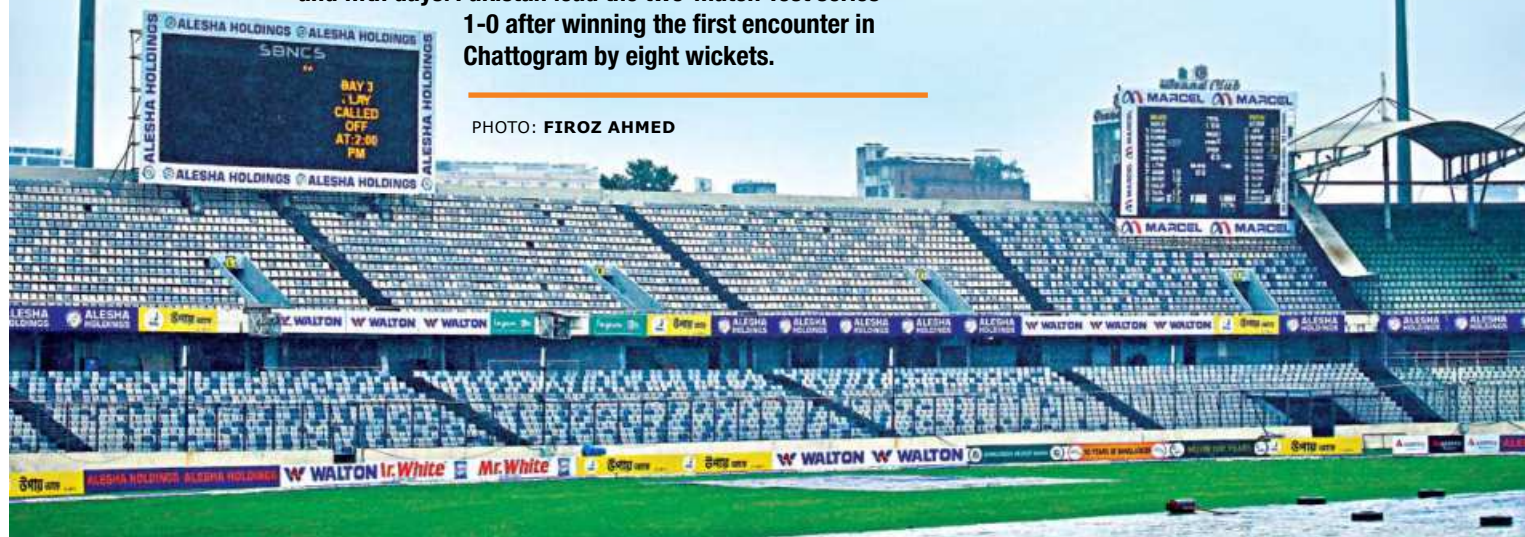


SPORT

RAIN WASHES OUT
THIRD DAY'S PLAY

Rain, triggered by a weakened cyclone, washed out the third day of the second Test between Bangladesh and Pakistan in Mirpur yesterday. The covers never came off the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium and players didn't come to the ground. Only 63.2 overs of play were possible over the first two days with Pakistan reaching 188-2 in their first innings. The weather, however, promises to be better on the fourth and fifth days. Pakistan lead the two-match Test series 1-0 after winning the first encounter in Chattogram by eight wickets.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



BCB ends Shakib drama 'officially'

SPORTS REPORTER



The drama surrounding Shakib Al Hasan's participation in the upcoming New Zealand tour may have ended as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan informed yesterday that the board has accepted the all-rounder's leave application.

But once again the lack of communication inside BCB and the loopholes in its system have left the board doing nothing but accept Shakib's leave application at the very last moment with Bangladesh set to travel to New Zealand on December 9 to take part in the two-match Test series, part of the ICC Test Championship.

"This is not embarrassing [the confusion] to be honest. We simply didn't know about it officially. The thing is these things have always happened unofficially. Now so that we can avoid confusion, we are emphasising that these matters should be official," said Hassan to the media yesterday.

Shakib had previously opted to take six months break from Test cricket back in

2017. That decision also came just hours before the selectors were set to announce the squad for a tour to South Africa.

Since then Shakib did not feature for Bangladesh in 12 out of 22 Test matches. Shakib skipped the New Zealand tour, on paternity leave, and the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka earlier this year as he took leave to take part in the Indian Premier League.

Considering the future of the experienced cricketers such as Shakib,

Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad who are all in their mid-30s, it is important for the BCB to realise the fact that the board needs to formulate long-term plans and prepare new players accordingly. "Of course, we need to rest or give break [to the cricketers] if needed regardless if the player is a key member or not. We have always said that we do not have an issue if a player doesn't want to play, asks for rest or a break. But that has to be done officially and with enough time in hand. They cannot simply come and say that they are not available. We will start this process in January. This will help us in the selection process," the BCB boss explained.

TIGRESSES
in extended isolation

SPORTS REPORTER



Following a triumphant maiden entry into the World Cup, Bangladesh women's national team suffer a setback after two players tested positive for Covid-19 on the last day of mandatory five-day quarantine yesterday. The Tigresses returned from Zimbabwe to Dhaka on December 1 following a hectic four-day journey, due to cancellation of flights, after participating in the ICC Women's ODI World Cup 2022 qualifiers, and proceeded to stay at a city hotel as per the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) Covid Management Protocol.

BCB informed over a press release yesterday that the two players, who had been sharing the same room, showed positive results yesterday even though the duo had returned negative results on tests conducted on December 1 and December 3, respectively. As a consequence, the Tigresses' isolation period has been extended, as per protocol.

The growing concern over the new coronavirus strain, the Omicron variant which was first detected in Africa, has certainly been amplified by the two cricketers testing positive. Thus, it will be a challenge for the BCB to deal with the latest pandemic setback, and that too at a time frame when Bangladesh and Pakistan men's national teams are sharing their stay in the same hotel, albeit on a separate bio-bubble, for the ongoing Test series. Earlier, a surge in Covid cases forced the International Cricket Council to eventually call off the qualifiers midway, where Bangladesh were sitting pretty on top of Group B with wins over Pakistan and the USA even though Thailand had the upper hand over the Tigresses.

The aftermath of the abandoned tournament meant the Tigresses are destined for a maiden appearance in the upcoming ODI World Cup, where its qualification slots were decided as per team rankings. Alongside Bangladesh, Pakistan and the West Indies qualified for the mega event in New Zealand next year.

India juggernaut rolls on at home

REUTERS, MUMBAI



India's spinners once again bared their fangs, sealing a record 372-run victory against New Zealand in the second and final Test at the Wankhede Stadium on Monday to secure a 14th consecutive series triumph at home.

It was the biggest margin of victory by runs for India in a home match, eclipsing their 337-run win against South Africa in a Delhi Test in 2015. The 1-0 victory meant India have not lost a home series since their 2-1 defeat by England in 2012 and it also helped Virat Kohli's side reclaim top spot in the Test rankings, pushing New Zealand to second.

With the series victory, the hosts also avenged their loss to New Zealand in the final of the inaugural World Test Championship in Southampton in June.

India's spinners wasted little time in removing New Zealand's remaining batters on Monday, sealing the victory in a little over three days on the spin-

friendly track at the sun-bathed ground overlooking the Arabian Sea.

"I know this result looks a bit one-sided but right through the series we've been made to work hard," said Rahul Dravid, the side's newly-appointed head coach.

"There have been phases of the game where we've been behind and had to fight back. Credit to the team for pulling themselves out of some difficult positions," the former India captain and batting great added.

Spin-bowling all-rounder Jayant Yadav did most of the damage on the fourth morning, picking up 4-49 -- his career-best figures -- to cut through New Zealand's middle and lower order.

With just a few hundred fans present in the stands to cheer the team on, Ravichandran Ashwin took the final wicket to finish with 4-34 as their opponents were all out for 167 in their second innings, chasing an improbable 540 for victory.

The wily off-spinner, the world's

leading wicket-taker this year with 52, took eight in Mumbai and was adjudged the player of the series for his tally of 14 wickets from two matches.

The victory will taste sweeter for India after they rested a number of established regulars while also missing a spate of players due to injuries.

"To play Test cricket you need passion and intent," Kohli told reporters.

