

PCB launches 1st women's tournament

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan launched its first national women's cricket championship Tuesday, with organisers hoping the event will inspire up-and-coming female cricketers in the conservative Muslim country.

"It's a historic occasion," said Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) spokesman Abbas Zaidi ahead of the week-long tournament in the eastern city of Lahore.

"With the unprecedented patronage of the PCB we hope the event will create huge interest in the new generation," he added.

Teams from Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Multan, Quetta, Hyderabad, Peshawar and Faisalabad are taking part. Four teams will qualify for a so-called super league, with the top two teams contesting the final on March 7.

Particularly significant is the presence of the team from Peshawar, where an Islamic fundamentalist provincial government discourages women's sports and last year banned male coaches for female players.

"We are here with the permission of our parents and have no fear of anyone," said a Peshawar player, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The PCB created a separate women's wing last year, after the International Cricket Council took control of the International Women's Cricket Council.

"We have begun a new chapter in women's cricket with over 100 women players in attendance for the eight regional teams," said Shamsa Hashmi, secretary of the board's female division.

Officials hope that handing control of the tournament to the PCB's women's section will also end a decade-long feud between three rival female cricket associations, which all claimed to be the game's true representative in Pakistan.

The feud ended up in the courts and also saw two Pakistan teams reaching India for the 1997 women's World Cup.

Gaibandha cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Ghagot Krira Chakra defeated Munshipara Krira Sangha by 120 runs in the First Division Cricket Super League at the Gaibandha Stadium yesterday.

Batting first Ghagot scored 221 all out in the stipulated 50 overs. Munshipara were all out for 101 in 28.5 overs.

Hosts hold

FROM PAGE 13 tourists clinch the Kolkata Test. Then there was off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq, who grabbed four successive hauls of five wickets to keep unrelenting pressure on the Indian batsmen.

Inzamam has conceded that his team will miss the services of Akhtar. "He's our strike bowler. He can be dangerous for the opposition and an asset for us only if he is fit, but unfortunately he is not," he said.

Fortunately, India captain Sourav Ganguly is not in the same boat as he has the luxury of leading a full-strength side.

Fast bowlers Zaheer Khan, Irfan Pathan, Ashish Nehra and Laxmipathy Balaji, who were plagued with injuries in recent series, have regained fitness and presented their captain with an embarrassment of riches.

All of them may not figure in the playing eleven as spinners Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh are proven match-winners on home pitches.

India appear to have an edge in both batting and bowling departments and it is only a dramatic reversal in form that can prevent them from asserting their supremacy in the Test series starting at Mohali on March 8.

It'll be 'awesome'



AFP, New Delhi

Indian captain Sourav Ganguly has predicted an "awesome" series against arch-rivals Pakistan, saying the team which handled the pressure better will win.

"I don't think there is much to choose between the two sides," Ganguly said in an interview as his team prepared to clash with Inzamamul Haq's tourists in three Tests and six one-day internationals.

"The key to winning is to keep your cool amidst the pressure that goes with an India-Pakistan encounter. Fans expect you to win against Pakistan more than any other team.

"But I will try to ensure my team is not burdened by unnecessary pressure. I want them to remain calm all the time and just concentrate on the task at hand."

Ganguly, India's most successful captain with 18 Test wins, scoffed at suggestions that Pakistan's less experienced team without injured fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar would be easy fodder for the hosts.

"I don't think anybody is a favourite," he said. "Pakistan are a very good side. Batsmen like Inzamam and Yousef Youhana are not to be taken lightly.

"And just because Shoaib has injury problems does not mean Pakistan's attack is weak. People

like Mohammad Sami and Danish Kaneria can be quite devastating on their day.

"We will have to play very well to beat them even though we are playing at home. It is going to be an awesome series."

Home advantage counts for little. The last two Test series between the old foes have been won by the visitors.

Pakistan won two of the three Tests they played in India in 1999, including the Asian Test championship match in Kolkata. Ganguly's men inflicted a 2-1 defeat in their first series on Pakistan soil in 15 years last year.

