



Abhani's new Iranian football coach Ali Akbar Pourmoslemi shakes hands with the players during an introduction ceremony at the club ground yesterday.

Panesar, Tremlett recalled for Ashes

Cricket

AFP, London

England recalled spinner Monty Panesar and fast bowler Chris Tremlett when they named a 16-man squad for their defence of the Ashes in Australia here on Thursday.

Left-arm spinner Panesar, one of the few successes of England's last tour of Australia, which saw them lose the Ashes 5-0 in 2006/07, has not played a Test since featuring in last year's Ashes opener in Cardiff where his tail-end batting helped England to an unlikely draw.

Since that match Panesar, 28, a veteran of 39 Tests, has been replaced as England's frontline specialist spinner by off-break bowler Graeme Swann.

Panesar, who moved from Northamptonshire to Sussex at the start of the season, is now set to travel to Australia as Swann's deputy having taken 52 first-class wickets at 25.69 apiece in 16 matches this season.

Tremlett played the last of his three Tests in 2007 but has won also won selection on the back of a successful move, having led Surrey's attack with 48 wickets in 12 matches at an average of 20.18 after joining from Hampshire.

His inclusion, along with fellow 6ft 7in seamer Steven Finn and the nearly as tall Stuart Broad, suggest England are looking to get the most they can out of the generally bouncier pitches in Australia.

Tremlett beat Ajmal Shahzad to a place in the main squad but the Yorkshire seamer is in a 16-man 'shadow' performance squad that will be in Australia in the lead-up to the first Test in Brisbane starting on November 25.

"The sort of conditions he (Tremlett) will get in Australia should suit him," said England national selector Geoff Miller.

Dream start

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Tusher and Anisur Rahman. The match went under full control of The Daily Star when Al Amin came in place of Refayet Ullah Mridha. The sports boss of the daily controlled the midfield and threatened the opponents with his well-judged set pieces that also helped the team score two more goals.

Nobin, who was later adjudged man of the match, completed his treble while Wasim sealed the game at the final whistle.

Meanwhile, Daily Jugantor, Channel I and Bhorer Kaghoj moved into the second round winning their respective matches.

Akbar's

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AFC instructor for 12 years. He has also experience in coaching Iran U-12 and U-18 national teams in his 15-year career.

Before coming here, Akbar worked out a six-month plan for the club, but he could continue his job after the period if the club wants.

He was not ready to predict about his first assignment of the season curtain-raising tournament Federation Cup, which is likely to get underway on October 7, as he first wants to watch his charges during the build-up and conditioning camp in the coming days.

Afridi hints

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All three were questioned by British police and returned home early to Pakistan.

"It was tough because of the controversies and became very difficult to cope with, because every time we went out of the hotel people passed remarks against us," Afridi said.

"Because of the controversies on the tour, it was the most difficult tour of my 14-year career."

Swann wanted to pull out

Cricket

CRICINFO

Graeme Swann, the England offspinner, wanted to pull out of the fourth one-day international at Lord's on Monday following Ijaz Butt's claim that England took money to lose the previous match at The Oval. It was only after extensive negotiations between the ECB and the players that the game went ahead, but Swann has revealed the players were ready to take drastic action.

"I couldn't wait for those games to end and get the hell out of there. It was a dreadful experience and one I never want to experience again," Swann told The Sun. "In fact, I didn't want to play at all in the one-dayer on Monday. I won't lie about that -- I was dead against playing. And I wasn't alone, plenty of other players had strong reservations."

"But Strauss, who has been brilliant throughout this episode, persuaded us the best thing we could do was get on with it as a team and make sure we won the series. He was proved to be right."

Swann, who took 11 wickets at 19.00 during the series which England won 3-2 with a 121-run success at the Rose Bowl, insisted it was no empty threat from the players about taking Butt to court over his claims.

Iran through, hosts

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long ball from a counter-attack and took it past two defenders before slotting it past the Iran goalkeeper Maryam Yektasi.

