India go for whitewash

Fifth & final ODI against NZ today

Cricket

AGENCIES, Chennai

High on confidence after steamrolling the opposition in the first three matches before snatching an improbable win in the next, a rampaging India would look to rout New Zealand with a 5-0 series whitewash in the fifth and

final one-dayer on Friday. The young Indian side have done remarkably well in the series in the absence of senior players like Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag and Harbhajan Singh who have been rested ahead of the tough tour to South

A 5-0 series whitewash would be a sweet revenge for India for the 2-5 drubbing during their visit to New Zealand in 2003.

It would also be a humiliating defeat for New Zealand since the two sides played each other since 1975-76.

Chennai, who have seen abandonment of matches due to inclement weather in the recent past, sun has come out brightly since yesterday after continuous rain for the past few days.

With weather gods relenting, the ground is expected to be fully dry up and a full match appears to be on the card at the MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Most of the top-order Indian batsmen have been among runs in the series, with the exception of Murali Vijay, and one or two have raised their hands in all the four previous matches to take the side to comfortable victories. The only time India had

hiccups in the series was in Bangalore on Tuesday with the home side in trouble at 188 for five at one stage while chasing a daunting target of 316 runs.

But from the way Yusuf Pathan butchered New Zealand bowlers to single-handedly take India to a five-wicket victory with seven balls remaining, it seemed that this young side would not lose any match in this series.

Yusuf's blitzkrieg unbeaten 123 of 96 balls and useful contributions from Sourabh Tiwary (37 not out), Rohit Sharma (44) and

Parthiv Patel (53) must have boosted the confidence of the side that they can go for a white-

Stand in skipper Gautam Gambhir has led from the front, hitting back to back centuries to top the batting averages for four matches.

Gambhir has scored 329 runs with an average of 164.50, followed by Virat Kohli (232 runs; 77.33 average).

Gambhir himself was upbeat with the chance to complete a memorable series clean sweep.

"We need to win this game. It is important. It would be good to have five wins in a row and wind up the series before heading for South Africa and it would be useful," he said.

In the bowling front though, India will have to improve upon their performance in the last ODI in Bangalore where they leaked runs at the death overs, an oftrepeated problem for the side.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has done a decent job in Fortunately for cricket fans in the series so far with eight wickets from four matches though he was expensive in the last ODI. Yusuf and Yuvraj Singh have also chipped in with useful contributions with six and three wickets with the former taking 3-49 in Bangalore.

Left-arm pacer Ashish Nehra

has been a bit of a let down having taken just three wickets in the four matches by conceding 197 runs. Zaheer Khan, having missed the first two ODIs due to injury, has taken two from the two matches.

For New Zealand though it has been a tough tour of India having lost the three-match Test series 0-1 and an ODI whitewash looming.

The Daniel Vettori-led side would, however, be happy with the way they had cornered India in Bangalore before a Yusuf special bailed the home side out. New Zealand top-order

batsmen fired in unison for the first time in the series in Bangalore to post 315 and Vettori would be looking for a repeat of that here if the visitors want to end their otherwise forgettable tour on a winning note. After a much-improved show

by his players in Bangalore, Vettori said he would focus on winning the last match though the series has already been NEW ZEALAND (from): Daniel decided. "We still think we can still win

matches. We will approach the game in the morrow like the way we do every game to keep motivated in not losing focus since the one-day series had already been decided," he said.

He would be looking to James Franklin, who scored a superb 98 not out in Bangalore if they want to post a big score and chase down a big target.

With the big guns like Brendon McCullum, Ross Taylor and Scott Styris coming a cropper, Franklin is the top run-getter for New Zealand in the series with 170 runs from two matches. New Zealand bowlers have not done better than their batting counterparts in the series with frontline bowlers like Kyle Mills and Tim Southee coming a cropper. Andrew McKay has been the most successful bowler with seven wickets from four matches. SQUADS

INDIA (from): Gautam Gambhir (captain), Murali Vijay, Virat Kohli, Yuvraj Singh, Saurabh Tiwary, Rohit Sharma, Yusuf Pathan, Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ashish Nehra, Pathiv Patel, Zaheer Khan, Praveen Kumar, Munaf Patel.

Vettori (captain), Martin Guptill, Brendon McCullum, Jamie How, Ross Taylor, Scott Styris, Grant Elliot, Kane Williamson, Gareth Hopkins, Nathan McCullum, Kyle Mills, Tim Southee, Andy McKay, James Franklin.



India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan (L) and his teammate Rohit Sharma stretch during a training session in Chennai yesterday. India will take on New Zealand in the fifth and final ODI today.

Zim keeping

FROM PAGE 17 concern over the weather. which at that time had not

taken a turn for the worse. "I am not worried with the weather. We know tomorrow [Friday] is a big match for us. We have to win tomorrow to keep the series alive," said the 25-year-old who notched a half-century on his ODI debut against India earlier this year.

