

Sports

Ex-cricketer Rafiq tells UK MPs: 'I lost career to racism'

Racism in English cricket is institutional, Rafiq says

LONDON: Former Yorkshire cricketer Azeem Rafiq fought back tears as he told British lawmakers yesterday he had "lost my career to racism", detailing widespread discrimination within the English game in an emotional testimony.

An independent report found the Pakistan-born player was a victim of "racial harassment and bullying" while playing for the county club, with Rafiq himself revealing he had been driven to thoughts of suicide. Although Yorkshire apologized, they said they would take no disciplinary action against any staff — a decision the former player told MPs on the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport committee left him "staggered".

"I felt, isolated, humiliated at times," Rafiq told the hearing in London. "Pretty early on, me and other people from an Asian background... there were comments such as 'you'll sit over there near the toilets', 'elephant-washers'. The word 'Paki' was used constantly. And there just seemed to be an acceptance in the institution from the leaders and no one ever stamped it out."

Rafiq, who is a Muslim, also recounted a frightening experience of being forced to drink alcohol at the age of 15 as a club player in Yorkshire. "I got pinned down at my local cricket club and had red wine poured down my throat, literally down my throat," he said.

Rafiq, whose wife gave birth to a stillborn child in 2018, added that his two young children "have not

had a dad really because all I've been worried about is Yorkshire going after me... I just hope that today provides some kind of closure."

His voice breaking again towards the end of his testimony, the 30-year-old Rafiq, who had two spells at the club, said: "Do I believe I lost my career to racism? Yes, I do."

“ I felt, isolated, humiliated at times ”

'Box-ticking'

And Rafiq warned that racial prejudice within English cricket was not solely an issue at Yorkshire, saying it was replicated "up and down the country". "I've had messages from people who have played at Leicestershire, a guy who played at Middlesex, messages from people who played at Nottinghamshire," he said. He labelled diversity initiatives by the England and Wales Cricket Board as

examples of "box-ticking" and "tokenism".

The fallout for Yorkshire — one of England's most successful and historic clubs — over the scandal has been swift and devastating. Sponsors have pulled out and the club has been suspended from hosting lucrative international matches. Yorkshire chairman Roger Hutton and chief executive Mark Arthur both resigned, with head coach Andrew Gale suspended for using a racial slur. Subsequent allegations of racism have been made by other players, setting in motion additional investigations at Yorkshire and other clubs as the scandal spreads across English cricket.

On Monday, current England spinner Adil Rashid joined ex-Pakistan Test player Rana Naved-ul-Hasan in alleging that former England Test captain Michael Vaughan had said in front of a group of Yorkshire players of Asian ethnicity in 2009: "Too many of you lot, we need to do something about it."

Vaughan has "categorically" denied making the comment. Asked about Vaughan, Rafiq said: "Michael might not remember it... three of us, Adil, myself and Rana remember it. "He clearly had a snippet of my statement. He used his platform at the Daily Telegraph to tell everyone he hadn't said these things. To go on and put a snippet of my statement out and talk about other things, I thought was completely wrong."

New Yorkshire chairman Kamlesh Patel told the committee he was prepared to take "whatever



LONDON: A video grab from footage broadcast by the UK Parliament's Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows former Yorkshire cricketer Azeem Rafiq fighting back tears while testifying in front of a Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Committee in London yesterday as MPs probe racial harassment at the club. — AFP

decisions I need to take". "This is an organization that's been hammered left, right and center, maybe for the right reasons," he said. "Changes are going to have to be made and it's not going to be overnight, but we have got to move on it, really quickly and really hard." —AFP

'Players are not machines,' says Indian T20 captain Sharma

NEW DELHI: Indian T20 skipper Rohit Sharma said yesterday his players were "not machines" and needed rest, ahead of an imminent encounter with New Zealand on home turf just days after the World Cup.