Ganguly admitted that four consecutive one-day losses to Pakistan since August -- in Sri Lanka, the Netherlands, England and India -- still rankled, but he was not unduly worried.

"Yes, those defeats are very much on our minds," he said. "I confess we did not play well and that's why we lost not only to Pakistan but also to other teams.

"But that was at the start of the season and we have gradually improved since then.

"We may have lost the home series to Australia, but we did win the last Test against them, then beat both South Africa and Bangladesh.

"I know we start afresh against Pakistan, but it is important to make winning a habit."

Ganguly brushed aside suggestions that the upcoming series,

which starts with the first Test at Mohali from March 8, was going to be the biggest of his career.

"Not at all," he said. "The World Cup is a huge tournament for any captain and we reached the final last time in South Africa.

"Then we went to Australia and held the world champions to a 1-1 draw. Not many captains have returned from Australia and survived.

"We toured Pakistan last year and won both the Test and one-day series. That was the first time an Indian team had done that in Pakistan.

"I am sure I would have been removed as captain if we had lost in Pakistan. Those were bigger series than this one."

Ganguly was convinced cricket played a big role in promoting peace between the two warring neighbours.

"We don't have to look beyond the last series in Pakistan to realise how much cricket builds bridges," he said.

"Thousands of Indians crossed the border to watch the matches. The hospitality in Pakistan was unbelievable and this is something I will always cherish.

"There was not a single unsavoury incident on that tour. Cricket is a passion in both countries. But more importantly, people on both sides have realised it is just a sport and not war.

"I hope Pakistan enjoy the same hospitality in India."

TIBET FED CUP Victori, Agrani in group finals

SPORTS REPORTER

Victoria Sporting Club and Agrani Bank moved into the group finals of the Tibet 20th Federation Cup football tournament beating their respective rivals at the Bishreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Agrani Bank managed a solitary goal victory over Dipali Jubo Sangha through a 13th minute strike from Swapan to reach the final in Group A.

The bankers will face Youngmen's Club Fakirerpool in the final tomorrow at the same venue.

In the day's second match, Victoria defeated Farashganj Sporting Club 5-4 in tiebreaker to book their seat in Group B.

The match was locked 1-1 during the stipulated 90 minutes.

They will meet today's winners of the match between Bangladesh Navy and Dhaka Wanderers Club in the final.

Three lead nat'l chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Masters Niaz Murshed and Ziaur Rahman and International Master Abdullah Al Rakib won their fifth round boards in the Mercantile Bank 31st National Chess Championship yesterday to jointly lead the table.

With the outcome, they raised their collections to 4.5 points each.

In the round, Zia beat Enamul Hossain Rajib, Niaz defeated Aminul Islam Palash while Rakib beat FM Rezaul Haque at the federation hall room.

IM Rezaul Bin Sattar and Syed Mahfuzur Rahman Emon followed the leaders with three points after beating Hasan Imam and FM Khondakar Aminul Islam respectively.

In the other fifth round matches, Uten defeated Mainuddin Ahmed, national junior champion Mehdi Hasan Parag drew with FM Abu Sufian Shakil.

Bari bucks up Sami

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's chief cricket selector said Tuesday he hoped the absence of paceman Shoaib Akhtar could inspire fellow bowler Mohammad Sami to spring a surprise on the team's first tour of India for six years.

"Because Akhtar is the fastest bowler in the world he will be missed and every player needs to give 25 percent extra to overcome his loss," Wasim Bari told AFP.

Akhtar pulled out of the Test series due to a hamstring injury but is aiming to make a possible return for the one-day series.

"One hopes that with the responsibility, the best in Sami will come out," Bari added.

Bari, a renowned wicketkeeper who played 81 Tests and 51 one-day games between 1967-1984, said Pakistan could still come away from the tour with a result.

"They can spring a surprise in India," he said. "I think we have a talented side. Obviously they made some mistakes on their last tour of Australia, but they must capitalise on the lessons they learnt."

Pakistan lost all three Tests and a tri-nation one-day tournament on their tour of Australia which ended early February.

Bari described the Indian tour as a turning point for Pakistan. "Good results will pave the way for the young team to get on the right path and attain more maturity," he said.

