

Pak skipper seeks people's support

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket captain Waqar Younis Tuesday admitted his team's poor form ahead of next month's World Cup was a serious problem.

"The recent performance of the Pakistan cricket team has been a cause of grave concern," Waqar said in a statement, a day after he returned home from a disastrous tour of South Africa where his team lost the one-day series 4-1 and both Tests by big margins.

"I attribute playing on the trot under hostile conditions as one of the factors that exhausted the players' minds and added to the stress level.

"However, I feel that whatever the reason, it is not an excuse to cover up the bad performance."

Under Waqar, Pakistan was routed by Australia 3-0 in their neutral venue series in October last year. The team is due to leave for South Africa on January 24 where the World Cup starts from February 8.

Waqar hoped the team would overcome the shortcomings.

"I am confident... we will prove to be a formidable opposition and will rise to the expectations of the 140 million people of Pakistan.

"My only request to everyone is to pray for our success, believe in us and offer positive encouragement so that every member of the squad could take on the challenge of the World Cup 2003 with zeal, confidence and poise."

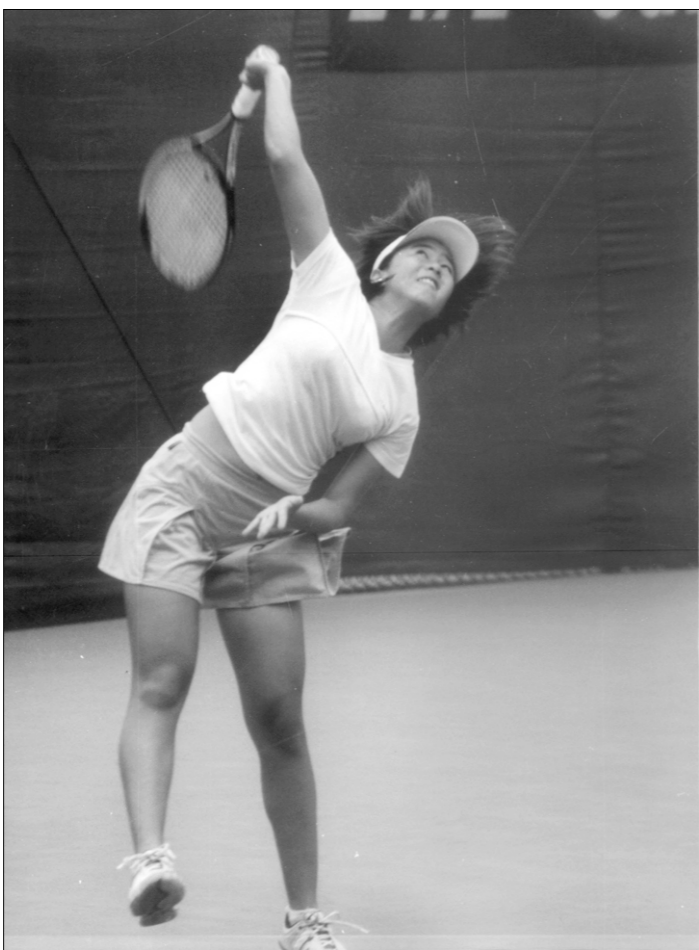


PHOTO: STAR
Varina of Thailand in action against Marutha Devi of India during the Ramma Tennis Complex yesterday.

Bacher happy



AFP, Johannesburg

Cricket World Cup chief Ali Bacher on Tuesday welcomed England's decision to go ahead with their World Cup game in Harare next month, saying it had "committed itself to the principles of international cricket."

"The England Cricket Board's decision is to be welcomed for cricketing reasons," said Bacher, World Cup 2003 executive director, in a statement issued in Johannesburg.

"In making this decision, England are committing themselves to the principles of international cricket - among which is a desire to develop the game in all regions of the world," he said.

Bacher said the World Cup 2003 organising committee understood that there were many calls for political change in Zimbabwe, "but cricket takes decisions for cricketing reasons and is not qualified to do the jobs of politicians."

"Now that this decision has been made, we hope the first Cricket World Cup to come to South Africa and this continent, will be able to proceed according to plan and greatly benefit our country, Africa and international cricket."

English cricket authorities Tuesday rejected British premier Tony Blair's call to boycott Zimbabwe during next month's World Cup.

The England and Wales Cricket Board decided to ignore pleas from the British government and go ahead with their game on February 13 in Harare.

