



IWM Rani Hamid (R) and Nazrana Khan are engaged in a cerebral war in the ninth round of the 30th National Women's Chess Championship at the federation hall room yesterday.

Investigation progressing, says Zardari

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday told Sri Lanka's foreign minister inquiries to find those who attacked the country's cricket team was making progress.

Six Pakistani policemen and two civilians were killed in Tuesday's assault on the team, who were en route to a Test match in the city of Lahore. Seven Sri Lankan cricketers and a coach were among 19 wounded.

"Progress has been made in the investigation and the perpetrators will be exposed and brought to justice," an official statement quoted Zardari as telling Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama in Islamabad.

"The incident was a serious setback that had also undermined the sport of cricket in Pakistan," it quoted the president as admitting.

Zardari underscored the need to "jointly devise a mechanism for promotion of peace, development and progress" across the region.

He suggested that the two countries hold "a workshop to learn from each other's experiences in fighting terrorism". Zardari welcomed a statement from the Sri Lankan government that the incident would not strain relations between the two countries.

The attack is likely to have brought an end to international cricket in Pakistan for now and has heightened concerns that radical Islamists linked to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are extending their ability to strike targets across the nation.

Ramiz seeks global help

AFP, Lahore

Former captain Ramiz Raja Wednesday appealed for world cricket to support Pakistan, saying the sport was a way of life in the country and it must continue.

Tuesday's attacks on the Sri Lanka team bus - which left seven players and an assistant coach injured and cut short their tour - have cast serious doubts over the future of international cricket in the cricket-mad nation.

Raja, now a popular television commentator, said the cricket community must ensure the game lives on in Pakistan.

"Obviously Tuesday's tragic events have pushed us back a fair bit," Raja told AFP. "But the entire world must realise that cricket is a way of life in Pakistan and it must not be taken away."

The Sri Lankan team returned home late Tuesday, and with them vanished hopes of Pakistan hosting foreign teams in the foreseeable future.

New Zealand indicated it would call off its November tour and the International Cricket Council (ICC) raised doubts over whether the country could still co-host the 2011 World Cup.

Last month, the ICC moved the elite eight-nation Champions Trophy out of Pakistan after three countries refused to tour over security fears.

Liza stays on Shirin's heels

SPORTS REPORTER

IWM Rani Hamid lost ground in the 30th Parachute National Women's Chess Championship when the defending champion went down to Nazrana Khan Eva in the ninth round yesterday.

The defeat meant Sharmin Sultana Shirin, who shared the top spot with Rani in the previous round, regained solo lead after defeating young prodigy Protiva Talukder at the federation hall-room.

Shirin now has eight points but only half-a-point ahead of last year's runner-up Shamima Akhter Liza, who beat Amena Begum.

In other matches, Jahanara Haque Runu beat Farjana Hossain Anne, Masuda Begum drew with WFM Zakia Sultana and Rokhsana Tiddi drew with Ahely Sarkar.

'Terror background helped'

CRICINFO, undated

Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene has attributed his players' immediate reaction in taking cover when terrorists attacked their team bus in Lahore to the situation in his country.

"We have been brought up in a background of terrorist activities," Jayawardene said after the squad returned home to relieved relatives and tearful hugs late Tuesday night.

"We are used to hearing, seeing these things - firing, bombings. So we ducked under our seats when the firing began. It was like natural instinct."

The Sri Lanka cricketers were on their way to the Gaddafi stadium when their bus was attacked by 12 armed terrorists near Liberty market. A grenade was also thrown at the bus but it missed.

Jayawardene said the players just wanted to spend time with their families now. "I am a Buddhist and I think we have done some merit in our previous birth to escape with minor injuries." He also said the attack on the team could have happened anywhere and could not be pinned down to Pakistan.

"In the future, I think all of us will step back and look at the bigger picture besides just touring abroad, taking into account our families."

