

Bravo, Prior sign for Victoria

AFP, Sydney

West Indian all-rounder Dwayne Bravo and English batsman Matt Prior will play for Victoria in Australia's Twenty20 Big Bash series next month, officials said on Friday.

Bravo has signed with Victoria for their first five matches of the tournament before returning to his own domestic T20 competition in the Caribbean.

Prior will join the team after the fifth and final Ashes Test in Sydney on January 9, officials said.

Bravo played a pivotal role in Victoria's successful 2009/10 Big Bash campaign, ending the tournament with 77 runs at a strike rate of 157.14 and four wickets.

Prior, England's Test wicketkeeper, believes the T20 Big Bash is one of the best competitions of its type in the world.

"When I was made aware of the Bushrangers (Victoria) needing a second overseas player a few weeks ago, I was really keen to join the team and be a part of the Big Bash competition," Prior said in a statement.

"The Big Bash looks like one of the best Twenty20 competitions in the world right now, the way it's promoted and advertised you can tell everyone in Australia is really excited about it."

Prior, 28, will play as a specialist batsman for the Bushrangers and has played 14 T20 matches for English County side Sussex this year, where he hit 443 runs including a high score of 117.

"I won't be keeping in this competition, so playing as a batsman, hopefully I can bring a lot of runs to the side," he said.

The Bushrangers' opening match of the Big Bash series is against the Queensland Bulls at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on January 2.

Fracas, dissent

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Later, Riyad and Carseldine stuck together till the end through their unbroken 110-run stand as Abahani completed their third win in a row, while Gazi suffered their second consecutive defeat.

BRIEF SCORES

SURJO TORUN: 245-7 in 50 overs (Hamidul 71, Junaed 69; Shakib 2-33).

MSC: 246-7 in 49.1 overs (Tamim 66, Yousuf 58 not out; Razzak 2-44).

Result: MSC won by 3 wickets.

GAZI TANK: 131 all out in 39.1 overs (Paranavitana 23, Riyad 3-24).

ABAHANI: 132-3 in 29.3 overs (Riyad 57 not out, Carseldine 51 not out).

Result: Abahani won by 7 wickets.

Biman soar

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and a six to put up 15 in 5 balls. Shoumya claimed two wickets conceding 44 runs and Reaz Mahmud captured two wickets giving away 61 runs.

In reply, BKSP were all out for 151 runs in 44 overs to suffer their third defeat in a row.

Jupiter Ghosh was the top scorer with 40 from 60 balls.

Right-arm paceman Shafiqul Islam, left-arm spinner Mosharrar Hossain and spinner Sharifullah picked up two wickets each.

BRIEF SCORES

BIMAN: 252-7 in 48 overs (Jahirul 23, Mushfiqur 80, Perera 68, Asif 30, Mosharrar 15 not out, extras 21; Reaz 2-61, Shoumya 2-44).

BKSP: 151 all out in 44 overs (Tariqul 21, Jupiter 37, Asif 40, extras 6; Shafiqul 2-25, Mosharrar 2-38, Sharifullah 2-20).

Result: Biman won by 101 runs.

Road show

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different educational institutes, journalists and political and social leaders took part in the march.

District Sports Association in collaboration with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) organized the procession, which was followed by a discussion that included Mozaharul Haque Prodan MP, deputy commissioner Banamali Bhoumick, Bangladesh Tourism Corporation official Shaikhul Islam. Later a band show and cultural programme was also held at the venue.



India fast bowler Zaheer Khan sends down a delivery during the nets session in Durban yesterday. India will take on hosts South Africa in the second Test tomorrow.

PHOTO: INTERNET

SA ready for backlash

Cricket

REUTERS, Durban

South Africa are prepared for India's experienced line-up to fight back strongly in the Boxing Day Test after their crushing defeat at Centurion, captain Graeme Smith said on Thursday.

South Africa cruised to victory by an innings and 25 runs in the first Test of the three-match series after India crumbled to 136 all out on day one in the face of testing Proteas pace bowling.

"After what happened in the first Test I expect them to be better, especially from a batting perspective, as they will know what to expect," Smith told a news conference before the match starting on Sunday.

"India are an experienced team and I expect them to come out fighting in the next Test and I expect them to use their experience to bounce back. We can't afford to take anything for granted in terms of how we expect them to go," he added.

