

Sports

World Cup organisers happy with security amid 'moderate' threat

No 'panic' for Tendulkar as India slump before World Cup

LONDON: Britain may be dealing with a national threat level of "severe" but officials are confident they have the security measures in place for a Cricket World Cup in England and Wales rated a "moderate" security risk.

Recent terror attacks in cricket playing nations have heightened safety concerns regarding the World Cup, which features 48 one-day international matches in 46 days starting with tournament hosts England against South Africa on Thursday.

In March, 51 worshippers were shot dead in mosque attacks in the New Zealand city of Christchurch while more than 250 people died in Sri Lanka as a result of suicide bombings on Easter Sunday.

"When those incidents happened so close to the tournament, quite understandably that did cause some nervousness," Jill McCracken, the World Cup safety and security director, told reporters at the Oval on Monday.

Public events in Britain have not been immune from terror incidents in recent years, with 23 people killed in a suicide bomb attack after a concert by the American singer Ariana Grande in Manchester two years ago.

McCracken, explaining the security position regarding the World Cup, added: "The UK national threat level sits at 'severe', which means an attack is likely.

"But we also work with security services

to assess the impact of the tournament itself and they have come to us with a bespoke threat for the event which is 'moderate'-the second lowest on the scale of risk.

"The threat in the UK is always around crowded places, they look for mass casualties, but when you look at the security measures that we have around the venues, around the teams, and the background work we do, that actually reduces threat."

Meanwhile the International Cricket Council said there had been 3.2 million applications for tickets—some four times the actual availability—with 110,000 women and 100,000 Under-16s expected to attend.

Officials are keen to attract family audiences to matches and players have been reminded of the need to set a good example while on the field.

"The definition of sledging (verbal abuse of an opponent) is always difficult," said ICC chief executive David Richardson.

"But one point we've emphasised in all team briefings is to uphold a good standard of behaviour.

"Any malicious or personal comments won't be tolerated. Over the last 12 months it's improved significantly, generally teams are pretty well behaved."

Richardson, a former South Africa wicket-keeper, added he hoped players and fans at this year's men's World Cup would follow the example of the 2017 Women's World Cup in England.

"The Women's World Cup was a good example of that family atmosphere," he said.

"Everyone is welcome, male and female, young and old. Any racism or homophobia, there's zero tolerance for that."

Meanwhile, India must not press the panic button despite losing badly to New Zealand in their first warm-up game for the World Cup, the country's batting legend Sachin Tendulkar said.

New Zealand thrashed India, one of the World Cup favourites, by six wickets at the Oval on Sunday with only Ravindra Jadeja and Hardik Pandya scoring more than 20 in India's total of 179.

India's batsmen were "blown away" on the green wicket, the Hindustan Times said, sounding the alarm for their World Cup hopes. But Tendulkar called for calm.

"I will not judge the team after each and every game. It's a tournament and things like these will happen," Tendulkar was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India news agency.

"The main tournament has not even started yet. I think, we need to settle down, one or two games may go here and there.

"India should make the most of the practice matches," added Tendulkar, the highest scorer in Test and one-day cricket.

"They should understand what kind of surfaces they might get. I won't panic at all as of now." New Zealand begin their World Cup against Sri Lanka in Cardiff on June 1,



Sachin Tendulkar

while India face South Africa in Southampton on June 5. Tendulkar also said teams used warm-up games to try different players, which was another reason not to read too much into the results.

"Teams are trying different combinations," he said. "Almost all teams are not

sure about their front-line playing 11. Several bowlers and batsmen are rested," he said. "All the teams are preparing and trying different combinations in those conditions which would work for them," said the former opener, who played in six World Cups. — AFP

Milestones beckons for Malinga in World Cup swansong

LONDON: Lasith Malinga's once-express pace has dropped as Father Time has caught up with the right-arm quick, but his guile should propel him to a few individual milestones at his fourth and final Cricket World Cup.

Malinga, who turns 36 in August, is on the cusp of breaking into the all-time top-10 one-day international wicket takers, with his tally of 322 just one behind former team mate Sanath Jayasuriya.

Muttiah Muralitharan heads the list with 534 wickets. Malinga has also taken three ODI hat-tricks and is the only player to have achieved the milestone twice during a World Cup. His first World Cup hat-trick was when he dismissed four South African batsmen in four balls in Guyana in 2007 — the only player to have achieved that feat in the tournament.

He then took another hat-trick against Kenya four years later in Colombo and while he said it would be nice to add a third in England and Wales, he was just keen on taking wickets when Sri Lanka start their campaign against New Zealand in Cardiff on June 1.

"I know I've got the skills to take wickets and (that) gives me confidence," Malinga told the International Cricket Council website. "One of the things I like about playing in England is you have to adapt to every condition.

"It could be really hot or quite cold and that is a real test of your skill as a bowler. "Why can't I get another hat-trick? I will be trying and that would be special." Malinga has already said that his fourth Cricket World Cup will be his last, with him targeting an international retirement after the World Twenty20 tournament in Australia next year.

He will however still anchor the pace attack with his



Lasith Malinga

ability to bowl fast swinging yorkers and well-directed bouncer and disguise changes in pace. The 1996 champions have struggled in the 50-over format this year, having lost eight of their nine completed matches, with their only victory against Scotland in Edinburgh.