Pakistan arrived in India on Monday to play three Tests and six one-day internationals. The tour opens with a three-day side game at the Indian hill resort of Dharamsala on Thursday.

Ramiz Raja, a former Pakistan captain and ex-chief executive of the Pakistan Cricket Board, said the side could upset India if they come out with all guns blazing.

Rallying around Mourinho



AFP, London

Colourful Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho received the full support of the League Managers' Association (LMA) on Monday following his sending-off during his side's 3-2 victory over Liverpool in the League Cup final.

The Portuguese coach put his finger to his lips when a Steven Gerrard own-goal levelled the match and took it into extra-time - the fourth official ordered him from the bench for inciting the Liverpool fans, though Mourinho has claimed it was aimed at the media.

Mourinho said afterwards the press had been too quick to conclude that after successive defeats to Newcastle in the FA Cup and Barcelona in the Champions League first leg clash that Chelsea were choking.

The Football Association were awaiting the official match report on Monday from referee Steve Bennett, who has already confirmed details of the incident would be included, before deciding on whether to take further action.

However Frank Clark, LMA vice-chairman, gave his unequivocal

support to the former FC Porto handler, who guided them to the UEFA Cup and Champions League trophies in successive seasons before decamping to Chelsea last summer.

"Was that gesticulation? All I saw was Jose put his fingers to his lips, I thought it was fairly innocuous," said Clark, who has managed Nottingham Forest and Newcastle. "Obviously someone in a posi-



JOSE MOURINHO

tion of authority thought differently but it didn't seem very provocative to me, I have to say.

"We regularly talk to our members about their responsibility for

behaviour in the technical area and we accept they must act in a sensible fashion within that area.

"We are all conscious of crowd safety at football matches but this was mild."

However despite the LMA's support the people responsible for security at the Millennium Stadium were sufficiently anxious the gesture caused offence to have Mourinho sent down the tunnel.

Should the FA judge Mourinho was provoking the crowd it could potentially lead to a second charge, following his first for claiming Manchester United players were cheating in the League Cup semi-final.

Clark, though, said if Mourinho called on his body to support him in any hearing they would do so.

"If a manager contacts us we would get involved," said the former Nottingham Forest centre-back.

"If he is charged in any way we would provide the legal assistance if we thought he was being harshly treated.

"Obviously if someone swears at an official in an aggressive manner we would not defend that. That would be different. You cannot defend the indefensible."

Venus falls, Sania advances



AFP, Dubai

Venus Williams will be off the WTA Tour for at least three weeks with a recurrence of an old stomach injury which worsened during a dismal 7-5, 7-6 loss to Italy's Silvia Farina Elia in the first round of the Dubai Open on Monday.

Venus, who had also been playing with both wrists strapped, acquired a further conspicuous bandage halfway through the match, on her right hand where she had a troublesome blister.

However during an error-ridden display it was hard to know whether

the bandage helped or hindered the elder Williams sister, or even whether she was in the right frame of mind to compete.

"I was smiling because my stomach hurts, and my hand's going crazy and still somehow I was in the match," she said.

"I thought why am I out here. To the people who came to support me -- I'm sorry I wasn't well."

Venus admitted that it was similar to the injury she had during the 2003 Wimbledon final, and that unless there was a marked improvement she might miss the Nasdaq-100 Open in Miami, starting on March 23.

All this was a significant disappointment to the Dubai tournament, which had managed a rare coup --

the presence of both Williams sisters in a tournament outside a Grand Slam.

Farina Elia next plays Jelena Jankovic of Serbia, with every possibility of going on to a quarterfinal with Svetlana Kuznetsova, the US Open champion from Russia.

Kuznetsova starts Tuesday against Sania Mirza, the 18-year-old Indian wild card entry, who recently won her first WTA Tour title and who came through 6-7, 6-4, 6-1 against Jelena Kostanic, the world number 36 from Croatia.

Top-seeded world number one Lindsay Davenport also starts on Wednesday, against Zheng Jie, the world number 65 from China who won 3-6, 6-4, 7-5 against Virginia Ruano Pascual of Spain.