While Smith expects the number-one ranked Test team in the world to present a stiffer challenge at Kingsmead, he said his own

charges would draw a lot of heart from how they had performed in the first Test.

"When you win by an innings and 25 runs you do take a lot of positives out of the game and a lot of confidence. From our perspective we have taken a few big steps forward in the series and India have probably got a few doubts," he said.

South Africa do not have an impressive recent record in Durban having lost their last two matches at Kingsmead by significant margins.

In last year's Boxing Day Test they were trounced by England by an innings and Australia won by a convincing margin of 175 runs.

Smith said that while he was aware of South Africa's woes at Kingsmead he was confident that his team had put those performances behind them.

"Our last two matches here have not been our best performances and all round we haven't played that well here but it's up to us to put that right," he said.

"We have had a good chat about how we want to play in Durban and the things we can use to our advantage. We have a lot of guys in the team who know the wicket and understand how it plays," Smith added.

McCullum to miss two T20s

Cricket

CRICINFO

New Zealand have suffered a setback as Brendon McCullum is likely to miss the first two Twenty20s against Pakistan due to back stiffness. On Wednesday, he had been named in the squad for the three Twenty20s over the next week but his availability is in doubt after a fitness test. New Zealand are already missing regular captain Daniel Vettori, who has been rested for the Twenty20s.

McCullum had injured his back during the second Test against India in November, in which he scored a double-century to secure a draw, but played in the third Test and three of the five ODIs that followed. The back problem had ruled McCullum out of much of the ongoing HRV Cup, New Zealand's domestic Twenty20 tournament, as well. He plays as a specialist batsman in Tests but continues to keep in the shorter formats.

"He has shown great determination and a great willingness to push through discomfort in order to help New Zealand during the

recent tour of India," said selector Glenn Turner, "but because Brendon is committed to being a wicketkeeper-batsman for New Zealand in limited-overs cricket, we are taking a longer-term view and will not risk further setbacks."

The first Test against Pakistan starts on January 7, for which McCullum is expected to be definitely available, though whether he plays the final Twenty20 on December 30 will depend on the result of another fitness test.

"The medical staff are confident that intensive treatment and the right rehabilitation will stabilise his injury and get him back to full fitness," Turner said. "He may be available for selection in the third Twenty20 as a batsman but only if the testing and assessment prove that his involvement will not have a detrimental affect on his overall recovery and his ability to wicket-keep in the one-day series."

The Pakistan series is rounded off by six one-dayers starting January 22 and will be the final international matches for both teams before the World Cup.

Clamour over bleep

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Christian and Farshaganj's Kingsly took part in the test although the latter one could not pass the examination.

However, there was some controversy over Ibrahim, who reportedly failed to complete all the stages but was still declared to have passed the examination.

"It is untrue that Ibrahim could not complete the test. He has completed all stages of the test successfully," said Golam Rabbani Choton adding that the BFF might hold another test before the start of the Bangladesh League as there are still some foreign players left to take part in the test.

As many as twelve clubs have so far signed up 47 players for the upcoming fourth edition of the professional football league and with yesterday's two, the number of successful booters in the bleep test has increased to 36.

The bleep test is a universally accepted multi-stage fitness test used by numerous organizations to measure an athlete's fitness standard.

SPOT-FIXING CASE

Butt faces 7-year ban

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan's suspended Test captain Salman Butt is facing a seven-year ban while his teammates Muhammad Asif and Muhammad Aamer could escape with two-year bans after next month's hearing of the ICC anti-corruption tribunal in Doha.

A well-placed source said Butt was likely to be banned and slapped with a heavy financial penalty.

"The way things are going for him the frequent change of lawyers and his abrasive relationship with the ICC, he does not appear to be in a position to plead his case effectively against the allegations against him," the source said.

"And apparently the ICC ACU have prepared a long list of evidences against him based on the fact that he was captain and responsible for the conduct of the team," the source said.

The source said the fact that Butt was captain would entail the longest ban on him.

Sonali decimate Dinajpur

SPORTS REPORTER

Sonali Bank began their campaign of the Dhaka Bank Victory Day Hockey Tournament with a massive 9-0 win over Dinajpur DSA at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

National striker Rasel Mahmud Jimmy struck a hat-trick, Nannu scored three and Sujon, Krishna and Rana struck one goal each for the bankers.