Muttiah Muralidaran said he saw images of his life flashing by when the bus came under attack. "All the while bullets were being sprayed at our bus, people around me were shouting, I am glad to be back."

While most of the players had minor injuries, Thilan Samaraweera and Tharanga Paravithana had to be taken to hospital for their wounds in Lahore. Geethanjana Mendis, a sports medicine specialist who examined the players, said they would need further treatment and surgery.

Suranga Lakmal, one of the players injured, was received at the airport by his anxious parents. "He is our only son. We have not eaten anything since we heard the news," his father Albert said. The tour to Pakistan was Lakmal's first call-up to the Sri Lanka national side.

PCB sees

FROM PAGE 17 condemned the attacks and sent a message of support and there is no hint of not touring Pakistan," said Butt.

He also played down fears Pakistan would not host its matches in the 2011 World Cup, a tournament which it is scheduled to share with India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

"There are still two years left until the World Cup 2011. We hope that security improves by the time the big event comes nearer," he said.

But Butt tribute to Sri Lanka players, officials and government for supporting Pakistan in difficult times.

"Hats off to every Sri Lankan player. All of them made brave comments after the incident and even their president called our president and assured (him) of support," said Butt.

Butt defended security arrangements for Sri Lanka squad.

"The security level was very high, no one can point a finger against security arrangements," he said.

"I pay tribute to security personnel and the team bus driver for their brave acts and I have written a letter of praise to the police chief of Punjab."

Mokammel

FROM PAGE 17 Twenty20 competition, defeated Lalmitia by a big 57 runs at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium, while Bangladesh Boys outshone Orient by 39 runs at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

12 nabbed in Lahore

Cricket

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan officials said Wednesday around two dozen people were detained over the ambush on Sri Lanka's cricket team, which has raised new questions about the government's war on militants.

The detainees were being questioned as police hunt for clues in Tuesday's brazen attack, which left six police and two civilians dead. Seven Sri Lankan cricketers and a coach were among 19 people wounded.

Up to 12 men armed with grenades, a rocket launcher and automatic weapons opened fire in an assault which has stirred up doubts about Pakistan's control over militants linked to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

"Around two dozen people have been picked up - most of them belonging to banned or outlawed organisations - in the hope of finding a clue to the identity of the escaped terrorists," one police official told AFP.

The official, who was speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to release the information to the media, indicated the gunmen were not among those detained.

A second security official confirmed around two dozen people had been detained in multiple raids in Lahore, where the assault took place. All the attackers fled and there has been no claim of responsibility.

"Some people have been detained and the investigations are progressing in the right direction," Lahore city police chief Habibur Rehman said.

Condemned around the world, the attack is also a serious blow for cricket in Pakistan, where millions follow the game passionately, and has deepened the isolation of a country now shunned by much of the world cricket community.

New Zealand indicated it would call off its November tour of Pakistan, and the International Cricket Council raised doubts over whether the country could still co-host the 2011 World Cup.

"I don't think any international team will be going to Pakistan in the foreseeable future," New Zealand Cricket chief executive Justin Vaughan said.

India, whose team withdrew from a tour of

Pakistan on security concerns after Pakistan-based militants were blamed for the Mumbai attacks in November that killed 165 people, said Islamabad was not doing enough to stop militants.

More than 1,600 people have been killed in attacks here in the past 22 months, and militants have forged a de facto safe haven in the country's rugged and lawless north-west along the border with Afghanistan.

Pakistan's ISI military intelligence agency has fostered Islamist militant groups in Kashmir and Afghanistan over decades, and there are suspicions that some ISI elements have links to militants inside Pakistan.

Officials have offered a reward of 125,000 dollars for information about the men behind the well-planned attack. A large weapons cache, anti-personnel mines and two unexploded car bombs were found at the scene.

"Progress has been made in the investigation and the perpetrators will be exposed and brought to justice," an official statement quoted President Asif Ali Zardari as telling Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama.

"The incident was a serious setback that had also undermined the sport of cricket in Pakistan," Zardari said.