See Streak play again

BBC ONLINE, undated

Former Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak has arrived in South Africa and is set to play his first international match for 12 months.

He has joined the squad for Wednesday's one-day match in Port Elizabeth.

A team spokesman told the BBC Streak had flown in on Monday evening and was due to take part in Zimbabwe's final practice session.

Streak, who has ended his dispute with Zimbabwe Cricket officials, said: "I'm looking forward to getting back."

"Obviously there's an element of concern at not having played at this level for a while, but it's not like I haven't been playing cricket. "I had a good season at Warwickshire [last summer] and have been playing club cricket."

Streak, 30, was sacked as skipper in April 2004 after criticising Zimbabwe Cricket's selection policies.

Now, he says he will be happy to be part of the new regime, with Tatenda Taibu as captain.

He said: "I'll be there for him to help and to lend the experience that I've gained."

Streak is Zimbabwe's leading wicket-taker in both one-day and Test cricket, with a combined total of 436 wickets.

He also has six first-class centuries to his credit, including an innings of 127 not out in a Test against West Indies in November 2003, and he will add valuable depth to their batting.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian tennis sensation Sania Mirza plays backhand against Jelena Kostanic of Croatia at the Dubai Open on Monday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down sections.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with clues and solution: ONR "UFMRO" NSG "JFAAO" Saturday's Cryptoquip: TWO LAUNDERERS WERE IN A HOT DEBATE, BUT THEY FINALLY IRONED OUT THEIR DIFFERENCES.

Aussies too strong

FROM PAGE 13 there was little other sign of resistance.

SCOREBOARD Scoreboard in the fourth one-day international between New Zealand and Australia at the Basin Reserve on Tuesday:

Table with columns for Team, Player, and Runs/Wickets. Includes scores for Australia (54) and New Zealand (43).

Pennant facing jail term

AFP, London

Arsenal's Jermaine Pennant faced jail on Tuesday for drink driving while banned from the road.

Pennant pleaded guilty at last month's hearing to charges of drink driving, driving while disqualified and using a vehicle without insurance.

Arsenal bought Pennant for two million pounds from Notts County in 1999, one of the highest amounts paid for a teenager at the time.

When Pennant made his Arsenal debut against Middlesbrough in a League Cup tie on 30 November 1999 he became Arsenal's youngest ever first team player at 16 years and 319 days.

He scored a hat-trick on his full Premiership debut for Arsenal against Southampton in May 2003 but failed to live up to his early promise and was loaned out to Leeds last season.

heard. The former England Under-21 star had been banned from driving for 16 months in February last year after being seen travelling in the wrong lane in London.

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Wanderers

FROM PAGE 13 Wanderers bounced back through two field goals from Sheikh Sumon Ali and Imran Haider.

Cricket dug

FROM PAGE 13 were only acting at the request of the cricket authorities.

"We wanted to take some more time but the cricket board had asked for the soil of the pitches so that it could be used at Mirpur and that's why we are uprooting it to avoid further damage," said BFF deputy secretary Monjur Hossain Malu.

Hard work

Table with columns for Player, Runs, and Wickets. Lists players like Bundela, Abbas, and Yadvan.

Extras: (b-1, lb-5, nb-4) 14 Total: (For 3 wickets in 90 overs) 248 To bat: Doru, Ojha, Kartik, Harvinder Singh, Srivastava, Parida.

Fall of wickets: 1-16, 2-24, 3-238. Bowlers O M R W Nazmul 9 3 25 0 Anwar 15 6 40 1 Jubair 23 3 74 1 Razzak 17 6 39 0 Manjarul 16 3 50 0 Kapali 10 5 14 1

Toss: Central Zone Umpires: AV Jayaprakash and SK Sharma

BCB XI: Mohammad Ashraf, Al-Shahriar, Sagor Hossain, Nafees Iqbal, Aftab Ahmed, Akop Kapali, Manjarul Islam Rana, Abdur Razzak, Talha Jubair, Nazmul Hossain, Anwar Hossain Monir.