

SPORT



Pakistan tour T20Is also in doubt?

SPORTS REPORTER

Amid all the uncertainty surrounding Bangladesh's tour of Pakistan in January 2020, it had seemed that the Tigers would be playing the three scheduled T20Is while opting to play the Tests later or at a neutral venue, but Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hassan hinted yesterday that even the T20Is may be in doubt. Hassan spoke to reporters and informed that Bangladesh will only be able to play the T20 series in Pakistan but even that will depend on whether the board can form a good team for the tour given that many of the players and coaching staff are unwilling to travel to Pakistan.

The BCB president said that talks were still ongoing with the players as the board prepares to form the T20 squad. Bangladesh are unwilling to play the Test series in Pakistan at the moment. He also said that there were no doubts about the security system in Pakistan.

"The biggest thing is that there is no room for doubt over the security system being provided by Pakistan. I went there myself and the women's team was there as well and also the U-16 team. The feedback we received from them was that the

do not want to stay that long under such a security environment. Those who have wanted to go, said that they want to go and play the T20s and return inside one week," BCB president informed.

Under such circumstances, the BCB are likely to find it difficult to put together a full-strength side for the T20I series in Pakistan. Hassan said that their decision will rest on whether they can manage to form a good side while also citing that they are waiting for all the security clearance from the government agencies.

International cricket in Pakistan had stalled for six years after the Sri Lankan team bus came under terrorist attack in Lahore in 2009. Since 2015, teams like Zimbabwe, West Indies, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have played the odd short series in the country. Only recently had Test cricket returned with Sri Lanka completing a two-Test series in Rawalpindi and Karachi earlier this month.

"We have already communicated [to the PCB] that we are trying to send a team for the T20s if the players are willing.

"If the players and the staff are willing and we can manage to form a good team, then we will send our team. Some of our star players have said that they don't even want to play the T20s. We are awaiting government clearances. We have already gotten approval from one

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NAZMUL HASSAN
BCB PRESIDENT



security system is good," Hassan said.

He also mentioned that many of the players and the foreign coaching staff do not want to go to Pakistan. "Many of the coaching staff has already informed us that they don't want to go. Some of them have said that they do want to go but only for a short period; only a handful though wanted that as most of the foreign staff do not want to go.

"From what I understood from talking to the players, some of them do not want to go. Others were willing to go only for a short period of time. I wanted to know why and understand their mindset.

"One of the factors in their decision was their families. Many in their families are very anxious about the Pakistan series. The second factor is how long they can prevail in such a security environment. It is fully secure and very much a closed-off environment. This is what the majority of the players are saying. They

section and awaiting other instructions. We need clearance from the security agencies.

"One thing is certain, we won't force any player to go," he said.

Question remains on whether the Tests -- part of the ICC Test Championship -- will be forfeited if Bangladesh do not play. "I don't know the whole detail of the procedure which will follow since this kind of situation doesn't arise often. I hope that they [PCB] will understand our situation and try to arrange the Tests at a neutral venue.

"We want cricket to return to Pakistan but our boys are going there for the first time after such a long gap so they should also consider our side. I think the matches can be rescheduled and if that doesn't happen the issue will go to arbitration," he concluded.



Khulna Tigers' cricketers enjoy their warm-up game of football at the Academy ground in Mirpur yesterday before preparing for today's BBPL match against Rangpur Rangers in their bid to move up the table. Before that, the day's first match will see the clash of form teams Dhaka Platoon and Chattogram Challengers, the current table-toppers, with the top spot at stake and the Challengers will be looking to (inset) Mehedi Hasan Rana to continue his form with the ball.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Chattogram eye play-off spot

SPORTS REPORTER

After a high-scoring Chattogram phase that ended on December 24, the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) will resume at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

Table-toppers Chattogram Challengers, who won three of their four home fixtures, will face third-placed Dhaka Platoon in the day game with the top spot at stake. In the evening match, Khulna Tigers will lock horns with bottom-placed Rangpur Rangers.

Chattogram's stand-in captain Imrul Kayes, who has been in fine form, informed that his team would like to win today's fixture and confirm their spot for the play-off.

"The future plan is to win the next game as maybe we will confirm [play-off spot] if we can win six matches, and then we will have four more matches and we will think about it later. But the next target is to win the next game," Imrul told reporters after Chattogram Challengers' practice session at the Academy ground in Mirpur yesterday.

Imrul also shed some light on regular

skipper Mahmudullah Riyad's return. Mahmudullah, who missed the last two matches of their Chattogram phase due to a recurring hamstring injury that he originally sustained during Bangladesh's pink-ball Test against India last month, may miss today's game but is expected to return for the next game if the physio declares him fit.

"This actually depends on the physio. But I hope that even if he cannot play tomorrow's [Friday's] game, he will be available for the next matches. But it is still not certain."

De Kock leads SA fightback

REUTERS, Centurion

Quinton de Kock fell five runs short of his century after dragging South Africa out of early trouble to 277 for nine at the close on the opening day of the first Test against England at Centurion Park on Thursday.

England took a wicket with the opening delivery of the four-Test series and had their hosts teetering on 111-5 after lunch but De Kock's belligerent innings brought South Africa back into the match.

James Anderson marked his 150th cap and return to the England attack with the first-ball wicket of opener Dean Elgar, setting the tourists up for early domination of an inexperienced home side seeking to halt a run of five successive Test defeats.

