

SL wary of minnows

AFP, Colombo

Ace Sri Lankan spinner Muttiah Muralidaran said Wednesday his team should not lower their guard against smaller teams in their quest to reach the World Cup quarterfinals.

Sri Lanka are in Group A with defending champions Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Canada and Kenya, with the top four sides qualifying for the quarterfinals.

"Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, we know these teams, who the players are, and their form. But we don't know about Kenya, Canada and Zimbabwe and they can cause a surprise," Muralidaran, 38, told reporters in Colombo.

"We can't call these smaller teams minnows anymore, because they have surprised stronger teams in the past."

Record-breaking Muralidaran, who has retired from Tests and will leave one-day cricket after the World Cup, said he felt no additional pressure to do well in his last outing.

"Nothing extra. The pressure is always the same. Without pressure, we can't perform. It is always good to win," said Muralidaran, the world's leading wicket-taker in both Test (800) and one-day (519) cricket.

Sri Lanka, champions in 1996 and runners-up in 2007, are co-hosting the showpiece event with India and Bangladesh, with the opening match in Dhaka on February 19.

Skipper Kumar Sangakkara said the team was upbeat about playing most of its matches in front of home crowds.

"It's important for us to start off well. To build momentum, match by match. It helps the team relax and rest. The final goal is to be in Mumbai for the final (on April 2)," Sangakkara said.

He said the players were "raring to go" despite not spending much time at two new home venues in Pallekele in Kandy and Hambantota in the south. Persistent monsoon rains scuppered the team's plans to practise at the venues.

"We would have liked to have more practice under lights in Pallekele and Hambantota, but it's been raining," the wicketkeeper-batsman said.

"We will read the pitches now, like any other team, as the



Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara answers questions at a press conference in Colombo yesterday.

game progresses. The main thing for us is to be consistent." Sangakkara said the team was unlikely to make any major changes and the batting line-up would remain the same.

"In bowling, we will make one or two changes, but the rest will more or less remain the same," said Sangakkara.

Sri Lanka meets Canada in their first match on February 20 at the 35,000-seater stadium in Hambantota.

Tanveer out of WC

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's already depleted bowling attack suffered a further blow Wednesday after left-arm pacer Sohail Tanveer was ruled out of the World Cup because of a knee injury.

"The medical panel thinks that though the recovery was good, it still thought Tanveer needs time to get fully fit before competing at international level," the Pakistan Cricket Board said in a statement.

Pakistan are replacing Tanveer with left-arm pacer Junaid Khan, 21, who started with the Under-19s alongside promising teenage quick Mohammad Aamer, who was this week handed a five year ban from cricket.

It will be Junaid's debut for the senior Pakistan squad, although he has impressed selectors by amassing 167 wickets in just 35 first-class matches.

Pakistan's World Cup hopes have already been dented by International Cricket Council's (ICC) bans against three key players, opener Salman Butt and pace bowlers Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer, on charges of corruption.

The 14-team World Cup will be hosted jointly by Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka between February 19 to April 2.

Tanveer featured in the six-match one-day series against New Zealand which finished last week, but had pulled out of the preceding Test series because of poor fitness.

The 26-year-old suffered a back injury in 2009 and was out of action last year because of knee surgery.

He burst onto the scene during the inaugural World Twenty20 in 2007, surprising batsmen with his awkward wrong-footed delivery, then finishing as player of the tournament in the inaugural Indian Premier League in 2008.

Club Cup cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Dinajpur's Eidgha Sporting Club won their second round match of the Club Cup yesterday.

The Dinajpur-side defeated Shaheed Sufi Samaj Kallyan Samiti from Faridpur by a big margin of 128 runs.

Meanwhile at the other venue in Mymensingh, Shamsumzoha Smriti Ekadosh from Narayan-ganj were handed a walk-over by Comilla's Young Society Club.

'I'll give my best'

PTI, Bangalore



S SREESANTH

Back in the Indian World Cup squad due to injury to his pace colleague Praveen Kumar, Kerala speedster S Sreesanth said he would look to do justice to the opportunity given to him.

"It is a great opportunity and a great challenge to be a part of Indian team for the World Cup. I am lucky to be a part of it and am looking forward to giving my best in the tournament," Sreesanth said.

