



PHOTO: AFP

BREAKING ANOTHER BARRIER: Cricket's role model and India's master batsman Sachin Tendulkar (L) is all smiles as he stretches during a training session on the eve of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Ahmedabad yesterday. Tendulkar will mark the start of his third decade in world cricket when the first Test gets underway today.

One more Sachin mark

First Test against Sri Lanka from today

Cricket

AFP, Ahmedabad

India's captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni on Sunday urged Sachin Tendulkar to mark his third decade in world cricket with a century in the first Test against Sri Lanka.

Dhoni also stressed the hype over Tendulkar's landmark with round-the-clock coverage on the world batting record holder in the Indian media would not distract his team from the task at hand.

"It's not a distraction, in fact it's an inspiration for all of us," Dhoni said ahead of the first of three Tests against the Islanders which opens at the Motera Stadium here today.

"What Sachin has achieved in phenomenal. He has been an ideal role model for all of us. I never dreamt of playing alongside him, so it's an honour to share the same dressing room with him."

"Hope he gets a century here. That will be the ultimate."

It will be the 160th Test for Tendulkar, the world's most successful Test and

one-day batsman, since his debut as a 16-year-old on November 15, 1989 against Pakistan in Karachi.

Only retired former Australian captain Steve Waugh has played more Tests -- 168.

India last played a Test match in March-April in New Zealand and Dhoni said his team was excited to be playing the traditional five-day game again after a hectic round of limited-overs cricket.

"We are not under-prepared for this Test," the captain insisted. "We will have to shift attention and apply ourselves to the longer game, but all of us have been in good touch."

"Hopefully we will play to our potential and win."

Sri Lanka have never won a Test match on Indian soil on six previous visits -- losing eight while six were drawn -- but Dhoni said the pressure on the hosts was as much as before.

"Whether we are playing the world's best team or a side that is at the bottom of the rankings, the pressure remains the same. That is what Test cricket is all about," he said.

"Sri Lanka is one of the best sides and it will be an interesting series."

India, helped by a formidable batting line-up and quality spinners, have won three of their last four home series against Pakistan, Australia and England, while the fourth against South Africa ended 1-1.

Test regulars Rahul Dravid and Venkatesh Laxman are back to join Tendulkar and Yuvraj Singh in a strong middle-order, with twice triple-century Virender Sehwag and Gautam Gambhir opening the batting.

India's bowling will be bolstered by the return of pace spearhead Zaheer Khan, who was sidelined for five months with a shoulder injury. The 31-year-old left-arm seamer has 210 wickets from 65 Tests.

Khan and young paceman Ishant Sharma are expected to share the new ball, with seasoned off-spinner Harbhajan Singh and leg-break bowler Amit Sharma providing the spin options.

Dhoni said the brownish wicket was "very different" from the seaming track that was prepared for India's last Test here in March last year.

India succumbed to South Africa in three days in that game after being shot

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Shakib not playing today

SPORTS REPORTER

Shakib Al Hasan is likely to be out of action for two weeks following his finger injury sustained during the last Premier Division Cricket League match.

Shakib, the Abahani captain, was struck in the finger during the match against Cricket Coaching School on November 13 and was advised to rest for two weeks by the national team's physio.

This means unbeaten Abahani will miss the services of all-rounder Shakib in today's match against Partex Sporting Club.

Abahani official Jalal Younus however said that Shakib needed one week to recover from his injury.

SAFF C'SHIP Security the top priority

SPORTS REPORTER

The Local Organising Committee (LOC) of the SAFF (South Asian Football Federation) Championship marked security as its top priority during the eight-nation tournament in December.

Bangladesh will host the sixth edition of the regional meet to be participated by holders Maldives, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan at the Bangabandhu National Stadium over December 4-13.

The decision was taken at the LOC meeting in presence of different sub-committees at the BFF House yesterday.

"Security got the highest priority in the meeting and the DMP Commissioner has been made convenor of the security committee," said LOC chairman and BFF senior vice-president ASalam Murshedy.

"All visiting teams will be escorted by the police and maximum security will also be

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'You're a role model'

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Former rivals of Sachin Tendulkar on Sunday praised the Indian batting master on the anniversary of his Test debut against Pakistan twenty years ago, describing him as a genuine role model.

