

Aussies optimistic on security issue

CRICINFO, undated



The Australian Cricketers' Association remains hopeful that its IPL security requirements can be met despite Lalit Modi's blunt criticism of players' concerns this week. The ACA chief executive, Paul Marsh, said there were positive signs that the IPL's security firm was taking seriously the list of safety issues that worried players after an independent report found that a terrorist threat against the league was credible.

"Our security adviser Reg Dickson has been working with the IPL's security adviser, Nicholls-Steyn," Marsh told Cricinfo. "They've been working for a few days now on what we've identified as the issues that have come out of various player meetings."

"Nicholls-Steyn is aware of those and they are working through the issues and we're making some positive progress. It's probably looked more positive over the last few days than what it has [before]. There's still 15 days to go before the event starts and things can happen very quickly in India, we've seen that over the years."

Modi also had a dig at Ricky Ponting and said he had heard that Ponting was encouraging players not to go to the IPL. There had been reports that Ponting had disagreed with some senior freelance players, including Matthew Hayden, Adam Gilchrist and Shane Warne, at an ACA meeting on Tuesday but Marsh said the reports of a rift between players were untrue.

"I presented to the players the information that we had and opened it up for discussion... like any meeting I'd have with the players," he said. "Like just about every meeting, when you're dealing with a difficult issue, there are different points of view and there were definitely different points of view in this particular meeting. The players were completely unified on the position that they wanted to go."

"However, there was one school thinking they would only go if our security adviser, Reg Dickson who we trust, believes it's safe to go. There was another school that said it's a risk-and-reward type situation, would we go regardless. We got to a position at the end of it where we all said okay, let's put back to the IPL the things that we need so that all the players can go."

"If we can resolve those issues with them, and that is our hope, then we would expect to get to a point where our security adviser recommends that it's safe for the players to go. If we can't overcome these issues then the opposite is the most likely scenario. This is a decision to be made by each individual player."



Australia pacer Mitchell Johnson (L) jumps into the air after dismissing New Zealand's Peter Ingram during their first Twenty20 international in Wellington yesterday.

2 Pak players in fixing probe

INTERNET, undated

Two Pakistan cricketers are under investigation for suspected match-fixing, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ejaz Butt said Friday.

"We suspect two of our players are involved in match-fixing but until we get a report from our inquiry committee I will not say anything more on this subject," Butt told a news conference in Lahore.

The PCB set up a six-member inquiry committee this month to investigate the Pakistan team's dismal performances on their recent tour of Australia. Pakistan lost each of their three tests as well as all the five one-day matches and the one Twenty20 international.

The committee is headed by former test captain and PCB chief operating officer Wasim Bari and also includes former test captain, Wasim Akram who was fined 10 years ago by a judicial commission investigating match-fixing.

Another former captain Salim Malik has been banned for life for match-fixing.

Youzhny battles into final

Tennis

AFP, Dubai

Mikhail Youzhny, who had to come back from the dead to survive his opening match, made his second final in succession when he reached the showdown of the Dubai Open.

The world number 17 from Russia did that with a 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) win over a surprise semifinalist, Jurgen Melzer, producing an economical performance in difficult conditions and serving consistently well, especially when it mattered.

It was an unusually tough contest, because shade temperatures reached 37 centigrade, and small sand clouds invaded the court. Spectators nestled on one side of the arena, backs to the sun, sheltering under the giant score-board.

"It was difficult, and I just played a little bit slower," said Youzhny, who squeezed through by small margins: just one break of serve in the penultimate game of the first set, and one mini-break only in the second set tie-break.

Youzhny also remembered how close he had come to the exit on Tuesday, when

he had been a set and 3-5 down against Lukas Lacko, a Slovakian qualifier.

"The first round was my toughest match so far because it was my first match after the injury," said Youzhny, referring to his retirement with a pulled thigh muscle against Robin Soderling in the Rotterdam final a fortnight ago.

"I'm still thinking about how the leg will be," he added, and when asked if it was now 100 percent, Youzhny declined to confirm that it was.

