

Terror strikes cricket

Sri Lanka players fired on in Lahore, seven injured; WC in South Asia uncertain

AFP, New Delhi

The audacious attack on Sri Lanka's cricket team in Pakistan on Tuesday rocked the South Asian heartland of the sport and prompted an immediate review of arrangements for the 2011 World Cup.

The showpiece tournament is due to be jointly hosted by India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the four cricket-obsessed Test nations that make up the sport's financial nerve centre.

"Quite clearly, this event puts a great question mark over the ability of Pakistan to host cricket World Cup matches," International Cricket Council (ICC) president David Morgan told the BBC.

"Things will have to change dramatically in Pakistan in my opinion if any of the games are to be staged there," Morgan said.

With international cricket in Pakistan effectively suspended for the foreseeable future, the other three World Cup host nations will be hard pushed to make a convincing case that they can offer sufficient security guarantees.

India, which generates an estimated 70 per cent of cricket's worldwide revenues, had its security credentials shredded by the Mumbai attacks last November which coincided with a tour by the England team.

One of the main targets of the attacks, when gunmen killed 165 people, was the Taj

Mahal Hotel, where the England players had stayed on arrival.

Sri Lanka is struggling to finish off a long-running conflict with Tamil Tiger rebels while Bangladesh is recovering from a mutiny in the armed forces that turned part of the capital Dhaka into a battleground last week.

Seven Sri Lankan cricketers were injured when gunmen opened fire on their bus as it headed to the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore for the third day's play in the second Test against Pakistan.

Before the Lahore attacks, the ICC and administrators in the four host countries were banking on the fact the World Cup was still two years away.

But the world governing body hardened its stance on Tuesday with ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat warning there will be "some serious repercussions" for Pakistan in the next 48 hours.

"In the next day or two we will have to make some serious decisions and we will," Lorgat told the Indian news channel Times Now.

There obviously have been breaches and the security has not been good enough. There will be some serious repercussions from this."

Of the 15 World Cup venues that had been identified, eight are in India, four in Pakistan, two in Sri Lanka and one in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is to host the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



WISH IT NEVER HAPPENED: (Clockwise from L) A grim-faced Pakistan captain Younis Khan is having a look at the bullet-hit bus that was carrying the Sri Lankan cricket team to the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore; Bangladesh skipper Mohammad Ashraful sticks black badges to his Gazi Tank teammates during a Premier League match against Victoria at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday. The Bangladesh players wore black badges in protest against the heinous terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan cricketers in Lahore where five players and assistant coach (clockwise from top left) Ajantha Mendis, captain Mahela Jayawardene, Kumar Sangakkara, Paul Farbrace, Thilan Samaraweera and Tharanga Paranavitana were injured.



PHOTOS: AP/ISTAR

Lanka shocked, angry

Pakistan regret; Imran slams lax security

AFP, Colombo, Lahore

Cricket-obsessed Sri Lanka reeled in shock and anger Tuesday at the attack on its national team as it toured Pakistan in place of an Indian squad that had backed out because of security worries.

President Mahinda Rajapakse condemned the attack and sent Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama to Lahore to oversee the evacuation of the team -- seven of whom were wounded when gunmen fired on the team's bus in Lahore.

"I condemn this cowardly terrorist attack," Rajapakse said in a message sent from Nepal, where he cut short an official visit.

The president stressed that the team had gone to Pakistan as "ambassadors of goodwill." He arranged a charter aircraft to bring back the team from Lahore later in the night.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani telephoned Sri Lanka's president Tuesday to express his profound regret over an attack on the country's cricket team, calling it a "conspiracy".

Gilani spoke to President Mahinda Rajapakse and "expressed his profound regrets over this unfortunate incident," said a statement from the Pakistani prime minister's office.

"The incident was a well planned conspiracy meant to create terror and isolate Pakistan's cricket," the statement added.

Gilani expressed his gratitude to the Sri Lanka team for visiting Pakistan at a time when most other squads refused to come and

said the nation would always "hold Sri Lanka in high esteem for this friendly gesture."

"This incident happened despite the fact that Pakistan had provided maximum security to the Sri Lankan cricket team," he said.

