



**Khulna Tigers captain Mushfiqur Rahim does the hard yards at the Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday as the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League moved back to Dhaka from a high-scoring Chattogram leg.**

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Eng get Stokes boost First Test against Proteas starts today

AGENCIES, Centurion



All-rounder Ben Stokes practised with the England team on Wednesday ahead of the first Test against South Africa, starting at SuperSport Park on Thursday.

A statement from the England and Wales Cricket Board said that Stokes' father, Ged, remained in intensive care in a Johannesburg hospital but had responded positively to treatment and was in a stable condition.

Ged Stokes, who had travelled to South Africa to watch the cricket, was admitted to hospital on Monday with what was described as a serious illness. Ben Stokes missed practice on Tuesday to be at his father's bedside.

The statement said the Stokes family thanked people for their support of the family and in particular the medical practitioners who had treated Ged Stokes.

Although fast bowlers Stuart Broad and Jofra Archer appeared to have recovered from illness, which caused them to miss England's two warm-up matches, three players - Jack Leach, Ollie Pope and Chris Woakes - missed the team's final practice because of illness.

The statement said the three ill players had not been ruled out of selection for the Test.

### VAN DER DUSSEN TO MAKE DEBUT

Meanwhile, South Africa batsman Rassie van der Dussen will make his Test debut in the first match of the series against England.

The 30-year-old Van der Dussen will bat at number five, captain Faf du Plessis said on Wednesday, in the place of Temba Bavuma who has been ruled out with a hip injury.

Van der Dussen is one of six uncapped

players named in the squad chosen for the first two matches of the four-test series against England.

He had played 18 one-day and nine Twenty20 internationals and was one of the few South Africans who impressed at this year's World Cup in England.

"He was a mature cricketer when he started for us in ODIs and is someone who knows his game very well," Du Plessis said of Van der Dussen.

"He came into international cricket looking very comfortable and over the last season and a half has been very fruitful and scored a lot of runs in white ball cricket."



"He is calm and composed with the bat. You can just see it sometimes when someone is suited for international cricket and that's been the case with him. I think he will be very much at home."

Du Plessis said a decision on playing an extra bowler would be made on Thursday morning after assessing conditions at Centurion, Pretoria.

"We have asked for good wickets for this test series that offer both something to the bowler and batsmen," the South Africa captain added.

## NZ make two changes Second Test against Australia from today

APP, Melbourne

New Zealand made two changes Wednesday for the Boxing Day Test against Australia with fast bowler Trent Boult back from injury and Tom Blundell replacing Jeet Raval at the top of the order.

The dangerous Boult missed the first Test in Perth, where his team crashed by 296 runs, with a rib injury that also kept him out of their final clash against England.

But he has worked his way back to fitness, desperate to play in the Black Caps first Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground since 1987, with a crowd of more 75,000 expected on day one.

Williamson also confirmed Blundell, usually a middle-order batsman, would open alongside Tom Latham in place of the out-of-form Raval.

"He's a positive player and a smart cricketer so it's just trying to adapt to the conditions. It's important he goes out and plays his natural game," Williamson told reporters of Blundell.

"He's been a very good player for a long time

and he's a mature head ... it's a really exciting opportunity for him."

New Zealand have had 10 days to recover from their Perth day-night Test thrashing, which saw their batsmen skittled for 166 and 171.

Williamson said they had learned from their mistakes.

"Perth was tough and Australia are very good and tactically sound," he said after his team were put through their paces in the nets on Christmas Day.

"It's important we learn from some bits of Perth but turn our focus to Melbourne and changing conditions and perhaps not be too reactive to that performance."

Williamson was also keen to ensure his players do not get carried away with playing in front of such a big crowd during one of the most prestigious days on the cricket calendar.

"I guess there's a sense of romance about being involved in the Boxing Day Test ... at the same time it's about removing a little bit of that and bringing the focus back to the cricket and making those improvements we need to."

### Hafeez banned from bowling in English cricket

Pakistan all-rounder Mohammed Hafeez was on Tuesday suspended from bowling in English cricket's domestic competitions after his action was again found illegal following an independent assessment.

According to a report in ESPN Cricinfo, off-spinner Hafeez's action was found to be illegal during a Vitality Blast (T20) match between his county Middlesex against Somerset on August 30. The on-field umpires reported his action.

Hafeez, has been called a number of times for illegal action, contested the findings of the assessment which held that his elbow extension for his offbreak exceeded the 15-degree tolerance

limit for bowling actions.

A bowling review group, which heard his appeal at Lord's on Tuesday, suspended him from bowling in ECB competitions, and advised him to correct his action, according to the report.

