Anju Bobby George asks Indian athletes to compete more in global events

NEW DELHI, JUN 30 /--/ Legendary long jumper Anju Bobby George says that the Indian athletes will continue to languish at the global stage until they aspire to compete regularly at top level international events. Anju, the only Indian athlete to have won a medal in the World Championships with a long jump bronze in 2003, said that most of the Indian athletes pay emphasis on training rather than going out and competing at the international events. She also feels that the top Indian athletes should now have managers of their own and embrace professionalism just like the Americans and the Europeans have been doing. "Infrastructure is much better now than in our time, but the main thing is that we are stuck at where we are because our athletes are still believing only in training, we are not going out for international competitions," Anju told PTI in an interview. "Actually, we are doing only the training part which is the 50 per cent part. But peaking in competitions and peaking in high level competitions through Grand Prix and

Diamond League events is not happening in India," she said. Explaining further how an Indian athlete should go about if he or she wants success at the global stage, Anju said, "We are still believing that we can train hard in the country and go for World Championships or Olympics. That is not the correct way, that is not going to give you a medial in the Olympics or World Championships. "That is not the way how the Americans or the Europeans are doing. You need to take part in other top level international competitions. I was doing in such a way (like the Americans or the Europeans were doing), that was why I got success at that level," she added. Asked who will sanction the funds for taking part in these top-level international events, she said, "Sanctioning money is the government's job but it is also about athletes acting like a professionals. "You are a professional athlete and your manager or coach should take care of everything...your travel, your training, your schedule, etc. All these you have to do, it is all about bringing professionalism in yourself. It is not the federation's job. The Americans and the Europeans, they are professional athletes and they are going all by their own. "This is to be done individually. If you are in top 10 or top 20, you will get entry in these big international events, including in the Diamond League series. You have to apply for these events and if you are among the top bracket, you will get invited," she added. Anju also stressed upon the need to groom athletes at the junior level to produce top performers at the senior level later on. "Actually our juniors are doing well, we have a junior world record holder in javelin (Neeraj Chopra). But there is a gap between the juniors and the seniors. We need to bridge this gap and we have to focus more on youth. That is what the AFI is doing now," she said. She lamented about the lack of interest by state governments to host National Championships which led to athletes having to compete in adverse weather conditions many a times. Many athletes and coaches have expressed concern at the recent Federation Cup being held under hot conditions at the NIS Patiala. "No state is ready to host championships, it's very expensive. The states do not want to hold these events and it will have to be staged somewhere. So, it is being held in this kind of weather. During this time, South India is better suited but no south Indian states was ready to host these events." Anju has recently decided to approach the International Olympic Committee to investigate into the results of 2004 Olympics after all the podium finishers -- Russians Tatyana Lebedeva, Irina Simagina and Tatyana Kotova -- failed drugs tests in other competitions. Anju had finished fifth with an effort of 6.83m. Anju Bobby George is a very experienced player, coach and administrator. The government of India and the state governments must give quotas, reservation and financial support to players as they give ... Read More Asked about any update on her efforts together with Australia's Bronwyn Thompson and Britain's Jade Johnson who had finished fourth and sixth respectively, she said, "We are still preparing the document, we have to collect a lot of documents. It is not easy. "We cannot give a vague statement, we have to give a strong case, solid evidence. But things are happening. The AFI is willing to support me and government is also supporting. It is the case of a medal for the country."

Cricket Australia braces for turmoil as pay dispute rages on; Ashes series under threat

SYDNEY, JUN 29 /--/ Cricket Australia and the country`s players looked set to miss a deadline to resolve a pay dispute on Friday, potentially leaving players unemployed and threatening fixtures including this year`s Ashes series.

The current Memorandum of Understanding between CA and the Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA) expires at midnight (1400 GMT) with hopes of a late breakthrough fading fast. The warring parties have failed to come to an agreement over revenue-sharing, and almost 230 players will be out of contract and will not be paid a retainer until a new MoU is agreed. Players who are on multi-year contracts that go beyond June 30 will continue to be paid, and will be required to play and train as before. The Australia A tour to South Africa in July is the first in the firing line, with its fate unknown if a new accord is not struck. Australia`s Test tour to Bangladesh in August and September and the lucrative one-day international series in India in September are also at risk, along with the showpiece home Ashes Test series against England later this year. The women`s team are currently competing in the World Cup in the United Kingdom. They have a special contract that will run until the tournament is complete. Players are due to assemble in Brisbane for training on Monday ahead of the scheduled Australia A tour of South Africa. The first tour match is supposed to start on July 12. Reports said that CA could hand out-of-contract stars like Glenn Maxwell and Usman Khawaja tour contracts that would ensure their participation in the series, although there is also the possibility of a boycott if no agreement is reached. The ACA board and executive are set to hold a meeting in Sydney on Sunday where they will consider the players` response should the agreement lapse and the bulk of contracted cricketers become unemployed.

