

# Strike over, but storm brewing

Though Bangladesh players have called off their strike, the absence of senior players in the camp suggests unease

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BANGLADESH CRICKET Board president Nazmul Hasan 'Papon' has alleged that there has been constant attempts to sabotage Bangladesh's upcoming tour of India and the strike by country's top cricketers with 11-point demand was an extension of that. He implied that several players are still disgruntled.

Bangladesh players called off the strike after BCB agreed to their demands of better pay package at the international and first-class level days before their four-week long tour of India where they are supposed to play 3 T20s and two Tests.

"You people (media) haven't yet seen anything about the India tour. Just wait and watch. If I am saying that I had specific information that this was a conspiracy to sabotage India tour, then you should believe me," Hasan told country's premier bengali daily 'Prothom Aalo' in an interview.

Asked to explain in detail why he thought so, Hasan has expressed his suspicion in the manner senior opener Tamim Iqbal has pulled out of the tour citing his wife's delivery as a reason after initially agreeing to only skip the final Test. "Tamim had initially told me that he will only skip the second Test (in Kolkata from November 22-26) for the birth of his second child. However after the meeting with players, Tamim comes to my room and said, he wants to opt out of whole tour. I asked him 'why so?' but he simply said he won't go," Hasan revealed to the Bengali daily.

Bangladesh are due to arrive in New Delhi on Wednesday, October 30 but he is sceptical that there could be a few more pull-outs. "Now after this, I won't be surprised if I find that someone else pulls out at the eleventh hour when we would be left with no other options. I have called Shakib to have a chat. Now if he also pulls out, where do I even find a captain? I might have to change whole combination. What do I even do with these players," he said. He informed that a call will be taken on him on Tuesday.

The top boss is still livid with the arm-twisting tactic employed by senior cricketers and feels he made a mistake by agreeing to their demands. He says he still can't believe what has been transpiring in the few days after the strike was called off. "I still can't believe it. I speak to them everyday. They didn't even intimate me before calling a strike. I feel that it was a mistake on my part to have agreed to their demands. I should have never done that," he said.

"I should have told the players, 'Unless you call off strike, we will not sit with you guys against the negotiation table. Speaking to various member boards, I felt that this should have been our approach but the media also created pressure on us,'" Hasan also added.

### Showcause notice to Shakib

Shakib al Hasan is unlikely to face any legal action from the cricket board but Bangladesh's Test and T20 captain will still have to reply to the showcause notice for violation of central contract clause, CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said. Shakib had signed as the brand ambassador of country's telecom major 'Grameenphone', which is a direct competitor of team's sponsor 'Robi'. According to the central contract clause, this is a violation Nazmul Hasan Papon had threatened legal action against country's best player. However BCB CEO Chowdhury has said that no legal action will be taken.



Bangladesh's Test and T20 skipper Shakib-Al-Hasan hasn't yet informed the board about the reason to skip the training camp for the Test series against India.

## 'Individual issues crop up, but won't affect us'

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY  
KOLKATA, OCTOBER 28

BANGLADESH HAS played a Test in India before, but a full tour which will be part of the World Test Championship provides an added dimension. Former skipper Habibul Bashar, now a national selector, talks about the significance and the recent problems, including the short players' strike.

### This is Bangladesh's first full tour of India. How do you look at it?

It makes the assignment even more important from Bangladesh's perspective. We are very excited, especially for the fact that we will be playing a Test at Eden Gardens. It makes the occasion humongous. Playing a Test at Lord's is a matter of pride and prestige. The same applies to a Test at Eden Gardens. Also, we will open our World Test Championship campaign with this series against India.

### How well are Bangladesh prepared for the upcoming series, given that the players went on strike and Test captain Shakib Al Hasan has fallen out with the BCB over an alleged breach of contract?

See, the strike didn't last long. The matter was resolved in two days. We didn't have any match or practice sessions during that period.



Chief selector Bashar is optimistic of a strong Bangladesh performance.

