



INDIA THE TARGET: Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi (R) practices some punches during a training session at The Punjab Cricket Association (PCA) Stadium in Mohali yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Vettori looks beyond semi

AFP, Dhaka



New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori dismissed suggestions on Saturday that reaching the World Cup semifinals should be the limit of his team's ambitions.

"I look at it as an achievement for a country so small that we make so many semifinals. That's a better way to look at it for a country of four million people," he said.

"People may put negative stamps on it but I think it's an achievement for a country like ours."

New Zealand came from behind to upset South Africa by 49 runs in Friday's quarterfinal at the Sher-e-Bangla stadium, their fourth win over the fancied rivals in six World Cup encounters.

Vettori's men, restricted to 221-8 after taking first strike in the day-night match, bundled out South Africa for 172 in an exciting finish.

Jacob Oram was New Zealand's man of the match with four wickets and two catches, while off-spinner Nathan McCullum claimed three for 24 from 10 overs.

Skipper Graeme Smith (28) and Jacques

Kallis (47) helped South Africa reach 108-2 by the 24th over, before the last eight wickets crashed for 64 runs.

It will be New Zealand's sixth appearance in the semifinals, where they await the winners of Saturday's match between Sri Lanka and England in Colombo.

"I think the reputation we have is that we can beat any team on a given day," said Vettori.

"But consistency has avoided us a lot of the time, so it's our big chance in the semifinals to go one or two better."

Vettori said beating South Africa in a crunch game boosted morale, and praised his side for fighting till the end.

"Something around 250 would probably have been a really good score, but we knew 221 was defendable and the way we bowled, and particularly the way we fielded, got us through to the victory."

"I think when we got de Villiers and Kallis out, we all started to believe we could go all the way, the captain said.

"Their top four batsmen have proved themselves for a long, long time and have an excellent track record. They also had a long tail. So we had to take wickets."

## Attack & win, says Latif

AFP, Karachi

Former captain Rashid Latif Saturday tagged India "favourites" for World Cup semifinal against arch-rivals Pakistan but said an attacking team stood more chance of victory at Mohali.

India, winners of the World Cup in 1983, meet the 1992 champions Pakistan in the semifinal on March 30, a match which has already left millions of fans across the border in a frenzy.

Latif said India on their home ground will be favourites.

"India in India are favourites, there is no doubt," Latif told AFP.

"But as a unit the Pakistan team has been very composed in this World Cup, so the team which attacks more will win."

Pakistan topped their group with five victories and one defeat, while

India lost to South Africa and tied their match against England besides winning the four other matches.

India ended Australia's 12-year domination when they beat the defending champions by five wickets in the quarterfinals on Thursday.

Pakistan overwhelmed the West Indies by 10 wickets in the last eight stage on Wednesday.

Latif, a member of Pakistan team who lost to India in the 1996 World Cup quarterfinals, said losing to their rivals is always painful.

"I was part of that game and I still feel the pain," said Latif of Pakistan's 39-run defeat at Bangalore.

"People have not forgotten that match even after 15 years. Every player wants to be remembered in history and an Indo-Pak encounter is an ideal opportunity to reach stardom in a flash."

Latif hoped current Pakistan coach Waqar Younis gets a chance of revenge

against India.

"No one can understand the agony better than Waqar, and he is lucky to have another chance to erase the bitter memories", said Latif of the former paceman who went for 67 in his 10 overs in that game.

Latif urged the management to include Shoaib Akhtar in the semifinal line-up.

"Akhtar has always been a team man, and his aggression and zeal, while playing against our arch-rivals, could be beneficial, and I feel the management is aware of this," said Latif of the paceman who will retire after the World Cup.

Latif, a former wicket-keeper batsman, said the passion of an India-Pakistan match spurs on the players.

"With the unity amongst the players this team stands a good chance against India. The Akmal brothers, Shahid Afridi, Abdul Razzaq and Younis Khan will be the players to watch."

## Mills out, McKay in

AFP, New Delhi

New Zealand seamer Kyle Mills was ruled out of the World Cup through injury on Saturday, just hours after being heavily fined for an angry bust-up in the quarterfinal win over South Africa.

Paceman Andy McKay has been called up as a replacement, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said.

Mills strained his left quadriceps in the group match against Canada two weeks ago.

McKay, with 19 wickets in 13 one-day internationals, is due to arrive in Sri Lanka on Sunday, two days before New Zealand's semifinal.

