

SPORT



After Gemcon Khulna won the final of the Masters Cricket Carnival, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) made a surprise entry to celebrate his hometown's win with the team's players. (INSET) Meanwhile, Shakib Al Hasan's daughter Alanya provided a welcome distraction from the action, with Tamim Iqbal pictured here trying to grab her attention with his car keys.

PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED



ENGLAND'S TOUR OF BANGLADESH Strauss issues deadline

AFP, Manchester



England chief Andrew Strauss said Wednesday that players have three days left to decide if they are willing to tour Bangladesh amid ongoing security concerns surrounding the country.

And the former England captain made it clear that anyone who opted out ran the risk of losing their international position if a stand-in did well in their absence.

All-rounders Moeen Ali and Chris Jordan have both said they are unequivocally available to tour and Alastair Cook, England's Test captain, is believed to have given a private assurance to the same effect.

However, limited overs captain Eoin Morgan has yet to commit to the tour and opener Alex Hales has also been reported to have safety worries.

ECB director Strauss will meet with England's contracted players -- who will form the bulk of the touring party -- at England's National Cricket Academy in Loughborough on September 9 and 10 for their annual appraisal.

During those meetings, the former England opener will seek a definitive answer on players' willingness to tour, with the squad due to be named publicly on September 16.

Strauss, speaking at Old Trafford on Wednesday told reporters: "Would I like both our captains to be on that tour? Absolutely, definitely."

However, Strauss added: "We have to recognise that, although we have two captains who have wider responsibilities than just themselves, they are still human beings at the end of the day and still subject to all the same thoughts and concerns as anyone else."

"I'm very assured by the report that Reg gave

to me and translated to the players... I believe the security plan we have in place mitigates the risk to an acceptable level.

"The persuasion is that we feel it's safe to go. "I genuinely believe that and that is why I'm encouraging every player to use that incredibly detailed and experienced viewpoint from Reg to make a judgement.

"If he says it's safe to go somewhere it's safe, and if (he says) it isn't, it isn't."

Nevertheless, Strauss stressed: "I cannot literally force people up the steps and say 'you have to go to Bangladesh'."

Strauss said players would have to weigh up the pros and cons for themselves.

"I think, at its most simple (level), the big consequence for not going is you are giving someone else an opportunity to step into your shoes and stake a claim for themselves.

"That's just the same as if someone gets injured ... you are out of possession of that spot... If someone does really well, then you can't give any guarantees (over selection)."

Strauss, however, said he had no great concerns over players' ongoing uncertainty following his own experience of being a member of the England squad that continued with the 2008 tour of India following the deadly Mumbai terror attacks.

"It doesn't actually (concern me), having been through this myself, after the Mumbai bombings.

"In my own mind, intellectually coming to the decision -- 'if Reg says it's safe to go somewhere, who am I to say otherwise' -- in hindsight, it looks like a very simple and obvious one.

"But it still took me some time to get there at that point, and there's no reason to expect a lot of these young guys, who are going through this for the first time, to make an on-the-spot decision.

A carnival indeed

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It might not have been widely publicised, neither was it a competition that cricket fans went crazy over, but at the end of the day the Masters Cricket Carnival, a tournament that saw the country's former cricketers battle against each other, lived up to its name.

And that's a statement that anyone present at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday would agree with. The final of the T20 competition took place yesterday between the Lanka-Bangla All Stars and Gemcon Khulna in Mirpur. And while there was plenty of excitement in the game, the day though will be remembered for its off-field events.

It was indeed a carnival; one which united not just the cricketers of the past and the present, but also administrators and journalists. While Habibul Bashar was busy playing his iconic pull shot on the ground, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Tamim Iqbal were having fun with the stars of yesteryear on the sidelines.

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan seemed to be having a field day with his daughter, while Mohammad Rafique, the slow left-arter who used to lead the Tigers' spin attack before Shakib, was busy explaining to his peers how he was still the fittest amongst the batch. His main claim of course was the fact that he was awarded the player of the series. One can't argue too much with the left-arter. He displayed his impeccable line and length during the tournament and won two player-of-the-match awards.

While it was all fun and games off the ground, on it there were a dozen serious 40-year-olds sweating it out. The match was reduced to 18-overs-per-side due to a late start.

Batting first, the All Stars were restricted to 124 in 18 overs. Javed Omar looked to step out of his typically defensive style of play and scored a stroke-filled 17. Former left-arm pacer Monjurul Islam, meanwhile, managed to swing his way, like he did in the past, to a wicket.

The total though wasn't enough as Khulna, led by Habibul Bashar, romped home with eight wickets in hand. Bashar, easily the fittest amongst the lot, top-scored with 28 runs. They needed five runs off the last over and they reached home with a boundary.

Following the win, it wasn't just the players on the field who celebrated. Shakib and Mashrafe, both players for Khulna, ran onto the field and joined the huddle, continuing the celebrations for quite some time.

Two-tier proposal on hold till 2019

AGENCIES, Dubai



Despite six of the International Cricket Council's (ICC's) members being in favour of a two-tier Test Championship, the plan was shelved until 2019 as the Indian cricket board significantly rallied against the idea.

