

India to issue visa to Pak visitors

PTI, New Delhi

Despite apprehensions over illegal overstay by cricket fans, the Indian home ministry has given clearance for grant of visas to around 1,000 Pakistani visitors to watch the ICC Champions Trophy matches in India.

The decision to grant the visas follows repeated requests from the BCCI and the Punjab Cricket Association in view of the enthusiasm generated across the border by the upcoming matches at Mohali which is not far from the Wagah checkpoint, Ministry sources said on Thursday.

They said visas would be granted ahead of the Pakistan-New Zealand match on October 25 and the Pakistan-South Africa tie on October 27 – both at Mohali.

The ministry has yielded to the request even as 11 of the 2,754 Pakistanis, who came here in March 2005 to watch the Indo-Pak test match at Mohali, are still untraced.

However, as a precautionary measure in view of the fears expressed by intelligence agencies that some Pakistani visitors could use the match ticket to gain entry into the country and overstay posing security risk, the MHA has this time decided to limit the number of single-entry visas to around 1,000 though the demand was much higher.

Trescothick now fully fit

BBC ONLINE, Undated

Marcus Trescothick said he is fully fit and raring to go to Australia for England's defence of the Ashes.

The opening batsman was unavailable for the current ICC Champions Trophy in India as he recovered from a "stress related illness".

But he told the Daily Mirror: "The buzz is back, the energy is back, I'm fit and raring to go."

Trescothick will fly out to Australia early next month to meet up with the rest of the England squad.

The 30-year-old was adamant he had fully recovered from the condition which first saw him return home from the tour of India last winter.

And he praised the support he has received from England and the Professional Cricketers' Association.

"I want to get back on the plane now, I want to get going and feel the bat in my hands again," said Trescothick.

"I've been through the mill, and not even my own teammates knew what was going on. I only told one or two – and even they didn't know the full extent of what was happening.

"The constant treadmill of playing, training and being away from home non-stop took its toll.

"But the possibility of being on the road for six months doesn't worry me – doing well in the Ashes and the World Cup would be perfect therapy."

Trescothick still has not traced the source of his illness but believes an accident that left his father-in-law critically ill, which occurred while the batsman was on tour in Pakistan, may have played a part.

England begin their defence of the Ashes on 23 November in Brisbane.

SL's must-win

FROM PAGE 21

defiant 89 on a turning wicket and hopes to continue in the same vein.

"I suppose one has to be a bit circumspect while batting on these wickets," he said. "It will always be an advantage to bat first and put up a good score."

New Zealand's final league match will be against Pakistan in Mohali on October 25.

TEAMS

SRI LANKA (from): Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Kumar Sangakkara, Sanath Jayasuriya, Marvan Atapattu, Upul Tharanga, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedara, Farveez Maharoof, Chaminda Vaas, Ruchira Perera, Dilhara Fernando, Lasith Malinga, Malinga Bandara, Muttiah Muralidaran.

NEW ZEALAND (from): Stephen Fleming (captain), Nathan Astle, James Franklin, Peter Fulton, Mark Gillespie, Brendon McCullum, Hamish Marshall, Kyle Mills, Jacob Oram, Jeetan Patel, Scott Styris, Daniel Vettori, Lou Vincent.

Chelsea

FROM PAGE 24

and, if they call us, they call the press. "So Fabien Barthez is a name. There are a lot of names in the air. What I know is that Carlo (Cudicini) and Hilario are very good goalkeepers and it is not easy for somebody to come and play in this team.

"We need somebody to give us security and replace Petr Cech in the group of keepers. That is the profile of the goalkeeper we are looking for."

Cech is recovering from an operation on the serious head injury he suffered in the early stages of Saturday's Premiership win.

The 24-year-old was involved in a collision with Royals midfielder Stephen Hunt, whose knee connected with Cech's head during the challenge.

A leading neuro-surgeon on Monday warned that rushing Cech back into action could prove fatal, claiming his injuries would require at least six months out of the game.

