

India to issue visa to Pak visitors

PTI, New Delhi

Despite apprehensions over illegal stayover 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 checkpost, 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 stayover 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.

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.

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

"We have solid grounds that it was a cause-and-effect case -- and the root cause was Ashraf."

Hair, 53, and West Indian umpire Billy Dorotheo 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

PCB won't pay England



AFP, Karachi

cricket's 129-year history.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) complained that it had given 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.

Dizzy gives up on Ashes?



AFP, Sydney

Veteran fast bowler Jason Gillespie concedes his chances of being part of Australia's new-ball attack in next month's Ashes Test opener with England are remote.

The 31-year-old South Australian, who was dumped after three Ashes Tests in England last year after taking just three wickets at an average of 100, is facing selection pressure from Australia's fast-bowling new breed -- Shaun Tait and Mitchell Johnson.

Although Gillespie unexpectedly regained his Test place during April's tour of Bangladesh, claiming eight wickets in the two Tests at an average of 11.25 and an amazing 201 not out in the second Test -- creating history as a nightwatchman -- he accepts he may never again play for Australia.

Gillespie would love to retain his place for the first Ashes Test, beginning in Brisbane on November 23, but he believes it is time to consider the next generation.

"You've got to be a realist sometimes," Gillespie told The Australian newspaper Thursday.

"They (the selectors) can afford to go for an inexperienced young punk because how much experience is in that bowling attack?"

Glenn McGrath, Shane Warne and Brett Lee collectively have 1,438 wickets from 313 Tests.

"You can have a young fellow come on first change like a Tait or a Johnson and let them loose. Give them a bit of free rein," he said. "Let them enjoy themselves and have a good time. I reckon it would be a great thing if they picked a young bloke."

"With Tait or Johnson you get a bit of an X-factor. Tait can run through teams. He bowls with genuine pace, swinging yorkers

and he's unpredictable. He's got some serious talent.

"Young Mitch is an extremely talented bowler. He's fast and he swings them. He gives you left-arm variety. He's obviously very green, but he's got plenty to offer.

"He just needs to trust his body, and he will as he fills out a bit more and gets stronger. He's going to be the real deal, I think."

Tait, 23, made a modest Test debut on last year's Ashes tour after dominating for his South Australian state and has since been forced to overcome shoulder and back injuries.

Johnson, 25 next month, has been injury-plagued for much of his career since fast bowling great Dennis Lillee saw him at 16 and announced that he was the best young paceman he had seen in a decade.

He impressed on the recent one-day tour of Malaysia, claiming six wickets in two matches, including 4-11 against India.

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 nether 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

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

But Sajju Datta disappointed with the bat in such a crucial match as they were bundled out for just 113 runs in 36 overs. Suharwardi Shuvro and Kamrul Islam 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 28, Salahuddin 27; Azim 2-39)

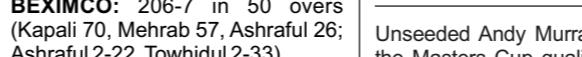
PARTEX: 209-9 in 50 overs (Hasanuzzaman 51, Milon 44; Datta 4-33, Islam 3-52)

ISPANHANI: 113 all out in 36 overs (Mazhar 28, Riyad 16; Shuvro 3-6, Hasan 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)

WACA loses pace bite



AFP, Perth

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.

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

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.

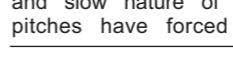
"You'd have to consider it, definitely," Langer said Thursday. "And that is unusual for here, to even think about it."

"You'd have to consider it if it was 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 programme 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 indoor 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, 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.