

## NZ target Aussies to lift spirit

AFP, Chennai

New Zealand cricket captain Daniel Vettori believes a World Cup win over trans-Tasman rivals Australia will help lift national spirits left shattered by the deadly Christchurch earthquake.

The 15-man squad desperately scrambled for news on loved ones caught up in Tuesday's 6.3 magnitude quake which killed at least 65 people, with the team admitting to being left shocked and numbed by the tragedy.

"The greatest thing we can do is beat Australia to hopefully help bring a little relief for the people who are going such a rough time at home," said Vettori.

"It's been a tough day. Five or six of the team and the management crew are based in Christchurch, so it's been a rough time for them finding out that their families are safe.

"We all have family or friends in Christchurch, it's been tough. We are feeling it too and the Canterbury community is in our thoughts and prayers.

"It's hard to deal with out of context. Guys will be thinking about wives and children at home who are dealing with the aftermath. It might be a distraction, it will be a testing time."

International Cricket Council chief executive Haroon Lorgat said that an appropriate gesture of respect would be made when New Zealand face Australia.

"At times like this, sport can only offer its support and its deepest sympathy to those who have lost loved ones during such a tragedy," said Lorgat.

## WC final venue gets safety nod

AFP, Mumbai

Mumbai's revamped Wankhede Stadium was cleared by fire chiefs on Tuesday to host the World Cup final, a welcome boost for a venue criticised for failing to respect safety standards.

"We have given the NOC (no objection certificate) to the stadium. They have fulfilled all the fire safety norms," Mumbai deputy chief fire officer A N Shinde told the PTI news agency after a fourth inspection of the ground.

"They can host matches. The stadium is safe and secure."

The Wankhede will host the final on April 2 as well as two group matches.

### SPORTS POLL

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Inter Milan v Bayern Munich

Live from 1:45am (Thursday)



**MUCH TO PONDER:** Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons has much to contemplate as he oversees practice at the indoor facility of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

# Siddons weighs his options

MOHAMMAD ISAM



The surroundings of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium remained unexpectedly quiet yesterday but inside, the Tigers rearranged their strategies ahead of a potentially do-or-die game.

Bangladesh take on Ireland for their second Group B game of the World Cup this Friday at the team's favourite venue and while both sets of players remained in their hotel yesterday, a few of the Tigers made their way back to Mirpur to work on their batting.

Batsmen Junaed Siddiqui, Imrul Kayes, Rokibul Hasan and wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim batted for a couple of hours with only a few onlookers around as the "home of cricket" returned to its usual desolate look.

Head coach Jamie Siddons was overseeing the batsmen going about their business and while the Australian had their technique, form, temperament, averages, etc in his field of vision, he had other things in mind despite catching a cold.

After the Tigers' 87-run defeat at the hands of India, a few more glitches in their system showed up but one problem that remained was the use (or misuse) of the batting Powerplay. The first thing the Tigers did after calling for the five-over slot on Saturday was lose Mushfiqur after only three balls. Though they made 30 runs, they lost two more wickets (Mahmudullah Riyad and Naem Islam) and with India using both their strike bowlers during the five overs, it was evident that the Tigers' inability to slog (or at least clear the in-field) is going to be one of the major headaches in the coming games.

Among the four who didn't play against India is of course Mohammad Ashraful and with the rumour mills abuzz with the news of his inclusion, Siddons confirmed

that they were considering the right-hander as a possible option.

"There's a chance but its one of a few options we have. We'll talk about it with Shakib [Al Hasan], Tamim [Iqbal] and the head of cricket operations," said Siddons. "We will try to consider all our options, one of which is also sticking to the same team and give everyone another chance."

The latter option though seems to be less likely given Ireland's weakness against the turning ball. The possible switch could be of Ashraful coming in to replace Rubel Hossain, a tough call after the pacesman turned out to be the best bowler on show against India. But being a second choice, Rubel's chances could suffer a blow if the think-tank pick a spin-heavy attack.

"Shafiq [Islam] is our opening bowler but we also saw how well Rubel [Hossain] bowled. At the same time [Suhrawardi] Shuvo could also come in, but they also have four left-handers so we would need off-spinners," he said.

Siddons will have his hands full in the next few days, pondering all his options for a game which could dictate the team's as well as the nation's mood in the coming weeks.

"It's a huge game; if we lose we are out," said Siddons, before offering more encouraging words, "We didn't pencil in the India game, we wanted to give them a go but we have pencilled in the Ireland game and West Indies as well. We are confident and we think we can win."

The stakes could not be higher for the Tigers and in such an important game, the wisdom of taking a punt with an erratic force has come into question.

"I am an Ashraful fan and of course I'd like to see him play. He can also provide a bit of off-spin but we have weighed over all the options that we have. We still have a couple of days to think about it," said Siddons.



## Kamande in no danger

AFP, Hambantota

Jimmy Kamande was hit on the jaw during Kenya's net practice Tuesday but team officials said the skipper was in no danger of missing his team's second World Cup match against Pakistan.

"Kamande is fine and will be available for the match on Wednesday," media manager Arjun Vidyarthi told reporters. "Kamande was hit on the right jaw during a throw-in and that's forced him to miss the press conference."

Instead, veteran batsman Steve Tikolo addressed the media after the practice session in Sri Lanka.

The 32-year-old Kamande has so far played 82 one-day internationals, scoring 1,030 runs and taking 45 wickets with his off-spin.

## Press rally round Zim

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe's World Cup campaign is still very much alive despite their opening 91-run defeat to defending champions Australia, a state daily insisted Tuesday.