"I am just looking forward to giving my best in the World Cup. I am absolutely fine with any role given to me. Whatever I would be asked to do I will perform accordingly."

The 28-year-old right-arm pacer, who was not in the original 15-man Indian squad, said it was unfortunate that Praveen Kumar could not recover in time for the World Cup. "I feel really bad for Praveen. It is unfortunate that injury keeps you out of the game. I hope he recovers fast."

Praveen sustained an elbow injury before the ODI series in South Africa last month and failed to recuperate in time. Speaking about his economy rate, which has always been a matter of worry, Sreesanth said he has improved immensely in the last two years.

"I was worried about that aspect of my game but in the last couple of years, whatever chances I have got I showed a lot of improvement. With age and experience you learn a lot. I am still learning and hopefully will do a good job," he said.

Sreesanth also did not seem too bothered

about the fact that the sub-continent pitches would have little to offer to the fast bowlers during the mega event.

"There are no issues as far as sub-continent pitches are concerned. Zaheer Khan, Ashish Nehra and Munaf Patel have all played in World Cups before and have enough experience. We are ready to give our best. We are doing well and are number two in ODIs. Hopefully, by the end of the World Cup, we could be the number one team in the world," said Sreesanth.

Asked if cricket fans would see an old Sreesanth or a reformed one during the World Cup, the Kerala youngster said, "I play cricket with passion. I just want to win games for the country. I really don't plan whether I would dance after taking a wicket or not. I only plan my bowling and just try to win as many matches as possible for India."

A lot of people criticised the national selectors for not including Sreesanth initially when the Indian squad was picked for the World Cup and former India captain Sourav Ganguly was one of most vocal ones.

When Sreesanth was asked about how he felt about the support he got from people like Ganguly, he said, "I am really thankful to Dada. He was one guy who told me to concentrate on my game and to remain focussed as he felt I could make it big in international cricket. Even Sachin paaji told me the same. So it is a big thing and I always appreciate their words."

Sreesanth, who composed a song to cheer the Indian team in the World Cup, said, "I was looking forward to cheer the team but now I am happy to be a part of it."

SA arrive in India

PTI, Chennai

Strong World Cup contenders South Africa, led by burly Graeme Smith, arrived here Wednesday morning and will soon start the preparations for the mega event, which they have never won.

Presence of in-form Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers and JP Duminy in the batting line up and a fierce pace attack, featuring world number one bowler Dale Steyn, Morne Morkel and Lonwabo Tsotsobe makes them a formidable side.

The South Africans are high on confidence after beating India 3-2 in the recent ODI series.

They have been drawn in Group-B along with India, England, West Indies, Bangladesh and minnows Ireland and Netherlands.

Shaheed Smriti hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Navy and Shadharan Bima won their respective matches of the Chowdhury Group Shaheed Smriti Hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday.

Bangladesh Navy handed a 5-3 defeat to Bangladesh Police AC despite trailing by two goals while Bima crushed Bangladesh Army 3-1.

A real Tiger

FROM PAGE 16 any hesitation the captain turns to him. When many spinners are never keen to open the bowling, Razzak relishes the prospect.

"If the team needs, I will open the bowling. The new ball skids and bounces more than the old one, so it suits me more than the other spinners," said Razzak during the open media session of the Tigers in Hotel Sheraton yesterday.

Though he seems shy, Razzak is ambitious and especially in the one-day format. "I'm No 3 in the bowlers ranking now but my best has been No 2. My only target is to get to the No 1 position, if it happens in the World Cup, nothing better than that."

The most inspiring thing for Razzak ahead of the World Cup would be that he took 86 wickets in home soil against all opponents in just 49 matches. His spells against India, South Africa, West Indies and England would be critical but in the matches against Ireland and the Netherlands, Razzak will be the man Bangladesh would be looking at.

Tremlett called up

AFP, London



CHRIS TREMLETT

Chris Tremlett has been called up to England's World Cup squad as a travelling reserve following a spate of injuries in the bowling attack.

Tremlett has recently recovered from a side strain and is in line to deputise for any of the teammates who also suffered injuries during the seven-match one-day international series in Australia, which England lost 6-1.

National Selector Geoff Miller said: "Whilst the injured bowlers in the 15-man squad are all progressing well, the selectors have decided it would be prudent to have an additional player on hand who is acclimatised in case we need to apply to the Event Technical Committee for a replacement due to injury."