Diwali fear for old foes



AFP, Mumbai

Old foes Australia and England will play their Champions Trophy match on Saturday amid deafening blasts, choking air and poor visibility.

The high-profile Group A match in the eight-nation tournament is slated in the northwestern city of Jaipur on the day India celebrates Diwali, the festival of lights.

Diwali, the country's biggest Hindu festival, is marked by ear-splitting fireworks that begin at dusk and continue for hours, leaving a dark haze of smoke and heavily polluted air.

A recent non-governmental study said noise levels soar by nearly 200 percent on Diwali and the air is polluted at least 150 times more than already-high levels, leading to increased cases of asthma.

Firecrackers will be banned from the Sawai Man Singh stadium, the

match venue, but it is likely to be engulfed in a thick blanket of smoke from those let off in adjoining areas.

The peak hours of the celebrations will coincide with the second innings of the day-night international, the first meeting between Australia and England since the famous Ashes series last year.

There will be no let-up even in the afternoon session since firecrackers are let off from morning of the auspicious festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil.

Day matches have been played before on Diwali, but this is the first time a day-night international has been scheduled.

The date for this year's Diwali, which is fixed according to the Hindu calendar, was known in January. The schedule for the Champions Trophy was finalised in April.

Indian cricket authorities said they had warned the sport's world governing body against holding the match on Diwali, but their pleas fell on deaf ears.

"We had asked the International Cricket Council (ICC) to have a rethink, but they said both Australia and England had not expressed any

reservations," an official said.

ICC spokesman Brian Murgatroyd told AFP the matter had been discussed when the schedule was being finalised. "It's not an issue at all. We do not anticipate any problems," he said.

The ICC has nevertheless paid the hosts 700,000 dollars to cover the cost of additional security after the Rajasthan Cricket Association feared they would be unable to provide adequate security on Diwali.

Police and para-military forces from adjoining states have been summoned to Jaipur for the match, officials said.

Both England and Australia have in the past complained about polluted air while touring India.

The match on Saturday is crucial for both teams after world champions Australia lost their opening match to the West Indies and England went down to hosts India.

Pervez urges punitive measures

PTI, Islamabad

In the backdrop of Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif testing positive for a banned steroid, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has asked the national cricket board to enforce discipline in the team's ranks but not at the cost of punishing an innocent player.

"No innocent player should be punished and players should be protected," Musharraf has told new PCB chief Nasim Ashraf.

Musharraf telephoned Ashraf on Tuesday to congratulate him over Pakistan's victory over Sri Lanka two days ago and also asked him to ensure discipline was enforced in the team, local daily 'The Nation' reported on Thursday.

Ashraf, who was nominated by Musharraf recently to succeed Shaharyar Khan, was expected to meet the players, currently in India for the Champions Trophy, this weekend and convey Musharraf's message.

Amelie passes Stosur hurdle

AFP, Zurich

Top seed Amelie Mauresmo overcame a strong challenge from Samantha Stosur to reach the quarterfinals of the Zurich Open on Wednesday, winning 7-6, 6-3.

Mauresmo will next face Slovak Daniela Hantuchova, who overcame Ai Sugiyama of Japan 7-6, 6-2.

Martina Hingis also advanced, beating Nathalie Dechy of France 6-3, 6-3, and Russia's Maria Kirilenko went through after Tatiana Golovin of France retired with an ankle injury while leading 4-2.

Mauresmo revealed that she is troubled by an ailing right shoulder, a factor that may have led to her hitting five double-faults.

"My shoulder isn't feeling great," Mauresmo reported Wednesday.

"It's difficult and frustrating not being able to play at 100 per cent, but I made the choice to play.

"I'm not playing my best tennis but I'm trying to do the best I can on the court considering the circumstances. It is frustrating, but it's a different experience and you work on these things mentally and just deal with it."

The plucky Australian fired 11 aces to keep Mauresmo at bay, and she refused to allow the world number one to dominate at any stage.