ECB chief executive Tim Lamb said the decision was unanimous but said the players would not be allowed to take part in a ceremony before the game where they could end up shaking hands with Mugabe.

Only a rapid deterioration in the security situation in Zimbabwe in the next few weeks is now likely to stop six World Cup games going ahead there.

There have been fresh incidents of rioting and the International Cricket Council has set up a committee to monitor the situation.

But they would have to decide that the country was not safe for officials and players before the games could be moved to South Africa, where most of the 54-game tournament is being played.

South African cricket authorities Tuesday also welcomed England's decision, saying it has given Zimbabwe a "privilege".

"England has given Zimbabwe a privilege. Without them (England), cricket there will be dead. Interest would have waned. Does it help to boycott it, or do we help to restore cricket in that country?" United Cricket Board (UCBSA) president Percy Sonn told AFP.

Asked whether he did not have a problem with playing a normal sport in an abnormal society, Sonn said: "It determines what you term an abnormal society. One viewpoint is as good as the other. Although some say that there were irregularities, they had elections there and President Robert Mugabe won."

Anxious days for Kenya

AFP, Nairobi

Doubts were raised Tuesday over whether Kenya would host two World Cup cricket matches next month after a delegation from the International Cricket Council (ICC) refused to reveal its findings after a two-day visit.

Delegation leader Campbell Jamieson said in a brief press statement the decision would be made by the ICC after studying a report of their findings from meetings with Kenyan sports officials and security authorities.

Kenya's chances of staging the matches against Sri Lanka and New Zealand were undermined by the November 28 terrorist attack in the Indian Ocean city of Mombasa which killed 18 people.

"A significant amount of information and an understanding of security in Kenya has been obtained from various meetings," Jamieson, also the ICC marketing manager, said.

"From this information, the delegation will prepare a report for an ICC decision, to be made in the next two days."

But Kenya Cricket Association (KCA) officials said they were confident of staging the matches in Nairobi.

"We are confident that we have made all our necessary requirements," said Sharad Ghai, who is both the KCA chairman and chairman of the organising committee.

"Sri Lanka have already given their consent to play here and it is only New Zealand yet to send in their acceptance," he said.

Dhaka enter

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127, Mowla 41, Imtiaz 31, Hasan 34, Al-Amin 3-99)

KHULNA: First innings 197 all out in 72.4 overs (Manzarul 78, Al-Amin 29 n.o., Hasibul 3-37, Nasir 3-38, Enamul 2-52)

SYLHET: Second innings Parvez lbw b Hasanuzzaman 39 Imtiaz c Monirul b Russell 28 Nasirul c Russell b Hasanuzzaman 27

Rajin c Salaudinn b Manzarul 78 Mowla b Manzarul 50

Taqrimul lbw b Manzarul 19 Hasibul b Manzarul 0 Mahmud lbw b Razzak 0 Enamul lbw b Manzarul 0 Imran not out 0

Nasir c & b Razzak 3 Extras: (b-10, lb-6, nb-1, w-2) 19 Total: (All out in 80.1 overs) 273

Fall of wickets: 1-58, 2-86, 3-105, 4-226, 5-249, 6-249, 7-254, 8-257, 9-262.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Al-Amin	6	0	22	0
Russell	14	0	65	1
Hasanuzzaman	16	5	40	2
Razzak	7.1	0	36	2
Jamaluddin	17	3	29	0
Manzarul	17	1	52	5
Salaudinn	3	0	13	0

KHUNA: Second innings Raju batting 0 Monirul batting 0 Extras: 0 Total: (for no loss in 0.1 overs) 0

Murali can't stop Aus

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Knock, while the restrained Jayawardene was limited to a solitary four.

Kumar Sangakkara (42 not out from 42 balls, with five boundaries) prevented the complete disintegration of the lower order.

Smarter from recent criticism of their fielding standards, the home team performed magnificently, keeping the Sri Lankans on their toes throughout the innings and holding all their catches while also completing four run outs.

Australia made a superb start when Shane Watson and Brad Williams combined to run out Sri Lankan dynamo Sanath Jayasuriya for six in the sixth over with the tourists on 13.

The Australians were jubilant over the cheap dismissal of the Sri Lankan captain, who had bludgeoned 122 and 106 in his past two knocks in the contest.

Watson's pin-point return from the outfield to Williams, stationed directly over the stumps at the bowler's end, found Jayasuriya just millimeters short of his ground.

