



PHOTO: AFP

**HAVE YOU HEARD THE LATEST JOKE?** The Pakistan team assembles in a show of unity at the Wanderers in Johannesburg yesterday.

## England boycotting?

AGENCIES, Johannesburg

England have formally informed the International Cricket Council that they intend to boycott Thursday's World Cup opener in Harare - but cricket chiefs are still battling to save the game.

The ICC have not given up hope of the match being played as scheduled and are demanding a final decision from the ECB later last night.

ICC president Malcolm Gray, responding to the ECB's request for further security information, wrote, in a letter to ECB chief executive Tim Lamb: "ICC Development International note that you are giving us formal notice that you are

unable to fulfil the scheduled fixture in Harare on Thursday the 13th February."

But the letter continues: "IDI and the United Cricket Board of South Africa require a final decision about whether you are going to perform your obligations under the agreement and play in the scheduled match on February 17 by 4pm (2pmGMT) today."

It was clear that the ICC were still trying to persuade England to fulfil the fixture despite their obvious reluctance to do so because of safety fears.

An ECB spokesman said: "We have not said that we are refusing to go to Zimbabwe, we have asked the ICC to move the match to a safe

location outside Zimbabwe on the grounds of safety and security."

Professional Cricketers' Association managing director Richard Bevan backed those sentiments, saying that processes were continuing.

Months of prolonged agonising have so far failed to yield a decision with England citing security fears as the key reason for their delay.

"We've bent over backwards to give them security information," Gray, an Australian, told the BBC. "As far as we're concerned they really have to come up with an answer one way or the other by 4pm today (Monday)."

Earlier Monday, the ICC said it had received "new information" from the England and Wales Cricket

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## Revenge or repeat?

INTERNET, Johannesburg

Pakistan believes Australia is ripe for the picking in Tuesday's potentially explosive World Cup cricket match at the Wanderers because of a batting line-up missing Michael Bevan and Darren Lehmann.

Pakistan coach Richard Pybus claimed his Jekyll-and-Hyde side was bubbling with confidence and keen to make a statement as Australia prepared to tackle Pakistan's potent pace attack with only five specialist batsmen.

"Our boys are looking forward to this match because they are sure they have a great opportunity," said Pybus.

"There is a lot of history between the two countries and there are a couple of scores to settle.

"If we take early wickets it will place enormous pressure on them because of the situation with Lehmann and Michael Bevan. The key for Australia is the top order and we will be going hard at them with our fast bowlers.

"Our focus is going to be on that top order and it is going to be a fascinating battle.

"Both teams like to play it tough. Australia know about us. They know that when we are hot we are very hot, when we hit our straps we can take out anybody."

Australia's top six became a top five when Bevan (groin) failed a fitness test, joining Lehmann (suspended) on the sidelines. Australia only selected one reserve batsman, Jimmy Maher, so the Cup favourites were left a specialist batsman short for the clash against Pakistan's fast-bowling royalty: Shoaib Akhtar, Waqar Younis and Wasim Akram.

Pybus said Maher and Australia's latest all-rounder, Brad Hogg, were unproven at World Cup and would be tested.

"It (World Cup) is a totally different stage," he said.

"I've seen a little bit of Jimmy -- there is a lot of responsibility on him now. He's a linchpin there in that middle order and we will be putting

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PHOTO: AFP

**YOU GUYS SPLIT UP AND FIND OUT WHAT THE PAKISTANIS ARE PLANNING!** The Australian players listen to trainer Mike Young (C) during practice yesterday.

## Warne the mentor

AFP, Johannesburg

He may be playing in his last World Cup but Australian spin legend Shane Warne is determined to make sure his legacy lives on.

The 33-year-old, man-of-the-final when Australia won the World Cup at Lord's in 1999, is passing on the tricks of his mysterious trade to Brad Hogg as the foundations for the future are put in place.

"The thought of the two of us bowling together is fantastic," said Warne as he pondered another battle with old rivals Pakistan at the Wanderers here on Tuesday.

"We are working on spinning his (Hogg's) leg-break a bit more and trying to minimise his bad balls. He's got a good flipper, but some times he rushes it and drags it

down," said Warne who, with 291 wickets one-day wickets, will be looking to break the 300 barrier over the next six weeks.