CA want to modify the current pay model whereby players receive a share (around 25 percent) of agreed cricket-related gross revenue, and replace it with a revised offer to divide a portion of surpluses among all players as well as deliver pay rises for men`s and women`s international and domestic cricketers. The updated offer, made last Friday, was rejected by the ACA which remains staunchly opposed to any move away from a revenue-sharing model. The players` union released its own proposal last March under which the definition of revenue is broadened and players receive a smaller (22.5 percent) share. That was rejected by CA, which said it retained the "inflexible" income-based revenue model to distribute payments. Since then, negotiations have remained at a virtual standstill.

Bengaluru FC retain Chhetri, Udanta

BENGALURU, JUN 30 /--/ Bengaluru FC have retained skipper Sunil Chhetri and Udanta Singh for the next three years till the end of 2019-20 season of the Indian Super League. With the signings, Bengaluru FC have ticked off the ISL's rule of a maximum of two retentions for players over 21 years, the club announced on Friday. "We are thrilled at being able to retain the present and the future of Indian football in Sunil and Udanta. The two of them have been immense for Bengaluru FC and will be vital cogs in our wheel as we take on the challenge of rebuilding the club for what will be a tough season ahead," said club CEO, Parth Jindal. Chhetri, 32, has been with Bengaluru for four seasons, finishing top scorer for the Blues every year. Udanta, meanwhile, joined Bengaluru in the 2014-15 season and has only grown from strength to strength. The 21-year-old from Manipur capped off a fantastic season under Albert Roca last year where he played a key role in the club's Federation Cup triumph. Udanta was also named Players' Player and Fans' Player of the Season at the club's annual awards night earlier this month. "I've always been vocal about how Bengaluru FC is a club that is always close to my heart and I couldn't be happier to commit three years to the blue shirt of BFC. The Bengaluru FC fans have always shown me so much of love and I am glad at the prospect of playing in front of them yet again. "With Bengaluru in the ISL, these are exciting times at the club and I'm sure we will build the best possible squad for the season," said Chhetri, who with 54 goals is also the top scorer for the national team. Udanta also expressed happiness at extending his stay with Bengaluru. (PTI)

Venus Williams allegedly 'at fault' in fatal car crash

MIAMI, JUN 30 /--/ Tennis star Venus Williams was "at fault" in a Florida traffic accident that resulted in the death of a 78-year-old man, police said in a report obtained by AFP. Williams, 37, slowed in the middle of an intersection when her vehicle was hit by a car driven by the man's 68-year-old wife, the report said. The accident occurred on June 9 in Palm Beach Gardens, a small city north of Miami. The driver's husband suffered a head injury and died two weeks later at the hospital. The winner of seven Grand Slam championships was not using her phone and had not taken drugs or alcohol at the time of the crash, police said. The driver of the other vehicle told police she was approaching an intersection going westbound when Williams' northbound utility vehicle suddenly cut across into the intersection, leaving no time to stop before her car hit Williams's vehicle.

We are still far away from China, says Gopichand

NEW DELHI, JUN 30 /--/ Chief national coach Pullela Gopichand today made it clear that India is still far away from being a dominant force such as China and said an overhaul of domestic structure and administration will be needed to become a badminton superpower.

"I think we are still far away from China. I don't think it is a fair comparison. We have done well but I would want them to do well in World Championships, Olympics and All England, playing consistently and only then we can say those things," Gopichand told PTI. "What we need to do is, when every country does well, it has its athletics going up and together they should also have the coaches and support staff going up, and also government structure and policy going up. "Here, by just our sheer push of energy we have our players going up there but our coaches, support staff, managers they are not of the same level," said the 2001 All England champion. Indian shuttlers, specially the men's brigade led by Kidambi Srikanth, have been in rampaging form as they scooped up four Super Series titles out of six till now. While P V Sindhu clinched the India Open, Praneeth lay claim to his maiden Super Series title at Singapore before Srikanth won back-to-back titles at Indonesia and Australia in the last two weeks. Gopichand, who took over the reigns of Indian badminton in 2006, was also critical of the level of domestic tournaments and administration. "Our tournaments and administration is not world class. We still have domestic tournaments which were built in 1991. So for 25 years we have same domestic structure, same nationals, same major ranking, same thinking," he said. "When we were state level we were producing the same quality coaches, today even though we are now world class, we are producing same quality." Gopichand, who produced two Olympic medallist in Saina Nehwal (London Games bronze) and P V Sindhu (Rio Games silver), hailed the government for support but said there is a need to plan things better. "Our structure is not sustainable. We have got a lot of support from government and sports authority of India but organisationally we haven't grown enough to support the system," he said. "We haven't done our planning and restructuring, our thinking is not still world class, our thinking doesn't even know what is world class. It is time to address those issues," said the 43-year-old. (PTI)