Tendulkar, who plays his 160th Test against Sri Lanka at Ahmedabad from today, made his debut as a 16-year-old on November 15, 1989 against Pakistan in Karachi.

Former captain Rameez Raja, who opened the innings for Pakistan in that Test, said Tendulkar had been amazing on and off the field.

"We know what a genius Tendulkar has been but the way he has conducted himself off the field has been amazing," Raja told AFP. "He has been a great role model and there has been no controversy linked with him. It's amazing."

"Tendulkar is so graceful that youngsters will follow him in the years to come. His records will remain in the books, and may be overhauled, but his grace would be unmatched."

Since making his debut, Tendulkar has scaled unmatched heights, scoring 12,773 runs with 42 hundreds -- both world records in Tests -- and 17,178 with 45 centuries -- both world records -- in 436 one-day internationals.

Raja said very few people believed Kapil Dev's words on Tendulkar in 1989.

"Dev told us to watch out for this kid and described him as world class material but we thought a 16-year-old couldn't be world class

and were of the opinion that Dev was praising him because he was an Indian."

"But when he showed confidence and his Abdul Qadir for three sixes at Peshawar in a game, we realised his potential and the tour of Pakistan gave him the right kind of platform to build his great career."

Another former captain, Javed Miandad, advised young people to follow Tendulkar's example.

"Tendulkar is a genuine role model for youth of the world," said Miandad, himself a great batsman. "The way he projects himself off and on the field is remarkable and a lesson for others."

Miandad singled out Tendulkar's passion for cricket.

"I remember Tendulkar dived and took a catch off the last ball of the 50th over in a recent one-day match against Australia, which shows his passion for doing the best for India, otherwise very few people do such a thing off the last ball."

Former leg-spinner Abdul Qadir praised Tendulkar as a great batsman.

"Tendulkar is unmatched," said Qadir, himself touted as a magician of spin. "The way he batted on that tour of Pakistan and hit quite a few sixes off me proved that he will have a great career."

Tendulkar's rival in the first Test, paceman Waqar Younis, said Tendulkar was a genius.

"The way he bats no one can match him," said Waqar, who also injured Tendulkar with a blow to his nose in the fourth Test at Sialkot. "His passion for batting never waned even he was badly hit by one of my deliveries. He has been amazing."

Lions in WC finals

AFP, Johannesburg



Cameroon coasted to a 2-0 win in Morocco Saturday and clinched a record sixth appearance for an African team at the World Cup.

Elsewhere, Emad Moteab scored five minutes into stoppage time to earn Egypt a 2-0 victory over Algeria Saturday and a 2010 World Cup lifeline.

The result left the bitter North African rivals level on points and goal difference at the top of Group C so they will meet again next Wednesday in Sudan to decide which country goes to South Africa.

Reigning African champions Egypt could not have wished for a better start with Amr Zaki giving them a second-minute lead before a sell-out 75,000 crowd at the Cairo Stadium.

But the 'Pharaohs' failed to build on their early fortune and Algeria missed several good chances to equalise in a clash between two of the fiercest African football rivals.

Moteab replaced Zaki after 65 minutes and when all seemed lost, he rose to head the ball into the far corner of the net past Algerian goalkeeper Lounes Gauaoui.

The 'Indomitable Lions' took a one-point lead over Gabon into the final round of Group A fixtures and stretched it to four by full-time as their only rivals for a place at the 2010 finals in South Africa fell 1-0 away to Togo.

Achille Webo put Cameroon ahead on 18 minutes in Feb and three-time African Footballer of the Year Samuel Eto'o added a second

soon after half-time against timid opposition.

Qualification was a personal triumph for French coach Paul Le Guen, who took over just three months ago from German Otto Pfister with Cameroon bottom of the table

having secured just one point from two outings.

But the highly successful former Lyon coach steered the four-time African champions to four consecutive victories and top place with 13 points

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PHOTO: AFP

Nigeria striker Obafemi Martins (R) celebrates with teammate Peter Osazo after his second goal in their qualifying match against Kenya at the Moi International Sports Centre Kasarani on Saturday. Nigeria defeated Kenya 3-2 in Nairobi and snatched a place at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Pakistan off to NZ

Cricket

AFP, Dubai

Coach Intikhab Alam identified batting as the key area for improvement as a 17-member Pakistan squad minus Younus Khan flew to New Zealand early Sunday to play a three-match Test series.

