

Pak welcome foreigners

AFP, Dhaka

Pakistan on Sunday stepped up efforts to raise domestic cricket standards by seeking the participation of foreign players and making a percentage of local events mandatory for cricketers.

Players from India and Sri Lanka would be the main targets to join in local events which are marred by an absence of leading home players engaged in international tournaments.

"International cricket encroaches upon our domestic events and in an attempt to make domestic cricket attractive we have decided to invite foreign players into our tournaments," said Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Nasim Ashraf.

Former captain Inzamam-ul-Haq last month urged Pakistan to raise the standard of first-class cricket, which produces half-cooked players who struggle at international level.

"Through the central contracts given to the home players they are now bound to play in domestic events and we will make sure they feature in at least 75 percent of these events," said Ashraf.

The PCB chairman warned any player not featuring in the required number of domestic matches would not be eligible for international cricket.

"The fee for playing first-class matches will be raised and the PCB will provide money to the regions to hire cricketers," said Ashraf, who took over in October last year.

The prestigious Quaid-e-Azam Trophy will now be the only first-class tournament participated in by eight private departments and 13 regional teams, Ashraf said.

Previously departments and regions featured in separate tournaments.

The PCB also resisted calls from former greats like Imran Khan and Ramiz Raja, who said the departments should be banned.

"Departments give economic security to the players by employing them and we hope that the steps taken will strengthen our first-class cricket, which is the first step towards getting good results at international level," said Ashraf.

Prep starts

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Bangladesh (IPSB) will jointly hold the mega-event, with the opening ceremony to be held in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka and the final due to take place in India.

Pakistan and India hosted the World Cup in 1987, while Sri Lanka did the honours in 1996.

Officials were expected to select a chairman for the organising committee, with Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) chairman Sharad Pawar likely to get the nod, Pakistan Cricket Board official Salim Altaf told AFP.

The committee's operations are to be based in Lahore, said Altaf, a former fast bowler who is now the PCB's director of special projects.

Officials were expected to discuss the possibility of shortening the World Cup, after criticism of the 47-day tournament held in the Caribbean three months ago.

"The final decision would come from the ICC but we can discuss every possible thing which could make the 2011 event attractive and acceptable," said Altaf.

The quartet of South Asian countries was awarded hosting rights for the 2011 event at the expense of Australia and New Zealand, who will now run the event in 2015.

India will host 22 matches, including the final, while Pakistan will stage 14 games including one semifinal. Sri Lanka will host nine matches with one semifinal, and Bangladesh will be hosting six matches.

Hamilton

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second row with the Brazilian even spending a few seconds on top of the pile before the McLarens came to the fore.

Fifth on the grid was the BMW Sauber of Nick Heidfeld while Heikki Kovalainen took the best grid spot of his career in sixth for Renault.

Seventh was the highly impressive debutant Sebastian Vettel in the second BMW Sauber while Jarno Trulli showed signs of a Toyota revival in eighth.

Mark Webber failed to match his normal qualifying form in ninth for Red Bull while Giancarlo Fisichella completed the top ten in the second Renault.

British veteran David Coulthard suffered a spin at turn eight in first qualifying and had to rely on all his guile to make it into the second session. He could not make it count twice though and ended up 11th in his Red Bull.

Anthony Davidson was content with 16th for Super Aguri, two places ahead of his teammate the Montrealer Heikko Kovalainen.

But Jenson Button was far less satisfied with 13th. He had a nasty scare in session one though when he became stranded on the weighbridge and only just made it into the next part in his Honda.



Gautam of Ajax Sporting Club plays a shot against Regan of Mohammadpur Boys (not in picture) during their match of the AB Bank Table Tennis League yesterday.

Who's next for NZ?

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

Three players appear to have the inside running to take the New Zealand Cricket (NZC) contract.

New Zealand manager Lindsay Crocker said the selectors would make a decision early next week.

The obvious choice is the player numbered 21 on their original list but, if that is Tuffey, it might not make sense to replace a specialist batsman with a bowler. The next batsman on the list would almost certainly be Cumming or Sinclair, with Cumming probably having the inside running based on the past two tests and his ability to open, undoubtedly New Zealand's Achilles heel.

However, he has told the Otago Daily Times that he would be surprised to be offered a contract and expected that Sinclair would be offered it instead. Sinclair has indicated he is looking offshore to further his career, though his lack of a UK passport might hinder him.

