



ICC WORLD TWENTY20



NAGPUR: New Zealand's Ish Sodhi (down) celebrates the wicket of India's Ravindra Jadeja during the ICC World Twenty20 2016 cricket match at the Vidarbha Cricket Association stadium in Nagpur yesterday. — AP

WEST INDIES' 'GAYLE STORM' SET TO HIT ENGLAND

MUMBAI: Controversial batsman Chris Gayle will be looking to ensure the West Indies' troubled build-up to the World Twenty20 becomes a distant memory when they open their campaign against England in Mumbai yesterday. The Windies are out to prove they are still a force in the shortest form of the game despite their declining Test status, while England want to atone for a humiliating early exit from last year's 50-over World Cup.

A pay dispute cast doubt over the West Indies' appearance in India and while the row was resolved at the 11th hour, relations between players and the country's cricket board remain tense. Their preparations have also been hit by the withdrawal of all-rounder Kieron Pollard and off-spinner Sunil Narine, who is T20 cricket's top-performing

bowler and has thrived in the Indian Premier League (IPL). But in the enigmatic Gayle they possess a batsman capable of destroying whatever bowling attack he faces and single-handedly winning any match, providing he stays clear of off-field controversy.

The Jamaican, nicknamed "Gayle Storm", faced allegations of sexism after he asked an Australian TV presenter for a date live on air in January during the Big Bash League. He also lit up the tournament for the right reasons, hitting a 12-ball half-century. Gayle, 36, holds the record for the highest ever score in T20s, 175 off 66 balls, and hit the format's first international century during the inaugural World T20 in 2007. "To me he is the best T20 batsman, the most destructive one in this game so he knows his game inside-out," West Indies captain Darren

Sammy said of the left-handed batsman last week. But the second-ranked Windies, who are looking to add to their 2012 World T20 title, face a tough prospect at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium in the shape of a new, attack-minded England side. Eoin Morgan's team have turned their fortunes around since they were dumped out of the 2015 World Cup by Bangladesh, adopting a more aggressive attitude which has seen them up their run rate. In Morgan, all-rounder Ben Stokes, opener Jason Roy and classy right-hander Joe Root, England have strength in depth but they will miss injured fast bowler Steven Finn. England, who won the 2010 World T20, enjoyed a six-wicket win over New Zealand in a warm-up game on Saturday. "The confidence we take from that is massive," said Roy. —AFP



MUMBAI: West Indies' Chris Gayle warms up during a practice session ahead of their ICC Twenty20 2016 Cricket World Cup match in Mumbai. —AP

BUOYANT BANGLADESH BID TO TURN SCREW ON PAKISTAN

KOLKATA: Bangladesh will look to compound the misery of beleaguered Pakistan today in their opening group match of the World Twenty20, fresh from humbling their arch-rivals in the Asia Cup. Despite their recent improvements in 50-over cricket, Bangladesh have a rotten record in the World T20 and have never beaten Pakistan in the premier tournament of cricket's shortest format. But they will fancy their chances like never before at Kolkata's Eden Gardens against a team who are on a miserable run and whose preparations have been hit by their late arrival in India in a row over security.

Bangladesh cruised through last week's preliminary round and know that a victory over Pakistan will set them up nicely if they are to make the semi-finals for the first time. Star batsman Tamim Iqbal is in the form of his life, scoring Bangladesh's first ever international T20 century in Sunday's victory over Oman after scores of 83 and 47 in the first two games. Fans in the cricket-mad nation held impromptu street parties earlier

this month when Bangladesh clinched a five-wicket win over Pakistan in Dhaka, sealing a place in the final of the Asia Cup which they lost to India.

Bangladesh was part of Pakistan before a brutal 1971 war of separation, and matches between the sides therefore always have an extra edge to them. Mashrafe Mortaza's side can expect strong support from their fellow Bengalis in what is the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal. But Afridi has been making his own overtures towards the locals by claiming his team has received more "love" from fans in India than back home, comments that incensed former Pakistan skipper Javed Miandad.

Backing for Boom Boom

Pakistan coach Waqar Younis said that the team's troubled build-up to the tournament did not mean they should be written off. "We're the kind of team that once we get the momentum going, we can surprise people," Younis said in a pre-match press conference. The former



KOLKATA: Pakistan's Mohammad Hafeez takes part in a training session ahead of their first WT20 match against Bangladesh at Eden Gardens in Kolkata. —AFP

bowling great also backed the big-hitting Afridi to rediscover the kind of form with the bat that earned him the nickname Boom Boom. "It takes less than a minute to lose form and to get it back as well.