The second came nine minutes later, when Shahnaz found acres of space on the edge of the box. This time she placed it past the advancing keeper to earn her fifth goal of the campaign. Iran pulled one back, though, in the 37th minute through Zahra Sarbali, who received the ball from Farhadhikah Parvin and placing it tactfully past the Jordan keeper to reduce the margin.

The second half was totally dominated by Iran as the Jordanians grew weary. Zahra Ghanbari and Maryam Rahimi, the midfield maestros of Iran, struck one attack after another. But they had to wait till the 86th min-

ute for that pressure to yield, when substitute Shadi Bahrami scored the second after availing from a scrambled clearance inside the box. The icing on the cake was provided in the 89th minute by Adeleh Karimi whose long-range effort evaded the keeper and sent the Iranian girls into euphoria.

Hosts Bangladesh suffered another drubbing at the hands of India in the inconsequential match.

Rina Roy scored four second-half goals after Bindyarani Devi gave India the lead in the 38th minute. Rina was also the source of the opener as her shot rebounded off the crossbar before falling kindly for Devi. Nima completed the rout in the 86th minute.

As in the previous two matches, Bangladesh held their own for most of the first half, but once that last line was breached, the game turned into one-way traffic.

Sachin hails Mary Kom

PTI, New Delhi

Star cricketer Sachin Tendulkar has become the latest to heap praise on Indian woman boxer MC Mary Kom for her unprecedented feat of five world titles, describing her achievements as "remarkable".

The 27-year-old mother-of-two from Manipur is the only woman boxer to clinch a medal at each of the six World Championships, starting with a silver in the inaugural edition in 2001.

And Tendulkar, an iconic figure in international cricket, lauded the diminutive boxer after coming back from South Africa from the Champions League Twenty20.

"Got 2 know about Mary Kom's stupendous achievement when I got back from SA. Simply amazing! All the more remarkable after taking break and having two kids," the veteran batsman wrote on his Twitter page.

An overwhelmed Mary Kom, who clinched the light fly weight 48kg gold in the latest World Championships, said she felt honoured after being complimented by one of her favourite athletes.

"I am honoured to get appreciation from him. I don't watch much cricket but I like Sachin Tendulkar. He is somebody who every Indian sportsperson should learn from," Mary Kom told PTI.

"I have never met him but from whatever I have seen of him on TV, he comes across as very humble," she added.

Dubbed 'Magnificent Mary' by the International Boxing Association, Mary Kom has also been picked for the Asian Games in November after giving trials within 24 hours of landing in Delhi from Barbados, where the latest World Championship was held.

2nd Councilor Gold Cup

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Ward No. 4 blanked Ward No. 6 2-0 in the day's first match of the 2nd Councilor Gold Cup Football tournament at the Rajshahi Stadium yesterday.

Man-of-the match Bulbul and Shamim scored one goal each.

In the second match, Ward No. 15 thrashed Ward No. 25 6-1 at the same venue.

Karim and Rasel struck twice while Shamim and Avi added one each. Emon netted the lone goal for the losing side. Shamim was adjudged man of the match.

Khulna: Star

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players missing out from the campaign as they plan to cut down the 30-man preliminary squad to a final fifteen for the first game. "We have so many players that some are going out to play for other divisions," he said. Club cricket is the life-blood of the divisional team and it is thriving in Satkhira, Bagerhat, Kushtia, Chuadanga, Jessore and Khulna town itself.

They open their campaign against Dhaka at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi on September 29.

Last year's position: Fourth.

Strength: Bowling attack. Player to watch out for: Sahagir Hossain Pavel.

Uneasy Delhi receives athletes

AFP, New Delhi



New Delhi welcomed the first athletes to its crisis-hit Commonwealth Games on Friday as organisers raced against time to rescue the event amid claims the city should never have been chosen.

The Commonwealth Games Federation signalled that conditions were finally improving, but that there was still work to do after the athletes' village was described as "uninhabitable" earlier in the week.

The showpiece multi-sport event, set to begin in nine days, had teetered on the brink of collapse on Tuesday when some nations threatened to pull out amid worries about security, a bridge collapse and the state of the facilities.

