

Shadab Khan shines again, helps visitors win Port of Spain thriller



Shadab Khan and Sarfraz Ahmed embrace following the win

PORT OF SPAIN, MAR 31 /- Shadab Khan gave another match-winning bowling performance as Hasan Ali held his nerve for Pakistan to sneak a three-run victory over the West Indies in the second T20 International on Thursday.

Set a relatively modest target of 132 to level the series following a 33-run defeat in the opening match in Barbados, the hosts were restricted to 129 for eight to suffer their fifth consecutive T20 loss to the visitors. Pakistan now hold an unbeatable 2-0 lead ahead of the final two matches at the weekend back at the Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad. In the wake of an impressive senior international debut at Kensington Oval, Shadab snared four for 14 with his smearing mixture of leg, back and googlies to stymie the West Indies quest. His most important strike came on the last delivery of his four-over allotment when he had Marlon Samuels caught at the wicket for a top score of 44. Samuels' imperious strokeplay, reminiscent of his two match-winning performances in World T20 finals, looked to be taking the home side to the target before he was undone by the confident 19-year-old. "Getting Samuels was important

for us to have a chance of winning," said Shadab after collecting his second straight Man of the Match award. "This pitch had more bounce and encouragement than in Barbados so I am really looking forward to the final two matches." From that point the balance was tilted in favour of Pakistan although West Indies captain Carlos Brathwaite, who had earlier taken three wickets on a sultry afternoon, battled to keep his team on course in partnership with fellow all-rounder Jason Holder. But it came down to fast-medium bowler Ali retaining his focus and concentration in the final over after being smashed for boundaries by Sunil Narine off the first two deliveries. West Indies needed just six more runs to complete the chase but the bowler's excellent accuracy denied both Narine and Holder, who could only manage a single off the last ball when a boundary was needed to tie the scores and force a super over. Put in to bat after Brathwaite won the toss, Pakistan struggled to gain any sort of batting momentum against the twin spin threat of Narine and Samuel Badree. Narine claimed three for 22 and Badree two for 14. Pakistan were indebted to the ninth-wicket

Virat needs a short break : Brad Haddin

MELBOURNE, MAR 31 /- Former wicket-keeper Brad Haddin feels it is possible to think about how he goes about things as a batsman and a captain, said Haddin. "Time away from playing might help Kohli to reach a fairer viewpoint on what has transpired over the past six weeks: a terrific battle in which the Australians genuinely challenged India, and gave Kohli the toughest time of his international career to date," he said. India defeated Australia 2-1 at home in one of the most intense but bit-

terly-fought Test series against Australia. At the end of this long and successful home season, I get the distinct impression that Kohli needs some time to think about how he goes about things as a batsman and a captain," said Haddin. "Time away from playing might help Kohli to reach a fairer viewpoint on what has transpired over the past six weeks: a terrific battle in which the Australians genuinely challenged India, and gave Kohli the toughest time of his international career to date," he said. India defeated Australia 2-1 at home in one of the most intense but bit-



terly-fought series in recent years. The series was marked by one controversy after another with the two captains - Kohli and Steve Smith - in the eye of storm. "Kohli saying that he no longer had any friends

among the Australian team after the conclusion of the series took a lot of gloss off the contest, and once again suggested that the touring side had got as close as they did to India by underhanded means. "This is not an assertion backed up by evidence and sets a poor example to all those watching the game, not only in India but around the world," Haddin was also impressed by the calm and composed demeanour of stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane, who led India in the series-deciding fourth and final Test in Dharamsala after Kohli missed the game due to a shoulder injury. "Ajinkya Rahane, the stand-in captain, is as different

from Kohli in his demeanour on the field as it is possible to be. He does not give the impression of looking for a reflection of the touring grocer in the supermarket, but his second-innings batting against Pat Cummins showed that a bold heart beats beneath the quieter exterior," he wrote. "Similarly, the way he was able to work with the Indian fast bowlers, particularly Umesh Yadav, showed good sense and strong character." It was a passage that said a lot about Umesh as a fast bowler, but also about Rahane as a leader. He showed toughness of mind to recognise the key moment and seize it," Haddin wrote.

Michel Platini lashes out at Sepp Blatter



PARIS, MAR 31 /- UEFA president Michel Platini has criticised former FIFA chief Sepp Blatter, saying the Swiss, who led soccer's world body for 17 years, was determined to make him "his last scalp". Platini and Blatter were banned from all football-related activities, initially for eight years, over a 2 million Swiss francs (\$200 million) payment FIFA made to Platini in 2011, with Blatter's approval, for work done a decade earlier. The Frenchman said the 71-year-old Blatter was the most selfish person he had ever known. "He thought he would grow old, finish then die and be buried in FIFA. It was his wish," Platini told Le Monde in an interview published on Thursday. "He always said that I would be his last scalp. I know he had a fixation on me, to the end.