Australia, England, South Africa, New Zealand, Pakistan and West Indies are thought to have supported the plan, while India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe opposed to idea.

However, the ICC did reveal proposals for a Test Championship play-off match every two years and said they hoped to introduce it by 2019.

"There are some complexities, not least because of scheduling and existing structures, but we envisage the changes being implemented for 2019," ICC chief executive David Richardson said after the chief executives committee meeting in Dubai.

"Members will now revert to their boards to share the details of the proposed revised structures and principles. Work will continue to develop a clear structure and position for each format over the coming months as the

ICC collectively focuses on improving bi-lateral cricket for fans and players in the long run."

An executive who attended Wednesday's meeting told Cricinfo there was no vote over the Test Championship but that India and Bangladesh, among others, had opposed the idea.

"There was a significant compromise and it was subsequently decided to withdraw the two-tier proposal," he said.

The news will come as an unwelcome one to players of the sport as a recent survey by The Federation of International Cricketers Associations (FICA) revealed that 72% of respondents were in favour of the divisional Test competition.

Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) president Anurag Thakur said his board's opposition to the proposals concerned the effects on the

smaller Test nations. "As the governing body of the game, the ICC's job is to popularise the game and increase its global reach," Thakur said.

"On the contrary, this system may be good for the top five countries, but apart from that, everyone else will suffer. On the one hand, we say we need to support teams like West Indies, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, while on the other, by bringing

up something like this, we will cut their legs. I am thankful to the members of the ICC who understood our viewpoint and agreed to take this proposal off the table."

Another report suggests that even the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) would have joined hands with BCCI to stop the move even though they have traditionally sided with the English and Australian boards.

Very good news for us: Papon

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Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon has welcomed the International Cricket Council's (ICC's) decision to withdraw the proposal for a two-tier structure in Test cricket. The decision was taken at a meeting of the chief executives committee (CEC) in Dubai on Wednesday.

"Obviously this is very good news. Bangladesh was always against this. India was on our side and so was Sri Lanka. We were confident that this would end well. We were against this from the start and when India came on our side, we were a

bit relieved. Today [Wednesday] the ICC officially let us know about this. As a result of this decision I can now say that we are not heading towards an uncertain future," Papon told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday night.

The BCB president said that he was not too worried when the proposal was initially brought up since, according to him, it never really depicted any specific gains for cricket.

"There wasn't much tension because I believed that this proposal would have been really difficult to be passed right from the start because it did not have any

specific benefit. Secondly they couldn't even manage to bring this up from the CEC [chief executive committee] meeting to the board since there was a lot of opposition. And this time even Zimbabwe was with us and our team was quite strong. And finally when India started supporting us, then I really had nothing much to worry about," said Papon, adding that Bangladesh was the first country to oppose the two-tier Test system.

"We were the first. You can get that on the ICC's records. We hope to do better in Test cricket in the coming days. We are going to play more Tests than we used to in the coming days," said Papon.

2017 CHAMPIONS TROPHY BCCI threatens to pull out

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Following its exclusion from the ICC's financial committee, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has threatened to pull out of the 2017 Champions Trophy, reports suggest.

The BCCI has been angered by the ICC's stance on various issues and this slight at the ICC meeting in Dubai has apparently forced the BCCI's hand.

BCCI secretary Ajay Shirke termed the move 'humiliating'. "These committees -- finance, commerce and chief executive -- are where all the important decisions are taken. India not having representative is a humiliation.

"We will tell the ICC, 'either you amend this or we will do what we have to protect India's cricket interests. It could be anything. We may even not play the Champions Trophy. Better sense may prevail, but there are options,'" Shirke was quoted as saying by the Indian Express.

'Foreign booters not the problem'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president

Kazi Salahuddin disagreed with the national team coach Tom Saintfiet's view that foreign strikers playing in the league are the chief reason for the lack of quality of local strikers. The 43-year-old Belgian coach lamented the poor finishing quality of the national team's strikers after his side failed to score against the visitors, despite being fed numerous opportunities in both halves.

The head coach and the members of the coaching staff met with the BFF president yesterday. The coach had hinted on the previous night about curbing the presence of 'mediocre African footballers' in local clubs or at least allow the local strikers some protection so that they could get enough opportunity to develop. The BFF boss, however, feels that lack of quality and to some extent commitment are the reasons for the strikers' failure. "In order to be a successful footballer,

you only need practice, practice and practice," Salahuddin told reporters. "No one gives his position away to any other player. If you are good enough, you can beat competition from foreigners and make your own position."

The BFF boss also explained the scenario from a coach's perspective. "I was a coach myself. A coach never plays a footballer at the expense of a better one. And the only thing that can make a footballer a good one is a lot of practice."

With the crucial second leg of the Bhutan fixture coming up on October 10 where Bangladesh will at least need a scoring draw to progress to the third round of qualifying, it has been learnt that the BFF boss had mulled the probability of running a continuous camp after the Eid holidays. However, after deliberation with the other BFF officials, he had to shelve that idea.

It was decided that the league will commence from October 19 and the coach will return from Belgium after vacation to watch the matches of the league for the next 10 days before starting the camp on October 30.



Chief selector Minhajul Abedin, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza were among the big names participating in an anti-militancy rally organised by the National Sports Council yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR