

Upbeat India hits the ground running in New Zealand

Black Caps wrestling with injuries to key players and Williamson's future as captain following thumping by Australia

T20I SERIES

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AUCKLAND
Preparations for the World Cup on top of its agenda, India takes on an injury-hit New Zealand in a rare five-match T20 International series starting on Friday during which seam-friendly wickets would be a major challenge for the visitors.
Unlike most overseas tours, this will be a quick start for the Indian team. In a tight season, the first T20 comes only five days after its last ODI against Australia at home.

Hectic schedule
The team arrived here on Tuesday and chose to rest on Wednesday. Thursday was when it hit the nets ahead of the tour-opening game.
On the plus side, this hectic schedule helps the team management maintain consistency in selection. The T20 showpiece is scheduled to be held in Australia in October this year.
Despite injury issues to key white-ball personnel like Shikhar Dhawan, Hardik Pandya, Deepak Chahar and Bhuvneshwar Kumar this past home season, the bench



At it, right away: Virat Kohli and Kane Williamson with the trophy for which India and New Zealand lock horns in a rare five-match T20 International series starting on Friday.
• COURTESY: TWITTER.COM/NEW ZEALAND CRICKET

strength has come across.
It begins at the top where K.L. Rahul has stepped up as a key part of India's white-ball plans. He did enough against the West Indies as Dhawan's replacement to merit a starting spot, and then formed a solid pairing with Dhawan returned while Rohit Sharma was rested.
And now, India will once again start this T20 series with Rohit and Rahul pairing up at the top. Skipper Virat Kohli dropped hints that Rahul's new-found confidence in his dual role as wicket-keeper-batsman had given vi-

India-New Zealand in T20Is – a statistical journey

OVERALL MATCHES 9

INDIA 3 NZ 6

IN NZ MATCHES 5

INDIA 1 NZ 4

As the Men in Blue get ready for their first-ever five-match T20I bilateral series, a look at the numbers so far:

Top run-scorers:
India: Rohit Sharma 193 runs, 8 matches, Avg. 27.57, HS: 80
New Zealand: Colin Munro 241 runs, 6 matches, Avg. 48.20, HS: 109 n.o.

Top wicket takers
India: Irfan Pathan (5 wickets from 3 matches) and Bhuvneshwar (5 wickets from 6)
New Zealand: Ish Sodhi (8 wickets from 6)

Surprise, surprise!

- Virat Kohli is yet to feature in a T20I in New Zealand. In his four appearances at home, the India skipper has scored 174 runs at an average of 58 (HS: 70). Jasprit Bumrah, too, will be touring New Zealand for the first time in a T20I series
- India's win percentage against New Zealand in T20Is – 27.27 – the lowest among all opponents (min. 5 matches)
- Mohammed Shami last featured in a T20I outside India, against WI in Kingston in 2017. The paceman has only played three overseas T20Is in the period since the last T20 World Cup held in India in 2016

Records beckon

- Kohli is currently tied with Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi for the most number of Man-of-the-Match awards in T20Is (12)
- Ross Taylor (95 matches) could become the first Kiwi, and the third in the world after Shoaib Malik (111) and Rohit Sharma (104), to play in 100 T20Is
- Rohit could become the second-fastest Indian behind Tendulkar to score 10,000 runs as an opener. He has scored 9937 runs in 216 innings as an opener across formats. Tendulkar took 214 to reach 10,000. Rohit is also 111 short of 14,000 runs in international cricket

The schedule

Jan. 24:	Auckland, 12.20 p.m.
Jan. 26:	Auckland, 12.20 p.m.
Jan. 29:	Hamilton, 12.30 p.m.
Jan. 31:	Wellington, 12.30 p.m.
Feb. 2:	Mount Maunganui, 12.30 p.m.

All times IST

COMPILED BY LALITH KALIDAS

India's dependency on Kohli has lessened: Shastri

Says 2019 was probably the team's best year, across all formats, for the sheer consistency

EXCLUSIVE

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

Acknowledging that his job is to “finetune” the players, India coach Ravi Shastri also stressed that the support staff played a huge part in the team's success.
“We all have roles. Our job is to finetune them (players) in every possible way because when you're on the road, there could be little things that creep into your game. If you don't realise, it could lead to bigger things,” Shastri told *The Hindu* prior to the team's departure to New Zealand.
Was the team not too dependent on Virat Kohli as a batsman, as a captain? Shastri responded, “I wouldn't say too dependent. I think it's become less as time has gone by because of guys getting experience, exposure. Virat is the biggest wicket for the opposition.
“But, in the last two three years, players like Mayank Agarwal, Rohit Sharma, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane have evolved. They have got better. And the fast