"I have also been trying to teach Brad the slider. He's starting to get there. I am teaching him all of my tricks," Warne told the Johannesburg Star newspaper.

Hogg, a left-arm spinner as opposed to Warne's right-arm mastery, has endured a fitful career having made his international debut

in 1996 since which time he has played just 15 times and taken only 15 wickets.

"One thing that Warne has always told me is to keep your variations in your pocket but I'm not going to talk about what we've been working on -- I will let the king do that," said the 32-year-old farmer's son from the Western Australian bush.

Warne, meanwhile, insists that

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PHOTO: AFP

**WISHUNDRED!** Zimbabwe opener Craig Wishart about to plunder another delivery during his undefeated 172 against Namibia at Harare yesterday.

## Whirlwind Wishart

REUTERS, Harare

Opener Craig Wishart has narrowly missed out on the highest individual World Cup score as Zimbabwe piled up 340 for two in their 50 overs against Namibia.

Wishart blasted an unbeaten 172 on Monday, the highest total by a Zimbabwe batsman in one-day internationals but short of Gary Kirsten's 188 not out for South Africa against the United Arab Emirates in the 1996 World Cup. Pakistan's Saeed Anwar holds the world record one-day score of 194.

Wishart, who struck three sixes and 18 fours in 149 balls, shared an opening stand of 107 with Mark Vermeulen, who made 39 before falling to the left-arm spin of Lennie Louw in the Group A opener.

The 43-year-old Louw, the oldest

player in the tournament, produced a juggling catch off his own bowling to claim Namibia's first ever World Cup wicket.

### LATEST

AFP, Harare

**Zimbabwe defeated Namibia their rain-affected World Cup Group B clash at the Harare Sports Club here on Monday.**

**The winning margin was 86 runs decided on the Duckworth-Lewis method after a torrential downpour brought an early conclusion to the match.**

Andy Flower scored 39 before being removed by Jan-Berry Burger's occasional leg-spin.

Flower, arguably Zimbabwe's greatest player and among the top batsmen in the world, had walked out on to the field wearing a black arm band in what is expected to be his last major international event for Zimbabwe.

But Wishart and Grant Flower (78 not out) lifted Zimbabwe past 300 with an unbroken third-wicket stand of 166, cashing in on a good batting pitch and an inexperienced Namibia attack.

The slightly-built Bjorn Kotze, nicknamed 'Bones', was hammered for 75 runs in his 10 overs while fellow medium pace seamer Louis Burger went for 70 in 10.

The hard-hitting Wishart reached his second century in one-day internationals at a run a ball and then accelerated, a savage pull for four taking him past Andy Flower's

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## Cry for democracy

AFP, Johannesburg

The 2003 World Cup was plunged into another desperate crisis on Monday when two of Zimbabwe's top cricketers donned black armbands to protest their country's regime and South Africa threatened to pull out of a tour of England in response to a possible Harare boycott by Nasser Hussain's team.

In a courageous move that reduced England's posturing over their February 13 fixture in the Zimbabwean capital to the sham it had rapidly become, Andy Flower and Henry Olonga issued a statement which passionately condemned the worsening conditions in their country.

Both wore black armbands in their opening clash against Namibia at the Harare Sports Club as they publicly denounced the regime of President Robert Mugabe.

Mugabe, a great cricket fan and the patron of the Zimbabwe Cricket Union, was not at the start of the match.

The match began barely a fifth full, with most of those spectators schoolchildren.

The statement read: "In doing so (wearing the black armbands) we are mourning the death of democracy in our beloved Zimbabwe.

"We are making a silent plea to those responsible to stop the abuse

of human rights in Zimbabwe. We pray that our small action may help to restore sanity and dignity to our nation.

"We cannot in good conscience take to the field and ignore the fact that millions of our compatriots are starving, unemployed and oppressed.

"We are aware that hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans may even die in the coming months through a combination of starvation, poverty and AIDS.

"We have heard a torrent of racist hate speech directed at minority groups."

"We are aware that many people have been unjustly imprisoned and tortured simply for expressing their opinions about what is happening in the country.

"We are aware that people have been murdered, raped, beaten and had their homes destroyed because of their beliefs and that many of those responsible have not been prosecuted."

Flower's and Olonga's stunning statement was released while 2,000 miles away, in the safety of Cape Town, England continued their dithering over whether or not to boycott their scheduled game in Harare on Thursday.