FIFA reveals proposed slots for 48-team 2026 World Cup

ZURICH, MAR 31 /- All 2026 World Cup slots increased when the tournament expands to 48 teams in 2026, with Africa's biggest winner, according to FIFA recommendations released Thursday.

The plan to expand the competition beyond its current 32-team format, which is subject to approval at FIFA's May Congress in Bahrain, guarantees Africa nine places, marking an increase of four. Asia, currently guaranteed between four and five World Cup entries, will get eight slots, while European confederation UEFA gets a boost from 13 to 16. The confederation for North, Central America

and the Caribbean (CONCACAF) will see places, above its current level of between three and four.

South America (CONMEBOL), which now has between four and five slots, will get six, according to the recommendations from FIFA's ruling council. Oceania, which has not been guaranteed an entry in past World Cups, will be assured one spot. UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin defended his federation "satisfied" with the plan.

"We feel that UEFA will be fairly represented with a total of 16 national associations competing in the new format of the World Cup," he said. "We look forward to

this proposal being ratified by the FIFA Council in Bahrain on May 9." The January 10 decision to expand the World Cup marked a major step under the new president Gianni Infantino, who has been on the job for just over a year. He boasted at the time that under the new format more countries "will have the chance to dream" and that larger tournament would expand the World Cup of the 21st Century.

FIFA's decision to expand the tournament infuriated many in the football world, with some branding it a money grab and a blatant bid by Infantino to win favour among developing world federations who helped elect him.

Experience of Bowling on Indian Wickets Will Play Key Role: Munaf

RAJKOT, MAR 31 /- Gujarat Lions medium pacer Munaf Patel on Friday said experience of bowling on Indian wickets would play a key role during IPL's 10th season, as most of the wickets in the country were batting-friendly.

"Experience to play on Indian wickets, which are batting-friendly, is very important. Luckily Gujarat Lions has medium pace bowlers who have enough experience to play on Indian wickets," Patel said. "I, Praveen Kumar, Manpreet Gony and Dhawal Kulkarni, all the four medium pacers have enough experience to play on Indian wickets. We all have played for the country and have enough experience of playing in IPL," Patel said. "We all know one another as well as our skipper very well in terms of what he wants from us as a bowling unit and that will give us an advantage of being Indians and playing on these wickets." Patel said when asked about his role as a senior member of the team, he said, "It's really a proud feeling that I am one of the senior players of the squad, and will lead the bowling department along with other senior bowlers. But I will have to carry extra responsibility of being one of the senior players of the squad," he said. According to him, Gujarat Lions has a good bowling unit. "When we have done and is doing. People should understand how difficult football is today, all the teams are more prepared," a latest poll reflects how much work Wenger has to



Kagiso Rabada, Pat Cummins and Zaheer Khan pose for the cameras, Delhi

Pep Guardiola backs under-fire Arsene Wenger

LONDON, MAR 31 /- Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola says it is not too late for Arsene Wenger to save his relationship with Arsenal's fans and remain in charge at the Emirates Stadium. Wenger has endured a miserable campaign and frustrated supporters have turned on the Gunners boss and called for him to resign. The Frenchman has been offered a new two-year contract to prolong his 21-year reign and reports suggest he will eventually sign it.

"When he goes back to winning the fans will be happy again. I promise you, 100 percent," Guardiola said ahead of Sunday's clash at Arsenal. "The Premier League is not easy to win but I'm pretty sure the fans respect a lot what Arsene Wenger has done and is doing. People should understand how difficult football is today, all the teams are more prepared," a latest poll reflects how much work Wenger has to

Will challenge spot-fixing charges: Khalid latif

KARACHI, MAR 31 /- Pakistan batsman Khalid Latif today said he will contest the charges of spot-fixing against him after appearing before a three-member anti-corruption tribunal set up by the country's Cricket Board.