"Yesterday's defeat by the Aussies was by no means a humiliation and, rather than break us, it should build us because it showed we could compete," the Herald said in an editorial.

"There is no need to bury our heads in the sand because, now that the Aussies are out of the way, our 2011 World Cup show can begin in earnest.

"It was hard to tell the difference between Goliath [Australia], which had won all its last 23 matches in the World Cup, and guided by a captain yet to lose a match at this tournament as skipper, and this little David [Zimbabwe] just emerging from the wilderness."

# Win for fans: Afridi

AFP, Hambantota



Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi vowed Tuesday to win the World Cup for millions of weary fans back home who lost out on the showpiece when their country became a no-go zone.

International cricket has been suspended in Pakistan ever since the terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore two years ago which left eight people dead and injured seven visiting players and their assistant coach.

Pakistan was among the four co-hosts of the 2011 World Cup but the International Cricket Council was forced to move the matches in the wake of attacks.

"Not playing in our country is on our minds," Afridi said, ahead of his team's first match against Kenya on Wednesday.

"We feel for our nation, our people who are missing the World Cup.

"I think this is the main thing for us,

so definitely we will try our level best to win, which is very important for us, and if we do that I hope some cricket returns to our country sooner than later."

Besides the suspension of international cricket, Pakistan has also been hit by the spot-fixing scandal, which ended in lengthy bans on Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer, and other disciplinary problems.

Afridi admitted it was hard to keep the team in the right frame of mind against a background of such problems.

"It was difficult to keep the team settled in the beginning when we had all those issues," said Afridi, himself banned for two matches on charges of ball-tampering during a one-day match in Australia in 2010.

"We had to rebuild the team again but now a situation has come that our team is settled. We now have such a combination that people have hopes that this team can do something," said Afridi, who took over as captain in July

last year. The Pakistan Cricket Board delayed in retaining him for the World Cup until he won his first one-day series in New Zealand earlier this month.

"It's difficult to be the captain in India or Pakistan with all that's happening, you have to make sacrifices. But my effort is always that I do well as captain or as player," said Afridi, who made his ODI debut against Kenya in 1996.

In only his second one-day match, he hit a world record 37-ball hundred -- which still stands -- against Sri Lanka in Nairobi.

"I love Kenya and Kenyans," said Afridi, when asked about his team's opponents.

"I don't think we will be relaxed when we face them and I would like to be playing at our full strength."

That meant express paceman Shoaib Akhtar will share the new ball with Umar Gul or Abdul Razzaq, with Wahab Riaz as fourth seamer.

Afridi and Mohammad Hafeez will lead the spin department.

## PAKISTAN V KENYA: HAMBANTOTA

# Waqar wants good start

AFP, Hambantota



Pakistan coach Waqar Younis believes the recent spot-fixing scandal will not have a detrimental effect on their World Cup campaign which gets underway against Kenya here on Wednesday.

Former Test captain Salman Butt and pacemen Mohammad Aamer and Mohammad Asif were banned on charges of corruption relating to last year's Lord's Test against England.

All three also face criminal prosecution.

But Waqar said his team, who are in action for the first time since the bans were announced, are not worried about the past.

"Whatever happened last year is now history. This is a new place and an important tournament, so we want to be fully focussed and start the event like India and New Zealand did," said Waqar.

Pakistan are also eager to put behind them their tragedy-hit 2007 tournament.

Four years ago, Pakistan suffered an embarrassing three-wicket defeat at the hands of outsiders Ireland in Kingston and crashed out in the first round.

As if the humiliation was not enough, their English coach Bob Woolmer died the very next day, threatening the World Cup and putting the players under investigation by the Jamaican police

who initially treated the death as murder.

Even after the death was declared as due to natural causes, Pakistani players came in for severe criticism from home fans who wanted them punished for their first round exit -- their second in as many events.

Captain Shahid Afridi said his team will take all opponents here seriously.

"There have been so many upsets in the World Cup in the past, like the one against Ireland four years ago, so we have that in mind and we will be on our toes in every match, be it Kenya or Sri Lanka," Afridi told AFP.

The current Pakistan squad has only four survivors from that Irish defeat -- Younis Khan, Umar Gul, Mohammad Hafeez and Kamran Akmal -- but Afridi said no player has forgotten the shattering loss.

Not even Kenya's abject 10-wicket surrender to New Zealand in a Group A match in Chennai on Sunday, makes Afridi feel at ease.

"If they had a bad day then they can come hard on us. We will be geared up as our main aim is to win all our group matches," said Afridi

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of the first stage where Pakistan also face Sri Lanka, Australia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe and Canada.

The top four teams qualify for the quarterfinals from each of the two groups.

Pakistan opener Ahmed Shehzad and middle-order batsman Misbahul Haq hit centuries in the first warm-up match against Bangladesh last week and senior batsman Younis scored 80 in a lost cause against England.

Younis and Misbah will be the key in providing a solid base for hard-hitters Afridi, Umar Akmal and Abdul Razzaq, who can run riot in the final overs and in the batting Powerplay.

Kenya captain Jimmy Kamande vowed to have a different approach against Pakistan, after his team was shot out for a paltry 69 against New Zealand.

"Next game, it'll be different opposition and a different approach from us. I would be happy as long as we improve each and every game," said Kamande, whose team reached the semifinal in the 2003 World Cup.

"We didn't express ourselves (in the first match) but we will show improvements," said Kamande, whose team has never met Pakistan in a World Cup match having been a regular feature in the World Cup since 1996.

Pakistan have won all their five one-day internationals against Kenya.



Pakistan paceman Wahab Riaz bowls during a practice session at Hambantota on Monday, ahead of today's WC match against Kenya.

PHOTO: STAR