

## India-England first Test starts today

AFP, Nottingham

India are determined England captain Alastair Cook remains on the defensive in the first Test at Nottingham's Trent Bridge starting on Wednesday.

Cook, upon whose leadership officials have staked plenty after ditching former star batsman Kevin Pietersen following the 5-0 Ashes thrashing in Australia, has now gone more than a year since making the last of his England record 25 Test hundreds.

And with England recently going down 1-0 to Sri Lanka after a 100-run defeat at Headingley, Cook's tactics have come in for severe criticism with Shane Warne accusing him of being responsible for the "worst day of international captaincy" the Australia great had ever seen during the fourth day in Leeds.

India have made no secret of their intention to target Cook in what will be their first five-Test series -- one in which the Decision Review System will not be in use -- in England for 55 years.

"Everyone goes through that phase where they don't score runs -- but because he has the captaincy as well, that might be troubling him a little more," India batsman Virat Kohli told reporters at Trent Bridge on Monday.

"We would like to keep him under pressure," added the talented 25-year-old, on his first Test tour of England and in whom so many India hopes have been invested following the retirement of all-time great Sachin Tendulkar.



Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim (R) jogs with teammates during a session of the preparatory camp for the West Indies tour at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

# SHAKIB BAN Appeal can be considered 'if attitude changes'

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon has said that allrounder Shakib Al Hasan has a scope to appeal against the BCB's verdict.

When asked as to what may be the possible result of the action he indicated that Shakib's six-month ban from competitive cricket may be reduced if he successfully manages to change his attitude.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Papon said, "If we see that he has indeed changed his attitude in the next month then we may think about reducing his sentence with regards to his six-month ban from competi-

tive cricket."

The BCB's decision to suspend Shakib created a mixed opinion amongst the public. There were several fans who criticised the BCB president for the move and also protested on the streets. Papon however, urged the public to remain patient.

"All I want to tell the public is that we are the last ones who want Shakib to be banned. He is our best player. But his activities have been pulling the team down as a whole and had we allowed this to continue it would destroy the future of the team.

"I urge everybody to be patient. I am confident that we will be able to form a strong team by next year," he said.

With Shakib avoiding the media ever since the sanctions were imposed, it is still

not clear as to what his next move will be.

The only medium of communication that the left-hander used was social media.

He tweeted: "Dear Fans, Ramadan Mubarak! I am truly overwhelmed by all the love and support I have received from you in the past and even more so now. In this moment of truth, please know from the very bottom of my heart that I am who I am because of your undying love and support and the colours of our flag.

"I play every moment keeping this love and emotion with me. My country means more than anything else to me and I intend to fight for my country and my fellow countrymen at every opportunity I get... please keep me in your thoughts and prayers as I always do for you..."

## Shakib punishment just the first step

SAKEB SUBHAN

The country is divided on the Shakib Al Hasan issue. There are some who are deploring the injustice of barring the best player in the land from playing for a long stretch of time. Others are saying, with barely concealed glee, that Shakib deserved the punishment and got what was coming to him. Yes, Shakib has flouted authority and his responsibilities as a role model all too often and he should suffer the consequences, but that a cricketer of his talent and stature has reached this stage is a long-term failure for which the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), and to a lesser extent the cricketing establishment -- former coaches, the media and the general public -- have to accept blame.

That is why the suspension of Shakib was the first, and shorter-term, step in solving the problems of cricket in this country; the BCB president admitted as much during an emotional speech outlining the punishment to be doled out to his most-loved cricketer on Monday. "Our cricketers can't take the entire blame. It's not that they have been doing these things for the last one or two months; they have always been doing this, and we have been ignoring these small issues for a while, because they are loved by the nation," he had said, and added: "There will be a massive change in different places (management level). But today this one issue was so important, so delicate and so touching that we couldn't touch any other topic."

They were not able to touch any other topic on Monday, but it is Wednesday today and there is no better time than the present, when change is in the air. If Shakib has been guilty, then are the people responsible for overlooking Shakib's rude gesture to the audience during Bangladesh's 2011 World Cup humiliation against Bangladesh any less so? Have not those who chose to wait till the end of the

series against India to take action on Shakib for leaving the dressing room and assaulting a spectator contributed to creating this situation? Surely, former coach Shane Jurgensen and Mushfiqur Rahim going on bended knees to the board to reduce Shakib's three-match ban, for a lewd gesture on live television made during an international match in February, because the team needed him is an act as culpable as Shakib's offences.

Papon's press conference on Monday also made obvious that the board were aware that Shakib had assaulted the spectator. Why then was action so long in coming? Indisciplined cricketers are present in every nation and every board has the constitution to deal effectively with them. BCB is no exception, but the difference is that they do not have the personnel to implement those measures, so the situation festers. In that light, Monday should not have been a surprise.

Papon's quotes are very revealing. The board have ignored issues like these because the players are so loved by the nation. This points to a system that panders directly to popular sentiment, which is in turn influenced by the mass media. There is room for improvement across the board, but Papon has to focus on what he can control. The board is not there to respond to media reports; their function is to regulate cricket and cricketers to ensure the long-term good of cricket in the country. It is well past time that those personnel and structures were put in place. To start off, the role of the cricket operations committee has to be looked into, as does the need for a strong CEO.

Shakib has been punished for his wrongs and we can hope that he emerges wiser because of it. His has been a public blood-letting, but there is much more to do -- and arguably more important -- behind the scenes if Papon is to achieve anything resembling long-term benefits.

