

THE FINAL: PAKISTAN V SRI LANKA Rising from tragedy

AFP, London



Pakistan and Sri Lanka, two teams linked by tragedy, will contest the ICC World Twenty20 final at Lord's on Sunday.

Six policemen and two civilians were killed, and seven Sri Lankan squad members injured, when militants launched a gun and grenade assault on their team bus as they travelled to a Test match in Lahore on March 3.

The incident led to the suspension of international cricket in Pakistan and dire fears for the national side's future.

But Pakistan, who beat favourites South Africa by seven runs in Thursday's semifinal, have bounced back in style at this tournament.

They will face unbeaten Sri Lanka in the final after their Asian rivals thrashed the West Indies by 57 runs at The Oval on Friday.

Despite the events in Lahore, Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara said relations between the two sides had remained friendly.

"What Lahore really brought home to us was we are just the same as anyone else," he said.

"It happens to everyone and it happened to us. I always said it's nice to be reminded of your mortality when the press and everyone else around you builds you up to be a bit more than that in this sporting culture."

"It's great the way the guys have prepared mentally, the way they've shown no fear and just played cricket. It's a fitting reward for that attitude."

Sri Lanka beat Pakistan by 19 runs in a Super Eights match earlier at this tournament but Sangakkara said: "We've played Pakistan many times before but in T20 you must take every game in isolation. Different players come into form at different times."

"Hopefully, we can put in a good per-

formance and walk away with a trophy."

The dangerous Shahid Afridi produced a brilliant all-round display in Pakistan's semifinal triumph, scoring 51 and then taking two wickets for 16 runs with his leg-spinners.

"He is a guy who can take the game away in few overs, but we can't just concentrate on him," said Sangakkara.

In Muttiah Muralidaran and Ajantha Mendis, Sangakkara has two star spinners of his own although Pakistan's Saeed Ajmal should not be disregarded.

"Mendir, the way he's bowled in the middle overs had been a charm," Sangakkara said.

"Even Pakistan watch him closely, they know he can get their wickets."

Sri Lanka's semifinal victory was built on a brilliant innings from Tillekaratne Dilshan, the leading scorer at the tournament with 317 runs, who carried his bat for 96 not out in a total of 158 for five.

Then came a sensational first over in

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PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh cricketers take to the field after a successful meeting with BCB vice-president Ahmed Sajjadul Alam (wearing panjabi) at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Leave past behind

AFP, London



Pakistan coach Intikhab Alam has urged his team not to falter at the last step as it takes on Sri Lanka in the World Twenty20 final at Lord's on Sunday.

"I have told the boys that we can win because we are the best," Alam said ahead of the second consecutive all-Asian final in the world championships of the sport's shortest format.

Pakistan had also made it to the title clash of the inaugural World Twenty20 in South Africa two years ago, but lost the exciting final to arch-rivals India by five runs at the Wanderers in Johannesburg.

Alam, a former Pakistan leg-spinner and captain, said the team was unaffected by what happened in 2007 and was looking to write a new chapter in the country's turbulent cricket history.

"What happened two years ago is behind us," he said. "This is a new beginning. You can't be affected by what happened in the past, that's not how sport is played."

"This team is entirely focussed on the final on Sunday. Having come so far, the boys are very keen to go all the way."

Winning the final will be a huge boost for cricket in Pakistan, who have been shunned by

all major cricket-playing nations due to security concerns in the volatile nation.

The International Cricket Council has moved the 2011 World Cup matches out of Pakistan after the Sri Lankan team bus was attacked by gunmen in Lahore on March 3 while on its way to the Gaddafi Stadium for a Test match.

Alam, a former Surrey player in English county cricket, said a win on Sunday will bring smiles on the faces of Pakistanis back home.

"They are going through a lot, we have to win it for them," he said. "No one outside Pakistan can imagine what a victory will do for the people at home."

Alam said Pakistan's campaign in the tournament reminded him of the one Imran Khan's side went through on their way to winning the 1992 World Cup in Australia.