Mills and New Zealand skipper Daniel Vettori, as well as South Africa's Faf du Plessis, were all slapped with heavy fines for their confrontation during Friday's match in Dhaka.

The fines followed a stormy clash at the end of the 28th over of the South Africa innings when du Plessis and the Kiwis exchanged angry words following the fall of AB de Villiers.

Mills, who was not part of the playing eleven, was on the field at the time, carrying drinks for his teammates.

## Vettori, Mills & du Plessis fined

AFP, Dhaka

New Zealand skipper Daniel Vettori and paceman Kyle Mills along with South Africa's Faf du Plessis were Saturday slapped with heavy fines for their ugly bust-up during the World Cup quarterfinals.

The fines followed a stormy clash at the end of the 28th over of the South Africa innings on Friday when du Plessis and the Kiwis exchanged angry words following the fall of AB de Villiers.

Mills, who was not part of the playing eleven, was on the field at the time, carrying drinks for his teammates.

Vettori was fined 50 per cent of his match fee for a similar offence and another 40 per cent for bringing the game into disrepute.

Du Plessis was fined 50 per cent of his match fees. The charges were laid by the on-field umpires and the sanctions were imposed by match referee Roshan Mahanama.

Mills pleaded not guilty to the charges and his case was considered in a full hearing by Mahanama who considered video evidence before handing over the verdict. The fast bowler has a right to appeal both findings.

The other two players pleaded guilty to the charges.

## The Yuvraj touch

AFP, New Delhi



A joke is doing the rounds at the World Cup that if India's Yuvraj Singh bats even with a stump, he will return to the dressing-room with at least a half-century under his belt.

The aggressive left-hander has already compiled 341 runs in seven matches with one hundred and four half-centuries at an amazing average of 113.66.

India may have prolific openers in Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag, but Yuvraj has caught the eye with scoring runs in crunch situations as well as taking wickets with his tidy left-arm spin.

He is the tournament's fourth-highest scorer after Tendulkar (379), Sri Lankan Kumar Sangakkara (363) and Sehwag (342) ahead of next week's blockbuster semifinal clash with Pakistan in Mohali.

What has pleased Yuvraj the most in this tournament is that he has managed to perform the role of a finisher remarkably well, like former Australian one-day specialist Michael Bevan.

"Finishing a game gives me a lot of confidence going into the next match. I'm just happy about how I am hitting the ball. My responsibility is to bat till the end whether we are batting first or chasing a target," said Yuvraj.

"I missed quite a bit of cricket over a year and a half due to injuries and now to come back and play my part in victories is very satisfying."

The latest example came during the quarterfinal against defending champions

Australia when he remained unbeaten with 57 to see his team home.

The game looked evenly poised when India were reduced to 187-5 chasing a 261-run target on a slow Ahmedabad track but Yuvraj held his nerve under pressure and added 74 runs with Suresh Raina in a match-winning stand.

When asked if everything he was touching was now turning to gold, Yuvraj said: "I think so. Last year, whatever I was doing was turning into mud."

Yuvraj, who smashed six sixes in an over from England paceman Stuart Broad in a 2007 World Twenty20 in South Africa, has a strike-rate of below 100 in this World Cup but his team are not complaining.

Yuvraj has also solved a major bowling problem for India.

The part-timer's best came when he bagged a maiden five-wicket haul against Ireland in Bangalore after the frontline bowlers struggled to make an impact.

"I am a part-time bowler and when I got those five wickets I was as happy as I was when I scored my first one-day international hundred. I think it's an achievement for a part-timer to get five wickets," he said.

Yuvraj took just two matches to prove he belonged on the big stage, cracking a brisk 84 against an Australian attack comprising Glenn McGrath, Brett Lee and Jason Gillespie in Nairobi in 2000.

He now returns to his home ground in Mohali hoping to put in another impressive all-round show. He has so far scored 8,030 runs in 272 matches with 13 hundreds and taken 105 wickets.

## Smith wishes SA well

AFP, Dhaka



Outgoing one-day captain Graeme Smith, devastated by South Africa's sudden World Cup exit, has predicted the national team will quickly overcome their latest debacle.

The Proteas collapsed from a winning position to hand New Zealand a dramatic 49-run victory in Friday's quarterfinal at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in the Bangladesh capital.

