

'They just kept firing. All

► As they drove through Lahore to the Gaddafi Stadium, the players' minds were on the sporting battle that lay ahead. Then the firing began, and another chapter was written in Pakistan's bloody history

By Omar Waraich
IN LAHORE

ABDUL GHANI BUTT wasn't surprised to see the big white coach carrying the Sri Lankan team lurch into the roundabout with its retinue of police cars. He'd also seen it pass by on Monday, as he made his way to the foreign exchange dealer's office where he works, in the well-heeled Lahore neighbourhood of Gulberg.

Like many Lahoris, he was inured to the noisy motorised rickshaws. Nor did he mind competing for narrow gaps with the drivers who choke up the four avenues leading to Liberty Square.

The Sri Lankan team, and a second contingent of aides and correspondents, had earlier begun their morning journey along the same route to the Gaddafi Stadium, snaking their way through the heart of Lahore. Once known as just Lahore Stadium, the red-brick landmark was renamed in honour of the Libyan leader in 1974, after he bellowed a speech cheering the then prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's nuclear ambitions.

Perhaps, like many other Pakistanis disillusioned with the national team's decline, Mr Butt's attraction to cricket had faded. "Initially I took no notice of the convoy," he recalled. But at 8.40am, he was forced to look hard. "I heard the attack, and spun around." What he heard was a rocket arcing over the coach, striking an electric pole. Was it a calculated distraction? In any case, the shooter, who had suddenly appeared from one of two white cars that pulled into the roundabout, displayed chillingly accurate aim seconds later.

"[He] put his rocket launcher down, and pulled out a rifle," said Mr Butt. An AK-47, to be precise. The man was between 25 and 30. Clean-shaven and dressed in a tracksuit. "He was carrying a backpack, just like the one Ajmal Kasab had." Like Kasab – the sole surviving Mumbai attacker – the Lahore gunman crouching on the grass that



The Sri Lankan cricket player Tharanga Paranavitana arrives at a hospital in Lahore after being shot REUTERS

covers the centre of the roundabout appeared well trained. "He changed the magazine so quickly that it could only have been done by a professional," said Mr Butt.

Several more men emerged, moving in pairs or in threes. Their first target was a police van at the edge of the roundabout. "They were constantly firing; all I heard was bullets for three to four minutes," said Mohammed Waqas, a 25-year-old travel agent. He lay on the road, as police and attackers were locked in a fierce gun battle that lasted for 15 to 20 minutes. "One of the police commandos came out into the open and began firing at them," he said. "I don't think he survived. The other commandos used their cars for protection."

At this point one of the gunmen strode forward, rolling a grenade under the coach. As video footage testified, the attackers moved around the square with ease. They struggled at times with the weight of their personal arsenals, but appeared familiar with

the area. Mercifully, the grenade failed to detonate. Had it not, today's front pages would likely have been emblazoned with the headline "Pakistan's Munich". Then the attackers fired at the coach's tyres, in an abortive bid to demobilise the team bus. The dozen gunmen now trained their guns on their principal targets: the Sri Lankan team behind the black-tinted windows. Inside the vehicle, a very human panic was playing out.

"We all dived to the floor to take cover," said the team captain Mahela Jayawardene. The windows shattered, sending shards of glass flying around the cabin that injured Mr Jayawardene and six other players and an assistant coach. Thilana Samaraweera and Tharanga Paranavitana were wounded by gunshot and later ferried to the Services Hospital. Prompted by cries of "go, go, go" from the cricketers, the driver Mehar Mohammad Khalil steered the team to safety within the stadium's grounds.

The minibus driver following him, carrying a group of umpires, was less fortunate. "Our driver was killed instantly from a shot from the front," said Nadeem Ghauri, the Pakistani umpire. "It was horrifying. There were bullets flying around us and we didn't know what was happening," he told Reuters. Ahsan Raza, the reserve umpire, was severely injured. According to local media reports, he pleaded with those around him: "Please save me, I have small children." The match referee Chris Broad, a former England opener, threw himself over Mr Raza to shield him. "It was very brave," Mr Ghauri said of Mr Broad. Stranded without a driver, the officials yelled to a policeman for help to drive them away.