Christopher Mpofu, too cared little for the weather, saying, "We are prepared for anything that is going to come our way. We are up for it," said Zimbabwe's most successful bowler of the series so far. The gangly paceman began the series in the best way possible, picking up the man-of-thematch award for this threewicket haul.

In a series dominated by the Bangladesh bowlers, Mpofu has been the sole figure making some sort of an impact.

Like many in the Zimbabwe side, he also took a good look at the straw-coloured wicket that had 'slow and turning' written

all over it. The wicket is a little bit on he slow side. 230-250 could be a good score. This one won't jag like the one in Dhaka," he said.

Mpofu's five wickets in the series so far has come at a cost of 22.20, a far cry from the devastation that Abdur Razzak has created in the Zimbabwean ranks. The 25-year-old from Plumtree said that it would be important to be positive

against the left-arm spinner. "I am confident [about our chances]. We are 2-1 down now but guys are playing positive cricket and if we continue to do that against the spinners, especially [Abdur] Razzak, we can pull it back a bit," said Mpofu of the man who has taken 13 wickets in the series so far, and is just three away from breaking his own record of most wickets in a five-match series by a Bangladeshi bowler.

"Razzak is the main difference between the two sides. If we can manage to play him well, everything will go our way," he added crucially, though it remains to be seen if at all the visitors get to face their tormentor of the series today.

Siddikur FROM PAGE 17

But Siddkur was not complaining.

"Playing conditions were perfect today and I couldn't have asked for a better start," he said.

Siddikur has been in redhot form since his Brunei Open triumph and has put up superb showings in highprofile tournaments in Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Harris fit for 3rd Test

Cricket

CRICINFO

Australia's struggling outfit has received some much needed good news after Ryan Harris was cleared of a serious shoulder injury and passed fit for next week's crucial third Ashes Test. Harris suffered the problem during the heavy loss in Adelaide, where he was the team's best bowler, but scans showed there was no significant damage.

Harris' health provides only one answer for the battered hosts, who went 1-0 down with the crushing innings defeat on Tuesday. The squad for the Perth match, which starts next Thursday, is expected to be named on Friday and by then the selectors will have had a week of headaches caused by the damaging bowling and batting issues.

Mitchell Johnson is in Perth training alongside Troy Cooley, the team's bowling coach, in the WACA nets instead of playing for Western Australia in the Sheffield Shield match against Queensland from Friday. The move shows he is almost certain to return after being dropped last week for the first time in his Test career.

Any hopes the selectors had of giving Johnson, who has not been able to click in two Ashes series, an extended break ended when Doug Bollinger and Peter Siddle struggled for consistency as England reached 5 for 620 declared in Adelaide. At least the selectors know that Johnson can deliver random brutal spells, which is something the side needs after taking only six wickets for 1137 runs in the past two innings.

Bollinger's fitness and effectiveness were below par so he is unlikely to make the squad, while Siddle hasn't taken a wicket since he broke through with six on the opening day of the series. Ben Hilfenhaus, who will be valuable bowling into the WACA's Fremantle Doctor breeze, and

Johnson are likely to join Harris, who collected 2

for 84 off 29 overs in his third Test.

Harris is capable of moving the ball during most stages of the innings and also operates in the 140kphs, but his body will never allow him to take his position for granted. He has a chronic knee injury that gives him constant pain and his latest problem provides another concern.

However, Alex Kountouris, Australia's physiotherapist, said Harris' shoulder injury was minor. "He was able to bowl during the game unrestricted and scans have cleared him of any significant damage," Kountouris said.

Ricky Ponting met with Andrew Hilditch, the chairman of selectors, after the match on Tuesday to discuss the way forward and senior Cricket Australia officials have also been in talks as the hosts attempt to prevent a first Ashes loss at home since 1986-87. The selectors are expected to name a 13-man squad, as they did for the opening two matches, and must decide whether to tinker or deliver wholesale changes.

There will be at least one alteration, with Simon Katich's serious heel injury leaving a spot for either Phillip Hughes or Usman Khawaja. The spin position also needs resolving after Xavier Doherty's ineffective performances over the first two Tests.

Nathan Hauritz is in form with the bat -- he scored 146 as a nightwatchman for New South Wales this week -- but needs some wickets in the second innings to show he is ready for a recall. Steven Smith, the legspinning all-rounder, is another contender and the confusion over the slow bowling ranks will probably earn a reprieve for the No.6 Marcus North, who doubles as the part-time offspinner.

Possible squad: Shane Watson, Phillip Hughes, Ricky Ponting (captain), Michael Clarke, Michael Hussey, Marcus North, Brad Haddin, Steven Smith, Mitchell Johnson, Nathan Hauritz, Ryan Harris, Peter Siddle, Ben Hilfenhaus.

