

'HURTING ENGLAND NOT GIVING UP'

England are "hurting" but determined to rise to the challenge and claw their way back into the Ashes series against Australia, batsman Dawid Malan said on Thursday. After slumping by nine wickets in Brisbane and then by 275 runs in Adelaide, the visitors will enter the Melbourne Cricket Ground cauldron for the third Test on Sunday needing to win. "The boys are hurting after our performances in the last two games. They realise we haven't been good enough across all facets of the game," he told journalists. "Speaking to all the guys, everyone is up for the challenge, everyone is really keen to face up to the Australians. The boys want to win, we want to win the series too." AFP



Karim Benzema broke the 400-goal mark in his professional career with a stunning strike from just outside the box in the fourth minute before adding another just three minutes later to send leaders Real Madrid eight points clear at the top of LaLiga with a 2-1 win at Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday. PHOTO: TWITTER

Cricket operates as usual

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI



The recent tumult in the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is not far removed from the usual. Despite not yet being assigned a department following the BCB elections, Akram Khan has revealed that he wants to step down from his previous role as cricket operations chairman.

This is just one more instance that reinforces the narrative that the processes and results under the BCB leave a lot to be desired.

Players have complained about the quality of wickets in the National Cricket League and even though the ongoing Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) has seen good performances, the quality required to edge the country's cricket forward has been largely missing.

Meanwhile the national men's team is in New Zealand and their results have not looked up for a while and the conditions in the country will test the limits of a side missing a few key players.

The BCB elections saw Nazmul Hassan elected for the fourth time as board president and, as usual, promises have been made. The lack of quality players in the pipeline, however, has been exposed yet again as key stars missed a few recent series.



The board of directors, elected as long ago as October this year, are yet to be assigned departments, and so they are still occupied in their old roles.

Coming back to Akram, who was elected uncontested from Chattogram Division, the task of the cricket operations chairman is to maintain relationships with overseas cricket boards while overseeing daily operations of the national teams and A teams for both international and domestic scheduling.

Akram, who had served as a

national selector before becoming a part of BCB's tournament committee, did not have any real impact during those terms. Then he became the cricket operations chairman in 2014 before being replaced by Naimur Rahman for a year in 2015. Akram returned to the role in 2016 and has been in the post since then.

It was Akram, who in March had mentioned that Shakib Al Hasan did not want to play in Tests and the latter had retorted by saying that Akram did not read his letter, asking to opt out of a tour. The

incident led to question marks over Akram's duties, but only momentarily. From instances like this to Akram informing reporters at the peak of the pandemic that Asia Cup preparations were about to get underway, only for the tournament to be cancelled soon afterwards, his record in the post does not inspire confidence.

On Wednesday, while talking to the media, the BCB president seemed perplexed by Akram's request to step down.

"We have not formed a committee yet so how can he leave it. The previous committee's tenure has ended so Akram was filling the role on an interim basis. When I heard the news in the media [of Akram trying to resign], I thought he didn't want to continue this interim role," the BCB president said.

More importantly, the BCB president said that the cricket operations department has a lot of tasks and the pressure can only be taken by someone who is willing to work steadfastly. Given Akram's last eight years in term, where he frequently did not have up-to-date information on matters that were under his jurisdiction, it remains to be seen whether the BCB considers Akram capable of leading such an important department where communication and transparency are of utmost importance.

'Benzema is a top player in the world'

REUTERS



LaLiga

Wednesday.

Real, who were missing eight players due to a COVID-19 outbreak in the club as well as suspended midfielder Casemiro, stretched their unbeaten run to 15 matches in all competitions as they reached the mid-season break with 46 points. They are eight points clear of Sevilla and 13 ahead of third-placed Betis. Athletic remain 10th with 24 points.

Benzema broke the 400-goal mark in his professional career with a stunning strike from just outside the box in the fourth minute before adding another just three minutes later when an Athletic defender missed a clearance.

Benzema's 14th and 15th goals of the season consolidated his position at the top of the league's goalscorers chart.

Oihan Sancet stopped Real's momentum with a sensational goal in the

10th minute. It was the first goal conceded by Real after five successive clean sheets in all competitions.

The hosts, who were also missing four players due to COVID-19, dominated most of the second half but Real held on to secure all three points.

"It was a complete game from our team with players that didn't have many opportunities before and that showed the grit and will from a group that are willing to compete in every competition," coach Carlo Ancelotti told reporters.

He also praised Benzema for his performance. "He is a top player in the world. Just amazing."

The French striker was given a standing ovation from Athletic fans when he was substituted late in the second half.

"I like this type of soccer, playing in this stadium, this environment. I'm happy. This win in this place is very important for us," Benzema told reporters.

"We played well, suffered a little like great teams do. My first goal? It was good but better was scoring because it gave us confidence to go on and score the second right away."

Inter in driver's seat

AGENCIES



Serie A

TE IM

Denzel Dumfries scored his second goal in two games to send Inter Milan seven points clear on top of Serie A with a 1-0 win over Torino on Wednesday, stretching the champions' winning league run to seven matches.

Simone Inzaghi's side were already guaranteed to go into the mid-season break as 'winter champions', the name given to the league leaders at the halfway stage of the season, and moved up to 46 points, seven clear of AC Milan and Napoli.

It was Inter's 32nd league win of 2021, a total only eclipsed once before in a calendar year in Serie A, by Juventus in 2016 with 33.

"It was an important win, we knew that Torino are a difficult team to face. We did well with our preparation over the last few days, we



knew about their ferocious pressing and that they would try to disrupt our game," Inzaghi told DAZN.

AC Milan midfielder Franck Kessie played a starring role by scoring twice in a 4-2 win over Empoli on Wednesday, leaving the Rossoneri second in Serie A at the midway stage of the season.

The Ivory Coast international was deployed in a more advanced attacking

midfield position, and excelled in the role by striking twice before halftime, either side of Nedim Bajrami's goal for Empoli.

An Alessandro Florenzi free kick and a Theo Hernandez goal extended the visitors' lead, before Andrea Pinamonti pulled one

back for the hosts from the penalty spot.

Milan are second with 42 points, four behind leaders Inter Milan.

A shock 1-0 defeat for Napoli at home to relegation battling Spezia means the third-placed Neapolitans are now three points behind the Rossoneri.

Denzel Dumfries celebrates his all-important goal against Torino on Wednesday as Inter Milan stretched their

winning league run to seven matches while AC Milan

midfielder Franck Kessie scored twice in a 4-2 win over Empoli, leaving the Rossoneri second in Serie A.

PHOTO: REUTERS



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