T20 cricket is like that, we're hoping that he's one innings away from getting back his old form," said Younis. Bangladesh's build-up has been serene

in comparison to the dramas in Pakistan's camp. But after seeing off Oman, the Netherlands and Ireland in the preliminaries, Mortaza knows the hard work now begins in a group that includes India, Australia and New Zealand. "In that group you can't make any mistakes, you have to be up to the mark everywhere," said the veteran bowler. — AFP

PAKISTAN'S COACH BACKS AFRIDI ON INDIA LOVE ROW

KOLKATA: Coach Waqar Younis stood by his skipper Shahid Afridi yesterday over his declaration that Pakistan's cricketers receive more love in India than back home, saying critics should stop stirring up trouble. Former Pakistani captain Javed Miandad has been at the forefront of the outrage over Afridi's comments at the weekend shortly after the team's delayed arrival for the World Twenty20 being played in India.

But Younis said Afridi's critics were making something out of nothing and he should not be criticized for wearing his heart on his sleeve. "This is something he felt. It's his emotions," the former fast bowler told reporters in Kolkata on the eve of Pakistan's opening match in the World Twenty20 against Bangladesh. "I believe we should leave it at that rather than creating a controversy out of nothing. We are here to play cricket, to beat teams," he said ahead of Pakistan's opening rubber against Bangladesh. "My message to the boys is just leave everything behind. This is about playing some quality cricket and playing for the nation."

In a press conference in Kolkata on Sunday, Afridi said that Pakistan had always enjoyed playing in India and "have been loved by Indians crowds more than crowds back home in Pakistan." The comments raised eyebrows as Pakistan's build-up to the tournament has been embroiled in controversy over whether they would be allowed to travel to arch-rivals India. They agreed to take the trip only after negotiations with India over security arrangements and the shifting of their match against the hosts to Kolkata from Dharamsala.

Diplomatic tensions between the two countries have meant that the two teams have not played any bilateral series for more than three years, and their rivalry is restricted to multi-national tournaments such as the World T20. India's batting great Sunil Gavaskar on Tuesday said Afridi's comments would help dull the hostility of the usually raucous home crowd at Eden Gardens, the venue for the much-awaited India-Pakistan tie on March 19. "Emotions run high whenever India play Pakistan," Gavaskar told the NDTV news network. "He (Afridi) said nice things-maybe you need it, maybe you don't. It will help as far as the crowd is concerned. It has ensured the crowds won't be overly hostile to him and the Pakistani team." —AFP



Pakistan's Captain Shahid Afridi

ENGLAND'S MORGAN FEELS FOR SUSPENDED NARINE

MUMBAI: England skipper Eoin Morgan voiced sympathy yesterday for West Indies spinner Sunil Narine after the number one-ranked bowler pulled out of the World Twenty20 following his suspension for a suspect action. The West Indies' hopes of winning the tournament were dealt a severe blow last month when Narine withdrew from the squad, saying he was not ready to return to the international fold after work to remodel his action. But while Narine's absence from the World T20 is something of a relief for Morgan's team who play the West Indies in their opening match on Wednesday, the England

skipper said he felt for his former teammate.

"I think it's a very touchy subject. I know Sunil. I'm not pleased to see what he's going through. I wouldn't wish it upon anybody," Morgan told reporters in Mumbai. The 27-year-old Trinidadian was suspended in November after being cited during a match in Sri Lanka for a suspect bowling action, the second time he has been reported for an illegal action.

Morgan and Narine have played together for the Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League (IPL), a competition in which the spinner has regu-

larly bamboozled opponents. "He's bowled the same way since he was probably 15 or 16 years old. The fact he's got to this stage in his career and it's only being looked at now is probably disappointing from his point of view," said Morgan. "But there are set rules in place that are being applied."

West Indies skipper Darren Sammy acknowledged in his pre-match press conference that Narine would be a big loss, along with allrounder Kieron Pollard who also pulled out of the squad after an injury setback. "It's always really difficult to replace someone like Narine or Pollard who have so much experience

here," said Sammy. "Yes we'll miss them, but it creates another opportunity for somebody else to step up to the plate."

Despite not playing since November, Narine is still way ahead of his nearest rivals in the T20 international rankings. Narine was a key member of the West Indies team which won the 2012 World T20, taking three wickets for just nine runs in the final against Sri Lanka in Colombo. He is one of a number of leading bowlers who are absent from this year's tournament, including Pakistan's former world number one Saeed Ajmal who has struggled with a remodeled action after being reported in 2014. — AFP