

Venue allotment for World T20 raises eyebrows

The Indian cricket board's (BCCI) decision to award almost half of the ICC World T20 matches next year to only two venues -Dharamshala and Nagpur -has raised eyebrows. These two venues - which will together host 17 out of 35 games in the tournament -belong to state associations from where the board secretary and president belong.

Bangladesh cricket team will play their three qualifying matches at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium at Dharamshala. Tigers start their journey on March 9, 2016 at the picturesque Dharamshala against Netherlands. On March 11, Ireland will be Bangladesh's next opponent. The third match of the qualifying round for Bangladesh will see Oman take the field on March 13.

Nagpur, the home association of BCCI president Shashank Manohar, is set to host nine games while Dharamshala -home to board secretary Anurag Thakur-run Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association -will stage eight.

Five other venues will host the other half of the tournament.Chandigarh, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore and Delhi -all traditional Test venues -will host a total of 18 matches, including the final at Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

There are 20 international cricket stadiums in the country , of which 15 are certified Test venues now. However, the BCCI decided to shortlist and finalize only these seven venues to host the World T20 matches, to be held from March 9 to April 3.

The biggest surprise is that the marquee game of the tournament -India versus Pakistan -has been awarded to Dharamshala, which has a capacity of only 23,000. Some other venues across India which were ignored boasts capacities ranging from 30,000 to 55,000.

"It is not even in rotation that Dharamshala has been awarded the game," a senior board functionary said, adding: "If you had a choice between 23,000 people watching India play Pakistan and 40,000 or 50,000 people watching, which option would you choose?" Clearly, outside of Maharashtra, where Pakistan are not welcome to play, there are several venues that could have been considered for this big-ticket game.

G Gangaraju, the BCCI vice-president from South Zone and also the chairman of the board's tour programme and fixtures committee, was not forthcoming on the reasons behind allotting 17 matches to Nagpur and Dharamshala and shortlisting only five other venues. "I'll have to look into it and get back to you. I'm in Parliament right now," Gangaraju said.

Only a month ago, BCCI had added six new venues to its list of certified Test centres. Of those six, only Dharamshala has been awarded eight World T20 games while the remaining five -Pune, Rajkot, Indore, Ranchi and Visakhapatnam -have been ignored altogether.

Some other traditional centres like Chennai -the power centre of the previous regime in the BCCI -have also been snubbed. Chennai will host only four women's World T20 games instead of the expected big-draw men's matches.

Officials from the grounds and pitches committee were also contacted to ascertain if there were particular reasons why so many possible venues were ignored. "Not that I know of," a senior committee member said. Two state association presidents also pleaded ignorance on why their venues, recently upgraded to Test centres, were not considered.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) will pay the BCCI Rs 55.2 cr to host the entire men's

World T20, which works out to Rs 1.6 cr per match for 35 matches.

It is understood that the BCCI will pay the hosting association the gate money for each game, which sources say is between Rs 2-3 cr per match depending on capacity and ticket sales.

Even for a venue with minimum seating capacity, hosting eight matches would mean earning a little more than Rs 8 cr from the board.

Surprisingly , there is nobody in the BCCI who is willing to explain the reasons behind the venue allotments.