"Our security agencies are in the process of investigating the incident and the Sri Lankan government would be kept posted of their findings," he said.

However, former Pakistan cricket captain Imran Khan blamed lax security for Tuesday's gun and grenade attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team, saying officials must be held to account for the incident.

"First of all I apologise to the Sri Lankan team for they toured Pakistan despite huge pressure. I strongly condemn the security provided to the Sri Lankan team because it was ten times less than what is given to Interior ministry adviser Rehman Malik," Khan told AFP.

"Sri Lankans were assured of top-level security but there was lax security and I think from the governor of Punjab to police officials, all must be made accountable -- how the gunmen openly shot at a high-profile team," added Khan, who is the head of his Tehrik-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice) party.

Eight people were killed and seven Sri Lankan cricketers wounded in Lahore when gunmen armed with rockets, grenades and automatic weapons attacked a convoy taking the team to the Gaddafi stadium to play Pakistan.

Five minutes from death

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan's cricket team escaped Tuesday's attack because they left their hotel five minutes late, coach Intikhab Alam said.

"We usually leave the hotel early on the first day because of the toss and on the second and third day we leave the hotel a bit late, so captain Younis Khan decided to leave at 8:35 but the Sri Lankan team left five minutes before us," Alam told AFP.

Eight people were killed and seven Sri Lankan cricketers wounded when up to 12 gunmen attacked the squad's convoy near the Gaddafi stadium with rockets, hand grenades and automatic weapons, police said.

The ongoing second Test between the two teams was abandoned as the Sri Lankan team were evacuated from the stadium in Pakistan Air Force helicopters. They were due to fly to Sri Lanka in a specially chartered plane later Tuesday.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

We're safe: Sangakkara

AFP, New Delhi

Sri Lanka vice-captain Kumar Sangakkara said on Tuesday the entire touring squad was safe after gunmen opened fire on the team convoy in the Pakistani city of Lahore.

"There are a few injuries, but everyone is safe and all the players are out of danger," Sangakkara told the Indian news channel CNN-IBN from Lahore.

"We are shocked, but apart from that everyone is OK."

Sri Lankan officials said seven players and an assistant coach were hurt during the attack which took place when the team was making its way to the Gaddafi stadium for the third day's play in the second Test against Pakistan.

Thilan Samaraweera and Tharanga Paranavitana were briefly hospitalised, while skipper Mahela Jayawardene, Sangakkara, Ajantha Mendis, Thilina Thushara and Suranga Lokumal received minor injuries, mainly shrapnel wounds, Sri Lankan sports minister Gamini Lokuge said

in Colombo.

The team's assistant coach, Paul Farbrace, a British national, was also hurt, officials said.

"I had shrapnel injuries in my shoulder, but they have all been removed and I'm OK now," said Sangakkara, 31.

"That is our profession. But all we want to do now is to go back home to our families, get back home and be safe," he said.

Skipper Jayawardene said the bus came under attack as they were driving to the stadium.

"The gunmen targeted the wheels of the bus first and then the bus," Jayawardene told the Cricinfo website. "We all dived to the floor to take cover."

The entire touring squad was air-lifted by helicopter from the Gaddafi stadium to an airbase from where they were due to fly home later on Tuesday.

"Thilan has a shrapnel wound in his leg, but he is fine. Paranavitana had shrapnel in his chest, but thank God it was not very deep and just on the surface."

"Ajantha had shrapnel in his neck and scalp, but he too has had medical attention and is fine."

"That is our profession. But all we want to do now is to go back home to our families, get back home and be safe," he said.

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PHOTO: AFP

The brother of Sri Lanka's legendary spinner Muttiah Muralidaran has a look of concern etched on his face as he makes an urgent phone call from Colombo on Tuesday.

Cricket world stunned

AFP, Lahore

The cricket world reacted with shock and anger Tuesday to the brazen attacks on the Sri Lankan team, warning of dire consequences for the game in Pakistan.

Eight people were killed and seven Sri Lankan cricketers were wounded when up to 12 gunmen attacked the squad's convoy near the Gaddafi stadium in Lahore with rockets, hand grenades and automatic weapons, police said.