Director General of Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisahan (BKSP) Brigadier General MM Salehin declared the eight-team meet open while BHF vice president Protap Shankar Hazra and general secretary Khondoker Jamiluddin were among others present.

NEW ZEALAND V PAKISTAN

Vice spectre hangs heavy

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand face Pakistan in a Twenty20 international at Auckland's Eden Park on Sunday to launch a series set to be overshadowed by corruption claims swirling around the visiting team.

Pakistan boasts the better form going into the series -- which features three Twenty20 matches, two Tests and six one-dayers -- after drawing two Tests and narrowly losing a one-day series 2-3 against South Africa.

New Zealand, meanwhile, are aiming to rebuild under new coach John Wright after losing their last 11 one-day matches -- including series whitewashes against Bangladesh and India.

But the match-fixing allegations against Pakistan trio Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer -- who are all suspended and not on the New Zealand tour -- is likely to divert attention from the on-field rivalry.

British tabloid the News of the World claimed earlier this year that several Pakistani players, including the suspended trio, were paid to take instructions from a bookmaker during a Test against England at Lord's last August.

The ICC will hold a hearing into the allegations in Qatar from January 6-11, coinciding

with the first Test between New Zealand and Pakistan in Hamilton, which runs from January 7-11.

New Zealand Cricket chief Justin Vaughan admitted in September he was concerned about how New Zealand fans would view the Pakistan team and the level of interest in a contest where one side was under a corruption cloud.

The Black Caps' dismal recent performances could also affect crowd numbers although there will be interest in seeing whether former India coach Wright can turn around the team's fortunes in time for the World Cup in February.

New Zealand Cricket's commercial manager Peter Dwan said last week he remained "reasonably optimistic" the series would ignite public interest, despite the corruption allegations.

"We can't change what is happening (with the match-fixing claims)," he told the New Zealand Herald.

"All we can do is go to the market with a product we think is very compelling -- a highly entertaining series of T20, then a good Test series followed by ODIs of our national team against very good sportsmen who are successful on the pitch."

New Zealand skipper Daniel Vettori has been rested from the Twenty20 matches due to a bad back and wicketkeeper-batman Brendon McCullum is also expected to sit them out because of a similar problem.

'Aussies are scared'

Cricket

ANI, Melbourne

England middle-order batsman Kevin Pietersen believes the Aussies are boasting and making big statements because they are under pressure to deliver.

In a far-ranging interview to The Sun, the man the Aussies love to hate gave his version of the sledgeing battle with Mitchell Johnson after which the fast bowler called him a "smart a***".

He explained: "I don't feel intimidated by the Australians. I think when you're under extreme amounts of pressure, you talk a lot more."

"And the good thing about our team is that we're on a plateau. We do what we do. We haven't come out and made any bold, huge statements. We know Australia are vulnerable - there are a lot of areas that are very vulnerable."

"We made a hiccup in Perth, but we were constructive in the criticism we chucked

around the team meeting. We need to wipe the slate clean, forget Perth and think about how well we did in Adelaide and Brisbane. We're absolutely fine."

When asked whether Australia still have fault lines in their team, Pietersen replied: "One hundred per cent."

After his brilliant double ton in Adelaide, KP managed just nought and three in Perth. He admits he was surprised by the amount of swing Johnson found.

Johnson was not impressed when Pietersen asked for his mobile phone number and there has been plenty of verbal jousting between the pair.

The former England captain said: "I was just seeing if I could be his friend - we play this game to make friends. Things that happen on the field should stay on the field."

"We didn't hear or see anything different to what normally happens in a Test match."

"Having played against Warne and McGrath, the sledgeing here is non-existent. You haven't seen any huge battles on the field or any proper abuse," he said.

Noh Asia's new star

Golf

AFP, Singapore

Asian golf uncovered a new star in 2010 with teen sensation Noh Seung-Yul winning the Asian Tour Order of Merit race as a battle between rival tours raged on.

Noh became the youngest player ever to top the money list after bursting onto the scene by winning the European Tour co-sanctioned Malaysian Open in March, while China's Liang Wenchong won the OneAsia Tour merit crown.

"I was happy to win the Malaysian Open this year. It allowed me to compete in Europe, the US and also the three Majors," said the 19-year-old.

"It started from my win in Malaysia. The event was good for me," added Noh, rookie of the year in 2008.

