

## TWO-TIER TEST PLAN AXED AFTER INDIA-LED BACKLASH

**NEW DELHI:** Controversial plans to create a two-tier Test system have been scrapped by cricket's world governing body after the powerful Indian board led a backlash, senior officials said yesterday. The proposal for a de facto premier league featuring the top seven sides had been welcomed by players and was one of the main agenda items at an International Cricket Council meeting in Dubai which ended Wednesday.

While the ICC said "significant progress" was made in discussions on "the future shape of all international cricket", both the Indian and Bangladeshi boards confirmed the two-division proposal had been ditched. "The officials at the meeting shot down the two-tier proposal," Anurag Thakur, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), told AFP. "The BCCI could have benefited financially from the two-tier system but morally we wanted to stand with the countries which would have been badly affected." His Bangladeshi counterpart Nazmul Hassan confirmed the plan had been taken off the table. "It's good news for us," said Hassan, whose board had been fiercely critical of the plan which would have effectively deprived Bangladesh of the opportunity to play major Test teams.

"India and Sri Lanka were also with us, so we were more or less confident that it would not be approved. We are delighted to know that ICC has now informed us of this officially," he told AFP. Under the proposed revamp, designed to boost waning interest in Tests, the seven highest-ranked teams would have formed a top division. The other three lowest-ranked sides—currently the West Indies, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe—would have joined a second division also including the likes of Afghanistan and Ireland.

Although England, Australia and New Zealand were in favour, Thakur made his organisation's opposition public last month, effectively rendering it dead in the water. India, the game's financial powerhouse, has a history of ensuring its stance prevails on key debates within the global body.



**MUMBAI:** In this photograph taken on May 22, 2016, Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) President Anurag Thakur gestures as he speaks during a press conference at BCCI headquarters. — AFP

India's Thakur, whose predecessor Shashank Manohar is head of the ICC, said the plan should never have got off the ground. "How could the ICC have proposed such a system in the first place? This should have been shot down at the outset," he said. Thakur said India would have stood to gain from playing more matches against teams such as England and Australia which attract big TV audiences and decent crowds.

"But countries such as Zimbabwe, West Indies and Bangladesh would have suffered huge losses and we didn't want that," he added.

### Appetite for change

In a statement issued on Wednesday, ICC chief executive David Richardson gave few details of the discussions in Dubai but did refer to long-standing plans for a Test championship play-off by the end of the decade. "Encouragingly there is an appetite from the 10 full members for more context around all three formats of the game and we have consensus on a range of areas," said Richardson. "This includes the details of ODI and T20 structures and principles around Test cricket schedules, which include the concept of a Test Champion play-off every two years, and the opportunity for more nations to be involved." The Federation of International Cricketers' Associations (FICA), which represents players around the world, said it would be "disappointing" if the two-tier proposal had been "shelved so early in this process". A recent FICA survey found 72 percent of players supported the idea of a divisional system, which would include the possibility of promotion and relegation, as a way of adding more meaning to each match. — AFP



**MANCHESTER:** Pakistan's cricket players celebrate after winning the T20 international cricket match between England and Pakistan at The Emirates Old Trafford. — AFP

## AHMED DELIGHTED AS PAKISTAN END ENGLAND TOUR ON A HIGH

**MANCHESTER:** New Twenty20 captain Sarfraz Ahmed was delighted to end the England tour on a "high note" Wednesday erasing memories of the damaging spot-fixing controversy of their last visit six years ago. Pakistan inflicted a crushing nine-wicket win over England at Old Trafford on Wednesday in Ahmed's first match in charge of the Twenty20 side and the final match of their tour.

Fresh from Sunday's four-wicket victory in Cardiff, where Ahmed made 90 as Pakistan avoided a one-day series white-wash, the tourists held England to 135 for seven in their 20 overs. Left-arm spinner Imad Wasim removed both England openers before fast bowler Wahab Riaz took a Twenty20-best three for 18. Openers Sharjeel Khan (59) and Khalid Latif (59 not out) then shared a blistering century stand as Pakistan won with 31 balls to spare.

"Credit to our bowlers ... and then Khalid and Sharjeel played really well," Ahmed told reporters. "After we won the match in Cardiff, the morale was very high when we arrived here." But I told the players that when we are playing T20 cricket we want some energy and we want some good fielding on the ground. The players did that," he added. "This is how to play modern-day cricket." Riaz had been plagued by no-ball problems as Pakistan came from behind to draw a four-Test series with England 2-2 — a result that took them top of the Test standings—before losing the one-dayers 4-1. But there was no over-stepping in Manchester.

"The credit goes to the bowling coach (Azhar Mahmood), he really helped me, he was very strict with me about the no-balls," said Riaz. "Because I was resting the last two games, he really worked hard with me," the 31-year-old man-of-the-match added. Pakistan confounded a succession of England batsmen with their changes of pace, none more so than Riaz, who broke the 90mph barrier in Manchester. "When I was running in, I had a plan within myself that if I have to bowl fast, it has to be very fast and if I have to bowl slow, it has to be

very slow," said Riaz. "You have to have a lot of varieties in this T20 game. I think I was successful in that and getting wickets."

### 'High note'

Pakistan's conduct, as well as their cricket, helped restore their reputation in English cricket circles following the spot-fixing controversy that blighted their last visit six years ago. "The whole tour was very good, our Test cricket was very good. We wanted to finish on a high note and we did," said Ahmed. Beaten England captain Eoin Morgan blamed a rapid change in conditions for a crushing loss. England managed just one boundary in their last 10 overs, whereas Sharjeel and Latif struck 14 fours and a six in the first five overs of Pakistan's reply.

But Morgan said evening dew had made the new ball come on to the bat nicely at the start of Pakistan's chase, even

though there was a gap of just 10 minutes between innings. "I think conditions changed quite dramatically throughout the game," he said. "With the benefit of hindsight, I probably would have bowled first and chased in the evening—given how much dew there was about."

### 'Pretty boys'

But England coach Trevor Bayliss was scathing after a disappointing end to his team's season. "The way we were going allowed Pakistan to get on top. We didn't show urgency with our running," he said. "We played like pretty boys at one stage," the Australian added. "We want to win every game. You can coach all you want but it's got to come from within. "The ceiling is still very high. We're still looking at how well we can play. We're looking at how we can become a bit more consistent." — AFP

## FORMER ARSENAL STAR FLAMINI JOINS PALACE

**LONDON:** Crystal Palace signed former Arsenal midfielder Mathieu Flamini on a free transfer yesterday. Flamini was released by Arsenal when his contract expired at the end of last term and the French star was unable to find a new club in time for the start of the season. But the 32-year-old has now accepted an offer to join Premier League side Palace until the end of the current campaign.

"Crystal Palace is a very ambitious club with great players and I am looking forward to being part of that squad," Flamini told Palace's website. "It is a very interesting challenge for me and I am very excited to be here. "I have had chance to discuss the move here with Palace manager Alan Pardew

and he really helped me make my decision."

Flamini, who has also had spells at Marseille and AC Milan, made 246 appearances over two spells at Arsenal. He won the FA Cup three times with the Gunners and also played in their 2006 Champions League final defeat against Barcelona. Having been beaten by Bournemouth in the race to sign Arsenal midfielder Jack Wilshere on a season-long loan, Pardew turned his attention to free agent Flamini once the transfer window closed. "His playing ability will help us but also his leadership qualities and his ability of how to win games in a passing style," Pardew said. "I am delighted we have secured a player of his stature." — AFP