The BCB handled it professionally. As for the issue related to Shakib, it's not a team issue. Sometimes, such individual issues crop up. I hope it will not affect our preparations. But we will miss Tamim Iqbal, as he is not available (the opener has pulled out on personal grounds). It's a big setback for us, because he has been our best batsman (in Tests) for long.

And like you mentioned, India are in tremendous form. They are the strongest opposition in Test cricket at this moment. So, opening our World Test Championship campaign against India is a huge challenge. We know that. It's a very tough test. At the same time, it's an opportunity for us as well. If we

perform well, Bangladesh cricket will make a rapid forward movement. But once again, it won't be easy. India probably have the best bowling attack in the world at this moment. Pace, spin – they have an all-round bowling attack. They probably also have the best top-five, batting-wise. So we have to play out of our skins.

### But Shakib is at loggerheads with the BCB; will it affect the team atmosphere?

No, I don't think so. I think players are now very happy, for whatever they demanded they got it. The problem between Shakib and the BCB is over a contract clause. It's not related to cricket. So the team (atmosphere) will not be affected.

### How excited are the fans in Bangladesh?

Fans are very excited. I'm sure a lot of fans from here (Bangladesh) will be going to Eden. For a lot of people in Bangladesh, especially those who are from Jessore and Khulna, it's easier to go to Kolkata than Dhaka, distance-wise (Kolkata is just 128 kilometres from Jessore). Obviously, there's sentiment attached as well, between Kolkata and Bangladesh. In Kolkata also, there are many people who have their ancestral roots in Bangladesh (erstwhile East Bengal). Like many people in Bangladesh consider Kolkata sort of their second home, I believe a lot of Kolkatans, too, reciprocate that feeling. A lot of my friends are planning to go for

the Eden Test. I won't be surprised if more than 6,000 Bangladeshi fans turn up.

### The Eden Test could be a pink-ball, day-night affair. If the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) receives a request from the BCCI in this regard, will the BCB be agreeable to it?

I'm 100 per cent sure that the BCB will not object. Although we haven't played pink-ball cricket much, I'm sure that the BCB and the team will accept (it). It won't be a problem.

### Bangladesh are a good batting unit and the team also has a few very decent spinners. But they probably need a tearaway fast bowler to reach the next level. Do you agree?

Yes, fast bowling is one area where we are struggling. We don't have flat-out fast bowlers. But I'm hopeful that Taskin (Ahmed) will be fit and available for the Tests. He is currently acquiring game time in first-class cricket. If he is fit for the Tests, that will be a real positive for us. We have also brought back Al-Amin (Hossain). We don't have a fast bowler like (Jasprit) Bumrah or (Mohammed) Shami. Whatever we have, Bangladesh had earned success with them in the past. And we will unearth fast bowlers in the future. At one time, India, too, had this problem (not having 140kph fast bowlers). Hopefully, we will unearth some fast bowlers soon.

## Vanua digs deep and guides PNG to maiden T20 WC

REUTERS  
MELBOURNE, OCTOBER 28

GLOBAL CRICKETERS hailed one of the sport's "feel good" stories of the year on Monday after Papua New Guinea dug themselves out of a huge hole at a Dubai qualifier to book their maiden appearance at the T20 World Cup in Australia next year.

Emerging cricket nation PNG were 19 for six against Kenya after an early collapse at Dubai International Stadium but ended up thrashing the Africans by 45 runs on Sunday. PNG then had a nervous wait for the result of the Netherlands' game against Scotland, but they ultimately topped their group at the tournament due to a higher net run rate and qualify directly for Australia, their first World Cup in any format.

The PNG players celebrated wildly in the stadium's terraces and their Australian coach Joe Dawes was overwhelmed. "I am feeling a little emotional," former Queensland bowler Dawes told the global governing body ICC. "It's been a pretty big two years, for them to achieve this is pretty special."

