of the first semifinal of the ICC World Twenty20 at Trent Bridge in Nottingham, England.

It is a lifetime opportunity for Al-Fahad for being able to be present at a tournament of this magnitude, and at the same time, have the opportunity to bowl to a cricketing icon.

To experience this unbelievable moment, Al-Fahad has already reached England. STAR Cricket will telecast this event live to millions of fans in Bangladesh.

He will live this unique experience because of the great consumer offer from brand Pepsi, in which he enthusiastically participated.

According to Al-Fahad, the lucky winner of the Pepsi "First Ball er Captain": "I am extremely excited to have won such a fantastic promotion. I

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Sri Lanka superstar Sanath Jayasuriya holds the record for the fastest 150 in an ODI innings off 95 balls against England in 2006.



Gary Kirsten (India cricket coach)

"The standard of cricket and the quality of cricket has been higher at the World Twenty20 than what we experienced in the Indian Premier League."



BTV & STAR Cricket

ICC World T20 (FIRST SEMIFINAL)
South Africa v Pakistan
Live from 10:30pm

ESPN
FIFA Confederation Cup
USA v Brazil
Live from 8:00pm
Egypt v Italy
Live from 12:30am (Friday)

TODAY'S T20 MATCH

(FIRST SEMIFINAL)
South Africa v Pakistan
Venue: Trent Bridge
Time: 10:30pm

Fresh blow for Jones

AFP, Worcester

England pace bowler Simon Jones has suffered a further blow to his hopes of a comeback after having fluid drained from his troublesome knee.

Jones is now awaiting the results of tests on the fluid amidst growing concerns that he may never capture the form that helped England win the Ashes in 2005.

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Lanka look to spinners

AFP, Nottingham



Sri Lanka expect the spinners to pick up another rich haul when they take on the West Indies in the World Twenty20 semifinal at The Oval on Friday.

The Sri Lankans have bulldozed their way through the tournament with five straight wins, mainly on the back of spin twins Ajantha Mendis and Muttiah Muralidaran who lead a balanced bowling attack.

Mendis, who puzzles batsmen by turning the ball both ways with one visible action, has so far picked up 11 wickets in the tournament, just one behind Pakistani seamer Umar Gul's tally of 12.

Muralidaran has five wickets, while fast bowler Lasith Malinga has picked up 10 with a mix of toe-crushing yorkers and slower deliveries.

Former captain Mahela

Jayawardene, who handed the reigns to Kumar Sangakkara before the tournament, said he was confident the bowlers will deliver at the crunch time.

"Look, Murali can turn the ball on any surface," Jayawardene said of the star off-spinner, who is the world's highest wicket-taker in both Tests and one-day cricket.

"And if Ajantha sticks to his plans, we have a fairly good chance of going all the way."

Mendis grabbed 3-9 in three overs as Sri Lanka routed New Zealand by 48 runs in their last Super Eights match at Trent Bridge on Tuesday.

The Black Caps failed miserably to chase down a target of 159 in a must-win game and were shot out for 110 in 17 overs.

Jayawardene said the team was taking it one match at a time and would not be carried away just because they had reached the semifinals.

"We set goals for ourselves when we came to the tournament. At the start was going through the first round, then the Super Eights.

"Now we have two goals left, win the semis and the final. But we have to stay calm and focussed on the job at hand."

Jayawardene said the secret of Sri Lanka's success in the tournament was trying to stay one step ahead of the others, like bringing on the slow bowlers in the first six overs when the field was inside the circle.

"As a team we realise we

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SEMIFINALS LINE-UP

World Twenty20 semifinals line-up after completion of Super Eights stage on Tuesday:			
Date	Time	Game	Venue
June 18	22:30BST	South Africa v Pakistan	Trent Bridge
June 19	22:30BST	Sri Lanka v West Indies	The Oval

Spain enter semis

AFP, Bloemfontein



Spain edged Iraq 1-0 to make the semifinals of the Confederations Cup on Wednesday and equal the world record for the longest winning streak by a national team.

