

Sonali Otit off to UK

SPORTS REPORTER

A 25-member squad of Sonali Otit Club, an organisation of former footballers, is scheduled to leave here for London today to play four friendly matches to be organised by Sonali Otit Club of UK.

Hasanuzzaman Khan Bablu has been appointed as team leader while Abu Noman Nannu will coach the side during their 14-day tour of England.

Sattayjit Das Rupu will captain the former footballers though the former national booter will leave the capital on September 29.

Squad: Hasanuzzaman Khan Bablu (team leader), Mossaber Hossain (deputy leader), Nannu (coach), Rupu (captain), Khorshed Alam Babul, Nasiruddin Ahmed, Sheikh Mohammad Aslam, Mostafizur Rahman, Sultan Ahmed, Azimul Islam Jibon, Bazlur Rahman Kislul, Sayeed Hasan Kanon, Kazi Fakhrul Islam, Mobinul Islam Khasru, Abdul Mannan, Iqbal Gaffar, Shamsuzzaman Yousuf, Billal Chowdhury, Shafiqul Kader Munna, Kamal Hossain, Mizanur Rahman, Akhtaruzzaman Khan Babu, Syed Golam Gilani, Zabid Hossain Apu, Mahidur Rahman Miraz and Nurul Huda Miru.



Coach Jamie Siddons speaks to his ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur as the training resumed after the Eid vacation yesterday.

Siddons back to business

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Coach Jamie Siddons returned to business on Friday relishing a challenge in next year's tri-nation tourney at home involving two powerhouses India and Sri Lanka.

The Australian flew to his country from Harare after his charges historic triumph in West Indies followed by 4-1 series victory against Zimbabwe in July-August and during his stay the Bangladesh coach had a successful skin cancer operation.

"It has gone and I am now fine" said a smiling Siddons when asked about the condition of his skin cancer during the practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Siddons also returned with another good news as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has decided to extend his job till the 2011 World Cup.

"Yes, I am happy as the board agreed in principle to extend my job. Now I will talk with the board about terms and conditions," he said.

A total of 12 cricketers

resumed practice yesterday after Eid vacations to prepare for the upcoming home series against Zimbabwe, who will arrive in Dhaka on October 21 to play a five-match one-day series against the Tigers.

Siddons however believes that the tri-nation one-day series in January next would be the big challenge for his side and they can take the opportunity to do the fine-tuning during the five-match series against Zimbabwe before the tough challenge ahead.

"The confidence level is pretty good after the last couple of good series but the hard challenge is coming in the tri-series," he said.

Bangladesh made history when they whitewashed West Indies both in the two-match Test and three-match one-day series in July.

The training has been concentrating on regaining the fitness level of the players in the hot and humid conditions after a month-long break from action.

Vice-captain Shakib Al Hasan, who is nursing his groin injury, joined the camp after returning from Adelaide but injured captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was absent.

Ajmal factor worries India

PTI, Johannesburg

He is just five feet four inches tall but with his ability to extract spin from any surface, Pakistan off-spinner Saeed Ajmal has become a thorn in the flesh for Indian batsmen ahead of the crucial Group A tie in the ICC Champions Trophy today.

Team India's problems were further compounded after vice-captain Yuvraj Singh was ruled out of the elite ICC event following a fracture in his right hand's little finger that he sustained during practice, thereby leaving a vacuum in the middle-order.

Interestingly, it sounds blasphemous to hear about India's concern for Ajmal as they are famous for their mastery in handling the tweakers. Even the likes of Muttiah Muralidaran and Ajantha Mendis don't quite give them sleepless nights.

But experienced Yuvraj's absence in the middle overs of the innings, where Pakistan invariably employs the spin duo of Shahid Afridi and

Ajmal, has raised a few concerns for Mahendra Singh Dhoni and his men. Ajmal made his debut at the age of 30

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Another Indo-Pak clash

AFP, Centurion



Fit-again skipper Younus Khan has returned to

bolster Pakistan in a high-pressure match against India in the Champions Trophy on Saturday.

The reliable middle-order batsman missed his team's opening game against the West Indies in Johannesburg on Wednesday due to a finger injury, making way for all-rounder Shahid Afridi to lead the side.

