

# Australia picks pace quartet for Champions Trophy

MELBOURNE, APR 20 /-/- Australia has picked four fast bowlers - Mitchell Starc, James Pattinson, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins - in its 15-man Champions Trophy squad while dropping all-rounder James Faulkner, the man-of-the-match from its triumph in the 2015 World Cup final against New Zealand. Australian selector Trevor Hohns referred to the four quicks as a "fast-bowling artillery" and "a very exciting proposition for Australian cricket." Starc returned early from Australia's tour of India with a stress fracture in his right foot, but Hohns said he was confident the left-arm opening bowler would be fit to play in the June 1-18 tournament in England. Big-hitting batsman Chris Lynn, sidelined for two months recently with a neck/shoulder injury, was also included in the squad. "Our medical staff will continue to monitor Mitchell and Chris' recovery from their respective injuries, but we are hopeful they will be fit in time for the team's departure on May 18," Hohns said. All-rounders Marcus Stoinis, Moises Henriques and John Hastings were also included in the squad to be captained by Steve Smith. Leg-spinner Adam Zampa was only specialist slow bowler selected, although Travis Head and Glenn Maxwell offer off-spinning options. Head and Aaron Finch are the likely contenders to be captain and vice-captain David Warner. Australia joins England, Bangladesh and New Zealand in Group A, while defending champion India is pooled with South Africa, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in Group B.

**Australia squad:** Steve Smith (captain), David Warner, Pat Cummins, Aaron Finch, John Hastings, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Moises Henriques, Chris Lynn, Glenn Maxwell, James Pattinson, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Matthew Wade, Adam Zampa. (AP)



Manipuri women in traditional dress playing football in Guwahati on Thursday.

# Laxman happy with problem of plenty in SRH

HYDERABAD, APR 20 /-/- Sunrisers Hyderabad mentor VVS Laxman feels his team is faced with a problem of plenty in the ongoing IPL as newcomers have made it count at the first given opportunity. Hyderabad are jointly top in the IPL points table after beating Delhi Daredevils by 5 runs yesterday. "I don't see any area of concern while we are under pressure, even though the matches are close. Having said that, we always look to improve," he said in the post-match press conference. Laxman appreciated Kane Williamson, whose brilliant batting helped Sunrisers SRH to set a challenging target of 192, and young players like Siddharth Kaul and debutant Mohammad Siraj. "With the new recruits we have got, we have plugged in the loopholes we had last year. Because of the new recruits, we have the luxury of fielding different playing Xis depending on the situation, depending on the opposition and conditions. We are very fortunate to have a lot of talented players and unfortunately, because of the nature of the game, only XI can play and only a few batsmen can play. It's really good to see that we are not relying only on one batsman or one bowler," he said. Afghanistan's Rashid Khan, who made his debut in IPL this year, has already created an impact in the tournament with his unique spin. Laxman said, "...he has got that X-factor. He has picked the wickets and he is bowling some tough overs. For a leg-spinner to bowl in the end, it shows the amount of confidence we have got in him." He said Delhi Daredevils' Shreyas Iyer said the team made a good start but let it slip. "This was a wicket, we could have restricted them for 100. Nonetheless, it is part of the game," he said. (PTI)



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# Serena expecting baby this year

LOS ANGELES, APRIL 20 /-/- Serena Williams is expecting a baby by her spokesperson confirmed hours after the tennis great hinted at the news in a Snapchat post. "I'm happy to confirm Serena is expecting a baby this fall," Los Angeles-based publicist Kelly Bush Novak said in a statement emailed to AFP yesterday.

While Williams won't play again this year, "she looks forward to returning in 2018," Bush Novak said. Williams' Snapchat post, quickly highlighted in US media, showed the 35-year-old in a yellow swimsuit that revealed an apparent baby bump. But the post was quickly taken down, lending an air of mystery to its meaning. "The GOAT herself (@serenawilliams) took to Snapchat to announce she's 20 weeks pregnant (Congratulations Serena)!" the US Tennis Association, organisers of the US Open which Williams has won six times tweeted, using the acronym for "Greatest Of All Time." But the Women's Tennis Association deleted a congratulatory tweet and acknowledged in a statement they had no confirmation of the news. It was hours before they could tweet. "It's official! @serenawilliams and @AlexisOhanian are expecting a baby this fall." In December, Williams announced her engagement to Red Bull co-founder Alexis Ohanian, first sharing that news on the Reddit social media site. If Williams is 20 weeks into her pregnancy, that means she was already expecting when she won her record-setting 23rd Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in January - where she beat her elder sister Venus in the final. For fans the announcement underscored Williams' superwoman status. Williams hasn't played since her Australian Open triumph, which saw her surpass Steffi Graf for the most Grand Slam singles titles in the Open Era. Only Australian Margaret Court has won more, capturing 24. The last of those came in 1973 - the year after Court gave birth to a son. Williams cited a knee injury in pulling out of tournaments in Indian Wells and Miami in March. Her inactivity saw her drop to second in the world rankings. But she is set to regain the top spot from Germany's Angelique Kerber on Monday when the latest standings are published. (AFP)