Australia's Marcus Fraser, who won the Ballantines Championship in South Korea in April, came second in the merit standings and said the Tour was fortunate to have a player of Noh's calibre.

"Everyone knew it was going to happen. Noh Seung-Yul was always going to fly away with the Order of Merit title," he said.

"He's a great player. The Asian Tour is lucky to have him on the money list."

In an open year, the only golfer to win more than once on the Asian Tour was Japan's Tetsuji Hiratsuka (Myanmar Open and Queens Cup) while Siddikur became the first Bangladeshi to lift a trophy by claiming the Brunei Open.

Plenty of top European talent once again travelled to the region and some found success, including Pdraig Harrington who snapped a

two-year winless streak when he won the Johor Open in Malaysia.

Ian Poulter claimed the Hong Kong Open title while Adam Scott scored an unprecedented third victory at the Singapore Open.

The Asian Tour, meanwhile, set a new landmark by co-hosting a US PGA Tour event for the first time, with American Ben Crane holing a pressure-packed birdie at the last to lift the CIMB Asia Pacific Classic by a stroke.

"With such tremendous growth for golf in the region, the CIMB Asia Pacific Classic

provided an exciting presence for the PGA Tour in Malaysia and Southeast Asia," said PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem.

A new 12-year television and production and global distribution deal was struck by the Asian Tour which players expect will attract more sponsors.

Three-time Asian number one Thongchai Jaidee, by far the most successful golfer in the region, said the agreement would reap benefits.

"It could be really big for the Asian Tour," he said.

But undercurrents contin-

ued to run, with the Asian Tour and OneAsia Tour remaining at loggerheads.

OneAsia, which has brought together tours from China, South Korea and Australia, hosted 10 events, branching out into India and Thailand.

It plans at least 13 in 2011 while the Asian Tour has announced a provisional 25-tournament schedule.

To counter any exodus, the Asian Tour rigorously enforced regulations that players who do compete on OneAsia without prior permission were fined 5,000 US dollars, with the threat of suspension hanging over them.

Few made the jump. It was a sometimes rocky year for OneAsia which narrowly averted a boycott by South Korean players in April.

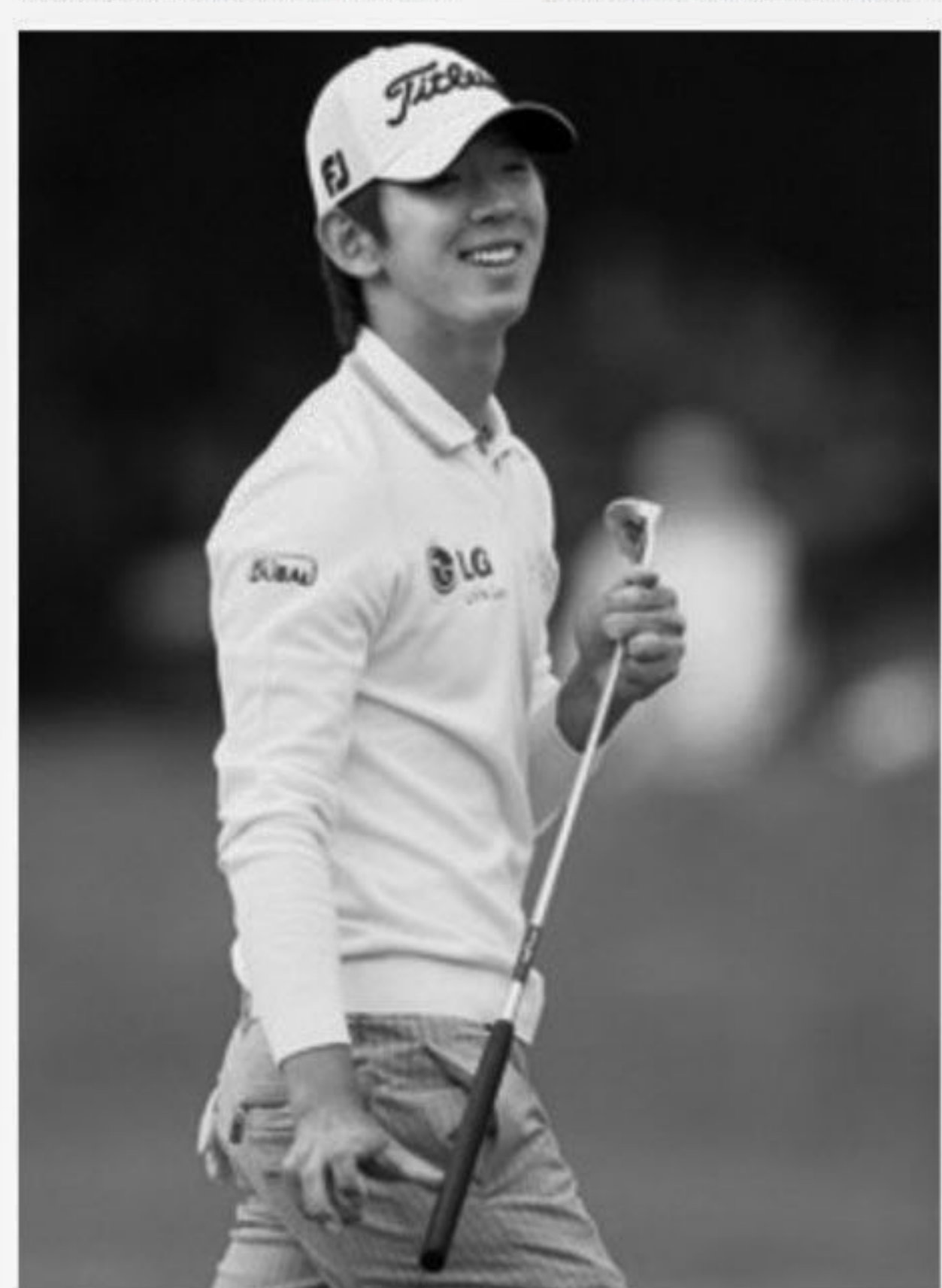
They cited discontent at the number of places available to Koreans at the Maekyung Open, the SK Telecom Open and the Korea Open but the issue was resolved when they were given reassurances.