Younus, who suffered a hairline fracture during a warm-up game, has regained fitness at the right time after Pakistan's batsmen struggled against an under-strength West Indies on a lively track.

Little-known paceman Gavin Tonge rattled Pakistan with a four-wicket burst before teenager Umar Akmal (41 not out) and Afridi (17 not out) helped their team

win by five wickets.

Pakistan will be looking forward to a vastly-improved performance from their batsmen against India, who have excellent fast bowlers in Ashish Nehra, Ishant Sharma and Rudra Pratap Singh.

A victory will strengthen Pakistan's chances of making it to the semifinals from the four-team group, which also features defending champions Australia. The top two sides advance to the last-four.

Pakistan will also be keen to improve their record against India in International Cricket Council-conducted tournaments, having lost four matches in the World Cup and two in the Twenty20 World Championships.

Their lone win over India came in the 2004 Champions Trophy in England.

Pakistan had reasons to be pleased with their bowling, with teenage pacer Mohammad Aamer and Umar Gul grabbing three wickets apiece against the West Indies. Spinner Saeed Ajmal also impressed, taking two wickets.

India's depth in batting will be tested, especially in the absence of Yuvraj Singh, a hard-hitting batsman who was ruled out of the tournament due to a finger injury suffered during a practice session on Wednesday.

He has been replaced with Virat Kohli. The Indian batting still looks solid as Sachin Tendulkar, skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Gautam Gambhir are all capable of playing match-winning roles.

The focus will be on middle-order batsman Rahul Dravid, who has just returned to the one-side after nearly two years. He is known for building an innings under pressure, having already scored more than 10,000 one-day runs.

India will be determined to maintain their consistency, having already clinched five successive bilateral one-day series and a recent tri-series in Sri Lanka.

India coach Gary Kirsten had said before the tournament that one of the goals was to become the best team in the world.

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Franklin replaces Oram

CRICINFO, undated

James Franklin, the New Zealand left-arm medium-fast bowler, has been called up as a replacement for the injured Jacob Oram at the ICC Champions Trophy. Franklin, who was playing for Gloucestershire against Kent in Bristol, will leave the match halfway to head to South Africa.

Oram pulled his hamstring during training and missed New Zealand's opening game of the tournament along with Ian Butler, who caught a stomach bug.

In seven Friends Provident Trophy matches for Gloucestershire this season,

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Players gain holiday weight

SPORTS REPORTER



After a week-long vacation of Eid-ul-Fitr, most of the clubs including giants

Abahani and Mohammedan resumed their Federation Cup camp yesterday. But almost all the coaches were faced with a similar predicament almost everyone was united in their belief that the fitness of the players had suffered during the vacation.

The Bangladesh Football Federation was forced to stop the season's curtain-raising tournament three days before the scheduled Eid vacation due to the steady rain that made the ground of the Bangabandhu National Stadium unplayable and subsequently postponed the tournament till September 28.

Only the coaches of star-studded Mohammedan and popular Abahani professed to be satisfied, the latter albeit reluctantly.

But the other coaches, including title contenders Muktijoddha Sangsad and Sheikh Russel, minnows Farashganj SC and newcomers Beanibazar SC were more or less disappointed with the players' fitness.

The footballers were asked to follow the schedules, given by their respective coaches, during the vacation, but they hardly maintained those charts that virtually deteriorated the fitness they gained before the start of the Federation Cup.

Mohammedan coach Maruful Haq is a bit lucky compared to others as his charges followed his instruction during the vacation.

"I am happy to see the fitness level of the

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Ze Roberto

(Former Brazilian midfielder)
"My decision to leave the national squad in 2006 is the biggest mistake of my life. I watch each national game on the TV and it really hurts me not to be there. If (coach Carlos Dunga) calls me, I'm there. It's my most cherished dream to play in the World Cup for Brazil."