Khalid and his Pakistan and Islamabad United teammate Sharjeel Khan have both now appeared before the tribunal in Lahore and decided to contest the spot-fixing charges against them in the corruption scandal that rocked the Pakistan Super League. The tribunal, which is headed by former judge of the Lahore High Court, will now carry out an inquiry and final hearings on a day to day basis from May 19 to decide the charges against the two Pakistan players. Latif, the only Pakistani batsman to score a double hundred in a domestic one-day match, appeared before the tribunal last week and pleaded not guilty to the charges levelled against him. Suspended along with Sharjeel since last month and sent back from the PSL in Dubai, both players have been pleading their innocence while the PCB says it has enough evidence against them. The tribunal, which also includes former Test captain, Wasim Bari and former Chairman of the board Lt Gen (ret'd) Tauqir Zia, has now given the PCB lawyers the date of April 14 to submit evidence against the players. Latif has been directed to respond to the charges by May 5, to which the PCB may offer a rebuttal by May 10 after which a final hearing will commence on May 19. Latif, 31, who has appeared in five ODIs and 13 T20 internationals has been charged under different articles of the PCB Anti-Corruption Code for Participants and is accused of spot-fixing and betting besides failing to report approached to the PCB. The PCB has so far suspended five players including Sharjeel, Khalid, Muhammad Irfan, Shahzaib Hassan and Nasir Jamshed in the PSL spot-fixing scandal.



A team of PCB ACU and legal department officials is scheduled to fly to London next month to interview and question Nasir who is settled in the UK. Earlier this week, tall left-arm pacer Irfan pleaded guilty for his role in the spot-fixing scandal. The PCB suspended his central contract for one year and fined him Rs one million but the suspension can be reviewed after six months. (PTI)

India not hosting IOC Session in 2019: IOA

NEW DELHI, MAR 31 /- India has lost its bid to host the 132nd Session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2019 even as the Italian city of Milan emerged as the host city for among the bidders. It is now certain India is not going to host the event. The IOA's bid to host the IOC Session had got the support of the Sports Ministry but it is now learnt that the National Capital Region's offer found few takers within the world sports apex body.

"We (IOA) made a bid to host the 2019 IOC Session and we got the approval from the government. It is for the IOC to choose the host city from among the bidders. It is now certain India is not going to host the event," IOA secretary general Rajeev Mehta told PTI. If the Prime Minister's Office wants, we can bid for the IOC Session in 2021," he added. India has earlier hosted an IOC Session in 1983 in New Delhi. Meanwhile, the IOC Session in 2019 is set to be named as host city of the 2019 IOC Session. The announcement will be made at this year's Session in Lima, Peru, to be held between September 13 and 17. Reports say that Budapest, Krakow (Poland), Brussels and Istanbul had also expressed interest to stage the 2019 IOC Session, during which the host cities of 2024 Winter Olympics and 2025 Winter Youth Olympics will be announced. An IOC Session is a prestigious event, next only to the Olympic Congress in the sports world. The IOC Session is the 206 National Olympic Committees of the IOC and is its supreme organ. A Session can adopt, modify and interpret the Olympic Charter and its constituent instruments. An IOC Session can elect the host city of the Olympic Games, seven years before they are held. IOC president, vice-president, Executive Director, Executive Board and IOC members are elected in IOC Sessions. An IOC Session is held at least once a year, often over two or three-day period. In the years when Olympic Games take place, the Session traditionally precedes them. (PTI)

SV Sunil Named Asian Hockey Player of Year

MUSCAT, MAR 31 /- Indian forward SV Sunil and drag-driker Harmanpreet Singh were named as the Asian Player of the Year 2016 and Asian Promising Player of the Year respectively by the prestigious Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) here on Thursday. Sunil played a vital role in India's successful outing at the FIH Champions Trophy in London where the team earned a historic silver medal. Considered to be one of the fastest men on the pitch in the world, Sunil has also served as the team's vice-captain and is entrusted with the duty of leading by example. The nominations for these awards were made by coaches across the national teams in Asia and the criteria of nomination was based on the performance for the year 2016. The Coorg player thanked the AHF for the award stating that it's a big boost to be named the Asian Player of the Year. "This award is an icing on the cake. I believe Indian hockey is growing year by year and we have enjoyed some memorable victories in 2016. This award could not have been possible if not for our team work. I would like to thank Hockey India for their efforts, our coaches and support staff too who work with us day in and day out as one big family. It is always a good feeling to be recognized with such awards as it only adds to the player's motivation to improve," stated Sunil. Harmanpreet had a stupendous 2016 with India winning the Asian Cup. He also led the team's defence and was instrumental in converting penalty corners. He was also part of the Indian men's team at the 2016 Rio Olympics and the Commonwealth Trophy in London. "I believe 2016 was a great year for Indian hockey and I would like to thank the AHF for honouring me with this prestigious award. Executive Director and Board and IOC members are elected in IOC Sessions. An IOC Session is held at least once a year, often over two or three-day period. In the years when Olympic Games take place, the Session traditionally precedes them. (PTI)