Although it may have reduced his mobility slightly, it was nevertheless good enough to get him through two hours and eight minutes in debilitating heat against an in-form opponent who had impressively dismissed Marin Cilic, the Australian Open semifinalist.

Melzer again looked dangerous, proving himself the harder hitter of the two as well as the livelier mover -- qualities which helped him to earn the first break point of the contest, at 5-4, which was also a set point.

The pressure on Youzhny at that pivotal point mounted further when he was foot-faulted, but he patiently played out a long rally which ended with Melzer smacking a forehand drive into the net.

This failure to convert brought a reac-

tion from the aggression Austrian, who made two more very important driving errors in the next game, costing him the only break of serve of the match.

Something similar happened in the second set. Youzhny was 30-40 on his serve at 2-3 but Melzer made an important error with a flat attacking backhand drive and was again unable to convert. This time though he narrowly avoided dropping serve immediately afterwards.

The match-deciding rally came in the fifth game of the tie-break, when Melzer, still the more positive but by now suffering from an increasing error rate, pulled a forcing backhand cross court drive into the tram-lines.

Youzhny then held both his two pairs of serves to consolidate the slight but crucial advantage, closing out the match before celebrating modestly.

"I lost a lot of finals previously, and I want to win this one," he explained, indicating that his mind was already on preparing for the next task -- against either Novak Djokovic, the defending champion from Serbia, or Marcos Baghdatis, the former Australian Open finalist from Cyprus.

In fact Youzhny has only lost five finals, and has won five too. His optimism may have been further bolstered by having got the better of Djokovic in Rotterdam.



Russia's Mikhail Youzhny celebrates after beating Austria's Jurgen Melzer in the Dubai Open semifinal yesterday. Youzhny won 7-5, 7-6.

Tigers look to spin trap

FROM PAGE 17 The Australian also painted a positive picture of his team's recent performance against the top-ranked sides.

"Two guys in New Zealand played really well in grassy conditions. In the tri-nation against India and Sri Lanka we were very good, and was probably beaten by the dew a couple of times. In our condition we played really well. We are a developing team, a team that is growing in confidence," said Siddons.

"The last twelve months we have been going through a really good time. I think we are still a team of 22-23 year olds. But we are getting better, not having those bad patches. We are putting good scores on the board and our bowlers are developing. [Shakib] is probably the best or second best spin bowler in the world. Tamim Iqbal is playing beautifully at the top of the order and a couple of really good bowlers are bowling 135 kilometres and over. So we are a better

team than what we were," he added.

The Bangladesh coach also said that England would need to play their best cricket to beat his side.

"England need to be at their best to beat us. I guess a couple of key players may be the difference. But we will wait and see," he said when asked about the absence of some key players like Andrew Strauss.

Responding to a question about Mohammad Ashraful's omission, Siddons said: "I spoke to Ash after the New Zealand series; he was talking about having a rest. Not sure what happened over the last three or four days. But Ash has made that decision and I respect that. He is a little diamond in the rough that we are looking to. He needs to step up to come along with, Tamim, Shakib, Mushfiq and Riyad. Those guys have really stepped up and now we need Ash to fill the gap and then we will be a formidable batting team."

Aus seal opening match

FROM PAGE 17 of more than 150 -- after Warner was bowled trying to slog another six from Bond and Watson was lbw to Daniel Vettori, who brought himself on in the fourth over. Vettori is always a threat against Australia and they got a sign of what life will be like over the next month as he bowled 1 for 13 from four. Bond touched 150kph in his opening spell to join the pace party and finished with 2 for 32.

Johnson's three early wickets left New Zealand at an uncomfortable 54 for 4 and the intervention of James Franklin, who collected a composed 43 off 42, was required to get them past 100. Only two other batsmen, Guptill (30) and Gareth Hopkins (21), reached double figures as the hosts were over-run.

Johnson, who finished with 3 for 19, joined in a frightening partnership with Tait and Nannes as the trio operated around 150kph. Tait and Nannes collected two wickets while Watson also chipped in with a couple of victims in a

comprehensive performance from the attack.

