

New Zealand crush India by 80 runs

WELLINGTON, FEB 6 /- A below-par India slumped to their worst ever defeat in T20 Internationals as New Zealand outclassed the visitors in all departments to win the first match of the series by a comprehensive 80-run margin here Wednesday. Batting first, unheralded keeper-batsman Tim Seifert took the Indian bowling apart blissing 84 off 43 balls as New Zealand posted a commanding 219 for six. With the crack opening pair of skipper Rohit Sharma (1) and Shikhar Dhawan (29) departing within the Powerplay overs, the chase became a difficult one and India were all out for 139 in 19.2 overs. Mahendra Singh Dhoni (39 off 31 balls) did play

during his little cameo but would need to do more in order to book a place in the World Cup-bound squad. The Pandya brothers - Krunal and Hardik - endured a contrasting day. While Krunal (he also scored 20 off 18 balls) had an okay outing, Hardik would quickly like to forget the nightmare (2/51 in 4 overs and 4 runs) before India play the second match of the series in Auckland on Friday. Earlier, Seifert, whose previous best score in T20 Internationals happens to be 14, was promoted to open alongside Colin Munro (34 off 20 balls) and they added 86 runs in only 8.2 overs in a whirlwind start. Seifert's knock had seven fours and half a dozen sixes, setting the tone for a big total. Seifert showed the intent straightaway as he gave Bhuvneshwar Kumar the charge, picking the knuckle ball early, dispatching it over mid-wicket for a six. The next shot was a four as he stood and hammered past the bowler. With Munro hitting Khaleel Ahmed (1/48 in 4 overs) for two successive sixes, New Zealand were off to a blazing start scoring 44 off the first four overs. Seifert was lucky to survive when Dhoni dropped a sharp chance after the batsman had edged one off Krunal. But he promptly put the next delivery into the stands, moving across towards off and sweeping it over backward square leg. There weren't any signs of overt footwork but he shuffled enough inside the crease to make room for the big shots and in the process disturbed the line and length of the bowlers. When Hardik drifted on the leg stump, he was flicked behind the square and when he pitched wide outside off-stump, he was lofted over the cover point region. In Hardik's next over, Seifert again hit the bowler for a boundary and a flicked six. In between, his elder brother Krunal was switched hit for a boundary. The elder Pandya finally got a breakthrough when Munro was caught in the deep off Vijay Shankar. But Seifert overleth the momentum drop and hit two more sixes off Krunal, who just kept on pushing the ball through a flatter trajectory. (PTI)



Vijay Shankar walks off the field

1st T20 International

his part but it was always an impossible chase with wickets falling at regular intervals at the other end. India had never lost a T20 International by 50 or more runs prior to this match. India's previous worst was a 49-run loss to Australia back in 2010. "We failed to get a good partnership, 200 was never going to be easy to chase," said Rohit in the post-match presentation. New Zealand bowlers kept the pressure on Indian batsmen, especially the two spinners - left-arm orthodox Mitchell Santner (2/24 in 4 overs) and leg-spinner Ish Sodhi (2/26 in 3 overs). Senior pacer Tim Southee (3/17 in 4 overs) had the best figures among the bowlers and the best delivery of the match was bowled by Locke Ferguson, who yorked Dhawan. They also kept the cover point region tight check and for some like World Cup aspirant Rishabh Pant (4, 10 balls), it was a frustrating little stay in the middle and he simply couldn't get going. On a pitch where Indian spinners Yuzvendra Chahal (1/36 in 4 overs) and Krunal (1/37 in 4 overs) went for plenty, the Black Caps slow bowlers literally tightened the noose on the visitors. While Pant didn't do his chances any good, Vijay Shankar (27 off 17 balls) impressed

I've to bat till 120 overs to avoid another collapse: Mandhana

WELLINGTON, FEB 6 /- The repeated failure of India's middle-order to up the game when it matters has convinced Indian vice-captain Smriti Mandhana that she has to "practically bat for 18 to 20 overs" for the team to stay in hunt during stiff chases. Mandhana smashed a 58-run knock off 34 balls but the Indian women's cricket team failed to make it count as they were dismissed for 135 all out while chasing a target of 160. "My will along with Jimmah's turned out to be crucial. If you get out back-to-back in T20, it proves costly. When you are chasing 160 and the run-rate is above 7 or 8, next time we have to plan and play better. It didn't work out today," Mandhana said after the match. "Practically, I would say I have to bat till 20 overs, that is the best option. The more I bat till 18 overs, we won't collapse because if the top three or 4 batters can bat till the 18-20th overs then rest can revolve around them, so tactically that is what I will try to do," Mandhana said but it was also an indication that the current middle-order lacks finisher.

