

Star SPORT



The Australian cricket team enjoy their first practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The Aussies will play three ODIs here with the first game on Saturday.

Sachin deserved to get Bharat Ratna: Dhoni

World Cup winning India cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni on Wednesday joined the growing calls to award batting ace Sachin Tendulkar the Bharat Ratna, saying no cricketer deserves it more than him. "Yes, 200 per cent, because he is an ideal candidate, he has served the country for 21 years with a few more to come. As a cricketer, you know, if he doesn't get it, then I don't think there's anyone who'll get the Bharat Ratna."



BCB XI v AUSTRALIA

Trio looking to impress



SPORTS REPORTER

A new-look Australia under the leadership of Michael Clarke will play their lone practice match against BCB XI today at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

While the Australian team will try to accustom themselves to the conditions, three national players in Alok Kapali, Rokibul Hasan and the uncapped Shuvogoto Hom will try their best to impress the team think-tank ahead of the first one-day of the three match series.

Rokibul Hasan has been named captain of the BCB XI; a decision which raised many eyebrows.

"I led teams in the premier cricket league and national league. So, I am not surprised by the decision but I am really excited that I'm going to lead a team against a team like Australia," said Rokibul when asked whether he was surprised by the decision to select him as captain for the match.

"I think it's an opportunity for every player to show their class against a team like Australia though it's a practice match only. Our main focus would be to play good cricket in the match to give them an impression about the standard of our cricket," said Rokibul.

"We also want to set the tone for the national team," he added.

The right-hander however was not worried with his personal form and said that he has no particular plans with regards to

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'Happy with Ponting'



SPORTS REPORTER

Shane Watson, as many others across the cricketing spectrum would have wanted to see, is a first-hand witness to the transition of a former captain joining the ranks. It would definitely seem strange to see Ricky Ponting walk behind Michael Clarke and new vice-captain Watson and slightly incredible that an Australian captain has continued to play after resigning from captaincy but that is exactly how it is going to pan out.

Clarke will lead the Australian team against Bangladesh on April 9 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, a mere two weeks after their unceremonious exit from the World Cup.

"I suppose we had no choice on what Ricky's thoughts were and his choice. I think this is a better time than any to start a new leadership group. It's absolutely brilliant that Ricky has decided to continue to play on," said Watson during their first meeting with the press yesterday.

"The immense talent that he's got and everyone has seen and the amazing record that he has



PHOTO: STAR

Australia vice-captain Shane Watson (L) speaks during a press briefing yesterday.

and having his experience in this group is very, very important for us. I think this is a perfect team dynamic to continue as a group," he added.

The 30-year-old Watson, who has been made Clarke's deputy, claimed that this is the beginning of an exciting phase in the country's cricket. "It is disappointing to not get through further than we did in the World Cup. We have to move on from that and we've three games here in Bangladesh

with a new captain and slightly new dynamics. I think it is a really exciting phase, a changing time for Australian cricket," he said.

Coach Tim Nielsen echoed Watson's thoughts on the change of leadership for the Australians, saying that he is happy to see Ponting around, but it would be more important to give the two new men on top of the room to get their ideas off and running.

"We are going through a change in our playing style and personnel. I am really pleased that Ricky has decided to stay around as a player. We have two new leaders; Michael has done the captaincy a little bit before Shane has done. It will be excellent for all of us to have Ricky's experience, cricketing knowledge and competitiveness.

"It is something we need to manage, but we have to give him the opportunity to put forth his opinions. At the same time, we will have to make sure Michael and Shane get to run the side the way they like and take it in the direction they like," said Nielsen, who termed Bangladesh a "stiff opposition" for his charges.

Admittedly, it would be Watson's first tour of Bangladesh but while the buzz is something he is excited about, he pointed out that Clarke's

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Nationwide girls football this year

SPORTS REPORTER

After the successful completion of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup Primary School football tournament last year, the government now plans to hold the Bangamata Fazilatunnesa Mujib Gold Cup Primary School girls football tournament across the country this year.

The U-12 girls' tournament to be organized under the Primary and Mass Education Ministry will be held in five phases union, upazilla, district, divisional and national level as the schools at union level will first compete among them and then a combined Union team will move into the Upazilla level to compete there.

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Akmal dropped



AFP, Lahore

Pakistani selectors on Wednesday dropped faltering wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal from the one-day and Twenty20 squad for this month's tour of the West Indies and rested senior players.

The 29-year-old was criticised for dropping crucial catches during the World Cup, where Pakistan lost in the semifinals to arch-rivals India.

"We have given Kamran Akmal a break because his wicketkeeping was not up to the mark during the World Cup," chief selector Mohsin Khan told AFP.

"We think Kamran needs a rest."

Local media said the wicketkeeper will also lose his Test place to younger brother Adnan Akmal, part of the Test team to New Zealand earlier this year.

Mohammad Salman, 29, will keep wicket in the Twenty20 and one-day matches.

Pakistan will play a Twenty20 international, five one-day games and two Tests on the month-long tour, starting from April 18.

Khan said the tour gives Pakistan an opportunity to test new players.

"We have chosen the team with a plan to try some youngsters who can serve Pakistan in the future," said Khan.

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