ESPN

ICC Champions Trophy
West Indies v Australia
Live from 2:15pm

English Premier League
Fulham v Arsenal
Live from 11:25pm

STAR Sports
English Premier League
Portsmouth v Everton
Live from 6:40pm

Stoke City v Man United
Live from 8:55pm

STAR Cricket
ICC Champions Trophy
India v Pakistan
Live from 7:15pm

SuperSport7
Primera Liga
Real Madrid v Tenerife
Live from 11:00pm

Malaga v Barcelona
Live from 1:00am (Sunday)

Ricky taking WI seriously

AFP, Johannesburg



Australia master batsman Ricky Ponting comes face to face with West Indies apprentice bowler Gavin Tonge today in an ICC Champions Trophy clash where the outcome appears a foregone conclusion.

It is not so much a question of whether the Australians will win but by how much against opponents lacking stars like skipper Chris Gayle and Shivnarine Chanderpaul owing to a long-running contract dispute.

Even at full strength the West Indies no longer rank among the giants of the game while Australia invariably are title favourites when an international one-day tournament comes around.

The Aussies arrived here this week weary but jubilant after thrashing Ashes tormentors England 6-1 in an ODI series that brought the curtain down on a four-month tour.

At the same time the fall and fall and fall of West Indies cricket continued with a home series loss to Bangladesh, a team not consid-

ered good enough to play in the Champions Trophy.

Ponting may have a tongue as sharp as his bat, but he refuses to write off their first opponents in a group completed by fierce rivals India and Pakistan, who clash 40 kilometres away at Centurion on the same day.

"The West Indies will get the respect they deserve from us. There is nothing we can do about the contractual dispute," he told reporters as the squad prepared at university grounds close to the city centre.

Tasmania-born right-hander Ponting is a cricket legend having scored more ODI runs than any other Australian in a 123-cap career that began against South Africa 14 years ago.

He assumed the captaincy of the 50-over team in 2002 and has led Australia to the pinnacle of the game twice with World Cup triumphs in South Africa and the West Indies.

Tonge is a much more recent arrival on the international scene, making his debut just two months ago against Bangladesh and failing to capture a single wicket.

However, two days ago the 26-year-old

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Booters of Mohammedan Sporting Club regrouped at the BUET playground yesterday after the Eid vacation as the Federation Cup gets underway again on the 29th of this month.

Sri Lanka rebuild

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lankan middle-order did the repair work after English pacers James Anderson and Graham Onions had rattled the top-order within half an hour of play at the Wanderers in Johannesburg yesterday.

Having won the toss on a cloud-covered day in Johannesburg, England skipper Andrew Strauss didn't have to give a second thought as he put the Lankans in to bat.

And it paid off immediately as Onions extracted the out-of-form Sanath Jayasuriya with his fifth delivery, caught behind nibbling outside off for a second-ball duck. Four balls later, Anderson extracted the prize scalp of Tillakaratne Dilshan. He fell to a scything slash to point off the fullest

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PCB against two-tier Test format

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The Pakistan Cricket Board has said it will not support the idea of a two-tier Test structure, if the topic comes up for discussion when the ICC board and chief executives of the member boards meet next month in Johannesburg on October 6-7.

There have been calls in the past to tweak the Test format by introducing a two-tier structure, separating the strong teams from the weak. Teams will battle to avoid relegation to the second tier, as is the practice followed in domestic competitions in India and England. Pakistan are currently ranked No.6 in the ICC Test rankings, above New Zealand, West Indies and Bangladesh.

"We have seen no such proposal coming from anyone but even if it does come up for discussion during the ICC meetings we will reject it outright," Wasim Bari, the PCB's chief

operating officer told PTI. "First of all we don't support having two systems in the FTP calendar and secondly, there is no way anyone can justify putting Pakistan in the second tier."

The ICC, however, hasn't given any strong indications that such a system would actually take shape. In an interview to Cricinfo in May, ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat said: "Personally, I would not like to see that (two-tier structure) happen. I think we've got an obligation to grow the game properly. Sri Lanka is an attractive team, I think Pakistan is a fantastic team, so why would one want to leave them out? If we can get a spread that is equitable, it would certainly be the position we would want to achieve. There has to be a framework."

These measures, including suggestions of a Test championship, have come about in the wake of Twenty20's phenomenal success, which has compelled experts and the ICC to reform the game's other formats to boost spectator interest.



India's little master Sachin Tendulkar (C) shares a light moment with teammates Virat Kohli (L) and Ashish Nehra during a training session at SuperSport Park in Centurion yesterday.