Liang has been a firm supporter of OneAsia and topped their money list.

"I am very happy and honoured. This is something that China supports and that gives me even more pride to take this trophy home," he said. "This win will be encouraging for the development of golf back at home."

In a sign that more battles lie ahead, Asian Tour chief Kyi Hla Han said in September that two tours could not realistically exist in the same region.

"I don't think it is fair for the players to have to choose and when we had our federation meetings at the Masters and the Open, people pretty much understood and acknowledged that there is not room for two tours," he said.



NOH SEUNG-YUL

'Business end of Ashes'

FROM PAGE 16

with a majestic 227 in Adelaide before they all stumbled in Perth.

Strauss gave a strong hint that the informal Ian Bell would remain at number six despite Paul Collingwood's low-scoring series.

Bell has hit three half-centuries in his four innings this series, while Collingwood has two single-figure scores from four knocks.

"I appreciate why people are clamouring for Bell to go up the order, but I am happy with what he is doing where he is," Strauss said. "He has been a very reassuring presence at number six."

"The main problem is that he has been left with the tail because there haven't been batsmen alongside him building big partnerships. That is our job. I do not

think this is a time for massive changes."

Australia looked a different team in Perth with pacemen Mitchell Johnson and Ryan Harris taking 18 wickets between them as England slumped to sub-200 scores in both innings.

A dilemma for Australia will be whether to retain the four-man pace attack that was so effective on the lively WACA wicket, or call up untried spinner Michael Beer on the drop-in MCG pitch.

Australia have never gone into a MCG Test without a frontline spinner during 102 Tests going back to the very first match in 1877.

"We've got to take all these things into consideration when we pick the team, but we also have to pick what we think is the best balanced attack for the conditions and the opposition we're playing

against," Ponting said.

Even though Steve Smith has been primarily chosen as a number six batsman and did not bowl in Perth, Ponting indicated he could use the all-rounder as his main spinner with his leg-breaks.

"Only a few months ago he played as our number one-picked spinner against Pakistan in England so I'm not worried about what he'll be able to give," the skipper said.

Concern eased Friday over whether Ponting will miss the Melbourne Test with a fractured finger. He broke the little finger on his left hand while attempting a slips catch during the Perth Test.

"He said it felt pretty good after facing some balls on the machines and facing the bowlers (in the nets)," vice-captain Michael Clarke said on Friday.