Sri Lanka's cricket administrators were criticised for allowing the tour to go ahead by lawmakers and the media Wednesday, as the team's wounded and shaken players flew home to Colombo on a specially chartered jet.

Star batsman Thilan Samaraweera and Tharanga Paravithana, both wounded by gunshots, were placed in an ambulance and taken to hospital. A specialist who saw them in Pakistan said they may need surgery.

But none of the team injuries is seen as life-threatening, and the players seem to have had a lucky escape. The militants missed when they fired a rocket-propelled grenade at the bus, and several grenades failed to explode.

"There were just these images of life flashing through my mind - all the while bullets were being sprayed at our bus, people around me were shouting," said star bowler Muttiah Muralidaran.

It was the first deadly direct assault against a sports team in Pakistan and left the world cricket community in shock.

The Age newspaper in Australia said: "The Sri Lanka team airlifted out of the Gaddafi Stadium is likely to be the last to tour Pakistan for a generation."

Aussies hesitant of IPL

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Australia's players are considering their involvement in the IPL this year following the attack on the Sri Lanka team in Lahore. The captain Ricky Ponting had already decided not to play this season because of his Australian commitments but he said his teammates would be thinking about whether they wanted to travel to the region so soon after the Lahore shootout and the Mumbai terrorist attack.

"I think there would have been enough concerns from the guys anyway after Mumbai," Ponting said. "That was still

pretty fresh in everyone's minds I think and this one on top again. I'm not going to the IPL, a decision that was made a few weeks ago. Some of the other guys that potentially could be going there will have all those things now that they've got to think about as well, more so than they did before."

Australia were on Wednesday practising in Durban ahead of the second Test against South Africa and Ponting said his men would be kept abreast of the security situation in Asia by the Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA). Ponting said he was not aware of any players who had already decided not to take part in the IPL because of the Lahore attack.

"I'm not against playing in neutral venues," Ponting said. "We've done it in the past, we played [Tests against Pakistan] in Sri Lanka and Sharjah a few years ago now. There's every possibility that neutral venues could come up."

The Lahore attack dominated discussions among Australia's players on Tuesday, when they had intended to refocus on the second Test following their 162-run win in Johannesburg. The Australian team physio Alex Kountouris, who previously worked with the Sri Lanka side, had been in touch with the Sri Lanka players while the coach Tim Nielsen had spoken to his fellow South Australian, the umpire Steve Davis, who was travelling in a van behind the team bus when the attack took place.

"From having a good win and having a bit of a celebration and waking up yesterday morning and seeing what was happening in our game on the other side of the world was very saddening for all of us," Ponting said. "Alex has made contact with them yesterday and I told him last night to send a message on behalf of the players to the guys over there that have been affected by it all."



Action from yesterday's Premier Division Volleyball League encounter between Wari Club and Power Development Board at the Dhaka Volleyball Stadium.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Swadheenata Krira Sangha and City United Club played to a 1-1 draw in the Citycell Metropolis 3rd Division Football League at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Sepoy Mohammad Mostafa Stadium at Kamalapur yesterday.

Mohammad Sharik put City ahead in the 8th minute, but Mohammad Helal restored parity in the 27th minute.

In the day's other match, Shantinagar Club played to a goalless draw with Govt. Printing Press at the same venue.

GIRLS' HANDBALL After a six-day break, the KFC-Pizza Hut 5th Girls' Mini Handball Tournament resumed with four matches played at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex.

Scholastica School beat South Point School 10-0, Viquarunissa Neon School and College beat South Breeze 3-2 while Scholastica again defeated BIS 3-1.

The day's other match

between Viquarunissa and Banani Bidya Niketan ended in a 3-3 draw.

Group A champions Sunnyday School will play Group D champions South Breeze School in the first semifinal at 10am while Group B champions Scholastica meet Group C champions Dhanmondi Tutorial in the 2nd semifinal at 11am today.