Yorkshire pacemen Tim Bresnan and Ajmal Shahzad were two of the bowlers to depart the ODI series early after suffering

respective calf and hamstring injuries.

Tremlett, who flew home alongside Shahzad but has made a sufficiently swift recovery, would be an ideal replacement should any of that pair or Stuart Broad - nearing full fitness after an abdominal muscle injury ended his tour following the second Ashes Test - not make it.

Spinner Graeme Swann is a further doubt with a back problem and batsman Eoin Morgan was Tuesday ruled out with a broken finger, but coach Andy Flower was upbeat on the prospects for his depleted bowling stocks.

"We've got good news on most of our other players," confirmed Flower.

"The guys that came back early are progressing well."

Tremlett excelled during the tour Down Under, taking 17 wickets at 23.35 in his three Tests as England won the Ashes courtesy of three innings victories and then adding a further six in four ODIs.

Strauss upbeat

AFP, London



ANDREW STRAUSS

England captain Andrew Strauss has predicted an upturn in his side's one-day fortunes at the World Cup when he expects to finally have his first-choice attack at his disposal.

Strauss returned to London on Tuesday after England's 6-1 defeat in the recent one-day series in Australia still insisting his team could match anyone in the world when their frontline bowlers were available.

Graeme Swann, Tim Bresnan, Stuart Broad and Ajmal Shahzad, all members of the World Cup squad, plus Chris Tremlett, who is a reserve, were missing for all or part of the beating in Australia.

But Strauss expects them to be firing and giving England a much-needed lift ahead of their first World Cup fixture, against the Netherlands in Nagpur on February 22.

"Our bowling attack has been the basis of a lot of our one-day victories over the last 12 or 18 months, Strauss told reporters at Heathrow Airport here on Tuesday.

"We have had a settled bowling unit who really know their roles really well and have bowled very well in tandem together.

"There is no doubt we missed that in Australia and I believe our bowling attack is a match for anyone in the world.

"They should be fit but they need to find some rhythm pretty quickly and the batsmen need to do their job," the left-handed opener added.

"The atmosphere at the World Cup is going to be very

intoxicating and very motivating. All the best players in the world will be there and ultimately only one team is going to walk away with that World Cup.

"We would have liked to have won the one-day series in Australia as preparation, but some of our players who have not been involved have had an opportunity to have a little bit of a rest through the fact that they were injured," Strauss explained.

"They are going to come back into the fold and add a huge amount of impetus."

England's collapse in the one-day series took the shine off their Ashes triumph and Strauss has urged his side, some of whom won the World Twenty20 in the Caribbean last year, to go on and claim the World Cup.

England have not won the International Cricket Council's showpiece event, despite appearing in three finals, and Strauss told his team that lifting the trophy would crown the best six months of their career.

He added: "We didn't do as well as we would have liked in the one-dayers and we won't hide away from that. Our aim when we went to Australia was to retain the Ashes and the fact that we did that and the style in which we did it speaks volumes for the players.

"But the nature of international cricket is you always move onto the next thing. When we are old and grey we will sit down and look over the footage of that Ashes series and still be very proud of what we achieved.

"It will go as one of the highlights if not the highlight of our careers. But now is not the time to look back on it.

"If we were to complete the double of an Ashes win and a World Cup win in the

space of six months that certainly would be the highlight of all our careers."

England head to the sub-continent without batsman Eoin Morgan who was ruled out with a broken finger and coach Andy Flower repeated his criticisms of a gruelling schedule that has left several of his players nursing injuries.

They fly to Bangladesh on Saturday ahead of two warm-up games with Flower hitting out at an itinerary that gives England's players just four nights at home in between coming back from the Ashes and travelling to the World Cup.

"We have played three-and-a-half-months of high intensity cricket and it is inevitable you will pick up injuries.

"But to have the tour ending just before the World Cup starts doesn't make a lot of sense to me," the former Zimbabwe batsman added. "So that is a very simple lesson to be learned."

Murali signs for Gloucester

AFP, London

Sri Lankan cricket legend Muttiah Muralidaran will play for Gloucestershire's Twenty20 side after agreeing a two-year deal with the English county, it was announced Wednesday.

Muralidaran, who retired from Test cricket last year and who will quit one-day cricket after the World Cup, will play in Gloucestershire's next two English T20 campaigns, it was announced.