-- Pti

### Won my heart in 40 minutes: Saqlain

Pakistani spin legend Saqlain Mushtaq has spoken about how Sourav Ganguly changed his opinion of how he was as a person over a 40-minute conversation.

Speaking on his YouTube channel, Saqlain said that cricket matches between India and Pakistan had always been fuelled by extra passion, which led to players from opposite sides often having a go at each other on the field.

"I was making a comeback after my surgery for Sussex and Sourav

had come to watch that match. When Sussex were batting, Sourav had seen me from the balcony. I did not see him because our dressing room was facing the other direction," Mushtaq said.

"Ganguly then came to our dressing room and offered me a cup of coffee and enquired about my knees, life, family. Then we just started talking. He sat with me for 40 minutes and ended up winning my heart."

Mushtaq added that Ganguly's behaviour on the field had convinced him that the Indian captain was an arrogant person who could never be a friendly person. However, that chat between the two of them led Mushtaq to respect Ganguly as a person "from his heart".

Mushtaq went on to add that he is confident Ganguly will do a great job in his current role as BCCI President.

-- AGENCIES



New Zealand pacer Trent Boult sends down a delivery in the nets ahead of the second Test against Australia which will start in Melbourne today.

PHOTO: AFP



## Locals make up ground in Ctg

NABID YEASIN

A Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) that seemed at first to lack enthusiasm has seen some colourful moments, at least on the field, when the country's biggest domestic league moved to Chattogram on December 17.

The usual hype surrounding the BBPL was missing from the beginning. And while the first Dhaka phase had seen some glimpses of brilliance, it was still not what the fans had been waiting for, as evidenced by the low turnout in Mirpur. Based on trend and past experience, it was however expected that the Chattogram phase would provide what the fans look for in a T20 game -- high scoring contests. And in that regard, the recently concluded Chattogram phase lived up to expectations.

Two out of the 12 fixtures played at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium saw teams piling up 200-plus scores in both the innings. Chasing a mammoth 221 for four posted by



MAHEDI HASAN



MEHEDI HASAN RANA

after already having shone with the ball with miserly figures of two for nine against Cumilla. He proved that he was not a one-hit-wonder when he followed up this performance with another match-winning 28-ball 56 against Sylhet Thunder the very next day.

Meanwhile, the likes of Liton Das and Imrul Kayes had continued to show glimpses of brilliance in Chattogram after decent showings in Dhaka, while stalwart Mashfiqur Rahim scored his career-best BPL score -- a 51-ball 96 while guiding Khulna Tigers to a five-wicket win over Rajshahi Royals in the opening game of the phase. Locals also shone at the end of the phase. Even though Tamim Iqbal's unbeaten 60 against Sylhet on the final day was not the quickest, but it would sure boost the left-hander who joined his side midway through the phase after recovering from sickness. And in the final game, it was yet another local all-rounder, Afif Hossain, who trumped a Dawid Malan century with a brilliant 53-ball 76 to help Rajshahi beat Cumilla convincingly.

Although the Chattogram phase saw locals step up, their influence in transforming a competitive score into a mammoth one is still debatable. When Chattogram posted 238 for four, it was the unbeaten 27-ball 71 blitz from foreigner Chadwick Walton that had done the trick. In the same game, Cumilla could not have scored anywhere near 222 if it was not for Malan's 38-ball 84. Even when Sylhet romped to their first victory, it was courtesy of an unbeaten 103 from Andre Fletcher and another 38-ball 90 from fellow West Indian Johnson Charles.

Even though this BPL has less star power compared to previous editions, the likes of Malan, Walton and Fletcher still seem to be overpowering the locals when it comes to taking the bat to the next level.

## Aus mull five bowlers for Boxing Day Test

APP, Melbourne

Australia could play five specialist bowlers against New Zealand during the second Test, captain Tim Paine said Wednesday, with the decision being left until the last moment.

The Melbourne Cricket Ground track has been lifeless during the past two Boxing Day Tests, making it hard to take 20 wickets, although a Sheffield Shield match there this month was abandoned due to a dangerous pitch.

With this in mind, Paine said a decision would only be made after a late inspection.

But one scenario could be a five-pronged attack, in which Queensland seamer Michael Neser likely makes his debut.

"We'll find out tomorrow. The wicket is a bit unknown... but we've got a plan in place for both scenarios (with five bowlers or without)," Paine told on Wednesday.

"We've probably got two different teams (in mind), to be honest, so we'll make the final call tomorrow."

Australia traditionally play only four frontline bowlers -- three quicks and spinner.

According to Cricket Australia, they have only fielded five once before in the past decade -- at the 2013 Sydney Test against Sri Lanka.

If they go down this route on Thursday, Neser is set to line up alongside Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon, with James Pattinson replacing the injured Josh Hazlewood.