Australia were also pleased with deputy wicketkeeper Maher's first extended stint behind the stumps for his country.

He acquitted himself admirably, picking up a catch and conceding only four byes with a performance that demonstrated he will be an adequate replacement for regular gloveman Adam Gilchrist in the World Cup one-day contest starting in South Africa and Zimbabwe next month.

Gilchrist, weary after a hectic international schedule in recent months, had asked to be rested from the Wednesday encounter.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the Australia-Sri Lanka tri-nation series day-night one-day clash at the Gabba in Brisbane on Wednesday:

Atapattu c Ponting b McGrath 70 Jayasuriya run out 6

Tillakaratne run out 7 De Silva c Martyn b Lee 0

Jayawardene b Hogg 56 Sangakkara not out 42 Arnold c Maher b Hogg 3

Vaas b Williams 0 B Fernando run out 0 Muralitharan run out 0 D Fernando not out 0

Extras: (b-4, lb-6, w-11, nb-3) 24 Total: (For 9 wickets in 50 overs) 211

Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-30, 3-35, 4-147, 5-165, 6-173, 7-181, 8-198, 9-201

Bowler	O	M	R	W
McGrath	10	2	33	1
Williams	10	0	33	1
Lee	10	1	44	1
Hogg	10	1	38	2
Watson	8	0	36	0
Lehmann	2	0	17	0

AUSTRALIA Maher stpd S'kara b M'tharan 30 Hayden c Fernando b M'tharan 42

Ponting stpd S'kara b De Silva 15 Martyn b M'tharan 1

Lehmann run out 38 Bevan not out 45

Watson c Tillakaratne b M'tharan 4 Hogg not out 14 Extras: (b-5, lb-4, w-11, nb-5) 25 Total: (For 6 wickets in 48.5 overs) 214

Fall of wickets: 1-76, 2-94, 3-98, 4-100, 5-172, 6-182

Did not bat: B Lee, B Williams, G McGrath

Man-of-the-match: Michael Bevan.

Next match: England v Sri Lanka, Jan 17.

ECB goes on with Zim



AFP, London

English cricket authorities Tuesday rejected British Prime Minister Tony Blair's call to boycott Zimbabwe during next month's World Cup.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) decided to ignore pleas from the British government and go ahead with their World Cup opener on February 13 in Harare.

ECB chief executive Tim Lamb said the decision was unanimous but he insisted the players would not be allowed to take part in a ceremony before the game in which they could have to shake hands with Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe.

"We are not, of course, immune to, or unaware of, what is happening in the wider world," Lamb told a press conference at Lord's cricket ground in London.

"But we do not believe that it is our role to make subjective moral judgments about the various regimes in the different cricket-playing nations."

"These are matters for elected governments to consider and take a decisive and early lead," Lamb insisted.

He added that not playing in Zimbabwe would be a "purely symbolic gesture" which would "not put food in one more stomach or fuel in one more car" in the famine-ravaged country.

The press conference was delayed for 90 minutes by protesters brandishing placards who forced their way inside when security guards opened steel gates to let media enter.

The leader of the protest, gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell who is a long-standing critic of Mugabe, claimed a torture and detention centre was situated near the cricket ground where England will play.

"It is where people are being tortured and raped by the Mugabe regime. That is not cricket and that's why the England team should not go," he said.

Even when the venue of the press conference was moved, a spokesman for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Zimbabwe's official opposition, still managed to gain access and accused the ECB of making a "craven decision" which was the "height of irresponsibility."

But Lamb said that after discussions with the players' representative, no member of England's 15-man World Cup squad had refused to play in Zimbabwe.

Australia, India, Pakistan, Namibia and Holland have all said they will go ahead with their matches in the southern African country, and Lamb said an England boycott would be both meaningless and risk provoking a split in world cricket.

Government efforts to make

English cricket pay a "unique and unilateral sacrifice" would "permanently damage the fabric of our national summer sport," said Lamb.

"And we are being asked to make this gesture with only four weeks to go before the World Cup begins, despite the fact that it was known this particular fixture would be played in Harare as far back as October 2001," Lamb added.

The ECB feared it would have to pay up to one million pounds (1.6 million dollars) compensation to the

There has been fresh rioting because of human rights abuses by Mugabe's regime and the ICC have set up a committee to monitor the situation.

But they would have to decide that the country was not safe for officials and players before the games could be moved to South Africa, where most of the 54-game tournament is being played.