## Glitters and that's gold!

AFP, Cape Town

World Cup cricket captains are performing the toss with a single-ounce, 24-carat gold medallion, while the player-of-the-match will receive a gold watch.

The South African gold-mining industry has produced 54 such medallions, one for each game in the six-week tournament that got underway on Sunday with the hosts taking on the West Indies at Newlands here.

The captain winning the toss will unfortunately not get to keep the coin, replicas of which will be sold to the public in gold and silver.

But the player of the match will take home the gold watch worth 10,000 South African rands (1,100 dollars).

The player of the tournament will receive a 1.5 kilogram trophy made of 24-carat gold.

The medallions for the toss will feature South African president Thabo Mbeki's head on one side -- to be referred to as heads at the toss -- and the World Cup logo on the other.

South Africa has 35 per cent of the globe's gold reserves -- the largest in the world.

## Top class ton

REUTERS, Cape Town

Brian Lara described his match-winning century in the opening match of the 2003 World Cup as the best one-day innings of his career on Sunday.

Asked where his 116 stood in his list of achievements, he told a news conference: "Today this ranks as number one.

"It's important in the context of the tournament. We didn't get off to a good start and this is the world stage. We had to fight."

The Trinidadian's 134-ball innings, out of a total of 278 for five and which set up a three-run upset win over the hosts, capped a remarkable comeback.

Just over a year ago the 33-year-old left-hander dislocated and fractured his left elbow when playing in Sri Lanka and did not return to the nets for three months. He was then dogged by a back injury and collapsed at the Champions Trophy in

September with a mystery illness after scoring a century against Kenya.

That illness almost cost him his place in the World Cup squad.

Lara had a huge slice of luck on Sunday, however, edging his first ball to a diving Jacques Kallis at second slip, only for the South African to get a hand to the ball but spill the chance.

"Considering the amount of work I put in during the last couple of months since I was cleared medically, I don't think I deserved a first-ball duck," Lara smiled.

"I really worked hard. I have been away for four to five months and the guys have played really good cricket in India in the one-day series and in Bangladesh.

"I came into a team that was full of confidence. I told myself before the start of this tournament that I would have to push and shove myself to the front of this team,

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## Fast talk

AFP, Johannesburg

Speed kings Shoaib Akhtar of Pakistan and Australia's Brett Lee clash in a key World Cup game on Tuesday but both have downplayed any prospect of a pace war.

The duo said they would rather concentrate on grabbing wickets instead of trying to prove who could bowl faster.

"I know I am required to keep the batsmen under pressure by taking wickets," said Shoaib, nicknamed the 'Rawalpindi Express.'

"I'm seen as an aggressive wicket-taking bowler so if I need to sacrifice speed for wickets I don't mind.

"It's not that I won't bowl fast. I have noticed that when you trouble a batsman with pace, send down a few short balls, he usually gets out

next ball."

Lee indicated he would follow the same policy when the match gets underway at the Wanderers, regarded as one of the fastest wickets in South Africa.

"Of course I want to bowl fast, but getting wickets is more important," he said.

"Pace remains my main weapon but I also look up to guys like Glenn McGrath who bowl line and length and take wickets which helps the team win. I must also do that."

Shoaib beat Lee to the magical 160-kilometre an hour barrier last year during a one-day international against New Zealand in Lahore.

Lee's fastest delivery has been timed at 159kmh during a Test match at Cape Town early last year.

With both bowlers running up top

speeds, promoters arranged a contest between the two in India, but it fell through after the Pakistan Cricket Board denied Shoaib permission to take part.

Former Pakistani captain Imran Khan, himself a pace bowler of repute, said taking wickets should remain a fast bowler's top priority.

"Lee and Shoaib generate excitement in the crowds with their pace but they must not forget the golden rule of maintaining a good line and length to be more effective," Imran said.

The outspoken Shoaib insists he and Lee are different bowlers.

"I am a match winner and he is not," he said. "Only when he starts taking wickets can he be compared to me."

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PHOTO: AFP

**LIFE IN THE FAST LANE:** (L) Australian fast bowler Brett Lee finds something amusing as he waits to bat in the nets while Lee's Pakistani adversary Shoaib Akhtar (R) loosens up during practice at Johannesburg on February 9.