Mauresmo had not conceded a set in their previous four meetings, and did not even give up a game when they met in Miami earlier this year. But she struggled to get the upper hand on this occasion.

The match might have been easier for Mauresmo if she had been able to take advantage of two break points in the first game. But Stosur saved the first with an ace and the second with another powerful serve that forced Mauresmo to net her return.

Stosur then held two break points of her own when leading 3-2, but Mauresmo held and then went on to edge the tiebreak 7-4.

Partex, Epyllion

FROM PAGE 21

show came from Nazmul Hossain Milon. The young all-rounder struck 4 sixes in his 21-ball 44 which also included couple of boundaries. Sajou Datta and Kamrul Islam took three wickets each.

But Ispahani disappointed with the bat in such a crucial match as they were bundled out for just 13 runs in 36 overs. Suharwardi Shuvo and Kamrul Hasan took three wickets each for the winners. For his superb effort, Nazmul was elected as the man-of-the-match.

BRIEF SCORES

ASIA PACIFIC: 126 all out in 39.5 overs (Swapan 57; Nabil 3-20, Baisya 3-33)

EPYLLION: 128 for 5 in 33.3 overs (Sadat 27, Salahuddin 27; Azim 2-39)

PARTEX: 209-9 in 50 overs (Mazhar 28, Riyad 16; Shuvo 3-6, Hossain 2-24)

BEXIMCO: 206-7 in 50 overs (Kapali 70, Mehrab 57, Ashraful 26; Ashraful 2-22, Towhidul 2-33)

SYFANG FAN: 64 all out in 34.4 overs (Imrul 11; Mehrab 3-3, Sharif 2-7, Razzak 2-10).

PCB gags

FROM PAGE 21

Pakistan Cricket Board's director of cricket operations, said on Thursday.

Altaf said that the first hearing would take place next week after the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays.

"Since the holidays are coming up we have decided to have the hearing immediately afterwards. Both will be given a fair opportunity to plead their case and can ask for a Test of their B samples," he added.

PCB won't pay England



AFP, Karachi

Pakistani cricket chiefs will refuse to pay England any compensation for this summer's Oval Test fiasco because they say Australian umpire Darrell Hair was to blame.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Nasim Ashraf made the declaration after English cricket authorities set an October 31 deadline for payment of what they say are losses of 800,000 pounds from the controversy.

"Hair was the main villain of the whole controversy," Ashraf told AFP. "We have solid grounds that it was a cause-and-effect case -- and the root cause was Hair."

Hair, 53, and West Indian umpire Billy Doctrove accused Pakistan of ball-tampering on the fourth day of the fourth Test at the Oval against England in August, subsequently awarding five penalty runs to England.

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq continued to play for another 45 minutes but his side refused to take the field after tea, forcing the two umpires to award the match to England.

It was the first forfeit in Test

cricket's 129-year history.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) complained that it had to give a 40 percent refund to spectators who attended the fourth day's play, while those who had tickets for day five had to get all their money back.

"The ball is back in Pakistan's court. If there isn't an obvious resolution it can be referred to the ICC's (International Cricket Council) panel," ECB chief executive David Collier was quoted as saying earlier this week.

Ashraf said the PCB had officially rejected the compensation claim in a letter last week and he vowed that the fight against the claim would continue -- as would Pakistan's battle to keep umpire Hair out of their future matches.

"Pakistan is making a strong case and we will send a letter to the ICC, hopefully by Friday, to not appoint Hair in any of our future matches and also contesting the compensation issue raised by the ECB," Ashraf said late Wednesday.

Ashraf, who was at the Oval when the controversy unfolded, took over as PCB chief two weeks ago after Shaharyar Khan resigned due to the Oval debacle and other recent incidents.

He said Pakistan had been ready

to play despite staying off for a few minutes at tea.

"ECB chief David Morgan would agree that we wanted to take the field but it was Hair who was adamant," he said.