Good tidings: India's recent success in Test cricket owes it to the likes of Mayank Agarwal stepping up. • FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

bowlers are there to take 20 wickets.”
Stands by Dhoni
The former India allrounder stood by M.S. Dhoni hanging in. “There is the IPL coming. Uske baad tum dekho. Evey-

For all you know, Dhoni may start the IPL; if he didn't feel good, he'll say ‘Thank you very much’

all you know, he may start the IPL; if he didn't feel good, he'll say ‘Thank you very much.’
Shastri highlighted the reason behind the recent success of Indian cricket. “The vision has been to carry on from where we left off in 2019. I thought that was probably India's best year, across all formats. For the sheer consistency, the number of wins, ability to adapt and if we had a good 15 minutes in that World Cup, might have been even sweeter. I think it will be a year hard to beat. The only thing missing for these guys is an ICC Trophy. That's destiny. You have to chase it. Don't be complacent. Don't rest on your laurels.”
When asked if India was only beating mediocre teams at home, Shastri said as a matter-of-fact, “I won't react. My job is to beat sides.

We went to South Africa, we won on a treacherous track in Johannesburg. We won in Australia. I don't care if the opposition is strong or weak. We treat every team as the same.”

Temperament is key
When was a youngster ready to make an international debut? “I would see temperament more than anything. How he handles pressure, how he copes with pace and technique, but, for me, temperament becomes extremely crucial. You might have a guy scoring thousands of runs. But I'd rather like to see a guy who scores the runs when it matters.”
“You don't have to go to a player and tell him something for the sake of telling it without having a solution to correct it,” he said. “So many times people will come and tell you ‘Tera aage ka pair theek nahi aa raha’ (your front foot is not coming right). I ask ‘toh phir karna kya hai’ (what is to be done)’. You are testing my mind for nothing. I'm thinking and you're not giving me the answer.”

WOMEN'S T20 WC

SHAYAN ACHARYA
MUMBAI

India's women's cricket team featured in a T20 World Cup two years ago, when it crashed out in the semifinals. And, as another edition beckons, captain Harmanpreet Kaur is confident of India's chances.
“We were pretty close in the last two World Cups (ODI, 2017 and T20, 2018). The only reason we did not win the last two World Cups, was we could not handle pressure when we had to,” Harmanpreet said on Thursday, before leaving for Australia.
Natural game
This time around, the team has set a new target. “Rather than taking pressure, we need to enjoy our game. We need to back our skills and rely on our natural game,” she said. While the T20 World Cup begins next month, India will play a tri-series involving England and Australia from January 31.
“We will get a few good, tough games that will give us



Australia-bound: W.V. Raman and Harmanpreet Kaur say India has covered all bases. • PRASHANT NAKWE

pointers to what needs to be done. And, even if we come off worse in the tournament, that's also good, because the only way after that is up, so any which way you look at it, the tri-series is going to be very helpful,” coach W.V. Raman said.
With youngsters Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues and Richa Ghosh in the squad, the batting has depth and Raman sees it as a positive. “That will definitely help us psychologically. At the start of last season, we did not do well enough in the few games. After that, the unit settled down. Each of the players had a good hit, they are all in good nick and they have also worked on

their skills, which means you do have a fair bit of sense of security and confidence going into this tournament,” he said.
“We are covering all the bases. This is perhaps one of the best teams. They are enthusiastic, positive and focused. That's very important,” the coach said.
While it will be a new challenge for most of the cricketers, Harmanpreet, Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah have the experiences of playing Women's Big Bash League in Australia. However, Raman stays cautious, saying there is a difference between franchise cricket and international assignments.

Sri Lanka cruises to 10-wkt. win

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HARARE
Suranga Lakmal took four for 27 to set up Sri Lanka for a 10-wicket win over Zimbabwe in the first Test here on Thursday.
The scores: Zimbabwe 358 & 170 (Sean Williams 39, Brendan Taylor 38, Suranga Lakmal 4/27, Lahiru Kumara 3/32) lost to Sri Lanka 515/9 decl. and 14/0.

India takes on New Zealand

UNDER-19 WC

SPORTS BUREAU
BLOEMFONTEIN
India will take on New Zealand in its final Group A game on Friday. The Priyam Garg-led side had earlier registered convincing wins over Sri Lanka and Japan, and leads the standings with four points.
On Thursday, Australia prevailed over England by two wickets in a humdinger at Kimberley. Connor Sully's heroics (35 not out off 20 balls) took the Aussies home off the final delivery. West Indies crushed debutant Nigeria by 246 runs.

