

V'ball team to tour Myanmar

SPORTS REPORTER

The national volleyball team will travel to Myanmar to play a tri-nation tournament as a part of their preparation for the 11th South Asian Games to be held in Bangladesh from January 29 to February 9.

The tri-nation tournament will feature hosts Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh and they will play double-league matches before top two teams advance to the final of the tournament, scheduled for January 12-17.

A 17-member team comprising 14 players will leave the country on Sunday and are scheduled to return home on January 17.

Cairns to sue Modi

CRICINFO, undated

Chris Cairns has announced he intends to sue Indian Premier League Commissioner Lalit Modi for comments made in relation to the IPL's decision to withdraw Cairns' name from the initial list of potential players.

Modi's comments appeared on his Twitter page and also in an interview with Cricinfo. "The allegation made by Lalit Modi that I have been involved in match fixing is scandalous and wholly untrue," Cairns said in a statement issued by Andrew Fitch-Holland, his solicitor. "For him to circulate such a falsehood around the world is outrageous. Mr. Modi's allegation has caused me huge personal distress and professional damage."

"I cannot allow these slurs to ruin my future and I have instructed my solicitors, Collyer Bristow LLP, to bring proceedings for defamation against Mr. Modi." "This situation has really caused Chris terrible upset," Fitch-Holland told Cricinfo. "There appear to be a lot of negative feelings against him being generated as a result of Modi's comments."

"This is both hurtful and distressing for Chris but also damaging to his future prospects. We immediately took advice from Rhory Robertson at Collyer Bristow here in London, who is a leading specialist lawyer with extensive experience in both defamation and professional sports."

"Having spent much of the last day seeking this expert advice, we will now move quickly to fight the damage being done to Chris' reputation."

When contacted by Cricinfo, Modi said: "We will deal with it as and when it arrives."

Intikhab calls for separate T20 team

CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan coach Intikhab Alam has called for separate teams for Twenty20 internationals as a possible means of arresting his side's current decline in the Test format. Intikhab echoed the comments made by captain Mohammad Yousuf after Pakistan's defeat in Melbourne, when he said the players in the Test squad were struggling to adapt to the format largely due to volume of Twenty20 cricket they played.

When asked if a separate team for the Twenty20 format was the way to go, Intikhab told the News: "I think we will have to do that. If you play too much Twenty20 cricket then it becomes almost impossible for you to have the sort of patience and temperament that you need to shine in Test matches."

"In Twenty20 cricket all you have to do is to hit the ball out of the park. But in Test matches, it is all about staying on the wicket. It is hard work and needs a lot of character."

Pakistan lost the Test series against Australia in Sydney, as they were beaten by 36 runs in their chase of 176. They had secured a first-innings lead of 206, but their batsmen capitulated to the spin of Nathan Hauritz while batting last. Intikhab said the lack of world-class batsmen was hurting Pakistan.

Abahani

FROM PAGE 17 Teams who confirmed their participation are: Abahani Limited (Bangladesh), Drukstar (Bhutan), Nagacorp (Cambodia), Kaohsiung City Yaoti (Chinese Taipei), Dordoi Dynamo (Kyrgyzstan), Yadanabon (Myanmar), Nepal Police Club (Nepal), FC Vakhsh (Tajikistan) and ITTU (Turkmenistan).



Belgium star Justine Henin plays a backhand slice on her way to victory over Ana Ivanovic of Serbia in their Brisbane International semifinal on Friday.

Clijsters, Henin face off

Tennis

AFP, Brisbane

Belgium comeback queens Kim Clijsters and Justine Henin followed the script to the letter on Friday to reach the final of the Brisbane International tennis tournament.

Henin demolished third seed Ana Ivanovic 6-3, 6-2 to win the first semifinal while Clijsters was made to work much harder before overcoming unheralded German Andrea Petkovic 6-4, 6-2.

Henin, granted a wildcard to play this week, was ruthless as she disposed of Ivanovic in just 65 minutes.

There were no signs of any of the rustiness she displayed in her epic three-set win over Melinda Czink in Thursday's quarterfinals as she broke Ivanovic three times in either set.

And while Ivanovic, like Henin a former world number one, was able to break the Belgian's serve in each set, Henin came back even harder to break back almost immediately and underline her complete dominance.

"I'm in the final of my first tournament back -- it's a great feeling," Henin said.

"It's a surprise of course, because it's not as easy as it may seem, because 18 months with no competition is not that easy."

Clijsters looked on course for a similarly easy ride when she broke Petkovic in the opening game of the match.

But the German refused to buckle to her more illustrious opponent and broke back later in the set to get the match back on even terms.

However, the greater experience of Clijsters began to tell and she gradually wore her oppo-

nent down, taking the match in one hour and 20 minutes.

Henin and Clijsters have set the tennis world alight since their respective comebacks.