The 38-year-old will join up with Gloucester after playing in the World Cup for Sri Lanka and Kochi in the Indian Premier League.

AFP, Colombo



NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands are hoping luck, obscurity and good preparation will help them spring a surprise on bigger teams as they start their fourth World Cup this month.

"We come in a little bit under the radar and most big teams don't know too much about us. I think it can do us a favour, can cause an upset in our favour," skipper Peter Borren, 27, told reporters in Colombo.

Under the New-Zealand born Borren, the Dutch have won five of their last 12 one-day internationals, including one against Bangladesh last July. They also stunned hosts England in the 2009 World Twenty20.

"It's going to be a serious challenge for us to beat the Test-playing nations," said Borren. "But we have a fairly strong batting line-up that can hopefully help us win a game or two and get us past the first round."

The Dutch, who trained in Dubai and India for the past few weeks, face India, Bangladesh, South Africa, England, the West Indies and

Ireland in Group B.

Four teams from the preliminary group will advance to the quarter-finals.

The Netherlands, who competed in the World Cups of 1996, 2003 and 2007, have not beaten a Test-playing side in the tournament, but boast wins over Namibia and Scotland.

One of the mainstays of the batting will be big-hitting Essex all-rounder Ryan ten Doeschate, 30, who was snapped up by Indian Premier League side Kolkata Knight Riders for 150,000 dollars.

In 27 ODIs, Doeschate has scored 1,234 runs at a formidable average of 68.55 with three hundreds and eight half-centuries. He has also taken 48 wickets.

"We need lots of luck," said Doeschate. "We have lost some seniors since the last tournament. The challenge for us this time is to focus and try and win every game."

Borren said the team will also bank on Tom Cooper, a South Australian cricketer who qualified to play for the Netherlands through his mother, who is Dutch.

Cooper made his Netherlands debut in June last year and scored three half-centuries in his first three games. In 10 matches, he averages 65.44 with one century and five 50s.

"We won one match each at the last two World Cups and we definitely want to improve that record," said Cooper.

Borren said the lack of matches against the Test nations was slowing his team's progress.

"We need more opportunities to play," he said. "It's not easy coming into tournaments like this to face the big teams. We can't change things, but the top sides should also play more often with us."

Abahani take

FROM PAGE 16 second goal for Mohammedan seven minutes later. At that time it was expected that Mohammedan were going to post their fourth victory, but Maksud Alam Bulbul stunned the visitors to level the margin two minutes from time to ensure Feni Soccer's fourth draw in eight matches.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Doc counter-part

12 Big name in cosmetics and hair care

13 Niche Bearlike

15 Erse

16 The Bee —

17 Throat clearer

19 Wapiti

20 Waiter's handout

22 Fool

24 Scepter topper

27 Gossip

29 Pub trayful

32 1967 Audrey Hepburn movie

35 Basin accessory

36 Hit Fox series

37 Method

38 Big Apple letters

40 "Cogito, — sum"

42 Brooch

44 Juno's house-work writer

46 Couch

50 "I, Robot" writer

52 Din

54 Actress Danes

55 Long reclining seat

56 "The Miracle Worker" subject

57 Hounds' prey

DOWN

1 Oliver Twist's request

2 Hibernian tongue

3 Belief of a sort

4 Author Fleming

5 Bulk of the house-work

6 Senate staffer

7 Andean beast

8 Expert

9 Deli salad

10 Beelzebub's specialty

11 Floor, afloat?

12 Schlep

18 Paul Newman movie, with "The"

21 School's URL ending

23 Blue

24 Have debts

25 Uncooked

26 In even-numbered years, maybe

28 One way up in the rankings

30 Mound stat

31 The air up there

33 Take a whack at

34 Journey segment

39 Task

41 Academy Award

42 Prepare for a trip

43 Capri, e.g.

45 Incessantly

47 Tom Joad, for one

48 Parker who played Daniel Boone

49 Corroded

51 Wire measure

53 "Eureka!"

Solution time: 27 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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E T Q L X N B F I Q F X L C T B A I .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: AN AMERICAN INSURANCE CORPORATION'S LIMA-BASED SUBSIDIARY SHOULD REALLY BE NAMED PERU-DENTIAL.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: F equals T