

Copter deal okayed ahead of Trump trip

\$2.4 billion agreement to buy 24 MH-60Rs is one among the various defence deals

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Days before U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to India, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, met on Wednesday and cleared the procurement of 24 MH-60R multi-role helicopters for the Navy worth around \$2.4 billion.

While other defence deals are expected to be announced, they are in various stages of procurement.

"The MH-60R helicopter deal has been approved by the CCS," a defence source said, adding it was ready to be signed after crossing hurdles. The deal is expected to be announced during Mr.



Timely buy: MH-60R will help to partially ease the Navy's shortage of helicopters. •AFP

Trump's visit and will help to partially ease the Navy's shortage of helicopters on its front-line warships.

MH-60R was earlier selected through a competitive process for 16 helicopters,

with an option for eight more. But the deal fell through owing to pricing issues and other developments. Thereafter, the tender was cancelled. A fresh tender for 24 MH-60R heli-

copters was floated later and processed through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) route of the U.S. government.

Another deal close to conclusion is of six additional AH-64E Apache attack helicopters for the Army. They will cost around \$930 million. The Apaches from Boeing are being sourced through the direct commercial sale and the Foreign Military Sales route from the U.S. side.

Also under discussion is the sale of Large Aircraft Infrared Counter Measure (LAIRCM), a missile defence system for large aircraft (such as those used by VIPs). A missile defence system,

Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS), which was approved last week by the U.S. State Department and which is now with the U.S. Congress for its consideration for up to 30 days, is also in the works. That potential sale, which could be valued up to \$1.867 billion, is likely to be taken up during U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper's visit to India, which will likely happen in March.

It is understood that Mr. Trump will push for U.S. solutions to fighter jet competitions of the Indian Army and Navy during his trip.

(With inputs from Sriram Lakshman in Washington, DC)

Only 'Namaste Trump' do for President in Ahmedabad

To fit in a Taj Mahal visit, he may leave the city early

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

'Namaste Trump', a mega event at Motera cricket stadium, seems to be the only engagement U.S. President Donald Trump will have in Ahmedabad on February 24.

Earlier, Sabarmati Ashram and then a high-profile event at the motor stadium, besides inauguration of the world's largest cricket stadium, were on the itinerary during the President's visit to Ahmedabad.

Inauguration put off

However, the inauguration of the stadium built by the Gujarat Cricket Association, once headed by Narendra Modi when he was the Chief Minister and subsequently by Amit Shah, has been postponed. Now, only the 'Namaste Trump' event is slated at the stadium, while its inauguration will be held later.

Moreover, the visit to the Sabarmati Ashram has also apparently disappeared



Trip minutiae: A USAF plane in Ahmedabad with cargo on Wednesday ahead of the President's visit. •VIJAY SONEJI

from the President's itinerary. According to sources, Mr. Trump and the First Lady will pay tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at Raj Ghat in New Delhi on February 25.

Though the President's exact schedule and itinerary have not been made public yet, going by the tentative schedule, Air Force One carrying the President and his delegation is expected to touch down around 11.55 a.m. on February 24 and straight from the airport, they will drive to the stadium for 'Namaste Trump'

while passing by the road show Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has organised.

"It appears that since the President and the First Lady want to see Taj Mahal at Agra, they will leave early from Ahmedabad," a top government official involved in the preparations for the visit told *The Hindu*.

Earlier, when the Ashram was included on the menu, the Agra visit was not confirmed but now it is official that the President will fly to Agra to see Taj Mahal during sunset.

U.S. Congressmen concerned over Kashmir

Ami Bera and George Holding discuss contentious issues with the Indian government

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Days before President Donald Trump's visit to India, two senior U.S. Congressmen have expressed their concerns to the government over the situation in Kashmir and protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Representative Ami Bera, who is the Chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee on Asia-Pacific, and Representative George Holding, who is a co-chair of the India Caucus in the House, were part of a bipartisan delegation visiting the region, and said they had discussed both contentious issues with the Indian government, and the U.S.'s plans for Afghanistan and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

"It is our desire and inter-



Ami Bera, left, and George Holding

est to see a resolution [to the Kashmir issue] and a return to normalcy. We did convey that [to the government] and I expressed my concerns over the continued detention of political prisoners in Kashmir," Mr. Bera, who belongs to the Democratic Party, told a small group of journalists during their visit to Delhi.