A second-half goal by Valencia striker David Villa undid the resilient Asian champions for two wins out of two in Group A to ensure a place in the last four where they are meant to meet either Brazil or Italy.

The hard fought victory wrote their names in the history books with Spain, who have not been beaten since November 2006, matching the record of 14 straight victories held by Australia, Brazil and France.

They also moved to within one win of equaling the 35-match unbeaten run by Brazil between 1993 and 1996.

Vicente del Bosque was forced to start without Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas who limped out of training on Tuesday after a strong tackle

by Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso.

He also rested Carles Puyol, Albert Reira and Raul Albiol, with Carlos Marchena, Gerard Pique, Juan Manuel Mata and Santi Cazorla in the starting 11.

Iraq coach Bora Milutinovic also rested several players, including star striker Younis Mahmoud, with his focus on their last match of the group stages against New Zealand, which he believes they can win.

Compared to their 5-0 thrashing of New Zealand on Sunday, this was a much tougher test for Spain and they made a hesitant start.

It took them eight minutes to unleash their first shot when Cazorla's left foot strike was easily gathered by goalkeeper Mohammed Kassid.

Iraqi forward Alaa Abdul Zahra found the target soon after but it never threatened Iker Casillas, winning his 94th cap, in the Spanish goal.

Pique's glancing header went close on 15 minutes and Fernando Torres, Spain's hattrick hero against New Zealand, almost got on the end of a looping Xavi through ball minutes later.

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Spanish striker David Villa celebrates after scoring the all-important goal against Iraq during their FIFA Confederations Cup match at the Free State Stadium in Bloemfontein yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Moeen Smriti in semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Shaheed Mukhtijodha Moeen Smriti Sangsad of Jessore moved into the semifinal of the Bashundhara Champions Club Cup Football eliminating Fantos of Rangpur 3-2 at the Jessore Stadium yesterday.

Moeen Smriti will play the first semifinal against Feni Soccer Club tomorrow at the same venue.

Away at the Cox's Bazar Stadium, Brothers Union Club of Pabna edged past Sadar Upazila Krira Sangstha of Shariatpur by a solitary goal scored by Shyamol Parvez.

In today's matches, Shuktara Jubo Sangsad of Narayanganj will play GRC Sporting Club of Narsingdi, and Brothers Union Club of Pabna meets Abahani KC of Barguna (play-off), both at the Cox's Bazar Stadium.

'Extra' festival in girls' cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Viqarunnissa Noon School and College 'A' team outplayed Rahmatullah Model High School by seven wickets in a 'battle of extras' in the girls' school cricket tournament at the Azimpur Girls' High School ground yesterday.

Batting first after winning the toss, Rahmatullah Model scored 35-9 in stipulated 20 overs with 31 runs coming from extras.

Chasing the easy target, Viqarunnissa Noon 'A' team had to fight hard as they reached 36 for 3 in 19.3 overs with 34 runs coming from extras.

In another match, Amzad Ali Sarker Girls' High School 'B' team earned a facile seven-wicket victory over Par Gandaria Primary and Junior High School at the Gulshan Youth Club ground.

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NSC approves zila stadiums to DFA

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Sports Council (NSC) has approved the use of Zila Stadiums by their respective District Football Associations (DFA) for 3-4 months a year during the football season.

A letter conveying this message reached the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday from NSC.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin once again proves his mettle as the football boss of the country as he had been pursuing the allotment of grounds to DFA's from day one of his tenure.

"I have been pursuing this and following up ever since I took office and it comes as a great news for the country's football as district teams will now have their own playground and as well as permanent office rooms," reacted Salahuddin.

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1ST SEMIFINAL: SOUTH AFRICA V PAKISTAN

Favourites v resurgent

AFP, Nottingham



An intriguing battle is on the cards when favourites South Africa clash with buoyant Pakistan in the semifinal of the World Twenty20 here on Thursday.

The South Africans have showed their all-round prowess during an unbeaten run in the tournament, including emphatic wins in all three Super Eight games against the West Indies, England and defending champions India.

The latest success came at Trent Bridge on Tuesday when the Proteas fought back after being restricted to a modest 130-5 on a slow wicket to keep off-colour India down to 118-8.

Pakistan bounced back after losing their first Super Eights game to Sri Lanka to defeat New Zealand by six wickets before ensuring their place in the semifinal by packing off minnows Ireland by 38 runs.

In the preliminary round, the enigmatic Pakistanis had shown a similar never-say-die attitude by thrashing England-conquerors Netherlands by 82 runs after losing their opening match against the hosts.

"We are slow starters but we never give up," said Pakistan captain Younus Khan. "If we lose a game we regroup fast and go out and prove ourselves."

Pakistan have been lifted by a sensational display by seamer Umar Gul, who claimed five wickets for six runs against New Zealand at The Oval last Saturday, the first five-wicket haul in Twenty20 internationals.

Gul, who was the highest wicket-taker in the inaugural World Twenty20 in South Africa when Pakistan ended as runners-up to India, again tops the list with 12 scalps in this tournament.

"Gul is a class act," said Pakistani coach Intikhab Alam. "He has shown that the best way to restrict a side in T20 is by taking wickets. He is definitely a trump card."

Suggestions from the New Zealand camp

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Dhoni blames batting

AFP, Nottingham



India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni admitted his highly-regarded batsmen had flopped after the defending champions lost their third successive World Twenty20 Super Eights match on Tuesday.

India, already out of contention for the semifinals, were defeated by 12 runs by South Africa despite chasing just 131 to win on a slow Trent Bridge wicket.

"The team was up for it right from the warm-up," said Dhoni.

"But the batting really hasn't been up to the mark. Hopefully, when we come back to England it will be different and improve. With the batsmen, if the top three don't click it becomes very hard."

"The bowlers did well but we have a few things to work on when it comes to the batting."

South Africa captain Graeme Smith, whose team will face Pakistan in the semifinals here on Thursday, praised his team's ability to adapt to all surfaces and conditions.

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PHOTO: INTERNET

A dejected India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni leaves the field after his dismissal. The holders' ICC World Twenty20 campaign ended with a defeat against South Africa in the Super Eights in Trent Bridge on Tuesday.

PAK WC MATCHES

Compromise on the cards

Cricket

PTI, Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) might agree to forgo demand of hosting all the 2011 World Cup matches of its share as now it's evident that the country can't host the games at home due to security reasons and have to organise them at neutral venues.

"In the meeting held in London on June 15 with officials of the other host countries and the ICC [International Cricket Council] president [David Morgan] and chief executive [Haroon Lorgat], PCB chairman Ijaz Butt was given a clear indication that a compromise needed to be found at the next meeting on June 19 to resolve the legal wrangle over the World Cup matches," sources in the PCB told PTI.

"The idea brokered at the meeting is that Pakistan agree to hosting a reduced number of matches and it would retain hosting fees for the other matches it agrees to concede to the other host countries," he added.

The ICC executive board earlier had moved the 14 World Cup matches out of Pakistan after the terror attack on Sri Lanka team in Lahore.

But the PCB launched a legal challenge against ICC's decision forcing the game's highest governing body along with other co-hosts - India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh - to come to the table.

UEFA slaps ban on Drogba, Bosingwa

AFP, Geneva

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba was on Wednesday banned from European competition for six matches, two of which are suspended, while full-back Jose Bosingwa was handed a four-game ban, with one match suspended, UEFA's disciplinary committee announced.

The decision follows the angry scenes that marred Chelsea's elimination from the Champions League on away goals at the hands of Barcelona after a 1-1 draw between the clubs in the second leg of their semifinal at Stamford Bridge on May 6.

"Drogba and Bosingwa were facing charges of being in breach of the principles of sportsmanship by insulting the referee by making offensive comments," read a statement on the UEFA website.

"Drogba's suspension

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