"It is vital that all remedial work that has already started continues with the greatest urgency," Commonwealth Games Federation president Mike Fennell said in a statement before inspecting the village.

"We must ensure that a suitable environment is provided to ensure the welfare of the athletes and their support staff."

The Games won a much-needed boost from England and New Zealand, which said they would send their athletes after an earlier warning from England that the competition was on a "knife-edge" as worries grew about Delhi's readiness.

High-profile athletes continued to pull out, however, including Welsh cyclist Geraint Thomas, an Olympic gold medal winner.

The first contingent of English athletes arrived at the airport in red and white tracksuits, but they moved into a hotel rather than the village, where thousands of cleaners have been pressed into urgent

action.

"There are still issues with the residences, electrical issues, plumbing issues..." said Team England's spokesperson Caroline Searle after a tour of the rooms allocated to the 560 English athletes and support staff.

"I can't say when it might be ready for us to move in. We're taking it day by day, hour by hour," Searle told AFP.

Australia's Olympic chief John Coates said that the Indian capital should never have been awarded the Games in the first place, adding that the Commonwealth Games Federation was also to blame for the shambolic organisation.

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"The Games shouldn't have been awarded to New Delhi, in hindsight," Coates told reporters in Sydney.

"I think the problem is the Commonwealth Games Federation is under-resourced. It doesn't have the ability... to monitor the progress of cities in the way that the Olympic committee does," Coates said.

Late on Thursday, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held a crisis meeting with senior ministers, and Delhi's Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit oversaw the deployment of hundreds of staff to clean the athletes' village.

"We are now working on a

war footing," said Ashok Kapoor, the chief administrator in the village which comprises 34 six-storey towers.

"More than 2,000 people are on the job, everywhere, round the clock, cleaning and re-fitting fixtures that do not work or are missing," Kapoor told AFP.

Wales said it was sending its team as planned after receiving assurances that the facilities were up to scratch, and Scotland said it had been "heartened" by Dikshit's involvement with the clean-up.

Canada, which had delayed sending its athletes, also welcomed the intervention by the Indian government.

"What you are seeing is now, for the first time, the injection or projection of significant political leadership in the organisation of the Games," said the president of Commonwealth Games Canada, Andrew Pipe.

Several world-class athletes have already pulled out, including Australian world discus champion Dani Samuels, English Olympic 400m gold medalist Christine Ohuruogu and world triple jump champion Phillips Idowu.

And three British cyclists joined Thomas in deciding to stay at home.

"It's a massive disappointment first and foremost, but with the hygiene and the risk of getting ill, it was a massive risk," Thomas said.

The treasurer of the Games organising committee, A.K. Mattoo, issued a fulsome apology Thursday for what he said was a "collective failure" to get the Games in order.

New Delhi had been expecting 7,000 athletes and officials for the showpiece for Commonwealth countries, mostly nations and territories formerly in the British empire.



THEY'RE FINALLY COMING: An English athlete arrives at the Indra Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi yesterday, ahead of the forthcoming Commonwealth Games.

Pakistan to keep touring

Cricket

AFP, London

No-one can play Pakistan at home right now and as far as the likes of former England captain Ian Botham are concerned no-one should be playing them at all because of the 'spot-fixing' allegations facing the side.

But money and politics -- two of the oldest reasons for doing anything -- mean Pakistan's travelling show is set to continue for some time yet.

A tour of England that started with a neutral series against Australia ended being mired in corruption controversy, with potentially hugely damaging consequences for cricket as a whole.

A report in Britain's News of the World tabloid led to Pakistan's Salman Butt, Mohammad Aamer and Mohammad Asif being suspended by the International Cricket Council (ICC) and questioned by British police over an alleged plot to bowl deliberate no-balls during last month's Test at Lord's.

England, much praised for helping Pakistan at a time when international cricket had come to a standstill in the Asian nation following last year's armed attack on Sri Lanka's team bus in Lahore, then found themselves in the firing line.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ijaz Butt accused England of losing last week's third one-day international at The Oval on purpose.