However, Lamb admitted it would be helpful if there could be a "re-visit" of Zimbabwe's safety and



PHOTO: AFP
A young performer poses in front of some dummy zebras at the Newlands Cricket Stadium in Cape Town on January 14. These props will be used during the opening ceremony of the World Cup next month.

International Cricket Council (ICC) in the event of a boycott. The British government said it would not offer compensation.

And the ECB, 85 percent of whose income comes from international matches, feared a withdrawal could lead to a Mugabe-inspired cancellation of Zimbabwe's two-Test tour of England starting in May with losses mounting to 10 million pounds (16 million dollars).

Only a rapid deterioration in the security situation in Zimbabwe is now likely to stop six World Cup games going ahead there.

security status by the ICC.

Mike Soper, ECB deputy chairman who took charge of Tuesday's meeting because chairman David Morgan is with the England team in Australia, warned that a boycott would have damaging long-term consequences.

"We would be left with years and years of deprivation for English cricket," Soper said.

A spokesman for the Britain's Department for Culture, Media and Sport said: "We won't deny that this news is very disappointing."

Agassi blows Lee up

FROM PAGE 13
"I definitely think it was much better, definitely a lot less errors," a relaxed-looking Venus said afterwards.

While Venus and Agassi sailed into the third round there were notable casualties in the men's tournament, with Spanish fifth seed Carlos Moya unhinged by world number 77 Mark Philippoussis of the United States.

Fish reeled in his opponent 3-6, 7-6, 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 and admitted he was as surprised as anyone to score a double over Moya after beating him in Sydney last week.

Fish will play South African Wayne Ferreira in the next round after a win which removes a sizeable obstacle from Agassi's route to a fourth Australian Open crown.

There was a further upset in the men's tournament with Olympic champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov suffering a five-set loss to Finland's Jarkko Nieminen.

Nieminen sent the Russian 22nd seed and former winner packing with a 6-3, 6-3, 3-6, 4-6, 6-1 victory.

Two other prominent seeds both made it through safely, with No.4 Juan Carlos Ferrero of Spain and compatriot Albert Costa, seeded eighth, advancing.

Ferrero downed Jean-Rene Lisnard of France 6-0, 6-4, 6-2, while Costa needed four sets before quelling Aussie hope Scott Draper 6-4, 6-7, 6-2, 6-3.

In the women's event, after surpassing expectations by winning in the first round, it was a case of normal service resuming for Anna Kournikova.

A crushing 6-0, 6-1 defeat to Belgian fifth-seed Justin Henin-Hardenne showed just how far the Russian glamour-girl has fallen since being a top 10 player three years ago.

The lop-sided nature of the rout prompted one reporter into asking if the contest could be described as a

The 22-year-old world number 42 was chasing the game from the outset, Henin-Hardenne's powerful groundstrokes forcing Kournikova to scramble around the back of the court in the opening game.

Seventh-seed Daniela Hantuchova's looks, meanwhile, have seen her get the 'Kournikova treatment' from the international media during her time on the tour.

But the Slovakian seventh seed showed nerves of steel to come through in three sets against Italy's Adriana Serra Zanetti, winning 7-6, 7-6 to earn her place in the third round.

Lindsay Davenport breathed a sigh of relief after scrambling past Uzbekistan's Iroda Tulyaganova.

The 26-year-old former world number one, who a year ago was learning how to walk on crutches after undergoing arthroscopic knee surgery, fought through a poor performance to win 6-7, 6-4, 7-5.



PHOTO: AFP

BAD LUCK! Australian Mark Philippoussis (L) shakes hands with Paradorn Srichaphan of Thailand following their men's singles second round match yesterday.

Paradorn 'Scudded'



AFP, Melbourne

Thailand's sporting hero Paradorn Srichaphan graciously left the Australian Open praising his conqueror Mark Philippoussis after a magnificent five-set joust on centre court here on Wednesday.

Philippoussis won a fascinating battle of the big servers to eliminate 11th-seeded Paradorn 3-6, 6-1, 1-6, 7-5, 6-3 and claim a third round match against Armenia's Sargis Sargsian on Friday.

Paradorn, who got his big start in tennis with a wild card entry into last year's Australian Open, won more friends for the sporting way he accepted the defeat to end his hopes of his best-ever Grand Slam showing.

With a smile on his face, the 23-year-old pride of Asian tennis praised the performance of Philippoussis to storm home winning the last two sets after appear-

ing to be lost against Paradorn's dazzling groundstrokes.