"When Hair removed the bails I feared he had taken a final decision and I prevailed over Inzamam to return to the field even without the umpires."

An ICC hearing last month cleared Inzamam of ball-tampering charges but banned him for four one-day internationals for bringing the game into disrepute.

Khan quit on October 6 after Younis Khan caused further chaos by publicly declining to be a "dummy captain" in place of Inzamam. Ashraf then reinstated Younis.

In the latest controversy to hit Pakistan cricket, fast bowlers Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif were sent home from the Champions Trophy in India on Monday after testing positive for the banned steroid nandrolone, and are set to face a PCB disciplinary tribunal next week.

India to pardon Azzu



AFP, Mumbai

India's cricket chiefs said on Thursday they will go ahead and resurrect former captain Mohammad Azharuddin from a life of shame despite objections from the sport's world governing body.

Azharuddin was banned from the game for life by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in 2000 after a federal inquiry found him guilty of match-fixing.

Azharuddin, 43, denied the charges and is awaiting judgement on a suit filed by him in a court in his home city of Hyderabad challenging the life ban.

The new BCCI regime headed by political heavyweight Sharad Pawar, which took over last year, is convinced Azharuddin has served enough punishment and deserves to be pardoned.

The BCCI, which is pondering lifting the life ban, has invited Azharuddin to a function in Mumbai on November 4 to honour him and other Indian captains for their services to the game.

The International Cricket Council (ICC), which follows a policy of zero tolerance towards match-fixers, will decide on November 3 at its Executive Board meeting here whether to attend the function if the invitation to Azharuddin stands.

The BCCI, however, will not back

off from inviting Azharuddin despite the ICC's reservations and even took a swipe at the world governing body.

"The general opinion is that Azhar had undergone enough punishment and he should be allowed to lead his life like cricketers who had faced similar charge in other countries but are going about as if they had done no wrong," the BCCI's chief administrative officer Ratnakar Shetty said in a statement.

"It must be clarified there is a feeling among BCCI members that what the board did when the scandal broke might have been correct, even if it was a knee-jerk reaction.

"In retrospect, they feel the board had been too harsh on its players considering the way the other boards went about protecting the guilty."

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed, who was in India earlier this week to attend some matches of the Champions Trophy, had criticised moves to invite Azharuddin for the November 4 function.

Speed told reporters that it was unfair to compare Azharuddin with Australian Shane Warne and South Africa's Herschelle Gibbs, who are still playing after being punished by their respective boards for their involvement with book-makers.

"It was alleged and proved that Azharuddin was actively involved in match-fixing," Speed said. "We need to be careful when we com-

pare cases with cases."

Warne and teammate Mark Vaughn were fined by the Australian board in 1995 after admitting they provided pitch information to a bookie in exchange for an unspecified sum.

Gibbs was suspended for six months in 2000 by the South Africans after he told an inquiry commission that he accepted an offer from then captain Hansie Cronje to under-perform in a one-dayer in India.

Gibbs, however, added he forgot about the offer when he went out to bat and told New Delhi police last week that he did not take any money from Cronje.

The BCCI's Shetty countered: "Yes, Azhar should not be compared with those who got away with murder, people who continued to play after serving a token punishment.

"One is being persecuted and condemned for life while others strut about as paragons of virtues," Shetty said in the media statement.

Azharuddin had played 99 Tests when he was banned. He scored 6,215 Test runs with 22 centuries and 9,378 runs in 334 one-dayers.

WACA loses pace bite



AFP, Perth

Perth's WACA Ground pitch has long been considered the home of fast bowling in world cricket, but its changing nature could force Australia to break with years of tradition and play two leg-spinners for the third Ashes Test in December.

Fast bowling greats Dennis Lillee, Jeff Thomson, Glenn McGrath, Wes Hall, Michael Holding and Curtly Ambrose have savoured the WACA's legendary pace and bounce and made the ground synonymous with express bowling.