Lot of similarities between Virat Kohli, Imran Khan: Abdul Qadir

KARACHI, FEB 6 /- Former Pakistan leg-spinner Abdul Qadir has said that he sees lot of similarities between Indian skipper Virat Kohli and former Pakistan captain and the country's prime minister, Imran Khan. "If I look at Virat Kohli as a batsman and captain... I can say he is similar to Imran in the manner that he, like Imran, sets an example by doing something himself and then expects his team to do the same," Qadir said on a TV show on Tuesday night. "I wouldn't compare the two (Kohli, Khan) but, if I look at Kohli, he also has this ability of leading from the front," he added. "Kohli also (like Khan) takes responsibility and performs and forces the other players to perform," Qadir said further. The spinner who played 67 tests and 104 One-Day Internationals for Pakistan, many of them under the captaincy of Khan, was reacting to Indian head coach Ravi Shastri's comparing Kohli to head cricketing figures like Sir Vivian Richards and the iconic former Pakistan captain. "If I talk about Imran, the sort of personality he had and his ability to get performance out of his players... I don't think Kohli is there as yet. But no doubt the Indian captain also leads by example," he said. Considered by many as the best batsman of the modern era, Kohli recently led India to their first ever test

series win in Australia and the Indian team under his leadership thrashed New Zealand in the recently concluded one-day series. Qadir, however, was very critical of the current Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman, Ehsan Mani who has been nominated to the post by Khan in his capacity as patron in chief of the board as the country's prime minister. "I want to congratulate the Pakistan people and the PCB that they have got a Buzdar plus in Ehsan Mani. Qadir said referring to Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar who has been ridiculed in the media for failing to find solutions to problems. Qadir claimed that just like Buzdar, Mani too has failed to resolve issues threatening Pakistan cricket. "I blame Mani for playing with Test cricket and destroying it in Pakistan. He has no concentration in this format of the game and similarly they are playing with the Quaid-e-Azam class tournament in domestic cricket," Qadir alleged. Backing the decision to retain Sarfaraz Ahmed as captain for the World Cup, the leg-spinner said that Mani's press conference on Tuesday to make the announcement had raised many questions. He pointed out that Mani and the board had earlier said that the captain of the team for the World Cup would be decided after the Pakistan Super League and that the appointment is made on a series to series basis. "What happened now... all senior players had said Sarfaraz should be captain. But what happened to the old statements of the board? Why didn't they announce earlier when Sarfaraz returned from South Africa," he questioned. The leg-spinner blamed Mani and the board for creating confusion by making announcements and then taking U-turns. "Whenever Mani has spoken to the media, he has created confusion," he said. (PTI)

Gnohere Krizo strike sends Snow Leopards Top

SRINAGAR, FEB 6 /- Hero-League debutants Real Kashmir FC continued their fairy-tale, securing the pole position on the points table with 1-0 return leg victory over Gokulam Kerala FC. Victorian beanpole striker Gnohere Krizo, scored his third goal of the season in the 51st minute of the second half to help his side log all three vital points in tough underfoot conditions. David Robertson, Kashmir's Scottish coach has more or less settled on his first team for the season and played Krizo, who was suspended for the last game, on the day in place of Ritvik Kumar Das. Gokulam coach Gift Raikhan, on the other hand, made as many as three changes to his starting XI, prominent among them being the induction of another Trinidadian forward Russell Alfred to partner Marcus Joseph up front. The game was played under constant snow and therefore a lot of long ball play was on display, which was also naturally advantageous to the hosts given their height and physically. The first half did not produce many chances and no goals, however, Real Kashmir's Dhanraj Ravanani did manage to pick up a yellow card for a cynical tackle.

Mandhana shines but India fail; New Zealand women win 1st T20

WELLINGTON, FEB 6 /- Smriti Mandhana remained an unstoppable juggernaut with a record-smashing half century but the Indian women's cricket team failed to make it count, going down by 23 runs in the opening T20 International against New Zealand on Wednesday. Mandhana held the record for the fastest fifty by an Indian before the match and she bettered it by a ball during her 58-run knock in the WestPac Stadium. The 22-year-old faced 34 balls and reached the 50-mark off 24 deliveries. However, New Zealand pacer Lea Tahuhu played a decisive role through two scalps off her four overs to derail India's pursuit of a 160-run target which was going smoothly till the time Mandhana was at the crease. India eventually folded for 136 in 19.1 overs. Leg-spinner Amelia Kerr (2/28) clinched the crucial wickets of Mandhana and Indian captain Harmanpreet Kaur to wreck the visitors' chances. Off-spinner Leigh Kasperok also picked up a couple of wickets. "Obviously we didn't get the start we wanted but it was pretty good to come back and win. It's great about keeping calm," said Tahuhu, who was adjudged

player of the match for her performance. Harmanpreet, on the other hand, blamed India's loss on a poor batting effort, especially in the last 10 overs. "I think bowlers did really well as we expected. We didn't bat well in the last 10 overs. That is only area where we were always struggling," she pointed out. Veteran Mithali Raj, who captains the Indian ODI side, was dropped from the match. "I was playing 150 or 160 overs to young girls, that is the only reason," said Harmanpreet when asked about Mithali's absence from the line-up and whether her experience would have come handy here. The next game of the series is scheduled to be held in Auckland on Friday. Mandhana and Jimmah Rodrigues (39 off 33 balls) combined for a 102-run second-wicket stand that should have been a solid foundation for the rest of the line-up. But India collapsed in the face of an inspired performance by Lahuhu. From 10/11, the visiting team was down to 17/6 in a matter of five overs that turned the match on its head. Harmanpreet (17 off 15 balls) played out a small cameo, including a massive six off her last ball, as the team home, failing to find any support at the other end.