Mr. Holding, a Republican Congressman, said he shared Mr. Bera's assessment

and concerns, but added that he was "heartened" by the description given by government officials of the economic redevelopment plans for Jammu and Kashmir.

The statements by the Congressmen are significant not just because they were made on the eve of Mr. Trump's visit to India, but because they were made after they had been briefed by the U.S. embassy officials on

the situation in Jammu and Kashmir after the amendments to Article 370 last August.

Last month, U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Juster had been part of a delegation of envoys that were taken to Srinagar and Jammu to assess the levels of "normalcy" on the ground. The Congressmen said they also would like to take a Congressional delegation to J&K at the earliest.

Normalcy steps

However, a government source said that during their meetings with the government, the two congressmen had acknowledged that the situation in J&K was very different from last year, and had been told about various initiatives to restore normalcy in the Union Territory. On

Tuesday, the Ministry of External Affairs tweeted that Mr. Bera and Mr. Holding had met Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla and "discussed strengthening ties & regional developments," but didn't give any further details.

Speaking to journalists, Mr. Bera said they had also spoken about the protests against the CAA and the "pushback against it". "It was important to speak to senior Indian officials to get their assessment of the reasons for the decision. As an Indian-American, my pride comes from India's founding as a secular democracy," Mr. Bera said, adding that as the largest democracy and the oldest democracy, India and the U.S. shared the understanding that "protecting minorities is important".

Police open probe into Geelani videos

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The J&K police have initiated an inquiry to find out who smuggled two videos of the ailing 90-year-old Hurriyat chairman Syed Ali Geelani, in which he made his "last wish", from his Srinagar house and managed to send them across the border.

The police have detained Mr. Geelani's cook and a helper to question them on who video-graphed it and how the videos managed to bypass the CRPF-J&K police scrutiny at the gates. The separatist leader has been under house arrest since 2010. Only a close relative is allowed to see him.

The videos forced the authorities to install more CCTV cameras in and around his residence in Srinagar's Hyderpora.

Three Hizbul militants killed in Tral gunfight

'Commander' was among those shot dead

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Three militants of the Hizbul Mujahideen were killed in a gunfight at Sherabad in Tral, Pulwama, on Wednesday.

Director-General of Police, Jammu and Kashmir, Dilbagh Singh said here that the police, the CRPF and the Army had conducted a joint operation. One of the slain militants had replaced Hamad Khan, who was killed in January, as the 'commander' of the terror group here. He identified the militants as Jahangir Ahmad Wani, alias Umer Mukhtar, Raja Umer Maqbool and Sadat Ahmad Thokar.

The police said Wani was behind the arson in a mosque, threats to civilians and attacks on the Army and the police.

Mr. Singh said 23 mili-

tants had been killed this year. Nearly 40 overground workers (those who offer support to the militants) were arrested.

Mr. Singh said security agencies would continue enhanced vigil in the run-up to U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to India.

He said Pakistan was continuing its attempts to misguide the youth. "Pakistan continues to use VPNs [virtual private networks], and even terrorists killed in the Nagrota operation used a VPN to send across pictures from the encounter site," he said.

Mr. Singh said a Pakistan drone flew for 11 to 12 minutes over Border Security Force (BSF) pickets along the International Border in Jammu on Tuesday. "It was fired at and returned," he said.

Russia, Turkey spar over Syria operation

Erdogan threatens to attack advancing Syrian troops; Kremlin warns against the 'worst scenario'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISTANBUL

Turkey and Russia exchanged warnings on Wednesday after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened an "imminent" operation in Syria to end the regime's brutal assault on the last rebel enclave.

Syrian aid workers called urgently for a ceasefire and international help for nearly a million people fleeing the regime onslaught in the country's northwestern Idlib province – the biggest wave of displaced civilians in the nine-year conflict.

Turkey, supporter of some rebel groups in Idlib, has been pushing for a renewed ceasefire in talks with Russia, which backs the Syrian regime. Ankara is eager to prevent another flood of refugees into its territory adding to the 3.7 million Syrians it already hosts.

The Syrian NGO Alliance said displaced people are "escaping in search of safety only to die from extreme weather conditions and lack of available resources".