Batsmen's era begins

FROM PAGE 17

Other notable first-timers were England's Darren Gough and Graham Thorpe, South Africa's Gary Kirsten and Shaun Pollock, and New Zealand's future captain Stephen Fleming. Gary Kirsten recorded the highest individual innings in World Cups when he scored an unbeaten 188 against U.A.E in Rawalpindi.

Javed Miandad, who came back into the Pakistan side after a long layoff, played the last of his six World Cups, a record for most World Cups played that is set to be equalled by Sachin Tendulkar in 2011. It was also the last for Craig McDermott who bowled three overs before returning home with a calf strain.

In the '96 World Cup, the Indian maestro Sachin Tendulkar started the journey that would see him hailed as the best batsman on the planet for the best part of the next decade. He scored two hundreds and three fifties en route to becoming the highest run-scorer in the tournament with 523 runs. His century against Sri Lanka in the group stage was a classic; pacing the innings beautifully before taking 23 off a Pushpakumara over at the death. Another memorable innings was when he scored an 84ball 90 against an Aussie team that included

Glenn MsGrath, Shane Warne and Damien

Fleming. It is a comment on the other Indian

players that they lost both those matches. But stealing the show was the man placed third in the batting charts, Sri Lanka's Aravinda de Silva. The diminutive batsman scored two hundreds in his tally of 448 runs, one of them in the final against Australia. He was also a valuable contributor with his offspin, as he showed with one of the most dominant performances in a final with three wickets to add to his century. He dominated the semifinal too, coming in at two wickets down with only one on the board he smashed the Indians all over the park in his 47-ball 66 to seize the momentum. His countryman Sanath Jayasuriya forever changed one-day opening batting with his crippling onslaughts during the fielding restrictions.

Spin dominated the wickets chart, which is to be expected of a tournament in the subcontinent. Three of the top five wicket-takers were spinners, with India's Anil Kumble taking 15 wickets from seven games. Waqar Younis was in second place with thirteen from six. The best bowling figures belonged to Zimbabwean legspinner Paul Strang when he took five wickets for 21 runs against Kenya at Patna.

The leading wicketkeeper for the tournament was Ian Healy of Australia with twelve dismissals, and in second place was Pakistan's Rashid Latif with nine.

SL-Windies ODI series postponed

AFP, Hambantota

Sri Lanka Cricket on Thursday postponed until January the limited-overs series against the West Indies because of persistent bad weather.

The tourists, who played three rain-hit drawn Tests in Sri Lanka over the past month, had been due to begin the fivematch one-day series in the southern town of Hambantota on Thursday.

But with the rains showing no signs of abating, local cricket authorities decided to put off the matches until a yet to be decided date in January.

The matches are now expected to be played ahead of next year's World Cup being cohosted by India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh from February 17 to April 2.

Hambantota is one of the two new venues alongside Pallekele that has been earmarked to host World Cup matches.

The current tour, which was planned in 2006, has been marred by unusually bad weather with more rains forecast for the next two weeks in the island nation.

At least six people have died and over 100,000 people left homeless due to torrential rains that have swept through Sri Lanka over the past week, officials said Thursday.

ICC team due here today

PTI, Kolkata

An International Cricket Council (ICC) team visited Eden Gardens on Thursday for a final inspection of the renovation and construction at the venue scheduled to host four ICC Cricket World Cup matches next year.

Having already visited the seven other venues, it was the team's last inspection in India from where they will head to co-hosts Bangladesh.

"We have also seen venues in Sri Lanka. We'll be inspecting facilities in Bangladesh from December 10-14," Samiul Hasan, ICC media and communications operations manager told PTI. A Cricket Association of

Bengal (CAB) official said, the ICC team visited Eden Gardens in the morning. They also were to visit the Jadavpur ground which will be a practice venue during the World Cup. Andy Atkinson, ICC chief

pitch consultant and his deputy David Eugene visited Eden Gardens on September 10 and urged the CAB to speed up the renovation work. Eden Gardens is scheduled to

host four group matches: India v England on February 27; Ireland v South Africa on March 15; Ireland v Netherlands on March 18 and Kenya v Zimbabwe on March 20.

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but he would discuss about it with others like the doctor, trainer to know the real state of the players before the game. Zoran, the former trainer of

the Bangladesh national team which emerged champions in the SA Games early this year, took charge of Sheikh Jamal in the middle of September on a six-month contract.

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Former cricket captains -- (L-R) India's Kapil Dev, West Indies' Vivian Richards, Pakistan's Imran Khan and Sri Lanka's Arjuna Ranatunga -- pose with the ICC World Cup 2011 trophy in New Delhi yesterday.