BCCI may scrap zonal policy

Sivaramakrishnan, Mongia, Chauhan, Khurasiya in fray

SELECTION PANEL

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI
A day before the deadline to apply for two vacant slots in the senior selection committee, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is mulling over whether to move away from the convention of appointing a representative from each of the five zones.
The BCCI last week issued an advertisement inviting applications for the two slots in the five-member panel, to be vacated by chairman M.S.K. Prasad (south zone) and Gagan Khoda (central zone).
Differing views
It is understood that a section in the Board feels it is time for the BCCI to move away from the conventional zonal policy, while some of the office-bearers feel it's best to stick with the tried and tested practice.
Sanjay Jagdale, who has served Indian cricket in various capacities including national selector, isn't sure whether Indian cricket is ready to move to a non-partisan selection panel.
“Personally, I don't think it's the right way to go about



L. Sivaramakrishnan.
• FILE PHOTO: V. GANESAN

I don't think it's the right way to go about it (doing away with zonal system). Although it should not be like that I don't think we are ready to move beyond the zonal policy

SANJAY JAGDALE
Former national selector



Nayan Mongia.
• FILE PHOTO: S.S. KUMAR

pointments, then it will not work.”
Former India cricketers – leggie L. Sivaramakrishnan, wicketkeeper Nayan Mongia, batsman Amay Khurasiya and off-spinner Rajesh Chauhan – confirmed on Thursday that they have formally applied for the selector's post.
Zonal policy or otherwise, Sivaramakrishnan will be a leading contender.
If the BCCI – which is yet to formalise the Cricket Advisory Committee that's supposed to conduct interviews of shortlisted candidates – decides to continue with the zonal policy, then Khurasiya and Chauhan will emerge as leading contenders from the central zone to replace Khoda.

A come-from-behind win for Awadhe Warriors

Subhankar scripts stunning turnaround after North Eastern had taken early lead

PBL

K. KEERTHIVASAN
CHENNAI
Awadhe Warriors started its Premier Badminton League season-5 campaign with a come-from-behind 4-3 win over North Eastern Warriors here on Thursday.
Subhankar Dey gave the finishing touches for Awadhe with a clinical 15-9, 15-13 result over the higher-ranked Tanongsak Sansomboonsuk in the fifth and deciding tie.
Trailing 1-3, Awadhe Warriors put its weight behind the top-notch ‘Trump’ South Korean pair of Ko Sung Hyun and Shin Bak Cheol in the fourth tie.
Making it count
The 2014 World champion duo made it count as it overcame a fighting Krishna Prasad and Lee Yong Dae 8-15, 15-14, 15-12 to enable Awadhe to equalise.
Krishna and Lee had their chances to finish the fourth tie and the contest in the second game, but failed to do so. The third game, too, went close but the South Korean pair maintained a handy lead throughout to put Awadhe back in contention.
Earlier, North Eastern appeared the better team on



Clinical: Subhankar Dey didn't let the deciding tie get to him as he beat the higher-ranked Tanongsak Sansomboonsuk. • R. RAGU

paper in the mixed doubles. Bodin Isara and Kim Ha Na, however, faltered at crucial moments to lose to the Awadhe duo of Ko and Christinna Pedersen 8-15, 15-11, 15-14. In fact, at 14-14 in the decider, Kim fluffed her service by dumping it into the net.
But North Eastern fought back in the second tie through the men's singles.

Trump player Lee Cheuk Yiu, with his effortless and deceptive game, took apart Wong Wing Ki Vincent 13-15, 15-10, 15-11.
The 28-year-old Michelli Li from Canada tamed Beiweng Zhang 15-13, 15-14 in the women's singles to give North Eastern a 3-1 lead, before Awadhe staged its comeback.

The result: Awadhe Warriors bt North Eastern Warriors 4-3 (Ko Sung Hyun & Christinna Pedersen bt Bodin Isara & Kim Ha Na 8-15, 15-11, 15-14; Wong Wing Ki Vincent lost to Lee Cheuk Yiu (T) 15-13, 10-15, 11-15; Beiweng Zhang lost to Michelle Li 13-15, 14-15; Ko Sung Hyun & Shin Bak Cheol (T) bt Krishna Prasad & Lee Yong Dae 8-15, 15-14, 15-12; Subhankar Dey bt Tanongsak Sansomboonsuk 15-9, 15-13).