Dawes said planning for next year's tournament could wait. "We are just going to enjoy the moment. For them to achieve this is a great thing for us and for the nation," he added.

PNG's automatic qualification came at the expense of the Netherlands, who defeated Scotland but will have to take the playoffs route to reach Australia.

Cricket was introduced into PNG in the early 1900s by British missionaries but the national teams have struggled to make an impression on the world stage until recently. The men's "Barramundis" team were awarded One Day International Status by the ICC in 2014 and they have benefited from development grants from neighbouring cricket power Australia.

"The fact that Papua New Guinea have qualified for their first Men's T20 World Cup in 2020 is one of modern cricket's amazing feel good stories," commentator and former West Indies fast bowler Ian Bishop tweeted.

India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin also hailed PNG's entry to one of cricket's biggest global stages. "So PNG qualifies for the T20 World Cup!! It's amazing to see the game expanding globally and will surely bring more young ones to play the great game," he tweeted.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Papua New Guinea 118 all out (Vanua 54, Bundi 4-18) beat Kenya 73 all out (Karim 29, Vala 3-7, Pokana 3-21) by 45 runs



All-rounder Norman Vanua struck 54 runs and took two wickets.

## Hockey Olympic qualifiers: A weekend of happy hosts, crazy comebacks and messy reviews

A vintage Pakistan performance followed up by, well, a typical Pakistan performance. A controversial decision by the video umpire that doused Ireland's Olympic hopes – and forced their captain to remark that the “video umpire should hang his head in shame”. A French scare for Spain, and China's improbable comeback against Belgium.

THE FIRST weekend of the hockey Olympic qualifiers – a two-match series played at the home of the higher-ranked team – threw up a few dramatic storylines and some improbable comebacks. Ahead of the Indian men and women teams matches against Russia and USA respectively this weekend in Bhubaneswar, here's how some of the matches panned out last week, with all home teams emerging winners.

### PAKISTAN FLATTER TO DECEIVE

**Game 1:** Ned 4 Pak 4  
**Game 2:** Ned 6 Pak 1  
*(The Netherlands won 10-5 on aggregate)*

■ Summing up his side's mentality, former Pakistan coach Shahnaz Sheikh had once said: “We either destroy others, or we destroy ourselves.”

■ Inside 24 hours in Amsterdam, they did both.

■ Pakistan entered the qualifiers after paying a fine of 170,000 euros to the International Hockey Federation, in installments, for withdrawing from the Pro League, sort of qualifier for the qualifiers, at the last minute.

■ The three-time Olympic champions, currently ranked world number 17, were pitted against two-time gold medalists and world number 3, the Netherlands. The Netherlands had played 27 matches against top-quality opponents this year whereas the cash-crunch meant Pakistan could manage just four games the whole year. They had a whole new coaching staff after the debacle at the World Cup last year



Canada clinched an Olympic spot in men's field hockey with a sudden-death shootout victory over Ireland on Sunday . File

and the playing group was shuffled as well. The Dutch were the clear favourites.

But Pakistan surprised all, even themselves. The first game – a match for the ages – saw Pakistan take the lead thrice, but on all three occasions the Dutch managed to find a way back. Pakistan's all four goals came from penalty corners, their forwards wrecking havoc in the Dutch 'D', finding gaps and methodically demolishing the famed Dutch structural play.

■ Pakistan's relentless attacks and unerring penalty corner conversion seemed to have shocked the Netherlands, who – somehow – stayed alive in the tie. Pakistan led 4-3 with one second remaining. However, Mink van

der Weerden converted a controversial penalty corner – his second goal of the match – to deny Pakistan a famous win.

Just how much Pakistan had hurt the Netherlands could be gauged from the fact that skipper Billy Bakker said, “I don't want to sound arrogant, but with the quality of team like that, we should do better.” And better they did.

■ The two teams returned on the pitch less than 24 hours later. But this time, the wounded Dutch had much more finesse than fragility. They didn't give Pakistan a sniff, romping through 6-1 and sealing a spot at the Tokyo Games. For Pakistan, this was a second successive failure to qualify for the Olympics.