"There is loud and clear talk in bookies'

circles that some English players were paid," he said, prompting threats of legal action by English officials.

At that point any hopes that England, who admittedly were looking to cash in on Pakistan's enthusiastic British-based support, would invite Butt's men again next season effectively disappeared.

As relations between administrators soured, England batsman Jonathan Trott and Pakistan seamer Wahab Riaz were involved in a pre-match altercation ahead of Monday's fourth one-day international at Lord's.

That England then won Wednesday's fifth one-dayer at the Rose Bowl by 121 runs to complete series wins in all formats against Pakistan this season was almost overlooked in the acrimonious atmosphere.

Botham, asked if Pakistan should be banned, said: "In my opinion, yes.

"We keep sweeping things under the carpet -- enough is enough."

But Pakistan are set to break new ground by staging Tests in Dubai and Abu Dhabi against South Africa in November.

Pulling out would cost Cricket South Africa money, both in terms of being sued by sponsors and television companies, as may well have happened to England had they cut short their series with Pakistan, not to mention a possible fine by the ICC for failing to fulfil a fixture under the Future Tours Programme.

Pakistan are then due to tour New Zealand in late December for an 11-match tour that runs until early February.

"You can't just do that (change opponents) the way the Future Tours Programme is structured," New Zealand Cricket chief executive Justin Vaughan told the New Zealand Herald on Wednesday.

"It's not a process where you can say 'we'd rather have someone else'," he added.

"It doesn't work that way."

Of course, were the ICC to suspend Pakistan that would be a different story.

But the ICC is only as powerful as its individual members allow it and banning Pakistan would reduce the influence of the dominant 'Asian bloc' in the affairs of the global governing body.

There is also the broader point for a sport that, despite everything, still prides itself on fair play, of whether it would be right to suspend an entire nation, one of the most talented in world cricket, because of what may be the actions of a few players.

Then there's the question of what would happen if the ICC, for whom this issue is a severe test of its anti-corruption unit, were to ban Pakistan only for credible fixing allegations to surface against players from elsewhere.

England captain Andrew Strauss, one of the few players who have emerged with their reputations enhanced as a result of the controversy, said the ICC could not afford to take their eye off the ball.

"The ICC must leave no stone unturned," he warned after England's Rose Bowl victory. "It's so important the ICC take a very strong lead from now on and don't take a breather now this series finished."

'Most difficult tour'

Pakistan return home

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

One-day captain Shahid Afridi Friday called Pakistan's scandal-marred tour of England the "most difficult" of his career as the team staged a low-key return home after four gruelling months away.

Coach Waqar Younis also conceded that it had been a punishing tour "on and off the field" after corruption investigations engulfed the side, triggering a barrage of condemnation from the press and public.

An exhausted-looking Afridi flew in to Karachi with three teammates while the rest of the squad arrived in Lahore in the early hours, with a phalanx of gun-toting policemen escorting the players out of both airports.

"It was tough because of the controversies and became very difficult to cope with, because every time we went out of the hotel people passed remarks against us," Afridi told a scrum of reporters in Karachi.

"Because of the controversies on the tour, it was the most difficult tour of my 14-year career," the explosive all-



HOME SWEET HOME: Pakistan one-day captain Shahid Afridi arrives at Karachi International Airport yesterday from their scandal-marred tour of England.

rounder added.

The tour ended on Wednesday with Pakistan losing the one-day series 3-2. England also took the Test and Twenty20 series.

The tour will be remembered less for the on-field play and more for the off-field revelations by British tabloids that sparked investigations by Scotland Yard and the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Afridi said team unity had remained intact despite the storm of controversy.

"The best part of the whole tour was that the players showed unity even in difficult times and gave a good fight in the one-day series against England," he said, while also hinting at a return to Test cricket.

"I will think about it and if the team needs it, I may consider playing the Test series against South Africa," he said, ahead of the Proteas encounters starting late next month on neutral turf in the United Arab Emirates.

Pakistan began their troubled summer tour with matches against Australia in England, winning both Twenty20 matches and squaring the two-Test series 1-1.