The final match will be played on Saturday at 3pm at the same venue.

NATIONAL BANK V'BALL Bangladesh Water Development Board earned a straight sets victory over Fire Service and Civil Defence (25-22, 25-13, 25-17) in the National Bank Metropolis Premier Division Volleyball League at the Dhaka Volleyball Stadium.

In the First Division League, Azad SC beat Dhaka Sporting Club by 3-0 sets (25-11, 25-18, 25-16) in the afternoon.

Earlier, on Tuesday Bangladesh Police outplayed East End Club 3-0 sets (25-14,

25-16, 25-18) in a Premier League match at the same venue.

On Tuesday, Bhai Bhai Sangha defeated Nabajagarani Sangha 3-2 sets (25-15, 23-25, 19-25, 25-18, 15-9) in a first division league match.

MSC's Sanath

FROM PAGE 17

game," he said. But the charismatic Lankan's previous experience in domestic competitions here was not happy one as he continued his Dhaka jinx after his single failure back in 1997 when he failed to lift Mohammedan against an ordinary Agrani Bank side. He returned in November 2007 but scored only 14 runs, dropped a vital catch as well as giving away 37 runs in seven overs without any success for Acme in the Corporate Cricket League final.

Mohammedan roped in the Sri Lanka opener for second time as the 39-year old cricketer along with Arjuna Ranatunga had earlier played for the Motijheel outfit after Sri Lanka emerged champions in the 1996 ICC Cricket World Cup.

The left-handed batsman, who is out of the Sri Lanka Test squad since December 2007, was supposed to come here earlier, but he was engaged in South African Club cricket.

Some action

FROM PAGE 17

The camp gives Dido a chance to shrug off his idleness since arriving in Dhaka in January. The Brazilian coach has watched the B. League matches and also has in mind which 25 players will join him in the national training camp for preparation of the AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers to be staged in Dhaka next month.

It is expected that 10-15 players from BKSP and the first division league would be added to the SA gamesquad.

"We will short-list the squad but we don't have a number in mind now," said Badal.

The squad for Challenge Cup will be announced during the March 11-27 Super Cup, where the top eight teams of the country will compete for a Tk 1-crore first prize.

The national camp is expected to start on March 30 also at BKSP. Bangladesh will compete with Myanmar, Cambodia and winners of the Macau-Mongolia pre-qualifiers for a place in the eight-team finals.

Ump Raza

FROM PAGE 17 terrorists opened fire in front of the gates to the Gaddafi stadium. He was shot in the back, but medical staff said the damage to his liver had only been "superficial".

Raza, 34, hails from Lahore and played 21 first-class fixtures as a wicketkeeper before turning to umpiring. According to Ghouri, Broad threw himself on Raza after realising he had been shot. "It was very brave," Ghouri told Reuters.

Davis added: "[Broad] actually was lying on the floor next to Ahsan and when Ahsan got hit and blood was gushing out of him. Chris tried to apply some pressure to the wound and tried to stem the flow of blood from him while we were all lying on the floor. It seemed like ages and then suddenly the door opened and a policeman came into the van and then he lay across the top of Chris and Ahsan and I think he was more trying to protect himself."

Fletcher advises KP, Flintoff to avoid IPL

Cricket

AFP, London

Andrew Flintoff and Kevin Pietersen have been warned they risk becoming "sitting ducks" for terrorists if they play in the Indian Premier League (IPL) in the wake of the attack on the Sri Lanka team in Pakistan.

Former England coach Duncan Fletcher has warned English cricket's biggest names that, based on his experience, some types of terrorist attacks are easier to carry out in India than in Pakistan.

Writing in Wednesday's Guardian, Fletcher recalled how the England tour party he took to Pakistan in 2005/06 had been criticised for the "presidential" level of security surrounding their trip, with roads to stadiums cleared and lined with armed guards.

"It provided some comfort at least," he wrote. "Nothing is 100 per cent but you sure as hell want that percentage to be as high as possible in your favour."