"The pattern is almost the same," said Alam, who was also the team coach in 1992.

"We were on the brink of elimination then, but fought back to make the semifinals, then the final and then win it in Melbourne."

"Here the team has fought back after bad starts and has peaked at the right time."

Pakistan were beaten by hosts England in their first preliminary match before storming into the Super Sixes by thrashing minnows Netherlands.

The mercurial Pakistanis also lost their first

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T20 still young, says Waugh

PTI, Kolkata

Twenty20 may be the biggest entertainer right now but Australia great Steve Waugh feels the shortest format of cricket is still in early stages where coaches and captains are working on "guesswork".

Commenting on the shock exits of World champions Australia and World Twenty20 champions India, the 1999 World Cup winning Australia captain said, "Right now, it's very much guesswork."

"I think it's still in the early phase where players and coaches are working out hard on how to play the game at its best. In another couple of years, there will be specific plan and separate teams for this format of the game," Waugh, who had led Australia in 15 of their world-record 16 successive Test victories, said.

The iconic Australian was in the city last night to launch the India chapter of his Steve Waugh Global Foundation, a voluntary organisation that

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Calm in Tigers camp

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

After a day's break, the West Indies-bound national cricketers resumed practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The spotlight however was not on practice rather it centred around Mohammad Ashraful and his men's meeting with the vice-president of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) Ahmed Sajjadul Alam before the start of the training.

But as expected it was an 'amicable view-exchanging' meeting between the players and the board high-up although there was a lot of fuss in the Tigers tent during Thursday's training following BCB director and former national skipper Gazi Ashraf Hossain's thumping comments about the ICC World Twenty20 performance in England.

According to sources, initially the players even thought of boycotting training until Ashraf apologised for his comments. But it took little time to change their stance on the same day and nothing important cropped up while they discussed the issue in the meeting.

Sajjadul Alam was not ready to speak

in front of the media about the meeting's outcome rather he left the job to media manager Rabeed Imam who only informed that there was a misunderstanding which was solved through an amicable discussion and that the players are now focused on their next assignment which is the tour of the West Indies. But Imam was not entirely clear about what the "misunderstanding" was.

It was learnt that the players who were vocal in the dressing room to ignite the atmosphere had little to say during the discussion although they fumed after leaving the room, especially angry about why some players had apparently said 'sorry'.

It was also learnt that some players had apologised for their bad reaction and that captain Ashraful had also apologised to Ashraf over phone for his comments.

Meanwhile, it is all but confirmed that Ashraful is going to lose the captaincy as BCB's spokesman Jalal Yunus already informed that the majority of directors were in favour of the removal of the 24-year-old batsman before the Caribbean tour. In addition he may also be fined for breaching the players' code of conduct.

Ashraful openly criticised Ashraf which many thought was a clear violation of the code of conduct.

Although everything appears to be normal now, everybody is looking forward to see what action the BCB, particularly the cricket operations committee, takes against the incident as soon as many of the high-ups return from abroad.

Many think that it's alarming the way some players reacted and showed their arrogance towards the comments of the higher authorities. "One can't compromise with disciplinary issues, no matter how big a player or official is. There is a lot of evidence that even stern action has been taken against big names on disciplinary ground. So, BCB will react accordingly," said an official on condition of anonymity.

Questions were also raised about the role of some officials in the team and everybody is suggesting that the BCB high-ups give a long-look on the issue to make sure of maintaining discipline within the team.

After the recent episodes, coach Jamie Siddons has tweaked his schedule and is likely to return to Dhaka on June 27 instead of joining the team in the West Indies from Australia.

Women's School Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Papia slammed all five goals as Azimpur Girl's High School thrashed Islambagh Ashraf Ali High School 5-0 in the Citycell Women's School Football tournament at the Dhamondi Women's Sports Complex yesterday.

Papia opened her account in the 11th minute and then scored in the 15th, 24th, 31st and 39th minutes respectively.