Clijsters, who retired in May 2007 and had a baby girl, set the ball rolling when she came back midway through last year to sensationally win the US Open.

Soon after that triumph, Henin announced she too would end her retirement at the start of this year, with the Brisbane International marking her return to the court.

From the moment Clijsters, 26, and Henin, 27, found themselves in opposite halves of the draw, the prospect of the pair meeting in Saturday's final has been the tournament's main talking point.

Fierce rivals on the court, their careers have also been marred by speculation of severe rifts off the court.

Henin, while admitting they weren't close friends, was keen to play down any talk of bad blood.

"Just because we are from the same country does not mean we have to be best friends," she said. "(But) there is so much respect between the two of us."

"I know sometimes people would love to hear that there have been problems between us but it's not the case."

"I respect her personally and I respect her play and I think it's the same for her."

Henin said it was simply a case of two different personalities.

"We are so different. We have good memories of when we were younger and we were travelling a lot to the same tournaments, but after that we grew up differently -- we went in different directions," she said.

'Anelka is main man'

Football

AFP, London

Nicolas Anelka has been told he will carry the responsibility of keeping the goals flying in for Chelsea in the absence of Didier Drogba.

Ivory Coast star Drogba is away at the African Nations Cup along with Salomon Kalou, Michael Essien and John Mikel Obi, but Blues boss Carlo Ancelotti believes Anelka has the ability to ensure that the club's leading striker is not too badly missed.

Anelka has recovered from a hamstring injury which kept him out of Chelsea's last four matches and is set to return to action at Hull on Saturday.

"Anelka is a very important player for us," Ancelotti said Friday. "He has shown he can play with Didier in attack and without him."

"He played the first three games in the Champions League without Didier and he did very well for us and that was important."

"It is very important for us

to have him, not only for tomorrow but throughout this period."

Ancelotti denied reports that the club's sporting director Frank Arnesen was in Italy this week checking on Sampdoria striker Giampaolo Pazzini, and insisted there were no plans to bolster Chelsea's playing staff.

"We stay with the same squad. I have said that a lot of times," the Italian said. "We have a good squad and have a very good striker in Daniel Sturridge. We don't need to have another new player. Pazzini is not a player who is of interest to us."

Anelka's squad travel to Hull with a two-point advantage over champions Manchester United and their coach is keen to avoid any slip-up, having taken notice of Arsenal's recent revival and the impact of his compatriot Roberto Mancini on Manchester City.

"This game will be the first one without the African players and it will be a difficult game," he said. "We have to pay attention to Hull and be aware. My must

concentrate on doing our best because we want to win and maintain our position at the top of the list."

Ancelotti added: "It is Roberto Mancini's dream to win the title. He has started his job very well. But it is important that we stay at the top."

"Arsenal have done very well in this recent period. They have had some fabulous results but we must maintain our position."

Nadal's lost

FROM PAGE 17

In London in his last match of the 2009 season, and who overcame Ivo Karlovic, the tour's leading server, by 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (9/7).

Davydenko came from 2-4 down in the crucial first set tie-break and again showed how fluently aggressive he is off the ground.

"He's on a roll," said Federer.

"He will be difficult to beat."

Smith rues

FROM PAGE 17

long time and he did it exceptionally well." Steyn gave South Africa an important breakthrough 36 minutes before lunch when he bowled Jonathan Trott with a superb delivery which swung in late.

But Steyn and Morne Morkel could not separate England's last two specialist batsmen when they took the new ball.

South Africa were hampered by a back injury to Friedel de Wet -- brought in for the dropped Makhaya Ntini -- who bowled only four overs during the day.

Strauss blasts 'malicious' claim

AFP, Cape Town

England captain Andrew Strauss said on Thursday that he believed South Africa's claims about ball tampering during the third Test at Newlands were 'malicious'.

The South Africans made it known they had drawn the attention of match referee Roshan Mahanama to an alleged changing of the condition of the ball but did not make an official complaint.

The umpires viewed footage which showed fast bowler Stuart Broad stepping on the ball and James Anderson running his fingers down the seam but decided to take no action.

"We're not particularly happy about it and I strongly refute the allegations," said Strauss.

"I really don't feel there was any concerted effort on behalf of any of our players to alter the state of the ball. I appreciate that some of that footage didn't look amazingly good but I don't think it was malicious."

"I think to a certain extent the South Africans announcing it to the media without being totally clear in their minds what they were going to do, whether they were going to put in a formal complaint, was a little bit malicious."

"Ball tampering is a very sensitive subject and if you're going to make allegations you have to be very clear or confident about exactly what the other team are doing."

England held out to draw the third Test ensuring that they cannot lose the series -- the fourth and final test begins next Thursday in Johannesburg.