# Bangladesh's Shafiqul Islam gets Champions Trophy nod

DHAKA, APR 20 /-/- Bangladesh today recalled fit-again fast bowler Shafiqul Islam as they named a 15-man Champions Trophy squad ahead of the tournament in England in June. Shafiqul, who last played for Bangladesh in October, replaces Subhasis Roy, the only change to the squad that drew the recent ODI series 1-1 in Sri Lanka. Shafiqul has been one of the best bowlers of late, but we could not include him in the squad in October because of fitness concerns," said chief selector Minhajul Abedin. "Now he looks fit and we hope the conditions in UK will also suit his bowling," he added. Wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan and all-rounder Shuvagata Hom, who were included in the extended squad in Sri Lanka but did not play, this time, Bangladesh will return to the Champions Trophy after more than a decade, having last played the tournament in 2006 in India. They will feature in Group A alongside hosts England, and Australia and New Zealand in the eight-team event. The Mashrafe Mortaza-led team will open their campaign against England at the Oval on June 1. Bangladesh will hold a 10-day training camp in Sussex and a tri-series competition against Ireland and New Zealand ahead of the main tournament. Bangladesh selectors added Nurul, Roy and batsman Nasir Hossain to their squad for the tri-series event, which will be hosted by Ireland. Nasir, who has played 17 Tests and 50 ODIs, will make his return after missing recent tours in New Zealand and Sri Lanka during a drop in form. "He played well in recent competitions, so we decided to take him to the tri-series to help him readjust in the national team set-up," said Minhajul. Bangladesh: Mashrafe Mortaza (capt), Tamim Iqbal, Imrul Kayes, Soumya Sarkar, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammadullah Riyad, Sabir Rehman, Mosaddik Hossain, Sanjamul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed, Rubel Hossain, Mahmud Hasan and Shafiqul Islam. (PTI)

# French Open decision on Maria Sharapova on May 15

PARIS, APR 20 /-/- Maria Sharapova will learn on May 15 whether she can compete at the French Open after her drugs ban, French tennis officials said Thursday, insisting the absence of pregnant Serena Williams would have no bearing on their decision. Two-time Roland Garros champion Sharapova controversially returns next week from a 15-month drugs ban at the WTA Stuttgart Grand Prix. Stuttgart offered the 30-year-old Russian a wildcard entry because she no longer has a world ranking - a move she has also been asked to accept. "Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova are two unconnected cases," said Giudicelli. "We're staging a Grand Slam, not a casting." If the FTF decides not to offer Sharapova a wildcard she still has a chance of making Roland Garros via the qualifiers, but for that route she must pick up enough points by winning or possibly even making the final in Stuttgart. Sharapova, a five-time Grand Slam champion, had an initial two-year suspension by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) reduced to 15 months after she tested positive at the 2016 Australian Open for meldonium.

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# Not finishing a game after being set is a crime: Pathan

KOLKATA, APR 20 /-/- Kolkata Knight Riders all-rounder Yusuf Pathan today termed his dismissal against Delhi Daredevils after playing a good knock as a "crime" as he feels that he should have finished the game. "I should have finished the game. After batting so well, if I cannot finish, then it's a crime according to me. Next time, I will try to finish the match with one or two overs to spare," Yusuf told reporters on the eve of their match against Gujarat Lions. From being 21/3 inside three overs, Pandey (69 not out) and Yusuf (59) anchored their 19-run chase with a 110-run stand off just 72 balls for the fourth wicket. "In this situation, it is not anything can happen. If a set batsman gets out, it's never easy for a new batsman and you in a three-match winning run will face star-studded Royal Challengers Bangalore in three days' time and Yusuf said it was a treat to watch Virat Kohli and Chris Gayle in their scintillating 122-run opening stand. "Whenever Gayle and Virat open together, they give a good start. It's a treat to watch them, be it as opponents or on TV. A combination of a

classical batsman and a hard hitter... You also get to learn a lot. There's a lot to learn from them." But come Sunday, Yusuf hoped the duo do not make big runs. "We have our way plans to get them out. I hope they get out soon and we win the match. We hope they don't score runs against us.

But it's a long way to go. Our focus at the moment is on tomorrow's match against Gujarat Lions. We have to focus on this game, we have time. I'm getting to play in this match." Yusuf further said he's revealing his new role of a batsman and a bowler. "I'm enjoying a lot. I hope you too are enjoying. I'm feeling great. Let me tell you, I've not changed my game, style or aggression. I've got more number of overs - 12-14 overs. Keeping that in mind, I thought I would continue playing my aggressive cricket shots and play a long innings." Pitted against a team from his home state, Yusuf said Kolkata Knight Riders is his team. "It's my home state. But as a team in the IPL, they are only two years old. I've been playing in KKR for seven years. Which one you should give importance to? Kolkata is my team," he concluded. (PTI)



# SC quashes case against Dhoni for portraying himself as God

NEW DELHI, APR 20 /-/- The Supreme Court today quashed a criminal complaint lodged against ace cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni in an Andhra Pradesh trial court for allegedly hurting religious sentiments by depicting himself as Lord Vishnu on a magazine cover. The apex court also quashed the criminal complaint against the Editor of the magazine and said that the offence under section 295A (hurting religious sentiments) of the IPC is not made out against them as they did not maliciously hurt the religious sentiments of the complainant. A bench comprising Justices Dipak Misra, A M Khanwilkar and M M Shantanagoudar said "it would be a travesty of justice" if the cricketer and the co-accused editor are prosecuted in the case.