Others in the frame could be Hamish's twin brother James but he also holds an Irish passport and the

tour of South Africa last April and was a late addition to New Zealand's squad at the World Cup, where he featured in three matches and scored one half-century.

New Zealand manager Lindsay Crocker said the selectors would make a decision early next week.

The England and Wales Cricket Board is reducing the number of overseas players allowed per county next season from two to one, making players such as the Marshalls attractive to coaches and marketers.

One of the problems facing NZC is an unavoidable one. Players ranked 17 to 20 receive a retainer of \$45,000, which is fine only if it is being regularly topped up by the \$6000 and \$2500 payments awarded for tests and one-day internationals respectively.

However, those ranked in that low tier are there for a reason: they are fringe players at best and would expect limited opportunities only.

Players' Association manager Heath Mills said the contract system was robust and well regarded by players and administrators.

Herald on Sunday understands he could also investigate opportunities in the United Kingdom, which would also rule him out of New Zealand consideration.

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Roddick storms

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scrambled to return what looked a certain winner from Tursunov.

That bloody-mindedness eventually wore Tursunov down and the California-based seventh seed sent a forehand well wide to hand Roddick the decisive break in the 11th game of the second set.

Roddick wasted no time in wrapping up the match. Tursunov had never threatened to break and that was the case again as Roddick held serve in the next game to seal the win.

If Roddick can win Sunday's final it will be his first tour title of the season and only his second since Jimmy Connors became his coach in July 2006.

Mahut's victory clinched his first ATP Tour final appearance and made him only the second French player to reach the Queen's final, emulating Sébastien Grosjean's appearances in 2003 and 2004.

Mahut and Clement are firm friends and they had spent the evening before their match dining together. But if they eat out again, it's safe to say Mahut should be paying after denying his pal a place in the final.

Mahut's progress to the last four had been one of the stories of the tournament. The unseeded 25-year-old had enjoyed a day to remember on Friday when he knocked out fifth seed Ivan Ljubicic and then came back later the same day to beat French Open champion Rafael Nadal.

With his wraparound shades and bandana, Clement looks more like a surfer than a tennis pro and the 14th seed would have been better off on a beach in the first set as Mahut quickly took control.

PCB talks to Done

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Sri Lanka recently appointed Trevor Bayliss as a replacement for Tom Moody, also an Australian, who left the job after the World Cup while India have yet to find a replacement for their Australian coach Greg Chappell.

Chappell refused to extend his contract after India's first-round exit from the World Cup.

Lawson, who initially showed little interest in the Pakistan post, said he changed his mind after last week's announcement by Jamaican police that Woolmer died of natural causes and was not murdered, as initially announced.

"It's a significant challenge to coach Pakistan," Lawson told reporters in Australia on Friday. "They're an underachieving team with plenty of talent. I'm flattered, I've even been invited I suppose."

"I certainly haven't been chasing it. At short notice they asked me to come to Islamabad for an interview," said Lawson, who admitted the

Benayoun

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for 17 million pounds, only for the striker to reject the move following talks over personal terms at Upton Park.

Charlton have insisted that the valuation has effectively been set by West Ham's offer but Liverpool - who are competing with Tottenham Hotspur for his signature - would only be willing, and able, to offer around 10 million pounds for the 23-year-old. Furthermore, Benitez has other priorities to pursue in the market, with any deal potentially reliant on the sale of his Wales striker Craig Bellamy.

The Premier League will now send the findings to the FA and FIFA who will decide whether to take disciplinary action.

An FA spokesman said: "The FA will give full consideration to its contents and the documentation that is due to be passed on by the

findings on Woolmer's case led him to change his mind.

"My wife would not have allowed me to go to Pakistan had it been a murder," Lawson said.

Another Australian Steve Rixon, a former New Zealand coach, turned down the job, saying he had already made up his mind when the PCB approached him.

The 51-year-old Done, who took 21 wickets in 10 first-class matches between 1978 and 1979 and 1985-86, visited Pakistan in 2001 as an Australian Cricket Academy senior coach and conducted a series of seminars on coaching.

A three-member committee comprising former wicket-keeper Imtiaz Ahmed, former paceman Zakir Khan, also PCB director of operations, and former opener Mudassar Nazar shortlisted the candidates and will also interview them besides Ashraf.

Berdych lifts

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and used his strong serve to smash five aces.

With Berdych serving for the match, Czech favourite Baghdati rallied, but the Czech never looked like letting his iron-grip slip.