The Black Caps, restricted to 221-8 after taking first strike, bundled out South Africa for 172 after they were sailing merrily at 108-2 by the 24th over.

South Africa, often regarded as the best team never to have won the World Cup, have now lost in three semifinals, two quarterfinals and once in the first round.

But Smith, who will stand down as one-day skipper but remain the leader in Test cricket, was confident the team will taste success again.

"This is an exciting period for South African cricket," he said. "We have the players and the talent. Hopefully in future we will go all the way."

"South Africa deserves to win the World Cup."

Friday's defeat lent credence to the widespread belief that South Africa are cricket's biggest chokers, and Smith was at a loss to pinpoint the reason for the failure.

"It is really hard to describe what happened," said Smith, mystified by a World Cup record which shows South Africa having failed to win any knockout game in the tournament since their 1992 debut.

"Your guess is as good as mine. It's been happening since 1992. We just weren't good enough, but we have to take it forward and not get bogged down."

"There will be a new coach and new captain. We are disappointed but nothing I say is going to change that for fans back home."

Smith said his team threw away a great opportunity. "We had the opportunity to close out the game after we

kept them down to 221 and can only blame ourselves," he said. "We let ourselves down, we let our fans down."

South Africa had topped the tough Group B with five wins from six matches in the league, but fell just when the pressure of a knock-out situation came along.

"I can't fault the way we played in the tournament," added Smith. "We trained hard and gave our best."

"We certainly bowled well in this game, but New Zealand squeezed us when the ball became soft. We needed to show composure at that stage. It is difficult to recover on wickets like this."

Jacob Oram was New Zealand's man of the match with four wickets and two catches, while off-spinner Nathan McCullum sealed the Proteas' fate with three for 24 from 10 overs.

New Zealand's innings had revolved around burly left-hander Jesse Ryder, who finally struck World Cup form with a fluent 83.

Ryder, whose best score in six previous innings in the tournament was 38 against Canada, hit eight boundaries.

Ryder put on 114 for the third wicket with Ross Taylor (43) after New Zealand were reduced to 16-2 by the sixth over.

"One must give credit to New Zealand for the way they played," said Smith. "Ryder set up the 200 which I thought was very gettable. But they stuck to the task in the field."

"They certainly deserved to win."

PROTEAS' WC WOES				
YEAR	VENUE	ROUND	OPPONENTS	LOSING MARGIN
1992	Sydney	semifinal	England	19 runs
1996	Karachi	quarterfinal	West Indies	19 runs
1999	Birmingham	semifinal	Australia	tied (Australia advanced on run-rate)
2003	Durban	group stage	Sri Lanka	tied (SL advanced on D/L method)
2007	Gros Islet	semifinal	Australia	7 wickets

## Ireland to host Pakistan

Cricket

AFP, Belfast

Irish cricket has received another boost with the announcement Ireland will host World Cup semifinalists Pakistan in a two-match one-day international series in May.

Both matches, on May 27 and May 29, will take place at Stormont, Belfast.

The latest addition to Ireland's fixture list comes after officials previously revealed the national side would be facing Sri Lanka in a triangular series also featuring Scotland in July.

Up until the Sri Lanka announce-

ment, Ireland's only major post World Cup fixture was a one-day international against England in Dublin on August 25.

However, Ireland were the outstanding non-Test nation at the World Cup, beating England by three wickets and coming close to also defeating Bangladesh as well as competing strongly against India and the West Indies before failing to make it out of the group phase.

Prior to the win over England, one of Ireland's greatest days as a cricket nation was when they knocked Pakistan out of the 2007 World Cup with a stunning victory on St Patrick's Day, Ireland's national day, in Jamaica.

Ireland coach Phil Simmons, the

former West Indies batsman, welcomed the Pakistan series by saying: "This is what we have been crying out for -- fixtures against the top teams in the world."

"We have shown just how much our cricket has improved, and by playing these type of games, it'll keep growing in the right direction."

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Ijaz Butt said: "The fight the Irish team displayed at the World Cup lit up the event and has added a new flavour to international cricket."

"The Pakistan team's upcoming tour is in line with the ICC (International Cricket Council) and PCB's vision of cricket development and support to associate members."



India cricketer Yuvraj Singh arrives at the team hotel in Mohali yesterday. He will hope to continue his rich vein of form when India take on Pakistan in the blockbuster semifinal clash on March 30.

PHOTO: AFP