I-League: East Bengal eye to maintain wining momentum against Neroca

KOLKATA, FEB 6 /- An upbeat East Bengal will look to build on their derby win and further cut the gap on league leaders Chennai City FC, when they take on Neroca FC in a crucial I-League encounter here on Thursday. East Bengal, who breezed past arch-rivals Mohun Bagan 2-0 to stay in the hunt for the title, are placed fourth in the points table with 25 points, five adrift of Chennai. Neroca, in fifth spot, are also on 25 points and will come into the tie on the back of a nail-biting 3-2 win over Indian Arrows.

The hosts, under Spanish coach Alejandro Menendez, would like to believe that they are peaking at the right time. The club can finally avail the services of all their six foreigners. Enrique Esqueda has come back from his rib injury just before the derby and now the Mexican forward is fully fit to feature in Alejandro's starting lineup. "From now until the end of the season, all of our matches will be very difficult. This is a very good team and we will try to win this match. We need to get a strong start," Menendez said on the eve of the match. "It is a new match and we need three points to continue to remain in the title race. We are taking it match-by-match. We will see what happens in the next games. For our focus is on tomorrow's (Thursday) game," said the Spaniard. The Spanish coach might make a change in the starting XI which defeated Mohun Bagan in their last game. Esqueda is likely to partner Jobby Justin in the front. If Esqueda comes in then Jaime Santos, another hero from the derby, might move to the left flank relegating Toni Dovalto the bench. Menendez expressed his disappointment over the scheduling of the I-League games as the red and gold brigade take on Real Kashmir in another important clash in Srinagar on Sunday, three days after their home tie against Neroca. "This is a tough situation for us. This is not a good schedule for the I-League. If the league wants to grow big, they need to see these things. When you



East Bengal are the best team in set-pieces: Menendez

KOLKATA, FEB 6 /- East Bengal play the first of their final six matches of the league season as they look to clinch their maiden I-League title. The Kolkata outfit are placed fourth on the table with 25 points from 13 matches and need to close gap at the top. They are up against NEROCA FC on Thursday at the Salt Lake Stadium and coach Alejandro Menendez pointed out that they can ill afford to take any team lightly. "From now until the end of the season, all of our matches will be very difficult. This is a very good team and we will try to win this match. We need to get a strong start." "It is a new match and we need three points to continue to remain in the title race. We are taking it match-by-match. We will see what happens in the next games. For our focus is on tomorrow's (Thursday) game," said the Spaniard. The Red and Gold play on Thursday before they embark on a trip to Kashmir where they will up against fellow title contenders Real Kashmir on Sunday. Menendez expressed his disappointment over the scheduling of the I-League games.

play so many matches in less time, it is bound to affect the performance of the teams," he said. The former Atletico Madrid coach stated that the most consistent team would go on to win silverware at the end of the season. "We are just focusing on our next match. I have always said that the team who is consistent will win and so we have to perform consistently," he added. East Bengal don't have any injury concerns going into the game with defenders Lalram Chullova and Johnny Acosta recovering from their respective injuries. "We don't have any special plans for any players. We are just focusing on things that we can do well against them. We don't have any injuries. All the players are ready and we will field the best possible XI tomorrow." Coming to the visitors, Manuel Retamero's side has collected just one point from their last four games after starting the season well. Neroca have Chennai City as their arch-rivals now and Retamero would hope he can solve their problems up front. "I want to take the three points. Happy to have Chhencho now. In the first match, they had Esqueda. Now some more good players like Justin, Doval, Colado. We cannot afford to make a mistake. One mistake from us and they will score. We saw the same against Mohun Bagan." Retamero said. Neroca will like to avenge the defeat in the reverse fixture. Esqueda's brace helped the Kolkata club clinch a win in Imphal in the very first match of the season. (Agency)

QUIZ Contest
CQ052

A BIG FEATHER THAT IS USED AS A PEN IS A ?

Yesterday's Answer: "A quill or quill pen." Name: Anurag Das, Jyotsnaghat, Piyusha Khanan, Pathan Qadir, Akhil, Anshu.

We will publish your name, correct answer in this space, SMS the answers alongwith your name, address, correct answers to the following mobile number: 8324620280.