New Zealand's tour begins with the first of three Twenty20 internationals today, only three days after the Kiwis lost in the Dubai tournament's final. The matches are spread across three Indian cities and wrap up just four days before Tests in Kanpur (Nov 25-29) and Mumbai (Dec 3-7).

"Workload management is very important to us. Players are not machines. Taking time off is necessary," Sharma said at a virtual press conference, with India's new coach Rahul Dravid at his side. "Some players who have been playing for long need to be rested to remain fresh. We want all our boys to be mentally fresh for the challenges ahead," he added. Indian Test captain Virat Kohli has opted out of the T20 series and will also miss the first Test. New Zealand captain Kane Williamson is also unavailable for the short-format matches but will return for the Kanpur encounter.

Former batting hero Dravid said cricketers needed to follow the example of footballers when it came to managing their workload. "Even in



JAIPUR: India's KL Rahul (right) talks with coach Rahul Dravid at the Sawai Mansingh stadium in Jaipur yesterday during a practice session ahead of today's first Twenty20 cricket match against New Zealand. —AFP

football, the big players don't play all the matches. A player's mental and physical well-being (is) very important," he said.

Earlier in the day, Kiwi paceman Tim Southee admitted the tight scheduling and the team's long spells in Covid bubbles were weighing on his side. "It's obviously a pretty busy schedule... even before leading into the T20 World Cup, we had a series in Bangladesh and Pakistan," said Southee, who will lead his squad in Williamson's absence. He added that the Kiwis "haven't really had a chance to stop and think" since Sunday's finals loss in Dubai. — AFP

News in brief

Kuwait, Lithuania tied

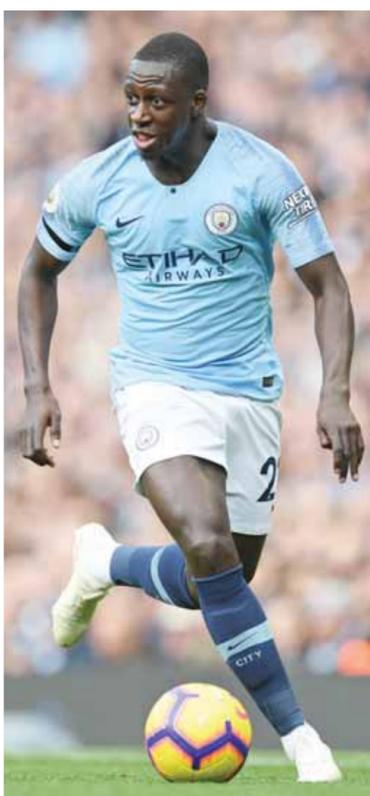
KUWAIT: Kuwait football team tied 1-1 with Lithuania in a friendly Monday. The match took place in Vilnius LFF stadions and saw the 'Blue' jerseys snatching a lead on the 43rd minute via Fawaz Aayedh before Lithuania evened the score in the 54th minute. The draw is the second for Kuwait throughout its 10 encounters since January. Kuwait recorded a single win during that span, while the team suffered a heavy 7-0 loss against the Czech Republic last week.

Timberwolves fined

NEW YORK: The Minnesota Timberwolves have been fined \$250,000 by the NBA after holding a pre-season training camp in Miami, the league said Monday. The Timberwolves visited Miami in September for events which included a party at new minority owner Alex Rodriguez's mansion. But the trip to Florida came with a hefty price tag, with the team in violation of NBA rules which prohibit clubs staging offseason practices and workouts outside a team's home market. US media reports have said the trip was paid for by former major league baseball star Rodriguez and business partner Marc Lore. Rodriguez and Lore joined the Timberwolves ownership group earlier this year in a deal worth \$1.5 billion. The duo are expected to take over full control of the team from long-time owner Glen Taylor in 2023. The Timberwolves have made a slow start to the season, with four wins and eight defeats leaving them 12th in the Western Conference standings.