Solomon Mire celebrates his maiden ODI century, Sri Lanka v Zimbabwe, 1st ODI, Galle,

'Fantastic' Rabada excites Richards

LONDON, JUNE 30 /--/ South Africa great Barry Richards believes the rise of Kagiso Rabada has "lessened the pain" of Dale Steyn's absence ahead of a Test series in England. Steyn, perhaps the best fast bowler of his generation, has been ruled out of the four-Test campaign with a longstanding shoulder problem that has sidelined him since the end of last year. But Rabada has helped fill the gap, the 22-year-old quick taking 71 wickets in 17 Tests at an impressively low average of 23.69 since making his debut against India at Mohali in November 2015.

"I think a lot of people were really wobbly about Steyn and the injuries he's had, the age group, he's in," said Richards, the outstanding opening batsman of the early 1970s, in London on Thursday. "Then Rabada popped out of the woodwork and he's been absolutely fantastic. He bowls at a good pace, nice, easy action. If conditions are right, he'll swing it way which is a real asset for a fast bowler," added Richards, speaking at an event staged by Test series sponsors Investec. "From a South African point of view, he's been fantastic for us and really lessened the pain of Dale Steyn not being in the set-up. "But I think our fast-bowling stocks are pretty good. (Chris) Morris as an all-rounder, and then (Morne) Morkel – he always looks like he should do well but he always bowls that yard too short for me, so even when his good ball beats the bat it goes over the stumps." Renowned swing bowler Vernon Philander missed the Proteas' three-day warm-up match against the second-string England Lions that started Thursday with an ankle injury suffered while playing for English county side Sussex a fortnight ago and Richards said: "Vernon is a worry for us for this coming series because he's been in and out of injury. "He's fantastic when he's on song but he needs need to keep his pace above 128 kph (79.5 mph). If his pace falls below that, he doesn't become as effective because it doesn't nip as quick you can adjust. But it's hard to bowl at 128 and above for 20 overs a day. "If there's a little bit in the wicket, he's a major factor." South Africa could give a debut in next week's first Test at Lord's to 33-year-old opener Heino Kuhn, who scored a double century and a century for South Africa A against Hampshire and the England Lions respectively on their recent tour of England. The Proteas have struggled to find an opening partner for Dean Elgar since Graeme Smith's retirement but hopes are high that Kuhn could help fill the void left by the former captain. "He's been around the traps for 12, 13 years now, been a big push for him to be included," said Richards, whose career was limited to four Tests, in which he scored two hundreds and averaged over 72, by South Africa's apartheid-enforced isolation.

Bishen Singh Bedi feels 'sorry' for Anil Kumble, slams BCCI for Jumbo's acrimonious exit

HYDERABAD, JUNE 30 /--/ Former captain Bishen Singh Bedi on Thursday said he felt "sorry" for Anil Kumble for having to quit as India head coach due to differences with skipper Virat Kohli, and slammed the BCCI for allowing this to happen. Bedi found fault with BCCI officials for allowing such a situation to develop in which the coach had to step down.

"I feel it was most avoidable situation. It is not between who is boss on the field and who is boss off the field. They both serve in the game in their own capacity. The need to agree to disagree is seldom followed. We are all grown up adults and we can have a difference of opinion. But we cannot have different path," Bedi told reporters here on the sidelines of an event. "You have allowed this to develop in the first place. Who allowed this? They (the BCCI) allowed. They are disqualified people, disqualified as far as Lodha panel is concerned, these BCCI officials," he said. Hailing Kumble as one of the finest cricketing brains in the country, Bedi said he felt sorry for him. "In this particular case, I feel sorry for Kumble. He is not given his fair due. If this can happen to Kumble, with the performance that he has had as a coach, can you imagine what is in store for who is stepping into his shoes?" he asked. When told about Sourav Ganguly's remarks that the episode was badly handled, Bedi said, "By whom? They were as much party to it. You cannot get away. You cannot wash your hands off from this particular ugly situation. "Who has handled it badly? What message are you trying to convey? Who is it who has handled it badly? That is important," he said. Asked about reports that Kumble and Kohli were not on talking terms for six months, Bedi said it was only a rumour. "That is only a rumour. How can you survive six months without talking to each other? Considering the success story of the last one of year of the Indian team, you cannot do away with the contribution of Kumble. "He is to my mind, most intelligent cricket analyst in the country. He is not a qualified coach. But, he knows what the game is all about," he said. Bedi also discounted the committee formed by the BCCI to look into the Lodha panel's recommendations.

