

# Pakistan relishes spotlight

## WOMEN'S TEAM ENJOYS BEING ON THE CENTER STAGE

By CUI JIA  
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — The Guangzhou Asian Games have made Sana Mir, the captain of the Pakistan women's cricket team, feel like a big-screen star.

Pakistan, the tournament's No 1 seed, easily won its game against newcomer China by nine wickets on Monday, but that sparkling effort was not what truly impressed Mir.

"We never get this kind of media coverage back at home. I am just so glad the sport made it to the Asian Games," said the 26-year-old. "There is always TV coverage when the men's cricket team plays in Pakistan because it is huge, but you never see us playing on big screens or TVs," she said.

Although Pakistan has 500 to 600 professional women players under the age of 19, and about 1,000 to 1,200 playing at the senior level, they are overshadowed by the men's game, said Ayesha Ashhar, manager of the women's team.

"Our earnings can't compare with what the men make. It's the love of the sport that keeps us going," said Mir. "We would like to be treated and rewarded just like the men's team."

Unlike some of the women players whose families are against them playing due to strict traditions, Mir's family is happy for her to play the game. "I have to thank my parents and brother for their support, otherwise I couldn't have made it this far."

Meanwhile, Ashhar said women's cricket in Pakistan has improved rapidly over the past two to three years, thanks to an effective domestic structure which helps players to train and progress at a young age.

"The team's performance at the international level wouldn't be as good as it is now without that."

She also said China definitely gave the No 1 seed a surprise in Monday's match — the first between the two countries.

"For a young team that only has three years' of history, what China did on the field was excellent — especially the bowling," the manager said.

Currently all of the Chinese



EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY

Pakistan batswoman Rashid Nida is hit by the ball during the game against China on Monday. Pakistan won by nine wickets.

players are converts from other sports, including rugby, softball, volleyball and athletics.

"Cricket needs many years to become established in a country. For China, the challenge is to attract enough talented players and coaches. But I believe when China chooses to develop a sport, it succeeds," Ashhar said.

"All we need now is time," said Liu Rongyao, manager of China women's team. "In ten years' time, China will be among the top three women's teams in Asia."

### COMMENT >> SHAHRIAR KHAN

The match between China and Pakistan lived up to its billing.

Pakistan won, but it had to play at its best. It was a respectable performance by the Chinese women, a team that has been together for only three years, against a world-class nation.

Pakistan had more experience, more skill and more ability, but those are things China can improve on with more time and continued investment.

After the match, Pakistan's manager said she hoped there would be regular series between the countries. When there are, China will have a chance to win some.



— SHAHRIAR KHAN, MEDIA MANAGER OF THE ACC

## ACC relief as cricket to stay in 2014

GUANGZHOU — Cricket was assured of its place in the 2014 Asian Games program on Monday after fears the sport would be axed, sparking a big sigh of relief from the Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

"It has been discussed and it has been accepted that cricket will be part of the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon," said Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) president Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah.

Cricket is making its debut at the Games here, but organizers of the Incheon event wanted it chopped from the program, along with karate, as part of a drive to limit the number of sports to 35.

That would be made up of the 28 Olympic Games sports and seven which reflect the sporting culture of Asia's five zones.

The sport's image here had also taken a battering with India's refusal to send a team.

ACC Chief Executive Ashrafal Huq was delighted that cricket had kept its place on the 2014 program.

"I am pleased the uncertainty is over," Huq said. "It means so much to Asian countries, especially those who do not play at the highest level."

"The Asian Games gives these countries a chance to make their presence felt on an international stage against some of the world's best players, which can only improve their game."

Huq also believes the decision, backed by the OCA which was desperate to convince Incheon of its wide-scale TV appeal, will only serve to boost the game in the region.

"These nations receive a lot of support from the ACC, the OCA and also their own national Olympic bodies," he said.

"I am certain good cricket facilities will be built in the Republic of Korea, as they were in China."

"My hope is that in four years' time, cricket would have taken a giant leap in Asia. I just hope India decides to send teams to the Games, its players are being missed here in Guangzhou."

The powerful Indian cricket board refused to field either the men's or women's team at the Games citing prior international and domestic commitments.