"I really enjoyed the match and I knew it was going to be a great tennis match because Mark is playing well right now," world No.14 Paradorn told reporters.

"Mark is a former world top-ten player. He's a great player."

Paradorn said he was grateful to Australian tennis for presenting him with the opportunity of allowing Asian players to gain wild cards to play in the main draw.

"I'm really thankful to Australian tennis, trying to put Asian tennis together," he said. "It's great for Asian players that they can get one player into the men's and women's main draw."

"They've been giving award wild cards to Asian players for the last couple of years, and that's great for Asian tennis."

Paradorn said it was his wild card into last year's tournament that provided him with the first step to play in the main draw of the Australian Open.

"I came back this year, I've been

doing well so far, I've seeded this year. I feel really great that I made the big jump."

He made a massive leap in the rankings over the past 12 months from 126 to a year-end 16. He is now ranked 14 in the world.

Paradorn said he was proud that the ATP Tour was putting on one of their tournaments in his home city of Bangkok.

"It's great for Thailand and Asian tennis and I will definitely be playing in the tournament in Bangkok," he said.

Paradorn rated Wednesday's match before 15,000 fans in Melbourne alongside his five-set loss to Britain's Greg Rusedski in the third round at last year's US Open in New York.

"I had more people going for me in New York in that match and here I played Philippoussis in his home town."

"I don't feel that bad because it's great to play out there. I know I tried my best and I know the crowd really enjoyed it tonight."

India won't be sans stars



AFP, New Delhi

India's cricket officials expressed confidence Wednesday the country's top stars will take part in next month's World Cup despite the ongoing contracts row.

"Take it from me, the likes of Sachin Tendulkar and Saurav Ganguly will be there at the World Cup," an official of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) told AFP.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has confirmed it received "signed but altered" contracts from India by the Tuesday deadline, but said a decision whether they will be accepted will be taken later in the week.

In a statement issued from its London-based Lord's headquarters Tuesday, the ICC said: "ICC Development International Ltd (IDI) confirmed today (Tuesday) that it has received the signed but altered player terms contracts from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)."

The ICC Cricket World Cup contracts committee will meet later this week to discuss whether the altered contracts will be accepted.

"A further statement will follow that meeting."

Indian cricketers, who ended a tour of New Zealand Tuesday, conditionally signed the contracts last week without accepting clauses that bar them from endorsing non-official sponsors before

and after the tournament.

The BCCI official, speaking privately, said the players were on a safe wicket even if the matter went to the Court of Arbitration for Sports in Lausanne, Switzerland.

"We have asked for arbitration because we are confident we have a good case," he said.

"The Court's decision could take weeks, by which time the World Cup would not only have started, but ended as well."

"The ICC can't ban players or enforce the players' terms till the matter is resolved, legally or otherwise."

Many Indian stars, including Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag, enjoy lucrative deals with non-official sponsors, which they may have to forego if the original World Cup contracts are enforced.

The other 13 teams playing in the February 8-March 23 tournament have signed the players' terms without qualification, the ICC has noted.

The BCCI and the players strongly oppose two of the 22 clauses in the players' contracts.

These relate to banning non-official endorsements for 30 days prior to the World Cup and five days after it, and allowing the players' images to be used by official sponsors for three months after the event.

The 30-day pre-tournament moratorium is already a non-starter. Indian players are featuring prominently in non-official advertisements even though the World Cup starts February 8 in South Africa.

The fear of paying millions of dollars as compensation if the BCCI loses the case is also not

causing sleepless nights to officials.

"Compensation claims can be put forward only by the official sponsors, and that is something we can work on," the official said without elaborating.

Three of the four major World Cup sponsors -- Pepsi, Hero Honda and LG Electronics -- have major interests in India and are keen to have a share of the South Asian nation's huge cricket market.

BCCI president Jagmohan Dalmiya last month appealed to these sponsors to "keep the country's interests in mind" and even hinted they could be blacklisted from Indian cricket in the future if compensation demands were made.

Dalmiya also said Indian players could not be banned from the World Cup just because they had objected the clauses.

"We are extremely keen to participate. There is no clause to stop the players if they have signed conditionally," Dalmiya, a former ICC chief, insisted.

MSC set

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Mushfiqur Rahman and Manzarul Islam Rana also signed for Victoria.

A total of 84 cricketers in the Premier League and 125 First Division players had changed clubs when the transfer