"India is different. The traffic is often so bad in the big cities where a lot of the cricket is played that the coach can move along only slowly at times, which turns it into a sitting duck for terrorists."

Fletcher added: "There is nothing stopping a tuk-tuk

pulling up alongside and detonating a bomb. I would be very nervous because that kind of attack is much easier to carry out in India - and these guys can attack when they like."

Pietersen and Flintoff are among 11 English players bought at last month's IPL auction.

Even before the Pakistan



DUNCAN FLETCHER

attack, Flintoff's participation had been in doubt because of a hip injury and no England players will be able to take part if -- as is being considered -- the tournament is delayed.

IPL bosses are reviewing alternative dates after the Indian government said it would be difficult to ensure adequate security for the tournament because it overlaps with elections due to take place in April and May.

Lankans return

FROM PAGE 17

from me -- luckily superficial wounds," Farbrace said.

Before leaving Pakistan, Jayawardene had thanked the bus driver for possibly saving the team, who were being escorted to the Gaddafi Stadium for the third day's play of the second Test.

"We owe the team bus driver our lives for his remarkable bravery in the face of direct gunfire," he said in a statement.

"Had he not had the courage and presence of mind to get the bus moving after the initial attack then we'd have been a far easier target for the terrorists."

Jayawardene expressed the

team's "deepest and heartfelt condolences" to the families of those killed.

Sri Lanka agreed to tour Pakistan despite the high security risk.

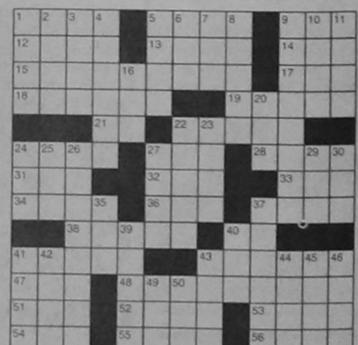
They replaced India, who refused to go following the deadly Mumbai assault in November which Indian authorities blame on a Pakistani militant group.

Sri Lanka won a three-match one-day series 2-1 in February, when everything passed off without mishap.

They returned to play a two-Test series, drawing the first game in Karachi last week in what was Pakistan's first Test match in 14 months.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 38 "Honey-mooneys" 2 Black, in 16 id 1 Maintained role 3 Parlia-ment VIP 20 Pigs' digs 5 Flavor enhancer 40 Hous-man's up your mind 22 Veranda 9 Expert initials 41 Brother of 5 Unac-companied 23 "Yeah, right!" 12 Reed instrument 47 Disen-cumber Daba 24 Follow relent-lessly 13 Follow 43 Collar 6 "The 25 Insepara-ble 14 Lubricant 48 Photog-rapher's "moon" 26 Bears' food? 15 China 51 Work unit 27 Daytime 17 Vitamin stat 52 Rever-berate 8 Theater memento 29 Cauldron 18 Reddish blue 53 Recedes critic 30 Hot tub 19 Skiers' mecca 54 Teensy Kenneth 35 Singer 21 Perform halt to 10 Dolphin one in a million? 22 Bean or pony 56 Back talk 11 "The 39 Runs 24 Info 1 Pussli-dweller heroine 40 "Bow-wow!" 28 Kennel Solution time: 25 mins. 41 Captain's group 31 Lennon's lady 42 Take on 43 On 32 Raw rock 44 Exile isle 33 Bribed 45 Parent shapers 34 Bacterium 46 Fish 36 Performer 49 Hallow-een abbr. 37 Catherine - "Jones" 50 Pi-follower



CRYPTOQUIP

F SOJDKB CATMXMKO HTP'R YJD SYZE ZYAAO, MYR FB OTY VT, REDP F JXO "STAD CTHVDA RT OTY!"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: DO YOU SUPPOSE THE FACTORY THAT MANUFACTURES SLEEPING PILLS MIGHT BE DESIGNATED A SLUMBER MILL? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals U