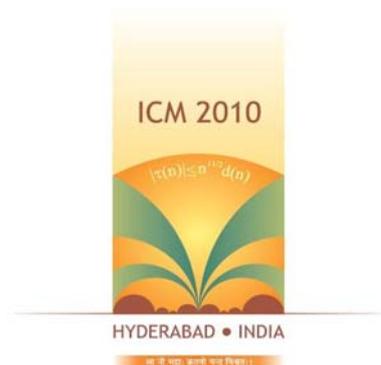**Geeks versus the Grand(est)master**

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August 2010 will see what is perhaps the largest gathering of geeks ever in India. Hyderabad is the venue of the ICM – the International Congress of Mathematicians, the biggest and most prestigious international mathematical meeting. The ICMs take place once every four years. No meeting in any scientific discipline has the kind of wide sweep that ICMs have: every branch of mathematics is covered and emphasis is on the essential unity of all mathematics. The venue keeps shifting from country to country and India has been accorded the privilege this year. The core academic programme at every ICM is – as is to be expected – a veritable mathematical feast. On the sidelines are cultural events which will vary with the host country reflecting its ethos.

At Hyderabad the hosts are offering the delegates an opportunity to play against the World Chess Champion Vishy Anand. Anand will play simultaneous chess against 40 opponents to be chosen from among the delegates to the ICM at Hyderabad. There are of course many chess enthusiasts among mathematicians. Chess is the most cerebral of all games and thinking in Chess is very close to the way mathematicians think. Emanuel Lasker, the mathematician well known to algebraists for the "Lasker–Noether Theorem" was the world chess champion for 27 years (1894–1921).

The game of chess originated in India in the sixth century. It was called *Chaturanga* (in Sanskrit, meaning four divisions (of the military): infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots, represented by the pieces that would evolve into the modern pawn, knight, bishop, and rook, respectively). The modern form of the game is somewhat different from the Indian version and evolved in Europe in the fifteenth century. It is indeed a matter of great pride for India that an Indian is the world champion in the game which has Indian roots.

Anand is a keen follower of developments in mathematics and science. One of his favourite books which he often refers to is Andrew Hodges's 'Inner Life of Numbers'. Asked about the unique opportunity to play 40 brilliant mathematicians, Anand said, "Actually I am quite looking forward to attending the congress and maybe even hear some lectures. I enjoyed Simon Singh's book on Fermat's Last Theorem and I keep reading the book repeatedly. During the WC match in Sofia I would read this book, 'The book of Nothing' just before the game. In fact when I first became a Grandmaster, someone presented me the book, 'The Man who knew infinity', a biography of Ramanujan. I was intrigued by his natural genius. That was my first introduction to a mathematician. Both chess and mathematics are closely linked and lot of our methodology in problem solving are similar".