BIT beat Dholaipur High School 1-0 thanks to Asma who converted a penalty in the 35th minute.

In the day's other match between Green Herald International School and Rajdhani High School ended in 1-1 draw at the same venue.

Shegufta put Rajdhani High School ahead in the 12th minute and Faria made the equaliser for Green Herald in the 29th minute.

He admitted pulling out was the toughest moment of his career but said that he is convinced he can return better than ever.

"I had physical problems in two of the most important tournaments for me, Roland Garros and Wimbledon, so it is tough to accept form me," Nadal said.

"I am going to work very hard to come back as soon as possible and when I do, I want to come back with 100 per cent right both mentally and physically."

"One of the big problems now is that when I am playing, I am thinking more about the knees than the game. It is difficult to play like this. I want to come back feeling 100 per cent."

"It is not a chronic problem. I can recover for sure."

Just 12 months after savouring his first Wimbledon title after a thrilling five-set victory over Roger Federer, it was a far more sombre Nadal who drove away from the south-west London venue this time.

Ending Federer's five-year reign as Wimbledon champion had been a crowning achievement for Nadal, who already had four French Open titles on his CV.

But Federer has already taken over as French Open champion and now he is the firm favourite to regain the Wimbledon title as well.

Nadal pulls out

AFP, London



World number one Rafael Nadal insists his decision to withdraw from Wimbledon was not a sign that his powers are on the wane.

Nadal opted not to defend his All England Club title after accepting that he would be performing at less than 100 per cent because he has yet to fully recover from knee tendinitis.

The Spaniard has been dogged by the problem for several years as a result of his all-action style and love of playing on clay courts.

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PHOTO: AFP
World number one Rafael Nadal of Spain plays a backhand during an exhibition match against Lleyton Hewitt of Australia at The Hurlingham Club in London on Thursday.



PHOTO: STAR
Action from yesterday's Citycell Dhaka Metropolis Women's School Football Championship match between BIT and Dholaipur High School at the Dhamondi Women's Sports Complex. BIT won by a solitary goal.

WC talks break down

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan cricket chiefs said on Saturday they will restart legal proceedings against the International Cricket Council (ICC) after talks over hosting World Cup matches in 2011 broke down.

"The PCB sought the support of its fellow Asian co-hosts for matches to be played under the aegis of the PCB in a safe neutral venue," the Pakistan Cricket Board said in a statement here.

"Despite the fact that these discussions had been helpfully and constructively brokered by the ICC president David Morgan and vice-president Sharad Pawar, no progress was made."

"This will mean that organizational issues surrounding the 2011 World Cup remain unresolved and that the legal proceedings the PCB has brought against the ICC in Dubai and in Lahore will continue," the statement added.

The PCB's response came after a meeting of officials from the four co-hosts - India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh - here at Lord's on Saturday on the sidelines of the World

Twenty20 tournament.

Pakistan had served legal notices on the ICC after being stripped of hosting rights in the wake of the militant attack on the Sri Lankan team in Lahore on March 3 and the deteriorating security situation in the volatile nation.

The ICC clarified earlier this week that while Pakistan were removed as a host location, the country remained a co-host and expected a final decision soon.

It meant Pakistan would still get a hosting fee of \$750,000 dollars per match from the ICC - a total of 10.5 million dollars for the 14 games irrespective of where they were held.

With matches in Pakistan ruled out, the PCB were in talks with the ICC and the other co-hosts to organise their share of 14 matches at neutral venues like the United Arab Emirates.

The meeting on Saturday followed talks between the ICC and the four co-hosts earlier in the week to "settle misunderstandings," in the words of ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat.

The ICC had also said that the other three host nations had agreed to forego hosting fees for the 14 extra matches allotted to them that were originally due to be held in Pakistan.

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THE FINAL
Pakistan v Sri Lanka
Venue: Lord's
Time: 9:00pm

TODAY'S T20 MATCH

THE FINAL
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Time: 9:00pm