Sam Curran's skilful bowling earned him figures of 4-57 and Stuart Broad returned from illness to claim 3-52.

But De Kock wrestled the initiative away from England with an innings that combined early aggression, as he sought to impose himself on the bowlers, with later circumspection.

He reached his 50 off 45 balls with some ferocious hitting before digging in to try to tire out the England bowlers on a hot day.

He fell agonisingly short of a sixth Test century as he feathered an away swinger from Curran through to wicketkeeper Jos Buttler for 95 off 128 balls.

De Kock featured in an 87-run sixth-wicket stand with 30-year-old debutant Dwaine Pretorius, who made 33, and 47 runs for the seventh wicket with Vernon Philander who was 28 not out at the close.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 277 for 9 (Hamza 39, Du Plessis 29, De Kock 95, Pretorius 33, Philander 28 not out; Broad 3-52, Curran 4-57)



Steve Smith's unbeaten knock of 77 put Australia in a comfortable position on the first day of the second Test against New Zealand in Melbourne yesterday. (Inset) 80,473 fans at MCG, the largest ever crowd for a day, watched the game.

PHOTO: AFP/TWITTER

Hosts seize control on Day 1

AFP, Melbourne

Master batsman Steve Smith ground out an unbeaten 77 Thursday as he zeroed in on yet another century, putting Australia in the driving seat after the opening day of the second Test against New Zealand.

In the Black Caps' first Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground since 1987, skipper Kane Williamson won the toss and opted to bowl, and

it looked to be a good decision with Joe Burns out first ball and David Warner just before lunch.

But first Marnus Labuschagne, the world's leading run-scorer for 2019, and then Smith smacked half centuries to seize back control and leave them on 257 for four, frustrating the disciplined New Zealand bowlers.

Along with the fidgety Smith, Travis Head was not out 25, desperate for runs after a lean spell. Labuschagne made 63 with Colin de Grandhomme taking 2-48.

The signs are ominous for New Zealand with superstar Smith scoring centuries in his past four Tests in Melbourne, and a fifth looking likely. "The way they bowled and placed their field, I had to be patient," said Smith. "It's not the kind of wicket you could go after them. I think we did pretty well today."

SCORES IN BRIEF
AUSTRALIA: First innings 257 for 4 (Warner 41, Labuschagne 63, Smith 77 not out, Wade 38, Head 25 not out; De Grandhomme 2-48)

'Format-specific teams possible'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan informed that the board will be able to determine over the next year if it can form three different teams for three different formats -- Test, ODI and T20I.

According to Hassan, he had been mulling this move for the past three years.

"I have been saying for the past three years that there should be a different team [for Tests]. Even five years ago, I said that there should be three different teams [for three formats]," Hassan told reporters yesterday.

Hassan also mentioned that the process has been delayed due to the dearth of players but remained positive as more players had emerged in recent times.

"We will be trying for it but we need to have players for that. It seems like that gradually we are getting some players. That was not the case even two years ago. But now we can think of making three different teams. We have some players and we are confident that it is possible," said Hassan.

The BCB president also informed that although the board may face some challenges, it will be able to determine if it can actually form three different teams over the next year.

"But the problem is that we need to think about who we can leave out. We cannot leave someone out of the team all of a sudden. For instance, it is not possible to leave out the senior players who are in good form. We need to think about that too. But by thinking along this line, we can determine over the next year if we can separate players for three formats and which player can play which format."



South Africa's Quinton de Kock struck 95 while the rest of the Proteas batsmen struggled against the England pace attack at Centurion on Day 1 of the first Test.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SHORT CORNER

'We never said that Pakistan players can't be there'

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan reiterated that just like the rest of the cricket boards, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) were also approached to provide players for the two T20 matches in March between Asia XI and World XI to celebrate the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation.

The BCB president confirmed that there was no such process to not involve Pakistan players despite Indian media reporting otherwise. "I haven't told them [BCCI] anything like that. It's going to be Asia vs Rest of the World. The thing is that the players who are available will play," he said during a press conference today.

"We never said that Pakistan players can't be there. When we communicated with the

boards, Pakistan were the only country which said that the time clashed with the PSL," he said before adding that PCB are yet to respond to BCB's request.

--- SPORT REPORTER

Kohli named in Wisden cricketers of the decade list

India captain Virat Kohli has been named in the Cricketers of the decade list alongside four others by the Wisden Cricketers' Almanac. Apart from Kohli, South African duo of Dale Steyn and AB de Villiers, Australia's Steve Smith and women's all-rounder Ellyse Perry also found a place in the list of five cricketers of the decade.

Kohli, who has scored 5,775 more international runs than anyone else in the last 10 years, has arguably been the best batsman over the last decade.

The 31-year-old Indian was named captain

of the Wisden Test team of the decade, while also featuring in the ODI XI.

--- AGENCIES

ICC ranking system absolute garbage: Vaughan

Former England captain Michael Vaughan has slammed the International Cricket Council's ranking system, terming it as "absolute garbage". India are currently ranked number one in ICC Test team rankings, followed by New Zealand, South Africa, England and Australia.

The cricketer-turned-commentator feels New Zealand and England don't deserve to get the second and fourth spot in the ICC Test rankings as they haven't won enough Test series in the last two years.

"I will be dead honest about the ICC rankings. I think they are absolute garbage," Vaughan was quoted as saying by the 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

--- PFI