



**MOHALI:** Pakistan's captain Shahid Afridi bats during a training session at the Punjab Cricket Stadium Association Stadium. — AFP

## PAKISTAN TO GIVE THEIR ALL FOR AFRIDI AT WT20

**MOHALI:** Veteran batsman Shoaib Malik vowed yesterday that Pakistan would go all out for a surprise victory against Australia at cricket's World Twenty20 to give their "big brother" Shahid Afridi a winning send-off. The big-hitting Afridi, who no longer plays Test and one-day cricket, has been hinting heavily that he will retire after the ongoing tournament after being heavily criticised for Pakistan's disappointing showing.

Pakistan have lost two of their three group matches and another defeat against Australia in Mohali on Friday will snuff out any lingering hopes of a second World T20 title. "This is going to be Afridi's last World Cup. I respect him a lot, he is like an elder brother to me," Malik said at the pre-match press conference.

"Nobody will be happier than me if we can win this World Cup for Afridi. "Every player is trying to give their 100 percent. Winning or losing is not in our hands, but each one of us is taking

responsibility and trying to give our best," he said.

### 'Boom Boom'

A veteran of 97 T20 internationals, Afridi has scored 1,391 runs while taking 97 wickets. While his batting pyrotechnics once earned him the nickname "Boom Boom", Afridi has endured a torrid time at the crease in the last couple of years, prompting critics to question his match-winning abilities. In the ongoing WT20, Afridi hit a match-winning 19-ball 49 and also took two key wickets in the opening group match against lowly Bangladesh.

But he made just eight and 19 in the defeats against India and New Zealand and drew widespread criticism for some of his team selections. A dejected Afridi admitted after the game against the Black Caps that he would call time on his career soon. "In every game, we're making mistakes and it's not good for us.

Maybe the next game (against Australia) will be the last one of my career," the flamboyant all-rounder said. "For now we have to forget this game and focus on Australia."

Malik, 34, also stressed yesterday the team was looking at plugging the loopholes against Australia, who have one win and a loss from two outings so far. "Our first goal is to win tomorrow. We missed out on scoring singles in our last game. Nobody is perfect. We are trying to improve our skills."

A win is the least that Pakistan require to keep their slim chances of advancing in the tournament alive. Malik also sought to dismiss talk of friction within the Pakistani dressing room, blaming the team's poor performance for the speculation. "Nobody talked about rift in our camp in 2009 when we won the World T20. Six of us were not talking to each other, we still won. "When you lose games, all the talk starts." — AFP

## GAYLE READY TO OPEN AGAINST PROTEAS AS WINDIES EYE SEMIS

**NAGPUR:** Chris Gayle is set to return to the top of the batting order as the West Indies seek to clinch a World Twenty20 semi-finals spot today against a South African side who can ill afford to lose. The Windies big-hitting opener tweaked a hamstring while fielding against Sri Lanka on Sunday night and was dropped down to number six, much to the disappointment of the Bangalore crowd.

Gayle's services weren't required as replacement opener Andre Fletcher hit 84 not out to power the Windies to a seven-wicket victory. It was the West Indies' second win of the tournament after a Gayle century, which included 11 sixes, inspired them to a six-wicket triumph over England in their opening match.

They sit top of Group One on four points and a defeat of South Africa in Nagpur would see them become the second team to qualify for the last four, after New Zealand. Gayle and Fletcher are expected to open the Windies' with Johnson Charles moving down. "I've opened the batting with him on many occasions so I know what sort of a player he is, he is very dangerous and he's capable of getting big scores as well," Gayle said of Fletcher.

South Africa desperately need a victory after picking up one win from two games as they bid to show the world that they have what it takes to clinch a first international trophy. They are yet to get up to full-steam after a stunning opening defeat to a record 230-run chase by England was followed by a win over minnows Afghanistan, leaving them precariously placed in third spot, two points behind England. If South Africa fail to beat the Windies then England would be in pole position to qualify from the group going into the last round-robin game. The Proteas' preparations were dealt a blow after all-rounder JP Duminy was ruled out of the match with a hamstring injury he picked up in the 37-run win over Afghanistan on Sunday.

The right-arm spinner, who bats left-handed, has been in fine form, making scores of 54 and 29 without being dismissed. "JP is a big player for us. Not having him is a big blow and does upset the balance of the side," South Africa coach Russell Domingo said in quotes carried by Cricinfo. — AFP



**Chris Gayle**

## T20'S UNSTOPPABLE RISE FUELS FEARS FOR TESTS

**MUMBAI:** As he joined the sell-out crowd for a Twenty20 match at the home of Indian cricket, Kaushal Loday said he wouldn't have come if the game was a Test. "I'm not interested in five-day cricket, it's too long," said Loday outside Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium, ahead of a showdown between India and South Africa. "T20's more entertaining. We like seeing sixes and fours."

The success of the ongoing World Twenty20 should be cause for celebration for administrators, with millions of TV viewers and packed houses enjoying batting pyrotechnics from the likes of Chris Gayle and AB de Villiers. But while T20 cricket was conceived as a way for cash-strapped boards to make some money on the side, its growth in the last decade

has led to fears it might devour the longest form of the game. The official line is that T20 can spread the game and encourage newcomers to the five-day Test matches, or 50-over one-day internationals. "We want to make sure all three formats of the game—Test, ODI and T20—are going to be able to co-exist well into the future and not only survive but flourish," said International Cricket Council chief executive David Richardson. But with the proliferation of domestic T20 tournaments giving players the chance to earn more in six weeks than they get from their boards in a year, some stars are turning their back on Tests. And with Tests often attracting paltry crowds, some players worry T20 cricket is endangering the format it was meant to underwrite.

### Big bucks

"I think it does threaten the traditional game," said England skipper Eoin Morgan, before admitting he didn't have any solution to the problem. This year's World T20 in India is the third on the sub-continent in a little over three years. In contrast the ODI World Cup is every four years. Players such as the West Indies' Gayle have stopped playing Tests and instead earn big bucks in tournaments such as Australia's Big Bash or the Bangladesh Premier League. Gayle has admitted he would "not be so sad" if Test cricket died a death, while de Villiers—South Africa's Test captain and still only 32—recently acknowledged rumors he was thinking of quitting international cricket in favor of Twenty20 tournaments.

"There are big tournaments going on around the world and some of them you can't ignore because financially they make a huge difference in our lives," he said. The biggest is the Indian Premier League (IPL) where an evening's entertainment features cheerleaders, fireworks and cameos by Bollywood stars.

Speaking outside the Wankhede, home to India's board and the Mumbai Indians IPL side, Indian fan Rohit Bhosale said he only had time for T20s. "The whole crowd seems to be enjoying T20 cricket more than the one-day or Test cricket," he said. India's board was initially cool on T20 cricket and only agreed to send a team to the first World T20 in South Africa in 2007 to secure the right to host the 2011 ODI World Cup. — AFP