Brad Haddin began the day in spectacular style when he dived to his right for a one-handed catch to remove the dangerous Brendon McCullum from the fourth ball. Johnson, the first-change, bowled Peter Ingram with his opening delivery to have the hosts 13 for 2 in the fifth over and he was also involved when Ross Taylor (9) was unlucky to be given out lbw by Billy Bowden. Taylor, a player who is so important to his side, was hit on the foot well outside off stump and departed at 3 for 33.

Finding the boundary was the hard thing for the home side and Australia's tight bowling prevented a quick start and a competitive score. Guptill broke free a handful of times but was taken by Johnson after Watson ran back to claim a top edge at midwicket. A quick stand of 50 in 5.1 overs between Franklin and Hopkins was crucial in gaining some momentum for the

NAT'L WOMEN'S CHESS Masuda, Eva share lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Masuda Begum and Nazrana Khan Eva with five points each are now joint top in the preliminary round of the 31st National Women Chess Championship at the close of the sixth round at the Bangladesh Chess Federation hall room yesterday.

Masuda of Barisal drew with Jahannara Haque Runu while Eva of Manikganj defeated Protiva in the sixth round matches.

As many as five players share the second place securing 4.5 points each. They are: WFM Zakia Sultana, Jahannara Haque Runu, Shamiha Sharmin Shimmi, Mahmuda Haque Chowdhury Moly and Rokshana Titi.

In the sixth round matches, Moly beat Mehnaz Ahmed Mithila, Zakia drew with Shimmi, Titi beat Amena, Dilara beat Lipi, Tisha beat Farzana Hossain Anne, Aeon beat Jannatul, Popy beat Zohoratul Jannat and Tani beat Feroza.

C'WEALTH SHOOTING Baki, Chandan finish eighth

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh pair Abdullah Hel Baki and Toufique Shahriar Chandan finished eighth in the men's 50m rifle prone pair event of the eighth Commonwealth Shooting Championship at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi, India yesterday.

Baki (582) and Chandan (577) together scored 1159, 20 less than the bronze winners James Huckle and Richard Wilson from England.

Indian pair Gagan Rarang and Joydeep Karmakar won the gold medal scoring 1186 while the Robert Howell and Warren Potent pair bagged silver medal scoring 1182.

Meanwhile, Bangladeshi shooter Sabrina Sultana finished 18th in the women's individual 50m prone with a score of 576 while Tripti Datta became 20th scoring 570, said National Shooting Federation press release yesterday.

Lee, Bracken in Twenty20 fray

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Brett Lee and Nathan Bracken remain in Australia's plans despite long-term injuries after they were named in the preliminary 30-man squad for the World Twenty20 in the Caribbean. Lee retired from Tests this week because his body can't cope with the workload, but he wants to return to national action in the limited-overs formats.

An elbow problem is Lee's current concern while Bracken is on the way back from surgery, but both have a tough task to win spots in the final 15-man squad for the tournament starting in April. Andrew Hilditch and his fellow selectors have also given hope to Brad Hodge, the 35-year-old batsman, who has not played for Australia since 2008.

There are four new players in the squad with George Bailey, the Tasmania captain, included as well as his state teammate Xavier Doherty, the left-arm spinner. The Victoria alldrounder John Hastings and Ben Cutting, the Queensland fast

bowler, have also been given some encouragement after strong domestic campaigns.

"We consider the squad to contain a good blend of youth and experience with several players who have excelled in Twenty20 cricket both internationally and domestically this year," Hilditch said. "From this 30 we hope to pick a final World Twenty20 squad that if it plays to its ability will be a very exciting, entertaining and extremely competitive." Australia have been grouped with Pakistan and Bangladesh and must finish on top to avoid being knocked out in the first round for the second World Twenty20 in a row.