Jordan demands investigation

AMMAN: Jordan has called on the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to launch an investigation to determine the sex of a goalkeeper on the Iranian women's football team, with Tehran denying foul play. Iran beat Jordan 4-2 on penalties after a goalless draw on September 25 to qualify for the 2022 Women's Asian Cup for the first time in its history. The president of the Jordan Football Association, Prince Ali Bin Al-Hussein, tweeted on Sunday a letter "requesting a gender verification check" on the Iranian player in question, suggesting that the keeper was a man posing as a woman. But Iran team's selector, Maryam Irandoost, dismissed the allegation. "The medical staff have carefully examined each player on the national team in terms of hormones to avoid any problems in this regard, and so I tell all fans not to worry," Irandoost told sports news site Varzesh3 on Sunday. Iranian goalkeeper Zohreh Koudaei blocked two goal attempts by the Jordanian team, resulting in Iran's qualification.



Benjamin Mendy

Mendy charged with two more counts of rape

LONDON: Manchester City and French international defender Benjamin Mendy has been charged with two additional counts of rape, prosecutors said yesterday. He now faces six counts of rape and one of sexual assault relating to four complainants aged over 16, with all the alleged offences relating to the period between October 2020 and August this year.

A second man, Louis Saha Maturie, has been charged with two more counts of rape and one of sexual assault, the Crown Prosecution Service said in a statement. Mendy, 27, from Prestbury, and Maturie, 40, from Eccles, both in northwest England, are due to appear before magistrates in Stockport, near Manchester, on Wednesday.

Court proceedings in Britain are subject to strict reporting restrictions before any trial, to avoid the risk of prejudicing a jury in their deliberations. Both men previously appeared at Chester Crown Court on September 10, and were told they would stand trial on January 24 next year. The pair were remanded in custody.

Mendy, a £52 million (\$70 million) signing from Monaco in 2017, has played 75 times for City, winning three Premier League titles, but his playing time has been limited by injuries and a loss of form. He has just under two years left to run on a six-year contract. The last of his 10 caps for France came in November 2019. The left-back, who won the World Cup in 2018, has been suspended by the Premier League champions pending the outcome of the criminal proceedings. — AFP



ITEN: Ibrahim Rotich (second right), husband of Kenyan distance runner Agnes Tirop who was found dead with stab wounds, arrives to a police station from Iten Law Courts after being arrested in Mombasa and transferred in Iten, Kenya, on October 18, 2021. — AFP

Husband of slain Kenyan Olympian charged with murder

NAIROBI: The husband of Kenyan distance running star Agnes Tirop was yesterday charged with her murder, a day after he was found fit to stand trial. Ibrahim Rotich, who is commonly known as Emmanuel, denied the charges when he appeared before the high court in the Rift Valley town of Eldoret.

Tirop's body was found with stab wounds at her home in the nearby town of Iten, a high-altitude training hub in western Kenya for top runners, on October 13. According to the charge sheet seen by AFP, Rotich is alleged to have killed the 25-year-old the day before her body was found in her bedroom.

The court had last week ordered Rotich to undergo a mental health test before entering a plea. Rotich, said by police to be aged about 41, took

officers on a dramatic late-night chase before his arrest on October 14 in the coastal city of Mombasa.

Tirop's death threw a spotlight on the pressures faced by the country's female athletes who pay a huge — and often tragic — price for their spectacular success in a male-dominated society. Devoted to sports from an early age, many young sports-women lack the necessary education to manage their finances, leaving them particularly vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of coaches, agents and even their loved ones.

Born to a peasant farming family, Tirop launched her athletics career less than a decade ago but swiftly ran up a host of second-place finishes in national and international cross-country races. She went on to become one of Kenya's rising stars — as the 2015 world cross-country champion, a two-time world medalist over 10,000 metres, and fourth over 5000m at the Tokyo Olympics this year. Tirop's shock murder came barely a month after she broke the world women-only record in the 10km in September. The court will rule on December 1 on an application to release Rotich on bail. —AFP