

ASIAN TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP

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The New Zealand chess team nearly didn't go to the Asian Teams Championship in New Delhi. After some members of the original team defected, NZCA decided to cancel the trip. Then the net was cast wider, and lower, in the search for prospective members, a young and not particularly strong team materialised, and it was all on again. We got to India, and spent quite a bit of the time there wishing we hadn't.

The team, in board order, was Jonathan Sarfati, Bernard Carpinter (captain), Michael Hopewell, Mark Noble, Anthony Ker and Michael Freeman. The tournament was scheduled for the middle of Sarfati's first-year university exams, but Victoria University co-operatively agreed to allow me to supervise four of his papers in New Delhi.

A pleasant couple of days in Singapore broke the long trip to India, but landing in the seething chaos of Bombay Airport in the middle of the night administered a sharp shot of culture shock. The shock deepened when we arrived in Delhi and were shown to the room (singular) in which the six of us were supposed to live for the two weeks.

It was in the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium where the play was to take place. The room was not large. It was dirty and smelly, and had a broken window and a thriving mosquito colony. The toilet leaked and the bathroom floor was constantly covered in water. No hot water (no hot water in the whole stadium, actually), no soap, no towels, and not enough bedding. It was noisy too.

We made many complaints and requests for better conditions but it seems that in India things happen very slowly or, more usually, not at all. Noble and I moved into a hotel at our own expense, but the others could not afford to leave. Eventually we did get an additional room, similar to the first but less smelly. Freeman got 20 mosquito bites on his first day in the room and Delhi belly on the second; four of us were to get sick in varying degrees and the other two seemed quite run down. One good point was the food, although we had to pay for it ourselves

and some of the team would eat only fish, bread and ice cream.

Ten countries turned up in the end, notable absentees being Australia and Indonesia. The top three teams were obviously going to be the Philippines, led by Candidate Eugene Torre, China and India. Curiously, India did not have their strongest team. They had been hoping for an odd number of entrants, which would have allowed them to field two teams, and they had selected two teams of roughly equal strength instead of the usual top team and reserve team. When an even number of entrants arrived they played one of these teams, led by young IM Dibyendu Barua whose successes included a win over Korchnoi.

The weaker teams seemed to be Brunei, Bahrain and Kuwait. The two Arab countries had expert assistance, however - Bahrain had Filipino GM Balinas as their coach and Kuwait the Polish IM Filipowicz. The other teams were Pakistan, Bangladesh and Malaysia.

Our team agreed that we should each play six of the nine rounds, and should try to equalise the strength of opposition that each team member met. We would also try to equalise colour distribution but that proved difficult.

Round 1

<u>Pakistan</u>	<u>2-2</u>	<u>New Zealand</u>
Lodhi	1-0	Sarfati
Omar Khan	$\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$	Carpinter
Chaudry	0-1	Hopewell
Hassain	$\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$	Noble

Brunei 0, China 4; Kuwait $\frac{1}{2}$, India $3\frac{1}{2}$; Malaysia 3, Bangladesh 1; Philippines 4, Bahrain 0.

We thought 2-2 against Pakistan was a moderate result, but as the tournament progressed it became obvious they were actually pretty strong; they beat China and their young board two scored $2\frac{1}{2}/3$ against IMs. Sarfati had a bad day, I had an up-and-down draw after sacrificing pawns for the initiative, Hopewell a good positional win, while Noble had a space advantage but reached a position where neither side could think of anything constructive to do.