



A Pakistan fan, watching the game on one of the many giant screens in Karachi, reacts with disappointment as her team tumbles towards defeat against India in the World Cup semifinal on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Fans accuse Misbah

AFP, Islamabad



Disappointed Pakistani cricket fans on Wednesday blamed a sluggish Misbahul Haq for defeat in the World Cup semifinal thriller with arch-rival India.

India defeated Pakistan by 29 runs in an action-packed match to set up a World Cup final showdown with Sri Lanka in Mumbai on Saturday, leaving fans across cricket-loving Pakistan dejected.

"We lost because of Misbah, as he did not score well when it was most required," angry fan Awas Shaker told AFP on Islamabad's main Jinnah Avenue as thousands of disappointed viewers were leaving screenings of the match.

"He just wasted time on the pitch."

Fans in other Pakistani cities which ground to a halt for the game also criticised Misbah, who scored a lacklustre 56 from 76 balls. His slow play pushed the Pakistan towards defeat before the 50th over.

For schoolteacher Hazrat Ali, it was disappointing -- but not the end of the game.

"Defeat and win is part of the game. Our team will win next time," he said.

In Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, engineer Mohammad Ali said: "It was a great contest all along and the day belonged to India. However Misbah and Younis Khan were very lazy."

The government had declared a half-day holiday in offices and schools to enable the cricket-mad population to enjoy the game.

Special prayers were offered in mosques and at homes, and people recited verses from the Koran, praying to Allah to guide the Pakistani team to victory.

By the evening all major roads in several Pakistani cities were gridlocked with cars, motorcycles and jubilant revellers, but the festive atmosphere turned tense as the Pakistani batting line began to fall before India.

Power cuts sparked protests by hundreds of angry spectators who blocked a main highway in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani Kashmir.

Motorists listened to the commentary on their car radios and shouted out the latest score to passers-by at a busy intersection in Islamabad.

Excitement reached fever pitch as shopkeepers flogged green T-shirts, caps and souvenirs, and networking sites Facebook and Twitter buzzed with comments on the wickets' falls and player's performance -- and prayers for the squad.

Young people were seen wearing the green T-shirts of the Pakistani squad, their faces painted in the nation's green and white, in the northwestern city of Peshawar, while large national flags flew from buildings, houses and cars.

In the eastern city of Lahore, which borders with India, more than 20,000 Pakistanis thronged the Gaddafi stadium to witness the match on large screens. Entry was free and people formed long queues to get in.

In Karachi residents blocked many roads and set up huge screens to watch the live broadcast from the Indian town of Mohali.

## 'Fielding undid Pakistan'

AFP, Karachi



Former greats and fans Thursday singled out sloppy fielding as the main reason for Pakistan's 29-run loss against bitter rivals India in the high-profile World Cup semifinal in Mohali.

Pakistan dropped six catches, four off Indian maestro Sachin Tendulkar, to help their rivals post a challenging 260-9.

Tendulkar went on to make 85 and won the man-of-the-match award.

Pakistan succumbed to the pressure of the run-chase and were bundled out for 231 in a match watched by Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and India's Manmohan Singh as well as millions of fans either side of the border.

Former Pakistan captain Imran Khan said India won despite not performing at their best level.

"Had Pakistan fielded well the target would have been around 220 which would not have been difficult on that pitch," said Imran, who led Pakistan to their only World Cup title in 1992.

"No team can win the World Cup with such poor fielding and dropping Tendulkar four times was a crime," added the former skipper in reference

to drops when the Indian star was on 27, 45, 70 and 84.

Imran added that India had handled the pressure well.

"The main thing in an Indo-Pak match is the team that handles pressure well wins, and on Wednesday it was India who did not succumb despite some brilliant bowling from Wahab Riaz and Saeed Ajmal."

Riaz was the pick of Pakistan's bowlers with a career-best 5-46, while off-spinner Ajmal finished with 2-44.

"I think they faltered in the batting order as well. They should have sent Younis (Khan) in at three and Misbahul-Haq at four so that they had wickets in hand," added Imran.

Former leg-spinner Abdul Qadir said fielding had been Pakistan's weakest link.