"We note with dismay and regret the events... in Lahore and we condemn this attack without reservation," International Cricket Council chief executive Haroon Lorgat said in a statement.

"It is a source of great sadness that there have been a number of fatalities in this attack and it is also very upsetting for the wider cricket family that some of the Sri

Lanka players and one match official have been injured in this attack."

Cricket powerhouse India, which pulled out of an anticipated tour of Pakistan this year because of simmering political tensions, said it was "shocked" by events, which highlighted the security problems blighting its neighbour.

"What has happened is very shocking indeed," said N. Srinivasan, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

"We have been saying that there was a lack of security and safety in Pakistan. But this is not the time to give statements on that. At the moment our concerns are only for the Sri Lankan players."

India called off their tour in December in the wake of the deadly terrorist attacks in Mumbai, which India blamed on Pakistan-based militants. It was only then that Sri Lanka

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka team members disembark from a Pakistan military helicopter onto the playing surface of the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Tuesday.

Pakistan's tour still on BCB, BOA, CWAB condemn attack

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The Pakistan cricket team's tour to Bangladesh is still on despite a cowardly attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team's bus in Lahore on Tuesday morning.

There had been confusions after the tragic deaths at the BDR headquarters whether the tour will take place on schedule and yesterday's attack by masked gunmen in the Punjab capital puffed up the uncertainty.

But State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarkar and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) confirmed that the upcoming tour is on.

Pakistan are scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on March 7 to play two Twenty20 matches and five one-day internationals. The two Twenty20 and first three ODIs will be held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur while the last two ODIs will take place at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium.

"The government decision so far is that the series is on schedule," said Ahad Ali Sarkar yesterday.

"We are prepared to host the series and still there is no uncertainty about it," said BCB's cricket operations committee chairman Enayet Hossain Siraj.

It has always been believed that sportsmen are above fear of terrorist attacks but after the shocking incident in Lahore there is no scope to think in the same line any more. And understandably, BCB looked very alert on the issue of the coming series.

"The security is always a big concern and no doubt after this incident we will be more careful," Siraj added.

The BCB strongly condemned the attack on Sri Lankan cricketers, which left six security men and two civilians dead and injured as many as six Lankan cricketers.

"The BCB is deeply concerned at this unprecedented attack on cricket, which is a symbol of hope and aspiration for millions in the Sub-continent and around the world. We are saddened by the unfortunate events and express solidarity with the players, match officials and victims of the attack," said BCB in a statement.

It also said that the BCB has been in touch with Sri Lanka Cricket, Pakistan Cricket Board and the International Cricket Council and has voiced its alarm at the incident.

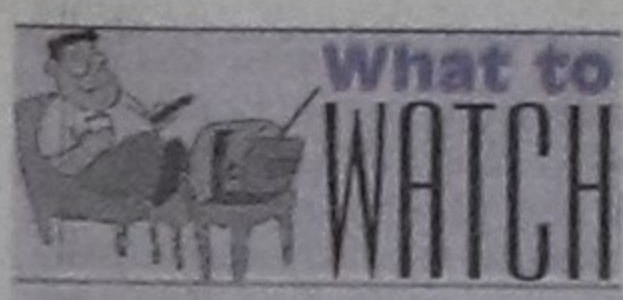
Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh also expressed their sorrow and anguish over the dastardly attack while the Bangladesh Olympic Association condemned the incident.



Novak Djokovic

(Serbian tennis star)
"It's a special night for me. But it's more than that. This win in Dubai is going to give me a lot of confidence for the rest of the season."

After winning the Dubai Open on Saturday.



ESPN

Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
English Premier League
Newcastle v Man United
Live from 1:30am (Thursday)

STAR Sports

English Premier League
Man City v Aston Villa
Live from 2:00am (Thursday)

Pak terror timeline

AFP, Lahore

Gunmen launched a brazen attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in the Pakistani city of Lahore Tuesday, killing at least eight people and wounding seven team members, police said.

Here is a timeline of incidents that have damaged Pakistan cricket:

September 2001: The New Zealand team en route to Pakistan, returned from Singapore after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

April 2002: New Zealand agreed to reschedule the tour.

May 2002: New Zealand cut

SEE PAGE 18 COL 3