Berdych, ranked 13th in the world, had a walk-over in Friday's quarter-final after Russian Mikhail Youzhny pulled out on Thursday with a back injury, and beat Finland's Jarkko Nieminen in straight sets in Saturday's semifinal.

In contrast, Baghdati, 18th on the ATP rankings, had a tougher run to the final, although neither seed encountered another top eight player before Sunday.

Twice Baghdati had to beat both his opponent and the passionate Halle crowd when he took out German number three Florian Mayer in straight sets in Friday's quarterfinal and then repeated the feat against number two German, and local favourite, Philipp Kohlschreiber, in Saturday's semifinal.

Enamul, Nasir stay on top

SPORTS REPORTER

IM Enamul Hossain and FM Sheikh Nasir Ahmed drew both their games to remain on top of the premier group in the Destiny International Rating Chess competition at the Federation hallroom yesterday.

Enamul drew with Abu Sufian Shakil while Nasir drew with Minhazuddin Ahmed as they moved to six points after the eighth round.

In the primary group, Hasan Imam, Kazi Taherul Islam and Amir Hossain are sharing the lead with 6.5 points each.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

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Ahmed (Narayanganji), Mobasshir Khan (Rajshahi), Rabiu Islam (Satkhira), Arifuzzaman (Rangpur), Moniruzzaman (Chittagong), Sajid Islam (Rangpur) and Kamrul Islam (Chittagong).

PINK CITY TALENT HUNT

An evaluation programme will be held at a local restaurant today in connection with the talent hunt programme, sponsored and organised by The Pink City, called 'Cricket Medhar Khoj'.

Out of 16,000 participants, 16 cricketers were chosen last year while 14 others were kept under consideration.

Among the organisers, Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury and former national captain Khaled Mahmud will be present while chairman of The Pink City Lutfullah Hossain will moderate at the occasion.

Hattrick wedding

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Beckham, but the Real Madrid and England midfielder could not attend. He was on club duty in Spain.

Brother Phil Neville performed best man duties. Their father Neville Neville was master of ceremonies.

Manchester United's England striker Wayne Rooney and his fiancee Coleen McLoughlin -- the queen of the WAGs for the tabloids -- turned up, with one newspaper saying their outfits seemed straight out of a 1970s sitcom.

United heroes Ryan Giggs, Bryan Robson and Paul Scholes also attended.

Gerrard married former nail technician Alex Curran at Cliveden House Hotel in Berkshire, west of London.

Michael Owen, Peter Crouch, Jamie Carragher, Rio Ferdinand, Theo Walcott, Jamie Redknapp, John Arne Riise, Robbie Fowler, Harry Kewell and Ashley Cole were among the football talent attending, while Tottenham mid-fielder Danny Murphy was the best man.

A magazine was reported to have paid 800,000 pounds for the photograph rights.

Meanwhile midfielder Carrick married childhood sweetheart and pilates instructor Lisa Roughhead at the exclusive Stapleford Park Hotel in Leicestershire, in the English East Midlands, with Joe Cole and Robbie Keane in attendance.

Best buys

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to become the most expensive signing in the history of the Premiership, did not feature at all.

The Ukraine international struggled to adapt to the Premiership and that was underlined by the study's findings, which claim his value to Chelsea was minus 10 million pounds.

His average performances, plus injuries, resulted in him missing the Champions League semifinal exit to Liverpool and the FA Cup final victory over Manchester United.

Controversial Hammers signing Tevez also featured in the table at seventh.

Tevez, who arrived at West Ham from Corinthians in Argentina, only made 19 starts and scored just seven goals but it was the timing and significance of those goals which pushed him into the top 10.

His goals against Wigan and Manchester United helped West Ham stay in the Premiership and collect a 50 million pounds payout.

C'paul defies

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Ganga c Cook b Sidebottom 0
Gayle b Hoggard 28
Smith b Sidebottom 4
Morton c Sidebottom b
Harrison 6
Chanderpaul not out 136
Bravo b Hoggard 44
Samuels b Sidebottom 19
Ramdin c Collingwood b Sidebottom 13
Powell c Prior b Harrison 1
Edwards b Sidebottom 5
Collymore b Panesar 13
Extras: (b-4, lb-13, nb-1) 18
Total: (All out in 97.1 overs) 287

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-32, 3-44, 4-55, 5-141, 6-199, 7-219, 8-220, 9-229.