Ankit Bawne says India A selection a step forward in right direction

MUMBAI, JUNE 30 /--/ Young Maharashtra batsman Ankit Bawne considers his selection in the India 'A' squad to tour South Africa for two four-day games as an opportunity which can eventually open the doors for the senior side.

It will be Ankit's first overseas India 'A' tour, having played for the side against Australia at the Brabourne stadium here in February. He had scored 25 in that match. "I see this tour as an opportunity to perform well, which can eventually open the doors for the India team," Ankit told PTI. "I am not taking any pressure having (enough) experience of playing domestic cricket. I will start my preparations considering the nature of pitches in South Africa, which are usually pacer-friendly," the right-handed batsman added. Ankit, who made his debut for Maharashtra in 2007, has so far amassed 4,688 runs in 69 first-class matches with 258 not out as his highest score. He, along with his Maharashtra teammate Swapnil Gugale, broke a 70-year-old partnership record for all wickets in the Ranji Trophy championship when they had stitched a massive, unfinished stand of 594 for Maharashtra against Delhi in a Group B match at the Wankhede Stadium here in October last year.

Indian women's hockey team leaves for HWL Semis

NEW DELHI, JUN 30 /--/ With their eyes set on a berth for the 2018 World Cup, the Indian women's team will leave tomorrow for the Hockey World League Semi-Final in Johannesburg, starting July 8. The 18-member Indian team led by striker Rani has been training here for the last six days before leaving for the World Cup Qualifier. "We played a couple of matches over the past one week against U-18 Boys. The whole idea of playing these matches was to see how the team copes with handling speed considering the boys play faster hockey. The physical aspect too was put to test," stated chief coach Sjoerd Marijne prior to their departure from here. Earlier this month, the squad trained at the SAI Centre at Shillaroo to get acclimatised to the testing conditions in Johannesburg.

Joe Root says ready to lead after bedding in under Alastair Cook

LONDON, JUNE 30 /--/ Joe Root does not admit to being a natural leader but England`s new test captain says the time spent as Alastair Cook`s understudy has groomed him for the responsibility. The elegant right-hander has established himself as one of the premier batsmen of his generation across all formats, putting him among such luminaries as India`s Virat Kohli and New Zealander Kane Williamson. The 26-year-old can also expect to take on the illustrious duo in tactical battles after joining them as a test captain of their respective national sides, making his debut in the role in England`s home series against South Africa starting on July 6. "I wouldn`t say I`m necessarily a natural leader but becoming more senior within the side and being vice-captain over the last few years will definitely help in that respect," England`s batting mainstay told Sky Sports.

While he can always draw on Cook`s experience after spending four years in an England side led by the Essex opener, Root is also keen to possess the grit of Nasser Hussain and the positive leadership of Michael Vaughan. "A balance of those two and someone like Mike Brearley... the way he was able to manage so many big characters, all in one dressing room, and get the best out of them, turn a series around against Australia (in 1981)..." he said. As a leader, the Yorkshireman said, he would be thorough in preparation but would always trust his instinct.

"I want it to be quite natural, not have all these grand plans in place and then something change or not go to plan and then feel like you`re back to square one. I want to be quite instinctive with it from the start. "I think (being instinctive) has been one of my big strengths as a player, as a batsman, and I think it would be silly not to go with something that has served me so well in other departments." Root has inherited a test side teeming with match-winners and believes all-rounder Ben Stokes will prove vital to England`s progress. "He is going to play a massive role," Root said of his deputy. "You`ve seen how his cricket has developed over the last year or so and he is the sort of person, the more you give him, the more you get from him. "I think it`s great that he`s got this chance to become a bit more of a leader in the dressing room, as vice-captain. "So he, along with the other senior guys like Stuart Broad, Jimmy Anderson and Cooky, obviously, will be massive for us moving forward," Root added.