Malinga, however, felt the side could surprise opposition teams in the round-robin format. "In pre-

vious years perhaps we had bigger names but these guys are very talented and they are looking forward to proving themselves and making people notice them," he said. "We have the best 15 players in Sri Lanka right now and we have a mix of more experienced players and some exciting young players, who just can't wait to get started." — Reuters

Fakhar Zaman: Pakistan's WCup weapon

KARACHI: Fakhar Zaman was still establishing himself in the Pakistan team when Jasprit Bumrah's no-ball in the Champions Trophy final triggered his unlikely rise from navy sailor to World Cup talisman.

India appeared to have made the perfect start in the 2017 Champions Trophy showpiece when Zaman edged to wicketkeeper MS Dhoni off Bumrah.

However, the Indian fast bowler had overstepped the crease and Zaman, who had scored just three at the time, was given a reprieve that he made the most of, reaching his first one-day international century.

Fakhar changed the game with a crisp 114 to help Pakistan beat their bitter rivals by a 180-run margin at the Oval to lift the trophy. Since then Fakhar has been the lynchpin of Pakistan's batting and will be expected to anchor the lineup when the World Cup gets under way in England on May 30. "That no-ball made me. I had a dream before the final that I will be dismissed off a no-ball and it proved to be true," Fakhar said. "Initially I was very sad as I had promised my parents to do well in that match."

Fakhar's role in that famous victory against India came in just his fourth ODI and made him a household name in Pakistan. But he said the recognition has not distracted him as he focuses on inspiring Pakistan's bid for a second World Cup win and first since 1992.

"I was very lucky and ever since that century I have become famous," he said. "But with that fame comes responsibility and I have become more mature and now I realise the importance of playing my part. That will be my top priority in the World Cup."

Luck has been on the unassuming left-hander's side since he defied his father's advice not to play cricket in his native Mardan. Fakhar joined the Pakistan Navy but cricket remained his dream.

He kept his hand in by playing for the navy team and crucially benefited from a stroke of good fortune to fulfil his wish of playing for the national side.

Pakistan opener Sharjeel Khan was banned in a spot-fixing case during the second edition of the Pakistan Super League in 2017, just three months before the Champions Trophy.

Fakhar's aggressive batting had impressed head coach Mickey Arthur and chief selector Inzamam-ul-Haq. They instantly selected Fakhar as an attacking option and he has paid them back by averaging a stunning 51.31 in his 36 ODIs.

"I saw a game changer in Fakhar," recalled Inzamam. "We had to find someone to replace Sharjeel and after watching Fakhar we thought 'here is our man'. "He lived up to that promise and we see him as an anchor in the World Cup."

The 29-year-old, called "soldier" by his teammates for his navy connection, smashed Pakistan's first double century in a one-day match in Zimbabwe last year and knows what is required of him in his country's World Cup campaign. "My job is to score runs and I am doing that so I know that hard work will pay off," he said. — AFP

West Indies perfect opportunity to test death bowling: N Zealand coach

LONDON: A power-hitting West Indian side will provide the perfect opportunity to test bowling tactics in the final 'death' overs ahead of the Cricket World Cup, New Zealand bowling coach Shane Jurgensen has said.

While New Zealand's bowlers produced a superb performance at the top of the innings in Saturday's six-wicket win over India, Jurgensen said the warmup match against Jason Holder's side on Tuesday should give them the chance to work on finishing off an innings as well.

"They'll put us under pressure and I think that will be key for us, especially for the bowlers," Jurgensen said. "One key area for all teams in this tournament is how you bowl at the death and limiting those boundaries in the last 10 overs.

"Taking wickets at the top will be a key component but at the back end of the innings you want to not leak too many boundaries and keep scores to a modest total."

Jurgensen added that he was pleased with the way Trent Boult, who took three early wickets, bowled against India, with his performance also showing how vital it was to exploit what swing is available during the tournament.

The Oval pitch supported New Zealand's bowlers against India but Jurgensen did not expect the ball to swing or seam as much in the tournament, predicting that opening bowlers might only get assistance for their first two overs.

"It was a good start against India but we can't get too excited," Jurgensen said. "We need to keep trucking on and working our way through the tournament. "It's a long campaign. Every time we play we need to make sure that we execute in all departments."

Jurgensen added that Matt Henry, unused against India, was likely to play against West Indies in Bristol and all-rounder Jimmy Neesham said it was vital that the whole squad saw some action ahead of their tournament opener against Sri Lanka in Cardiff on June 1.

"Getting some overs into the legs of the guys that didn't bowl so much in the last game and hopefully getting a few runs as well," Neesham said of the goal for today's game. "From here on in it's about making the guys feel comfortable so that we can hit that first game knowing that we can do it."

"The World Cup is the pinnacle and the guys are really buzzing. We have to keep the excitement under wraps." — Reuters



KUWAIT: The doubles semi final of the Late Abed Ali Bahman Ramadhan Squash tournament was won by Qais Al-Mazidi and Ayman Al-Farra who defeated Hisham Ramadhan 2/1. The final will be Friday against Abdallah Maqseed and Adnan Dashti.