Younus opted to sit out the New Zealand tour and hand the captaincy to Mohammad Yousuf after his side's one-day series defeat in Abu Dhabi last week, saying he wanted to rest after suffering poor batting form.

Yet it was not only him, the batsmen faltering badly in the one-day series which New Zealand won 2-1. Pakistan won the two-match Twenty20 series 2-0 here on Friday.

"Our batting must click and show improvement because it will be tough to switch from one-day and Twenty20," Alam told AFP. "Our bowling has the capacity to bowl New Zealand out twice but we must put runs on the board first."

Alam, who took over as coach after Australian Geoff Lawson was sacked in October last year, said Younus's absence was a blow, but appeared to harbour no bitterness.

"Naturally, Younus is a senior batsman and although he had a poor batting form he is a world class player who can come good any time, but you miss players through injuries as well and Younus's replacement will have a chance to prove his worth."

"Batsmen will have to show temperament



Did U Know?

AC Milan failed to win a single championship title from 1907 to 1950.



What to Watch

Neo Cricket & SuperSport2
India v Sri Lanka
First Test, Day 1
Live from 11:00am
ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 9:30pm



Premier Div Cricket League
Mohammedan v Biman
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium
Abahani v Partex
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Surjo Torun v Gazi Tank
Venue: BKSP-2
Bangladesh U-19 v Zimbabwe U-19
Third Youth ODI
Venue: Khulna Divisional Stadium

Kumar thinks alike

Cricket

AFP, Ahmedabad

Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara on Sunday joined Indian great Sachin Tendulkar in calling for more Test cricket, saying the lop-sided schedule needed to be changed.

"It's really a shame that we are being deprived of Test cricket," Sangakkara told AFP ahead of the three-Test series against India that opens at the Motera Stadium on Monday.

"The young guys in our side are desperate to perform at the highest level, and that means Test cricket. They are just not getting enough of it."

The International Cricket Council is working on a Future Tours Programme (FTP) for international matches post 2012, juggling to fit in Test matches amid an explosion of one-day and Twenty20 cricket.

Sri Lanka have just one Test series scheduled next year -- against the West Indies at home in

November -- forcing world bowling record holder Muttiah Muralidaran to abandon his dream of claiming 1,000 Test wickets.

Muralidaran, 37, who has claimed 783 Test wickets, has already said he will retire from the five-day game after the West Indies series, with no hope of reaching the 1,000-wicket mark.

"At one time, I could have gone for it, but for that to happen we needed to play more Tests and that is just not happening," the off-spinner said.

Sangakkara said there was no point in talking of a proposed world Test championship till each of the nine Test nations -- Zimbabwe are currently playing only one-day matches -- got to play more Tests.

"Ideally, there should be eight to 10 Tests a year for every team, that needs to be worked out first," the Sri Lankan captain said.

Sangakkara's grouse followed a similar appeal from Tendulkar, the world's leading batsman in both Test and one-day cricket, who begins a third decade in international cricket today.

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Armin, Mahmud shoot to gold

SPORTS REPORTER

Armin Asha clinched the gold medal in 10m air pistol event on the concluding day of the 2nd Air Gun Championships at the National Shooting Complex in Gulshan yesterday.

Asha of Narayanganj Rifles Club scored 454.6 to finish on top, putting behind BKSP's Antara Islam, who made 452.4 points, Farzana Kawsar of Dhaka Rifles Club finished third with 450.9.

Little known Mahmudul Hasan of BKSP stunned star Asif Hossain Khan to bag the 10m air rifles gold scoring 692.7 out of 700 points. Asif finished third behind Abdullah Hel Baki, who made 691.5 points while Asif scored 687.1.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Ashad Ali Sarker distributed prizes among the winners.



PHOTO: STAR

Armin Asha (R) of Narayanganj Rifles Club sets her sight on the bull's eye during the 10m air pistol event of the second National Air Gun Championships at the National Shooting Complex in Gulshan yesterday. The unheralded shooter won the event with a score of 454.6 points.