"We have hundreds and thousands of people who are fleeing... not just from bom-



Flare-up: A family fleeing the town of Tarmanin in Syria's Idlib province towards the northern border with Turkey with their belongings on Wednesday. •AFP

bardments but from lack of insulation, from the weather, a lack of heating. It feels like doomsday," Razan Saffour, of the Syrian Expatriate Medical Association, said. The group said a total of \$336 million was needed for basic food, water and shelter.

'No desired result'

Mr. Erdogan said talks with Moscow over the past fortnight had so far failed to achieve "the desired result" and warned that Turkey would launch an offensive in-

to Syria unless Damascus pulled its forces back by the end of the month.

"An operation in Idlib is imminent... We are counting down, we are making our final warnings," Mr. Erdogan said in a televised speech.

He called for Syrian forces to retreat behind Turkey's military posts in Idlib, which were set up under a 2018 deal with Russia designed to hold off a regime advance.

The Kremlin quickly responded to Erdogan's threat, warning that any operation

against Syrian forces would be "the worst scenario".

With Turkey moving large numbers of reinforcements into Idlib in recent weeks, Defence Minister Hulusi Akar emphasised that it was "out of the question for us to withdraw from our observation posts".

Earlier this week the UN said the displaced were mainly women and children and warned that babies were dying of cold because aid camps are full.

The Syrian NGOs called

for the warring parties to allow safe access for humanitarian groups and for a "complete ceasefire and end to human rights violations".

Violence continues

The regime offensive has killed more than 400 civilians since it began in December, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"The violence in north-west Syria is indiscriminate. Health facilities, schools, residential areas, mosques and markets have been hit," the UN head of humanitarian affairs and emergency relief, Mark Lowcock, said earlier this week.

Moscow has repeatedly vetoed Security Council resolutions. The head of the World Health Organization said Tuesday that out of nearly 550 health facilities in northwest Syria, only about half were operational.

Syrian troops have reconquered swathes of Idlib and retaken the key M5 highway connecting the country's four largest cities as well as the entire surroundings of Aleppo city for the first time since 2012.

Passengers disembark cruise ship after 2-week quarantine

China reported 1,749 new cases, the lowest since Jan. 29

REUTERS
TOKYO/BEIJING

Hundreds of people began disembarking a cruise ship in Japan on Wednesday after being held on board for more than two weeks under quarantine, as criticism mounted of Japan's handling of the COVID-19 outbreak outside China.

Even as patients trundled off the Diamond Princess cruise liner, Japanese authorities announced 79 new cases had been discovered on board, bringing the total above 620, well over half the known cases outside mainland China.

One more Indian aboard the ship was tested positive and shifted to hospital, taking the number of Indian nationals infected with the virus on the vessel to seven, according to the Indian Embassy on Wednesday.

In China itself, the death toll from the SARS-CoV-2 climbed above 2,000, but the tally of newly reported cases fell for a second day to the lowest since January, offering hope and helping



Free at last: A passenger surrounded by mediapersons after she disembarked from Diamond Princess on Wednesday. •AP

Asian shares and U.S. stock futures rise. Outside China, eight people have died from the disease. Two Iranians died in the holy Shi'ite city of Qom on Wednesday.

More will leave

From Wednesday, passengers who tested negative and showed no symptoms were free to leave. Around 500 were expected to disembark on Wednesday, with the rest of those eligible departing over the next two days.

Confirmed cases were to be sent to hospital, while those who shared cabins with infected passengers

may still be kept on board.

Meanwhile, China's National Health Commission reported 1,749 new confirmed cases, the lowest tally since January 29. Hubei – the epicentre of the outbreak – reported the lowest number of new infections since February 11, while outside of Hubei there were just 56 new cases, down from a peak of 890 on Feb. 3.

The latest figures bring the total number of cases in China to more than 74,000 and the death toll to 2,004, three-quarters of which have occurred in Wuhan.

(With PTI inputs)

Won't honour UN pledge on war probe: Mahinda

Sri Lanka to withdraw from co-sponsorship of resolution 30/1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on Wednesday said that his government will withdraw from co-sponsoring a UN Human Rights Council resolution on accountability for war crimes.

His statement came days after the U.S. imposed travel

restrictions on Army chief Lt. Gen. Shavendra Silva and his immediate family members over alleged gross violations of human rights during the final phase of the island nation's Civil War in 2009.