"Indian cricket is in safe hands when you have so many people who have that. People are hungry to play Tests well. It's nice to see youngsters want to feel what it is to play Tests."

New Zealand's dogged batters had denied India victory in the first Test after their last pair hung on for 52 balls in a thrilling final session but they were unable to show the same kind of resistance on Monday.

New Zealand left-arm spinner Ajaz Patel's 10 wickets in the first innings and a match-haul of 14 was one for the record books but their batting skills on a spin-friendly track were found wanting.



Eight applications for BPL franchises

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has received eight EOIs (Expression of Interest) after inviting reputed business firms last week regarding ownership rights of six franchises for the upcoming edition of the Bangladesh Premier League T20, likely to take place next year during January 20 to February 20.

"We have received eight interests [EOI] for the upcoming BPL T20. Now we will evaluate the applicants," BCB president Nazmul Hassan told the media yesterday.

Meanwhile, it has been learned that Beximco Group, Gemcon Group and Bashundhara Group have not shown interest in the franchise ownership rights this time.

The upcoming BPL T20 will be a special edition to mark the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, following which the BPL governing council will review the teams and revise the regulations, before handing out long-term rights to the team owners.

Last year, after failing to resolve conflicts with the franchisees, the BCB arranged the Bangabandhu T20 Cup of its own accord, involving only the local players. It was an attempt from the board to return competitive cricket to the country following Covid-19 outbreak, while commemorating the occasion of Bangabandhu's birth centenary as well.

History against England as Ashes gets underway tomorrow

AFP, Brisbane



After a build-up overshadowed by controversies and Covid, Australia and England's hotly anticipated five-Test Ashes showdown gets under way Wednesday in Brisbane with Joe Root's men confident of defying recent history to cause an upset.

Few series between the old rivals have witnessed such troubled preparations, with the tour threatened early on over Australia's tough Covid-19 quarantine rules.

With that hurdle cleared, the hosts were rocked by a text-message scandal that led to the downfall of skipper Tim Paine, while English cricket has been engulfed in claims of institutional racism.

Throw in torrential rain that severely derailed both teams' warm-up games, and it has been memorable for all the wrong reasons before a ball is even bowled.

The poor weather could yet cause more problems. Showers are forecast for the opening Test at Brisbane's Gabba, where the deck looks set to favour the seamers given the recent deluges.

England haven't won a Test at Brisbane's 'Gabbatoir' since

1986 and will need to conquer those psychological demons to avoid another potentially fatal start to their Ashes campaign.

It comes courtesy of India, who pulled off a stunning three-wicket upset in January, snapping Australia's undefeated red-ball streak in the Queensland capital stretching back to 1988.



"Look at that India team that won at the Gabba. They were a long way from their first-choice XI but they had no fear," skipper Root said ahead of his departure for Australia.

As history suggests, if something can go horribly wrong for England at the outset of an Ashes series in Australia, it usually occurs at the Gabba.

In 1954, England's legendary Len Hutton won the toss and sent Australia in to bat -- and crashed to an innings defeat. In 2002, Nasser Hussain did the same and England were crushed by 384 runs.

Root's men didn't fare much better four years ago, crashing by 10 wickets with Steve Smith

smacking an unbeaten 141 and David Warner 87 not out.

At least seven of that 2017 Australia team, including dangermen Smith and Warner, will again be standing in England's way come December 8. England are also massively boosted by the return of all-rounder Ben Stokes after a finger injury and mental health break.

There was doubt whether he would travel to Australia, but England's 2019 Ashes hero was on the plane and is expected to start in Brisbane.

Captain Root expects Stokes to play a major part in the Ashes but warned Monday that England must manage his bowling workload on his highly anticipated return.

Meanwhile, Australia are strong favourites to retain the urn, despite the disruption of losing Paine a fortnight ago.

In his place, Pat Cummins will captain his first Test, supported by deputy Steve Smith. Australia go into the series once more relying heavily on the batting prowess of Smith and David Warner, along with the bowling firepower of Josh Hazlewood, Cummins and spinner Nathan Lyon.

Cummins is a rare thing -- a fast-bowling captain -- and how he juggles the task will be under intense scrutiny.

