

Zimbabwe voluntarily pulls out of 2009 Twenty20 World Cup

Zimbabwe Friday voluntarily offered to withdraw from the World Twenty20 tournament to be held in England in 2009, it was announced by the International Cricket Council (ICC) Friday.

The African nation's decision at the conclusion of the ICC board meeting here came in the wake of the British government's directive to the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to cut off bilateral cricketing ties with Zimbabwe.

'The Zimbabwe delegation to the ICC annual conference week is aware of the decision of the British government not to allow its bilateral series in England in 2009 to go ahead,' ICC acting chief executive Dave Richardson said at a press conference here, reading out from an official statement.

'Zimbabwe Cricket has also taken note that the British government is likely to refuse to grant visas for the Zimbabwe cricket team to take part in the ICC World Twenty20 2009. Therefore, the Zimbabwe delegation has decided to recommend to its board that the team should withdraw from that event,' he said, adding that the Zimbabwe delegation would report to the ICC within a month the decision of the Zimbabwe Cricket Union (ZCU) board after Friday's decision.

Zimbabwe will also not suffer financially because of this decision, as it would continue to receive ICC funding.

The Zimbabwe issue dominated the ICC annual conference that was held here across the week. The British government issued the directive to the ECB because of its opposition to the Robert Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe.

According to the statement, the Zimbabwe delegation took the decision in the greater interest of world cricket and the ICC.

'This recommendation should be viewed as a one-off and will not be taken as a precedent,' it read.

Outgoing ICC president Ray Mali has recommended that a sub-committee be set up comprising Julian Hunte of West Indies, Arjuna Ranatunga of Sri Lanka and another ICC official to be confirmed later.

'The role of this sub-committee will be to advise the ICC board on all matters relating to Zimbabwe cricket including its return to full participation in the international game,' Richardson said.

'The specific terms of reference for the sub-committee will be finalized in due course.'

Briefing newsmen about Friday's decision, ICC president-elect David Morgan said that the decision was a voluntary one on the part of Zimbabwe.

To a question as to whether the Zimbabwe issue put to a vote as was widely expected, he said: 'It was a voluntary decision from the Zimbabwe cricket board. We unanimously voted to accept it.'

Asked whether this decision put the Zimbabwe's status as a full member of ICC at stake, he said: 'The full membership of Zimbabwe is currently not in doubt.'

Some countries, like England and South Africa, have been demanding that Zimbabwe be stripped off the full membership of ICC citing its standards of the game at the international level.

Morgan, however, added that the role of the new sub-committee was crucial in deciding about the future of Zimbabwe in world cricket.

When asked what this decision meant in terms of tours of England and Australia to Zimbabwe under the ICC's Future Tours Programme (FTP), Morgan said: 'A government directive is an acceptable term for non-compliance (of an FTP tour).'

He said the ICC discussed with Zimbabwe Cricket chairman Peter Chingoka during the course of the meeting and outgoing president Mali played an important role in moving this decision forward.

On his part, Mali said that the leaving the Zimbabwe issue hanging would have been irresponsible.

'I have special interest in cricket... it is a passion for me. Leaving the Zimbabwe issue hanging would have been irresponsible on my part. Zimbabwe's decision now is a win-win situation for everybody,' he said at the news conference.

'Without any doubt, we couldn't have jeopardized that (ICC World Twenty20 2009) tournament,' he added.

Meanwhile, Chingoka was quoted as saying that his country did not want to be gate crashers in the tournament.

'We have been informed that the British government may not grant visas to our players, and that situation may prevail during the Twenty20 World Cup. We don't want to be gatecrashers,' he was quoted as saying by a cricket website.

President of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) Sharad Pawar said that India agreed with the Zimbabwe decision.

'It was a collective decision and I was a part of that decision,' he said.

India was earlier widely expected to oppose any decision that could have affected Zimbabwe's future in the game.

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