## FIFA denies leniency claims

ESPFC.COM

FIFA has rejected reports of issuing a directive to referees to issue fewer cards at the 2014 World Cup.

In the wake of Neymar's vertebra injury, it was claimed by media in Germany that FIFA urged referees to be more lenient and only issue yellow and red cards as a last resort.

German tabloid Bild alleged that FIFA was to blame for the Brazil star's injury, as well as Colombia's Juan Camilo Zuniga who committed the challenge.

In a piece headlined "Referee scandal at the World Cup," the German tabloid Bild picked up the story which had been reported on established referee blogs like Collinas Erben and The 3rd Team since the beginning of the 2014 World Cup.

"There is a story today... that there is a secret plan from FIFA telling the referees not to sanction with yellow or red cards in order to have more entertainment or television shares," FIFA's chief spokesman Walter De Gregorio said in quotes reported by Reuters.

"In other words that FIFA is risking and tolerating that players like Neymar and others are injured. This is just unacceptable.

"This goes into the core business -- protecting the main actors, the players, it's the most important thing we have to do at FIFA.

"We have to protect the players. If Neymar isn't playing the semifinal or the final, it's not good for us too."

De Gregorio added, according to German wire dpa: "This report is a declaration of bankruptcy for a journalist."

While the Bild report was without quotes, people like the former FIFA referee Urs Meier and the German referee boss Herbert Fandel have also hinted at the possibility of the existence of a directive in recent interviews.

"Sadly, they avoid the public like the plague. There's a good reason, to not make certain things public. But the lack of transparency only fires up the discussion about the alleged directive," Alex Feuerherdt of Collinas Erben told ESPN FC.

# Spaniards mourn Di Stefano

AFP, Madrid

Spaniards flocked to pay homage on Tuesday to Real Madrid legend Alfredo Di Stefano, one of the world's greatest footballers who inspired millions of fans during the isolation of the Franco era.

Hundreds of people queued around the block by the towering walls of the club's Santiago Bernabeu stadium where Di Stefano's body lay in state, a day after he died following a heart attack, aged 88.

Inside, mourners bowed and crossed themselves as they passed in front of his coffin, which was draped with a white Real Madrid flag.

The numerous silver trophies he helped the team win were lined up nearby.

Among Tuesday's mourners, Real Madrid's captain Iker Casillas embraced members of the former player's family, who sat dressed in black in front of big garlands of white flowers.

Known as "the Blonde Arrow", Di Stefano was a hero of the all-conquering Real sides of the 1950s and 1960s.

Following tributes from sportsmen around the world as well as the Spanish government and royal family, the press called him a "genius", a "legend" and a "complete player".

Fans fondly remembered the man who transformed their club into one of the most successful sides in the world.

"I feel cut up. He was the greatest," said Javier Lopez, 28, waiting in the queue at the stadium in a white Real Madrid shirt, with a tattoo of the club's shield on his arm.

"If it wasn't for this man, Real Madrid would be nothing. He defended, he directed play and he scored goals."

Di Stefano had gone into a coma after suffering a heart attack on Saturday. He died on Monday at 5:15 pm (15:15 GMT) at the Gregorio Maranon hospital, Real Madrid said in a statement.

"He has left us, but his legend will live forever," Real Madrid chairman Florentino Perez told a news conference on Monday evening.

On Tuesday, leading Madrid sports daily Marca left its cover all white except for a small black-and-white photograph showing the back of a departing Di Stefano wearing



PHOTO: REUTERS

**A man walks past a poster of former Real Madrid legend Alfredo Di Stefano at Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Tuesday.**

his number 9 shirt, his hand waving.

It urged Real Madrid to withdraw the number 9 shirt in Di Stefano's "eternal honour".

The director of rival sports daily AS, Alfredo Relano, said Di Stefano's exploits on foreign football fields gave Spain pride in the 1950s, during the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco.

"In the poor, isolated, aged and introverted Spain of the second half of the 1950s, there was something to hang on to: Real Madrid, the European Cup, those remote games in Belgrade, Vienna, Brussels, Glasgow," Relano said.

"The old, strong and prestigious Europe only bowed to us if Real Madrid was there. And Di Stefano."

Leading daily El Pais declared on its front-page: "The genius of football dies" above a black-and-white picture of Di Stefano, leaping into the air with his arms raised after scoring in the semifinals of the 1958 European Cup.

"Alfredo Di Stefano was a timeless player for all times, for eternity," the paper said.

Queueing patiently outside the Bernabeu, 86-year-old Jose Luis Saura said he worked at the club for decades and remembered Di Stefano celebrating with staff after winning the Spanish league in 1954 in his first season with Real.

"I got on well with him, as a player and as a person," Saura told AFP. "He was friendly to everyone."

## Zia slips to 2nd

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman slipped to second position in the XXXIV Open International Villa De Benasque as he drew against Spain's Bellosta Lopez Pablo in the fourth round in Benasque, Spain on Monday.

Zia has now 3.5 points along with 18 more players in second position, said a Bangladesh Chess Federation press release yesterday.

### NATIONAL JUNIOR CHESS

FIDE Master Mohammad Fahad Rahman maintained his solo lead in the Union Insurance 34th National Junior (Under-20 years) Chess Championship at the close of the eighth round at the Bangladesh Chess Federation Hall Room yesterday.

Fahad beat Swarnavo Chowdhury to earn maximum eight points from eight matches, followed by holder Ikramul Haque Siam with seven points.

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