

MS expects
easy game

AFP, New Delhi

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni wants to have an easy game against the Netherlands on Wednesday after surviving some anxious moments at the World Cup.

The Indians cantered to an 87-run victory against Bangladesh followed by a high-scoring tie with England and a tense five-wicket victory over upstarts Ireland.

"It has been a good start for us so far," Dhoni told reporters Tuesday ahead of the clash against the Dutch at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium.

"We saw a tight game, a close game and a good one. We are now looking forward to an easy game against the Netherlands.

"We want to make the most of this game and especially in the departments where we want to see an improvement. We should not really be thinking about the result but the process, what are the things we want to get out of."

Dhoni accepted that the bowling had not been up to the mark but backed his under-fire attack to come good as the tournament progressed.

"We would like to improve a bit in our bowling especially when a batsman sets in, how to put pressure on that particular batsman and push him into playing a big shot and get him out."

"I don't mind who is taking the wickets as long as the team is winning. To target a particular bowler is difficult. Bowlers are also under pressure as there has been a lot of talk about it."

"But they are showing signs of improvement and I am hopeful they will peak at the right time."

Dhoni said all-rounder Yuvraj Singh's form with the ball was a bonus for the side as that afforded the luxury to play an extra batsman.

"I am a big fan of Yuvraj. He bats at number four or five. He can play aggressively or be defensive if the situations so demands."

"He is a big asset to the team. He also has to fill in the job of the fifth bowler which he has done brilliantly till now."

The burly left-hander excelled as a part-time spinner, taking 5-31 against Ireland before making an unbeaten 50 under pressure to become the first player to achieve the double feat in the World Cup.

Dhoni replied cheekily when asked about the controversial umpire decision review system.

"Many times we have just taken the DRS for the heck of it before the 50 overs run out to see what happens. We don't mind using them instead of taking it back unused to the dressing room."



SKY THE LIMIT?: India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (L) and batsman Virender Sehwag enjoy a light moment during practice at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP

INDIA V NETHERLANDS: NEW DELHI

India can ensure qtrs today

AFP, New Delhi



India will look to wrap up a convincing victory over rock-bottom Netherlands in the World Cup on Wednesday and virtually make sure of their quarterfinal berth.

India are the only team who have yet to taste defeat in their group and that record is unlikely to be broken against the under-performing Dutch who have still to register a win.

The host nation are on top of Group B with five points. England have as many points but have played a game more and have a worse run rate while West Indies and South Africa have four points each.

But thanks to some topsy-turvy results in the group and the tied game against England, India are technically not assured of a place in

the last eight as yet.

A strong performance against the Dutch will not only give India a strong net run-rate but also pave their way to the knockout round.

The only weak link for the Indians has been their bowling which has been exposed time and again.

India's frontline bowlers failed to find much success against a spirited Ireland and had it not been for a five-wicket haul by part-time spinner Yuvraj Singh, they could have been in trouble.

India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni, however, tried to play down the indifferent form of his bowlers.

"We are showing signs of improvement, which is good," he said.

"I feel it's important to peak at the right time because it's a long tournament so definitely what we have seen is slow and gradual improvement on the bowling side."

Yuvraj's show with the ball might tempt Dhoni to leave out an off-colour leg-spinner Piyush Chawla and bring in attacking off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin.

Former Australian Test batsman Mark Waugh said India's strong batting compensated for their lack of specialist bowling options.

Writing in the Times of India, he said: "The batsmen compensate their bowling arsenal and on paper, under these conditions, they possess one of the best batting line-ups in the tournament."

"India do have the option of going in with five bowlers in place of the

four that they usually prefer. I do not, however, think that is necessarily the right way to go about it because Yuvraj Singh can do a good job as a fifth bowler and bowl his quota," he added.

The home side are unlikely to be tested against the Netherlands, who ran England close in their opener, thanks to a sparkling 119 from Ryan ten Doeschate, but have since struggled.

The Dutch scored an impressive 292 against England but slumped to a huge 215-run defeat to the West Indies and lost by 231 runs against South Africa.

Skipper Peter Borren said Wednesday's game at New Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla stadium would be a tough proposition.

"India are a tough side as their batting line-up has some unbelievable cricketers," said Borren.

INDIA v NETHERLANDS

Match: 1
India win: 1
Netherlands win: 0
No result/Tied: 0
Only meeting: Feb 12, 2003, Paarl -- India won by 68 runs

Bagai feels
at 'home'

AFP, New Delhi



Canada captain Ashish Bagai relished "home" support as he led his team to a much-needed World Cup win over fellow minnows Kenya before an array of family and friends in New Delhi.

Bagai, born in the Indian capital, emigrated to Canada with his family as an 11-year-old but still has strong ties with the country of his birth.

His connections were evident on Monday as members of his family cheered vociferously from the stands at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium.

"It was indeed a special win for us as it came in front of the Delhi crowd which wanted us to do well," said Bagai, after the day-night match, which finished in a five-wicket win for Canada.