"Pakistan's fielding has always been their weakest link and their batting has always been unreliable. Both these things came to haunt them," said Qadir, singling out opener Mohammad Hafeez's reverse sweep as one "which let the team down".

"Hafeez (43) was playing well but suddenly he played a reckless shot and the whole batting came under pressure," said Qadir.

But Qadir admitted that by reaching

the semi-final, the Pakistan team, which had been under a cloud following last year's 'spot-fixing' controversy that saw three of their teammates banned, had fulfilled its promise.

"Before going to the World Cup the captain and the coach had promised to reach the semi-final and they fulfilled that. Had they been up to the mark in batting and fielding they would have been in the final," said Qadir.

Co-hosts India and Sri Lanka play the final in Mumbai on Saturday.

Former captain Aamer Sohail also pinpointed poor fielding as the turning point.

"The whole game turned upside down with dropped catches," said Sohail, a member of team which lost to India in the 1996 World Cup quarter-finals, one of Pakistan's five defeats in as many games against their rivals in World Cups.

Fans blamed poor fielding and reckless batting, lashing out at Misbah's selfish batting.

"He (Misbah) batted for himself and not for the team. He dropped Tendulkar on 27 and then batted slowly to pile pressure on other batsmen," said Haroon Khan of the middle-order batsman who made 56 off 76 balls.

## 'Don't judge Dhoni on final'

AFP, Mumbai

Kapil Dev, the only man to captain an Indian World Cup winning side, said Thursday that Mahendra Singh Dhoni's reputation as skipper should not depend on the result of Saturday's final against Sri Lanka.

Dhoni, having steered India past Pakistan in the semi-finals, is expected to complete the job with victory in Mumbai on Saturday to give the home side a second title to add to Kapil's 1983 breakthrough.

"I will never doubt Dhoni's credentials as a captain irrespective of the result of World Cup final," said Kapil.

"Lots of people believe that it's the ultimate result which will count but I believe otherwise."

"Look at Ricky Ponting. He has won two World Cups and after one bad World up he is out. That's not the way to judge a captain. So I would like that Dhoni not be judged by a win or loss. Instead, let's all wish him the very best."

## End of the Express

AFP, Mohali



A shadow of the tearaway who once terrified batsmen, as well as cricket administrators worldwide, Shoaib Akhtar's career ended meekly, denied the headline farewell he cherished.

The 35-year-old, out of form and out of shape, was deemed surplus to requirements after being clobbered for 70 in nine overs against New Zealand at the World Cup.

That mauling prompted him to announce he'd retire after the tournament, but one last shot at India in the semifinals beckoned if only skipper Shahid Afridi and coach Waqar Younis could be tempted to take the gamble.

They resisted and their caution was rewarded when Wahab Riaz, Shoaib's junior by 10 years, took a career-best five wickets to keep Pakistan in the game.

"We wanted Shoaib Akhtar to play but he was struggling," Afridi explained after Wednesday's 29-run defeat to their arch-rivals.

"We could not play someone who is at 50 percent or 60 percent of peak fitness. Riaz played in his place and you have seen his performance."

Shoaib had already admitted that time

had caught up with him, opting to jump before he was pushed in an emotional retirement speech earlier in the tournament in Sri Lanka.

"Mentally I wanted to go on forever but I have decided to make way for the youngsters," he said.

"I have no regrets. I made lots of friends but some people have misunderstood me. It was an honour to have played with Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis. I never imagined I would play for Pakistan. It was my greatest moment."

Shoaib, who made his international debut in 1997, took 178 wickets in 46 Tests, the last of which was against India at Bangalore in 2007.

He ended his career three wickets short of 250 in 163 one-day internationals and took 19 wickets in 15 Twenty20 internationals.

Shoaib, known as the Rawalpindi Express during his tearaway days as one of Test cricket's most feared if unpredictable talents, once cracked the 100mph barrier at the 2003 World Cup.

His career will always be remembered for a series of fitness problems and discipline violations that put the brakes on achieving his true potential.

True to his volatile nature, he was fined \$2,000 for breaching discipline after the defeat to New Zealand following an on-field spat.

