

## ICC cannot afford to mix politics and sport: Haroon

Haroon Lorgat, the new chief executive of the International Cricket Council (ICC), unambiguously stated Friday that as sport's governing body, the ICC cannot afford to mix politics and sport.

'The position of the ICC is very clear. We cannot as a sports governing body afford to mix issues of politics and sports and I share that sentiment,' Lorgat said in his first press conference as chief executive.

His comments came following pressure from some member countries to suspend Zimbabwe from the ICC full membership.

"I was very encouraged by the robustness of the debate (on Zimbabwe playing in the tournament) that went on the executive board table, but keeping in mind clearly at the end of the day that issues of politics and sports should be kept separate," he added.

Zimbabwe announced Friday that it was withdrawing from the 2009 Twenty20 World Cup to be held in England.

Zimbabwe's action came following directives from the British government to the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to cut off bilateral cricketing ties with Zimbabwe and indications that British visas would not be issued to Zimbabwean players for the Twenty20 tournament.

The British government directive is based on its opposition to the Robert Mugabe regime in the African nation.

Outgoing ICC president Ray Mali has also 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 to advise the ICC board on all matters relating to Zimbabwe cricket including its return to full participation in the international game.

"I am confident that the task team (or sub-committee) is responsible enough and capable enough. On that task team would obviously be the Zimbabwean (cricket board) president himself as a participant. He was party to the recommendation that was put forward to the board.

"That makes it - the recommendation - quite strong from the ZCU (Zimbabwe Cricket Union) point of view. I am reasonably confident about the goodwill that has come through in the process of our deliberations. Everybody looks at the big picture that we are faced with. I am optimistic at this stage and do not have to be apprehensive about anything."

Asked what would happen if the Zimbabwe cricket board president himself did not uphold the recommendation, he said: "I think that would make it extremely difficult if (ZCU president) Peter Chingoka himself was not in favour of the recommendation. I think it was quite magnanimous (on the part of the ZCU)."

To a question as to who would replace Zimbabwe in the Twenbty20 World Cup, he said it was something for the ICC cricket operations team to look at.

"We will have to find an alternative participant. I think at this point it would have to be somebody who can come through our associate members league table, just like the top two that qualify for the World Cup," he said.

"I think we still have some time ahead of us... and in any case, the qualifying... the associate members only do that in March next year."

Asked to comment on his new role as the chief executive, Lorgat said: "I guess as a cricketer you start with a big innings and then it gets easier. I walked into some tough issues and having managed to find a way forward, certainly I am looking forward to the challenges ahead."

Lorgat was appointed as the ICC chief executive in April this year after fellow South African Imran Patel withdrew his candidacy from the post.

A chartered accountant and businessman by profession, Lorgat had played as an all-rounder for Eastern Province and Transvaal and also held various administrative posts in South African cricket.

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