SQUAD

Michael Clarke (captain), George Bailey, Travis Birt, Doug Bollinger, Nathan Bracken, Daniel Christian, Ben Cutting, Xavier Doherty, Brad Haddin (wicketkeeper), Ryan Harris, John Hastings, Nathan Hauritz, Moises Henriques, Brad Hodge, James Hopes, David Hussey, Michael Hussey, Mitchell Johnson, Brett Lee, Andrew McDonald, Shaun Marsh, Clint McKay, Dirk Nannes, Tim Paine, Steven Smith, Shaun Tait, Adam Voges, David Warner, Shane Watson, Cameron White.

Zimbabwe eye Windies scalp

Cricket

AFP, Port of Spain

Zimbabwe wicketkeeper and batsman Tatenda Taibu believes the visitors can topple West Indies in their forthcoming limited-overs series starting Sunday.

The former national captain expects Zimbabwe to punch above their weight and deliver a stinging blow to the confidence of a West Indies side still vulnerable following a recent hiding by Australia.

"We want to win the games, and we really want to start playing hard cricket again," said the pint-sized Taibu.

"Zimbabwe cricket has been respected [as having] ups and downs, but we really want to stamp our authority now and start performing as expected."

Taibu has plenty of faith in the other players in the side, particularly off-spin bowler captain Prosper Utseya and batsman Stuart Matsikenyeri,

whose combined experience of more than 200 One Day Internationals will be vital.

"They've played a lot of games, and they've got a lot of maturity at the moment," said Taibu.

"So we're looking to play a lot of good cricket. I've been here before, so it's great to play cricket here again."

He added: "There are a lot of times the guys have said there is a lot of talent in Zimbabwe, but we really have to put it to show now. It's not just about the talent, we really have to join the two [talent and maturity] and play good cricket."

Taibu is excited about Sunday's Twenty20 International against West Indies at Queen's Park Oval in the Trinidad and Tobago capital.

"Twenty20 is exciting, [but] it's not really about only explosive cricket," he said.

"It's about mental cricket, reacting to situations. It will be exciting. Twenty20 will be exciting for the crowd. I'm sure they're going to come for some good cricket."

Zimbabwe open their tour with a 50 overs-a-side practice match against a University of the West Indies (UWI) Vice Chancellors XI on Friday at Frank Worrell Oval on the UWI's St. Augustine campus about six miles outside of the capital.

After Sunday's Twenty20 International, they play five one-dayers against West Indies -- the first two next Thursday, March 4, and next Saturday, March 6, at the Guyana National Stadium, and the last three on Wednesday, March 10, Friday, March 12, and Sunday, March 14 at the Arnos Vale Multiplex in St. Vincent.

Sunday's Twenty20 International is the first between the two sides since the format gained international status six years ago, and West Indies have never lost a one-day series against these opponents.

India rest

FROM PAGE 17 Bowlers such as Ravindra Jadeja and Yusuf Pathan, who have succeeded in choking runs in the middle overs.

Not willing to take any chances, Gujarat police have made robust security arrangements for the India-South Africa one-dayer to be played here today.

Over 1000 police personnel, three teams of bomb disposal squads (BDS), specially trained commandos and four companies of State Reserve Police (SRP) have been deployed at the Sardar Patel Stadium at Motera and at the hotel where the players are staying, a police official said.

"Robust security is in place at the stadium and the players' hotel as a precautionary measure as we do not want to take any chances," joint commissioner of police (JCP) Satish Sharma told PTI.

"Over 1,000 police personnel including 134 officers, 400 policemen, 100 women constables, two companies of home guards including one of women team have been deployed for the match," Sharma said.

Visitors' school

FROM PAGE 17 also arranged such programme in 2007 when the England A team came here and took them to a school in Gaibandha.

After having spent some time in the class rooms, the cricketers, split into five groups, took to the playground and played cricket with the boys and the girls with a huge number of enthusiastic people, mostly children, taking to the roof of the buildings surrounding the school ground cheering the guests.

"It is a humbling and fantastic experience as every kid is young here and it is always nice to spend some time with such talented players," said England's paceman Stuart Broad.

He also added, "It's been a real eye-opener for us. It's often easy to miss the poverty and hunger when you are caught