## Future bright, says Afridi

AFP, Mohali



Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi said the performance of his side's younger players had been among the positives of a World Cup campaign that ended with a 29-run semifinal loss to India.

And he said he hoped Wednesday's match, watched by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistani counterpart Yousuf Raza Gilani, would be the catalyst for more games on Indian soil.

Pakistan have been unable to play matches at home since an armed attack on Sri Lanka's team bus in Lahore in 2009.

Now Afridi wants to see the restoration of normal cricket ties with India as part of his country's sporting rehabilitation.

"We want to play in India, we have shown them our hospitality in the past, I hope they do so too," the all-rounder said.

Pakistan saw 25-year-old left-arm quick Wahab Riaz take a career-best five for 46 as India were held to 260 for nine in the semifinal.

But the Pakistan innings struggled to get going in the face of accurate Indian bowling.

Only 20-year-old Umar Akmal threatened to keep up with the run-rate whilst Misbahul Haq faced 76 balls for his 56 before the 36-year-old was last man out.

"I'm proud of my team, the boys have really done a great job in this competition. We played as a unit and no-one was expecting us to play cricket like this so I'm very happy as a captain," said Afridi.

"I think the youngsters really performed well. Asad Shafiq and Umar Akmal played well and I hope they will do well in the future. I think we have played better than in the 2003 and 2007 World Cups," said Afridi.

Pakistan cricket has been under a cloud since last year's 'spot-fixing' scandal in England which led to bans for several duo

Mohammad Aamer and Mohammad Asif as well as former Test captain Salman Butt.

"It has been a difficult 10 months for us," Afridi said. "I am thankful to my board officials and team management for backing me."

"We had a rickety team coming into the World Cup and considering that it has been a good performance."

As for Riaz, he added: "We didn't bowl well with the new ball, but because of his bowling we came back, otherwise I thought they would have scored about 300. It was a great bowling performance from him."

Riaz was selected after Pakistan felt they could not risk Shoaib Akhtar, meaning there was no fairytale farewell for the 'Rawalpindi Express', who had said he would retire from international cricket after the World Cup.

"We wanted Shoaib Akhtar to play but he was struggling," Afridi explained. "We could not play someone who is at 50 percent or 60 percent of peak fitness. Riaz played in his place and you have seen his performance."

India's total of 260 for nine was built on Sachin Tendulkar's 85 but Pakistan did not help their cause by dropping the man-of-the-match four times.

However, Afridi eventually held the chance that ensured his pre-match prediction that Wednesday would not be the day when Tendulkar scored his 100th international hundred came true.

"I want to congratulate the India team and the whole nation. I think they deserved to win," Afridi said.

"I think we made some big mistakes in the fielding, we dropped some catches, like for Sachin. Like I told you, Sachin didn't score a hundred."

India now face Sri Lanka, beaten by Pakistan in the group phase, in Saturday's final in Mumbai and Afridi could not pick a winner. "Both teams are playing very good cricket, both teams are well balanced."



Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi clutches his hair in despair as another catch off the bat of India batsman Sachin Tendulkar is grassed off his bowling during Pakistan's semifinal loss to India at the Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Sania wins domestic 'war'

AFP, New Delhi

Indian tennis star Sania Mirza, who had jokingly tweeted she was at 'war' with husband -- and former Pakistan cricket captain -- Shoaib Malik, praised the defeated semifinalists on Thursday.

Mirza, as well as Indo-Pak tennis partners Rohan Bopanna and Aisam-Ul-Haq Qureshi, had cheered on their teams from the United States where all had been involved in the Miami Masters tournament.

"Bad luck to Pakistan..fantastic win by India but job only half done..one more to go..phewww..now I can go practice in peace..GO INDIA," Mirza wrote her Twitter account.

She later tweeted: "As for today the men in blue brought smiles to a billion ppl: Now to support an Indian (Rohan Bopanna) and a Pakistani (Aisam Qureshi) playing together in Miami."

Mirza added: "Makes you wonder what they (Pakistan) could achieve with this talent and without all the problems and controversies surrounding them!!"

Shoaib, who was left out of the 15-man World Cup squad, tweeted to his wife: "I wish I would have played today's match. The boys in green should walk with their heads held high."