Greats split over WC favourites

AGENCIES, New Delhi



Kapil Dev and Sir Vivian Richards feel that India are run-away favourites to win next year's ICC Cricket World Cup, but Imran Khan and Arjuna Ranatunga added a note of caution about their ability to soak in the pressure of playing at home.

That, in a nutshell, was how the former captains and legends in their own rights felt about how things will pan out in a couple of months' time as the marquee event starts on February 19.

"They are the No. 1 in the world [in Test matches] and have a volatile crowd behind them. They have something to defend. The team is going to South Africa where pitches will be different but it can prove to be helpful as they prepare for the World Cup," legendary West Indian batsman Richards, who was the member of the 1975 and 1979 World Cup winning squad, said.

'King Richards', however, wasn't too sure about how West Indies will perform although he admitted that the likes of Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo and Kieron Pollard do have the talent to go the distance. "Some prayer would obviously help," he

said in lighter vein. "On a serious note, they do have the talent but they need to get things organised a bit. May be they need a catalyst who could inspire them like Arjuna did with the Sri Lankan team during the 1996World Cup." For Kapil Dev, the first step should be

towards reaching the semifinals and taking it

"If you want to win the World Cup, you need to play well in those 20-30 days. Also the fact that they are going to South Africa before that would be of great help like we had a tough tour of West Indies right before the 1983 World Cup. We played tough cricket in the Windies and subsequently in the World Cup.

"Similarly if the Indians do well in South Africa, it would be a great confidence booster. Even if they don't, they know they will be playing in front of the home crowd," Kapil said pointing out that the likes of Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Gautam Gambhir will play key roles.

About Harbhajan Singh's lean patch with the ball, Kapil said, "It's matter of time before he gets back to form. The only thing is that he needs to mentally feel that he can do it."

While Imran Khan termed India as favourites, he cited how West Indies and Pakistan were favourites in the 1983 and 1987 editions but buckled down under pressure. "I remember going into the semifinal feeling

confident. However, we made mistakes and

couldn't handle the pressure. The same thing happened with West Indies in 1983. Just after Viv got out, they wilted under pressure," Imran said. The iconic former Pakistan skipper also said that the key to winning World Cup lay in having

two batsmen who can play well throughout the tournament and others building the innings around their knocks. Sri Lanka's World Cup winning captain Arjuna Ranatunga termed his country as

favourites and didn't forget to mention that Indians tend to crumble when they play in front of huge crowds in pressure cooker situation. "I have seen the Indian team fail in pressure situations while playing in front of 100,000

people. There are times when the expectations are huge and it takes a toll," Ranatunga said. The burly former skipper feels that Lankans have a potent combination with experienced players such as Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela

Jayawardene, Lasith Malinga, Muralitharan to name a few. "However, I believe the team of 1996 had a better middle-order as we had players such as Aravinda D'Silva, Asanka Gurusinha, myself,

Roshan Mahanama, Hasan Tillekratne."

Rain looms over Tigers charge

FROM PAGE 17

from there.

"If we can start off well, the spinners can take control, much like they have done in the last three games.

"Of course we [new-ball duo] have to put a check on the runs and if we can get a breakthrough, it would make the job of the spinners much easier," he said.

Chief selector Rafiqul Alam said that there won't be any changes but if the game starts at the latest time, there might be one. "We are going with the same team [as the 3rd

ODI], but if necessary we might change. It depends on the situation we are in tomorrow. If the game starts, say at 1:00pm, something might pop up," said Rafiqul.

Zimbabwe began training yesterday under overcast skies and a slight drizzle. Though a few of their players sounded confident about the weather, poor weather was inevitable as news of Dhaka's unseasonal rain trickled through. No sooner had the Tigers started to warm up, the drizzle turned into a downpour as the play-

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ers rushed in. Only Abdur Razzak, Mushfigur Rahim, Rokibul Hasan and Sohrawardi Shuvo were seen spending some time at the adjacent indoor facilities as the rain continued to pour.

batsmen who faltered in the last game and an outfield that looks mostly barren. "We have to improve our batting. We would have been in trouble had it not been for the

Mashrafe, meanwhile, was critical of the

Shakib [Al Hasan]-Mushfigur [Rahim] partnership. A good start from Tamim [Iqbal] and Imrul [Kayes] is what we need since we know that spin is such a dangerous proposition in this wicket. "The outfield is slow, so a score of 250 is cut

down to 230. If we can manage 220, they would also have a few runs cut down by the slow outfield and we can cash in on it," he explained.

But all talk inevitably centered on the weather, which the Narail Express thinks is a circumstance the team has to face. "If the game is curtailed, we have to play accordingly. There's not much we can do about it," said Mashrafe.

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TOO MANY WHEAT PRODUCTS AT ONE TIME, COULD YOU CALL HIM A GLUTEN GLUTTON?