"I had my entire family present. My grandparents, parents and cousins -- about 50 people were cheering us. It was good to have them, it was great!"

Bagai's captain's knock of 64 not out was complemented by Jimmy Hansra, another Indian-born member of the Canadian squad.

Hansra, born in Ludhiana in the northern state of Punjab, hit a sparkling 70 that included seven fours and two sixes as Canada overhauled Kenya's 198 with 27 balls to go.

Bagai said the win would spur his team to perform well in their remaining group matches.



Netherlands batsman Ryan ten Doeschate (L) talks with physio Tessa Konemann during the team's practice session at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium in New Delhi yesterday, ahead of today's World Cup match against India.

PHOTO:
AFPLet some sense
prevail

ATIQUÉ ANAM



Cricket, once called the gentleman's game, is anything but these days. It is a game played by shrewd professionals who will pounce on you at the slightest mistake you make, coached by savvy generals who will research every possible chink in your armoury to launch an attack, and preached by media men who will clutch at any semblance of news and no-news to satisfy the audience's appetite.

With stakes that high, brewing up an unwanted controversy in the middle of a World Cup campaign is the kind of distraction the Bangladesh team can ill afford at the moment.

The chief players in this controversy are the Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan, coach Jamie Siddons, and some former national cricketers. The blame game that started with the defeat against the West Indies and was fuelled by Shakib's ill-humoured column in a national daily not only dampened the morale of the side, but also presented the sad state of affairs the side is in before their crucial encounters.

Shakib, the young captain has reached the height of fame, which he is proving to be ill-equipped to deal with. His obscene gesture at the crowd after the demoralising defeat against the West Indies may be excused as a rush of blood, even his indolent remarks at the press conference could be attributed to signs of his immaturity and young age, but his scathing criticism of the former national players, and that through a column in a highly circulated daily, speaks ill of the man's mental status. However, that view is firmly shared by the coach as well. Jamie Siddons, the Australian, instead of calming his captain, came out blasting the former greats of Bangladesh cricket in a manner befitting a lesser man.

Having said that, the former cricketers themselves did not make it any easier having knives out for the players after the defeat. True that they had laid the stepping-stones of Bangladesh cricket's coming of age, but lambasting the current team for one off day in the field belies their greatness. This was perhaps the worst time to do so, right in the middle of a World Cup campaign and especially when the team is playing at home.

Even so, the likes of Shakib must realise that they are more accountable than the former players. The current cricketers represent the country, the former players have moved on to other vocations, some of which dictate that they provide the occasional soundbite. Current players, especially the captain, should know better than to react and create distractions which will eventually harm the team.

For all the passion emanating from our cricket and all the hard work going into the development of the game in the last decade, there is no denying the fact that this generation of players, and specifically this very squad of 15 have transformed once-in-a-long-while upsets into regular and expected victories. Let's be hopeful that the progress will not be reversed with just one forgettable result.

In a latest development, the Bangladesh Cricket Board

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4

Fans beaten
up in Nagpur

AFP, Nagpur



Captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni on Tuesday sympathised with the fans who were baton-charged by police as they queued for tickets to see India's World Cup clash with South Africa.

"Police take the action when they feel it is needed," India skipper Dhoni told reporters in New Delhi where India take on the Netherlands in a Group B clash on Wednesday.

"To avoid a stampede-like situation, they have to resort to lathicharge (baton-charge). So to always project the police as bad is not an ideal thing. But of course everybody feels bad when fans get beaten up."

Ticket-hungry fans, desperate to see Saturday's match in Nagpur, were baton-charged by police as they queued, witnesses said.

The clashes happened outside the Vidarbha Cricket Association offices, as police struggled to control the crowds. Fans started queuing on Monday, a day before the counters opened for the sale of tickets for the first World Cup game involving India in the Orange City since 1987.

Engineering student Ajay Zade had given up hope of buying one of the 16,000 tickets for the high-profile match, to be held at the VCA's Stadium.

"I have been waiting since early morning but I have no hope of getting the tickets," said Zade, 20.

"I was close to the counter but had to leave because of the baton-charge in the morning. I was very keen to see the India match but now I have no hopes."

Mohammad Safwan, a 20-year-old student, was more fortunate, securing his ticket on Tuesday despite the crush which prompted the police intervention.

"It feels like I have won the World Cup," he said. "I have been standing in the queue since last night and I slept on the footpath. There was a baton-charge in the morning, but my slogan was 'bear the baton-charge for tickets'."

"I want to see Sachin Tendulkar's batting and Yusuf Pathan's sixes."

It was the second time at the World Cup that fans have been baton-charged. Similar incidents took place in the run-up to the February 27 clash between India and England in Bangalore when fans queued overnight in the hope of securing one of the 7,000 tickets placed on general sale.

Ticket sales and their allocation have caused a major rift between local organisers and the International Cricket Council.

The game's rulers claim the system had pushed their relationship with their commercial backers to breaking point.