'Review a boon for spinners'

AFP, London

Phil Tufnell believes cricket's new decision review system has increased the importance of spinners in the game by making umpires more willing to give tight leg before decisions.

"In the old days batsmen used to put their front foot down the wicket and you'd never get an lbw," Tufnell, the former England spinner said.

"I must admit you do sit there and think, 'Crikey, I'd have another 1,000 wickets if I was still bowling!' But there you go -- times move on and the game has changed. You take what you get."

England's Graeme Swann, who has taken 19 wickets in the first three Tests of the current series in South Africa, is one spinner who appears to have benefited from the new system and Tufnell has been impressed with his contribution.

"He has done very well," said Tufnell. "He's had a fabulous past year with bat and ball. He backs himself, plays with a smile on his face. I like the way he plays. He is a bit of a character and he enjoys it."

"He has come in and performed brilliantly. The spot was there and he was determined to go in there."

Vidic out for ten days

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United will have to do without centreback Nemanja Vidic for another ten days because of the injury he suffered while warming up before last weekend's shock FA Cup defeat by Leeds.

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson said after the match he did not know why Vidic had pulled out of the match, a comment which fuelled speculation of a behind-the-scenes rift and further encouraged rumours the Serbia international is keen on a move to either Barcelona or Real Madrid.

Ferguson however moved to clarify the situation on Friday, saying Vidic had damaged a nerve. "He felt a bit of a problem with the right side of his leg and didn't feel confident about playing the game," Ferguson said.

"I understand that because it was quite painful. We sent him to a specialist on Wednesday and the problem will be solved by some exercises we are going to have to give him now. He should be back in about 10 days' time."

Vidic will miss Saturday's Premier League match at Birmingham and next weekend's home clash with Burnley.

Butt voices optimism

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's cricket chief voiced hopes on Friday for improved security so matches could be played at home this year and said he was working to renew ties between the national team and India.

"Like every Pakistani, I too hope that the security situation improves in this new year and that we can resume hosting international teams on our home soil," Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ijaz Butt told AFP.

"We faced unique challenges in the past year and hope for a better 2010."

An ongoing campaign of violence by Taliban militants including a gun attack on the visiting Sri Lankan team last year have battered Pakistan's reputation as an international venue.

The March 3 attacks, which killed eight people and injured seven Sri Lankan players and their assistant coach, forced the International Cricket Council (ICC) to relocate all 14 of Pakistan's World Cup 2011 matches.

Even before that, several foreign teams had refused to tour Pakistan due to security fears, forcing the ICC to also relocate the eight-nation Champions Trophy from Pakistan to South Africa.

Butt said his board had tried to limit the damage by staging international games in neutral venues.

"The results that we have achieved such as regular cricket for the national team on neutral venues will help to minimise the damage caused from the temporary suspension of international tours," he said.

He said the PCB had also worked to restore ties with arch-rivals India. New Delhi cancelled a tour to Pakistan after an attack on Mumbai in November 2008 that was blamed on militants based in Pakistan.

"We have made a strong case for Pakistan at all international forums," said Butt, whose board has only hosted Sri Lanka since he took charge in October 2008. "I would especially mention our efforts to resume ties with India."

"We are in close liaison with our High Commissioner in India on this matter. He has worked very hard and his efforts are very much appreciated. We are confident that our joint efforts will bear fruit in 2010."

Eng confirm Pak dates

Cricket

AFP, London

England will play two Twenty20 matches against Pakistan in Dubai next month ahead of their tour of Bangladesh, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced Friday.

The matches will take place on February 19 and 20. The senior England squad will leave Dubai on February 21 for Dhaka, where they will play two one-day tour matches before the start of the three-match ODI series against Bangladesh.

England's second-string Lions side will also tour the United Arab Emirates (UAE) next month with their programme featuring T20 matches against England, the UAE and Pakistan 'A' followed by a further three 50-over matches against Pakistan 'A'.

ECB Managing Director, England Cricket, Hugh Morris said: "We are delighted to have agreed in partnership with Pakistan Cricket Board and Dubai Sports City such a comprehensive programme of cricket in the UAE for both England and England Lions."

"The two T20 Internationals against the current world champions in this format of the

game will be an exciting challenge for the England team and provide important additional T20 international experience before the next ICC WT20 tournament in the Caribbean in April.

"The combination of three T20 matches and three 50-over matches for the England Lions team to be played at Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi will also provide those players with an excellent opportunity to push their case for selection for the England One-Day side as we continue to build not only for the World T20 in West Indies later this year but also for the ICC World Cup in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh."



Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina holds an official meeting with ICC vice president and chairman of the central organising committee for the World Cup 2011, Sharad Pawar (R) and BCB president, AHM Mostafa Kamal at her official residence Jamuna yesterday.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh International Tender Notice. Includes details of the tender for Police Headquarters, Dhaka, and a list of items for purchase.