### (HARD) LUCK OF THE IRISH

**Game 1:** Canada 3 Ireland 5  
**Game 2:** Canada 3 Ireland 1  
*(6-6 on aggregate, Canada won 5-4 via tie-breaker)*

■ Video reviews aren't causing controversies in football alone. On Sunday, Ireland, one of the most improved teams in recent times, believed they had sealed the Olympics spot. Amidst the jubilation, they missed the bit where a collision inside their 'D' had been referred to the video umpire. Seconds later, a penalty corner was awarded to Canada after Ireland's Lee Cole was adjudged to have infringed upon a Canadian forward. The Irish argued, with some merit, that the video was unclear at the time of contact. But the decision was made. Canada scored, forced a tie-break and won that as well to seal an unlikely win. Ireland, who won the first game 5-3, had a two goal advantage going into the decider. They extended it with a goal from John McKee in the sixth minute. But Canada scored twice, in 21 and 37 minutes, to get within a goal of forcing a shootout. The late penalty ensured it went their way.

■ Ireland captain Jonny Bell did not hold back after the match. “The video umpire should hang his head in shame. It was a terrible, terrible decision...”

### SPAIN SURVIVE FRENCH SCARE

**Game 1:** Spain 3 France 3  
**Game 2:** Spain 3 France 2  
*(Spain win 6-5 on aggregate)*

■ France, the story of last year's World Cup, almost pulled off the improbable once again

by racing to a 3-0 lead in the first leg against Spain, ranked four places above them at 8th, with goals from Victor Charlet, Gaspard Baumgarten and Amaury Bellenger. But Spain came back, with penalty corners from veteran striker Pau Quemada.

■ In the winner-takes-all second game, there was nothing to separate the two sides once again. Both sides squandered leads until Xavi Leonart's penalty stroke in the 40th minute sealed France's fate. Spain, who have played in every Olympics since 1956, are on their way to Tokyo as well. France, meanwhile, have been waiting for their first Olympics appearance since 1972. And looks like it'll end in 2024, when the Games will be held in Paris.

### CHINESE WOMEN LEAVE IT LATE

**Game 1:** China 0 Belgium 2  
**Game 2:** China 2 Belgium 0  
*(2-2 on aggregate, China win 2-1 via tie-breaker)*

■ The largely eventless tie between two evenly-matched sides came to life in the final five minutes. Belgium had established a comfortable 2-0 lead after the first game, and had done well to protect it in the deciding fixture for 55 minutes. China's coach Huang Yongsheng replaced goalkeeper Li Dongxiao with an outfield player in the 54th minute.

■ Belgium buckled under relentless Chinese pressure. The hosts scored two goals in as many minutes, 56th and 57th, to force a tie-break. The goalkeeper was back under the bar for China and she pulled off a string of miraculous saves to deny four out of the five Belgian penalty takers. China eventually won the shootout 2-.

### TEAMS QUALIFIED MEN

**Japan** (Hosts, 2018 Asian Games champions)

**Argentina** (2019 Pan-American Games champions)

**South Africa** (2019 African Olympic Qualifiers) Belgium (2019 European Championship winners)

**Australia** (2019 Oceania Cup winners)

**Spain** (Defeated France in qualifiers)

**The Netherlands** (Defeated Pakistan in qualifiers)

**Canada** (Defeated Ireland in qualifiers)

### WOMEN

**Japan** (Hosts, 2018 Asian Games champions)

**Argentina** (2019 Pan-American Games champions)

**South Africa** (2019 African Olympic Qualifier winner)

**Netherlands** (2019 European Championship winners)

**New Zealand** (2019 Oceania Cup winners)

**Spain** (Defeated Korea in qualifiers)

**China** (Defeated Belgium in qualifiers)

**Australia** (Defeated Russia in qualifiers)