Viswanathan Anand at the press conference after his title triumph over challenger Veselin Topalov. – PHOTO: AFP

Anand's reign continues

CHESS / World title will remain in Indian hands for two more years

Ian Rogers

SOFIA: Viswanathan Anand retained his World chess championship title with a slashing attacking win in the 12th and final game in Sofia, Bulgaria.

With the score tied at 5.5-5.5, Anand broke through to win the final game in 56 moves to break the deadlock which had existed through a series of marathon games over the past week.

When Topalov extended his hand and resigned the final game the silence in Sofia's Military Club was shattered; the crowd broke into applause and a member of Anand's entourage shouted 'Jai!'

Topalov congratulated his opponent and talked to Anand a little about the game — "These were virtually the first words we had exchanged since the match began," Anand admitted.

Remarkable achievement

This was a remarkable achievement by Anand who went into the match outranked and apparently exhausted after a delayed two-day trip to the Bulgarian capital.

"This was by far the most intense match I have ever played," a relieved Anand said after the decisive game.

"When I woke up this morning I thought that this could be the saddest day of my life or the happiest.

"I have almost no experience in a World championship match where every result is possible on the final game. I was not unhappy that it would be over soon."

Topalov rued his missed opportunities; "I had the advantage in most of my games with white, but could win only two."

Anand lost the first game of the match badly and it seemed that the local hero would cruise to the World title.

However, Anand fought back, winning two games and losing one more, before he launched the decisive assault in the final game.

The Bulgarian challenger Topalov had the advantage of the first move in the 12th game but was surprised by Anand's choice of the Queen's Gambit Declined opening and failed to make any headway, with his Indian opponent controlling the centre of the board.

On the 26th move, Topalov offered a possible repetition of moves, effectively asking for a draw which would have sent the game into rapid tieb-reakers. However, Anand declined, targeting his opponent's king with a violent pawn sacrifice on the 30th move.

Topalov unwisely grabbed the offered material and soon his king was hounded to destruction.

"I refrained from repeating moves because I was afraid of playing the rapid tie-breakers; I had lost such tie-breakers in (2006)" said Topalov.

"This was my mistake. I was crazy to take the pawn — I missed (Anand's 34th move)."

"My opponent is a fantastic fighter," Anand agreed. "My opponent had the advantage in most of our games (here). Either of us could have won this match."

Anand's win earns the 40-year-old World champion 1.2m Euros and the World title will remain in Indian hands for another two years.