

## **20100223 Press piece for AKE Asia-Pacific**

**Despite a threat from a little known Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist group, both Australia and New Zealand are sending sports teams to India to compete in the upcoming Hockey World Cup. AKE believes they have made the right decision.**

Earlier this month Ilyas Kashmiri, the chief of Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, a terrorist organisation said to be fighting the Indian Army in Kashmir and campaigning for Kashmiris to be granted the right of self-determination, claimed that the group will target the 2010 Hockey World Cup, Indian Premier League (IPL) and the Commonwealth Games later in the year. He went even further to say "Nor should their people visit India - if they do, they will be responsible for the consequences." Kashmiri's profile in the west is not high, but his alleged membership of Brigade 313 and Lashkar-el Zhil, both Al Qaeda affiliates, have caused quite a stir.

The threat came in the wake of the worst terrorist attack to target India since the Mumbai attacks of November 2008. Both these attacks and the recent blast in Pune appeared to specifically target foreign personnel. The bomb in the popular meeting place for foreigners, the German Bakery, killed 16 people and injured nearly 60 others on 13 February. These acts have led many to reconsider the threat of terrorism in India. Further, Kashmiri's links with the Pune attack have further brought his threats into the public's consciousness.

As international showpieces of the sporting calendar, the events will be widely supported and involve all of the leading international teams. Television coverage will be extensive, increasing the visibility of any potential attack. The media frenzy following the alleged threat has led many to question whether sportsmen should even travel to dangerous regions. Some sportsmen have withdrawn from their squads and have even chosen to remain at home. The 2009 IPL tournament was moved to South Africa at a very late stage due to the increased threat of terror.

Yet AKE does not believe the immediate threat to be as severe as some media outlets are proposing.

Considering the Hockey World Cup and the IPL are a matter of national prestige for the UPA government in New Delhi, it is not hard to believe the preliminary reports which suggest unprecedented security arrangements are being made. The authorities have claimed players will receive a "presidential" level of security for the competitions. Moreover, India has two other big international sporting events – the Commonwealth Games and the Cricket World Cup - to prepare for. Any unfortunate incident will cast a shadow of doubt on those future events as well and thus it is imperative for the earlier tournaments to pass without incident.

Preliminary reports suggest that some 200 security cameras will be used during the hockey matches to monitor the stadium. Unlike many western countries, CCTV is not common in India. This is an indication of the government's seriousness in providing adequate security. The recent India and South Africa cricket match in Jaipur reportedly suffered threats, the result being that 2000 security personnel were deployed for a stadium with a capacity of 28000.

The resignation of Maharashtra Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh after the Mumbai attacks of 2008 will no doubt have made other CM's keenly aware of preventing a security incident of this magnitude, meaning the security forces will be on high alert.

So while security is expected to remain high, the head of the IPL, Lalit Modi, is adamant that tournament will not be moved or postponed. The move to South Africa of the 2009 tournament coincided with the 2009 general elections, meaning the Indian central government refused to release the extra security forces to provide security. Coming amid a less turbulent political scene, this will not be the case in 2010 and the Indian security forces will be able to concentrate on providing security directly related to these showpiece sporting occasions. The Indian government already reviewed its security preparations for the Hockey World Cup from February 28 - March 13, with an extra 1,200 soldiers including 200 commandos drafted in to guard key buildings.

Based on the security provisions in place, athletes are likely to be completely secure in their hotels and stadiums. No information is available regarding the security arrangements during their movements from airport to hotel and from hotel to the sporting venues. AKE believes that they are most vulnerable during such journeys and if any attacks were to take place, it will happen during such transit.

With proper planning and on-site security, AKE believes that teams should not face much more than an elevated threat, despite the lofty ambitions of the Brigade 313 group. That said, while AKE believes the chances of a terrorist attack on the IPL or the Hockey World Cup are remote, subsequent attacks on places frequented by foreigners could occur as terrorist groups move to exploit the standing down of security forces.