As a result, local spinners Ashley Mallett, Terry Jenner and Stuart MacGill were forced to go interstate to look for more suitable decks and subsequently flourished and went on to play Test cricket.

However, the increasingly placid and slow nature of the WACA pitches have forced the West

Australian side in the domestic Sheffield Shield competition to turn increasingly to spin in the last two seasons.

The WACA's transformation from fast bowler's paradise to spinning deck culminated in this week's drawn Shield match against Victoria, in which just 18 wickets fell in four days and spin was the favoured bowling option for much of the game.

Few would have ever envisioned spinners being used in tandem as a common practice at the WACA Ground.

Yet by the end of the first session of the game, Victoria's two leg-spinners, champion Shane Warne and Cameron White, were operating at either end.

The home side used left-arm finger spinner Aaron Heal and part-time off-spinner Marcus North for long periods, even giving a third spinner, Adam Voges, a stint at the bowling crease.

WA captain and Australian opener Justin Langer lamented the lack of pace and bounce in the latest

WACA pitch.

The neighbouring wicket used in last year's drawn Test against South Africa has been pencilled in for the third Ashes Test, starting on December 14, and is expected to provide similar playing conditions.

Langer compared the wicket for the Victorian game to the one for last summer's South Africa Test, and said playing both Warne and MacGill in Perth was shaping as a real option for national selectors.

"You'd have to consider it, definitely," Langer said Thursday. "And that is unusual for here, to even think about it.

"You'd have to consider it if it was as dry for the Test match as it is at the moment."

Langer said the usual assistance for the quick bowlers early in a WACA match was missing.

"You expect as an opening batsman here for the first two sessions of the game to be really hard work," he said.

Murray, Nadal progress



AFP, Madrid

Unseeded Andy Murray interrupted the Masters Cup qualification progress of Ivan Ljubicic with a second-round upset win at the Madrid Masters Series Wednesday.

The teenaged Scot, ranked 19th, held his nerve over more than two hours to eliminate his world No. 3 opponent, firing his eighth ace of the match to win 6-4, 3-6, 6-3.

The defeat was a blow for Ljubicic, who came to Spain on the back of his indoors title win in Vienna at the weekend.

The 27-year-old Croat, who went down to Spanish ace Rafael Nadal a year ago in the title match after holding a two-sets-to-love lead, could have joined Roger Federer and Nadal in the season-ender at Shanghai next month had he reached a second consecutive final here.

Ljubicic was not the only big name victim in Spain on Wednesday.

The winner of the Stockholm Open on Sunday, American James Blake suffered his third consecutive opening defeat in Madrid, 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 to Kristof Vliegen.

The No.8 failed totally to back up his successful title defence in Stockholm, and he is yet to win a match in Madrid after defeats in 2002 and 2003.

Blake's game blew apart as he went down to the battling Belgian for the second time this season.

Blake can now only sit and watch nervously as the rest of the contenders take aim at places in next month's season-ending Masters Cup in Shanghai.

And playing the waiting game is not something that Blake, the winner of five titles this season, does easily.

Masters Cup candidate Fernando Gonzalez meanwhile emerged from a dogfight against Paradorn Srichaphn from Thailand, the No.10 seed from Chile snaring a 7-5, 6-7, 6-

4 victory in nearly two and a half hours.

Robby Ginepri from the US dulled the season-ending qualification chances of Mario Ancic from Croatia with a 7-6, 7-6 win.

Ancic stands provisional 10th in the eight-man race for Shanghai next month, with Tommy Haas pressing hard.

But the German boosted his chances with a 6-3, 7-6 defeat of Dominik Hrbaty Wednesday to set up a meeting with defending champion Rafael Nadal.

Nadal dispatched his opening opponent in a spirited start to his title defence, defeating Mardy Fish 6-4, 6-2.

The win in just under 90 minutes was the third for Spain's world No. 2 against the American qualifier. Nadal notched 19 winners and broke three times.