The instant complaint was lodged against Dhoni and others at a trial court in Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh. The apex court had on September 5 last year quashed a similar case lodged against Dhoni and others in Karnataka and set aside the High Court order which had refused to stall the proceedings against them. It had also said the trial court in Karnataka did not follow the due procedure in summoning the cricketer and others in the case. Dhoni had filed the Special Leave Petition challenging the Karnataka HC order. The complaint had alleged that Dhoni was seen on the cover of the magazine as Lord Vishnu, holding several things, including a shoe in his hands. Taking cognisance of the complaint, the trial court in Karnataka had directed registration of a case against Dhoni under section 295 (injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class) along with 34 (common intention) of the IPC. Later, Dhoni was directed to appear before the court after which he moved the high court against the summons issued against him. (PTI)

# FIFA image damaging search for 2018 World Cup sponsors, claims hosts Russia

MOSCOW, APR 20 /-/- FIFA's tarnished image is badly hindering the search for sponsors for the 2018 World Cup in Russia, Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko said on Wednesday. His comments came after the Financial Times reported that the corruption-tainted world football body was struggling to find new sponsors for the upcoming World Cup, with Russian companies being the slowest to come on board. "The difficulties in securing sponsors are tied to the fact that there was a huge and big attack against FIFA," Interfax news agency quoted the outspoken Mutko as saying. "FIFA has been accused of corruption and the like, they have ruined themselves. The losses in terms of image are colossal." Mutko added the FT report had "wrongly interpreted" FIFA's predicament. "FIFA is running a search for sponsors for the 2018 World Cup in Russia but in general," Mutko said. FIFA has been struggling to find major new sponsors since corruption scandals that ousted its head Sepp Blatter and dozens of other football officials erupted in 2015. Sony and the airline Emirates quit as top-level sponsors after the 2014 World Cup and were not immediately replaced. FIFA this month announced hefty financial losses for 2016, which it had spent a large portion of its reserves in the past year. Mutko, who also heads Russia's football union, was barred last month from competing for his seat at the FIFA Council in light of his position as deputy prime minister. FIFA's governance committee ruled that Mutko was ineligible to run based on its principles of "political neutrality and the prevention of any form of government interference." Russia is one of the 11 World Cup in 11 cities, including Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Sochi.

# U-17 World Cup: FIFA 'evaluating' AIFF request to stage India matches in Delhi

NEW DELHI, APR 20 /-/- Once a decision is made, it will be communicated to the AIFF accordingly," FIFA's head of events Jamie Yezza told PTI. "FIFA works closely with relevant football federation, its member and partner in the country, but also with the authorities of the respective host country. The government support is crucial for FIFA to be able to organise a World Cup." "So, we cooperate closely with all football stakeholders in the country, but the final decision about where the matches will be played are with FIFA," said Yezza, who led a FIFA team to inspect the World Cup venues last month. He described India's request to stage group matches, involving the national team in New Delhi, as a "normal" practice. "Such requests are not unusual and frequently seen at FIFA World Cups. The allotment of the matches depends on many factors, like capacity of the stadium, ticket sales, interest of the venue, etc. This is a normal request in the process of establishing the final match schedule and the draw pro-

cedure. As the draw is taking place on July 7, we still have time to evaluate this request," Yezza said. The union government has spent a lot of money for the prestigious tournament, the first FIFA event to be held in India, and it has been learnt that the Sports Ministry is keen on New Delhi hosting India's group matches. The officials of the Local Organising Committee had also talked about the possible presence of the Prime Minister at Jawahar Nehru Stadium during the tournament. The FIFA team that announced the schedule after its inspection visit last month has not allotted the marquee matches in New Delhi due to concerns over high pollution level after the Diwali festival. The

FIFA team had said that New Delhi can host matches only till October 16. While announcing the schedule, Yezza said the six groups, Yezza had given a May 15 deadline to complete its preparation work. Asked whether FIFA would reallocate Kochi's group matches to one of the remaining five venues or consider a completely different venue if the deadline is missed, Yezza said, "Both possibilities are open, but we still believe in Kochi." "The authorities have confirmed that the shops will be closed during the tournament so that safety and security can be guaranteed. This is a very important step in the right direction," he said. Regarding the venue in Kochi, FIFA's concerns involved security for the players, officials and fans because of the stores/shops inside the stadium complex. "We are looking at the bucket seats at the 55,000 capacity facility, which is mandatory for any venue hosting FIFA tournaments or matches."