At 8.55am the firing stopped. The gunmen melted away into nearby trees and bushes, according to Mr Butt. The police say they fled east, toward Liberty Market, from where a cache of weapons including a rocket launcher was later discovered.

"Our driver was killed instantly from a shot from the front. It was horrifying"

NADEEM GHAURI
PAKISTANI UMPIRE

Salmaan Taseer, the Governor of Punjab who assumed control of the province last week, ordered a manhunt as police cordoned off the area. For the second time in the past week, the centre of Lahore ground to a standstill. Shopkeepers hauled down their shutters in Liberty Market and the adjoining Gulberg Boulevard. Last week, they were chased away by political riots led by supporters of Nawaz Sharif after a Supreme Court ruling barred the former prime minister from standing for elected office.

"It was a similar type of attack to Mumbai," said Mr Taseer. "They were well armed and well trained. They had rocket launchers, grenades and Kalashnikovs. The police have discovered a vehicle that was used by the gunmen that was packed with explosives. The engine was running with the key in. If anyone turned off the car, it would have blown up. We are not afraid – the people of Lahore are not afraid. We'll get the bastards who did this."

Six members of the Punjab Elite Police were killed in the attack. Their bodies were rushed away for burial when rescue services arrived. The President Asif Ali Zardari hailed their bravery, and local news channels saluted them as martyrs. At the scene, their vehicle remained for hours after the attack, the windscreen of the blue van bearing six bullet holes. On the driver's seat lay a blood-stained cap belonging to one of the police commandos. Blood was smeared across the steering wheel, flecked on the windscreen, and in small pools across the back seat.

At 12.15pm, the Sri Lankan team was airlifted to a nearby army base, before boarding a chartered plane for Colombo last night. Nearly 13 years ago, they left the same stadium holding aloft the World Cup. Yesterday, they left with physical and emotional wounds, as the last team that will play Pakistan there for years to come.

Attackers escape after military-style assault

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being driven in a convoy to the Gaddafi Stadium, shooting out the tyres of buses before opening fire with assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.

Six policemen and the driver of a bus carrying the match umpires were killed during a firefight lasting more than 15 minutes. Players and match officials, some of them bleeding from bullet and shrapnel wounds, huddled on the floor of their vehicles.

The Sri Lankan all-rounder Thilana Samaraweera suffered the worst injury after being hit on the thigh with grenade fragments. Among the others injured was Paul Farbrace, a former Kent cricketer who was assistant coach to the Test team. He said: "There was a lot of shouting and peo-

ple hitting the floor and when I got to the floor I realised that the blood I could see was coming from me." A former England player acting as an official, Chris Broad, helped protect an injured umpire, Ahsan Raza.

Pakistan's President, Asif Ali Zardari, said he "strongly condemned" the attack and pledged that those responsible would be caught. Rehman Malik, the Interior minister, said the country was in a "state of war... Be patient, we will flush all these terrorists out of the country".

Salmaan Taseer, the Punjab province's Governor, said: "It was the same terrorists who attacked Mumbai. It was the same pattern, the kind of weaponry they had, the way they attacked, they were obviously trained."

"Players and match officials, some of them bleeding from bullet wounds, huddled on the floor"

He added that the gunmen had been chased into a nearby shopping area after the attack where police had lost track of them. The province's police chief, Khawaja Farooq, said "some" arrests had been made but refused to say whether they included any of those who had taken part in the attack.

The police displayed 10 AK-47 rifles, two grenade launchers, 32 hand grenades and plastic explosives.

Imran Khan, the Pakistani politician and former captain of the country's cricket team, said the Sri Lankan team had been given inadequate protection. "This was one of the worst security failures in Pakistan," he said. "The Pakistan government guaranteed the Sri Lankan team that they would provide them with security, and they failed to do so adequately."

The International Cricket Council cast doubts over Pakistan's ability to continue to host high-level games. "It's difficult to see international cricket being played in Pakistan for the foreseeable future," said its chief executive Haroon Lorgat.

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