"Our government has decided to withdraw from the process of co-sponsorship in relation to resolution 30-/1," Mr. Rajapaksa said in a state-

ment. The resolution 30/1 on promotion on reconciliation in Sri Lanka was co-sponsored in 2015 by the then Sri Lankan government.

The resolution also called for an independent investigation with foreign judges and prosecutors to probe war crimes allegation.

Mr. Rajapaksa accused his predecessor of betraying the island's security forces by co-sponsoring the resolution.

"It is because of the histor-

ic betrayal that other countries are able to name members of our armed forces as violators of human rights," said Mr. Rajapaksa, who was president and commander-in-chief when Sri Lanka launched the offensive to crush the LTTE in 2009.

The 2015 resolution was based on the UNHRC report, which had accused the Lankan troops of violating human rights, Mr. Rajapaksa's statement said.

Sri Lanka's ruling and op-

position parties have strongly opposed the U.S. move to impose the travel ban on Lt. Gen. Silva, saying America's decision was based on independently unverified information.

Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena last week said that Lt. Gen. Silva was only conducting a war against a designated terrorist group which was the LTTE.

Lt. Gen. Silva was appointed as the Sri Lankan Army Commander last year.

WSJ reporters expelled from China over 'racist' headline

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

China on Wednesday ordered three reporters from American newspaper the *Wall Street Journal* to leave the country over what Beijing deemed a racist headline, in one of the harshest moves against foreign media in years.

The expulsion came as Beijing also slammed Wash-

ington's decision to tighten rules on Chinese state media organisations in the U.S..

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said the *Journal* op-ed – titled 'China is the Real Sick Man of Asia' – had a "racially discriminatory" and "sensational" headline.

The *Journal* reported that deputy bureau chief Josh Chin and reporter Chao

Deng, both U.S. nationals, as well as reporter Philip Wen, an Australian, had been ordered to leave the country in five days.

The three journalists are in the *WSJ*'s news section.

The op-ed, written by Bard College professor Walter Russell Mead, criticised the Chinese government's

initial response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

ELSEWHERE



Erdogan slams rights activist after acquittal

ISTANBUL
Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan renewed criticism of leading civil society figure Osman Kavala on Wednesday, a day after he was acquitted in court and then swiftly detained again in a separate case. AFP

MH370 downed in murder-suicide: Abbott

SYDNEY
Former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott has claimed "very top" level Malaysian officials believed vanished Flight MH370 was deliberately downed by the pilot in a mass murder-suicide. AFP

Sanders surges to double digit lead: poll

He got 32% support against Biden's 16%

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Bernie Sanders has surged to a double-digit lead over his rivals in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, a new poll published on Wednesday has found.

As the self-described democratic socialist rose, moderate former Vice-President Joe Biden slumped by a whopping 16 point since January's last take of the *Washington Post*-ABC-News poll.

The *Post* said Mr. Sanders – at 32% support, up from 23 last month – is climbing on the strength of strong performances in the Iowa caucuses and the New

Hampshire primary. Mr. Biden stood at 16% support in this survey of voter preference.

Third place in the poll went to former New York mayor Mike Bloomberg at 14%, followed by progressive Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren at 12%.

Pete Buttigieg is in single digits nationally despite narrowly winning in Iowa and finishing a close second in New Hampshire.

The poll was released on the same day of a Democratic debate, in which Mr. Bloomberg, a New York billionaire accused of buying prominence with staggering ad spends, will face off his rivals for the first time.

'Trump offered to pardon Assange if he denied Russia link to e-mail leak'

WikiLeaks published emails that hurt Hillary's campaign in 2016

REUTERS
LONDON

U.S. President Donald Trump offered to pardon WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange if he said that Russia had nothing to do with WikiLeaks' publication of Democratic Party emails in 2016, a London court heard on Wednesday.

Mr. Assange appeared by videolink from prison as lawyers discussed the management of his hearing next week to decide whether he should be extradited to the U.S.

At Westminster Magistrates' Court, Mr. Assange's barrister, Edward Fitzgerald, referred to a witness



Julian Assange

statement by former U.S. Republican congressman Dana Rohrabacher, who had visited Mr. Assange in 2017, saying that he had been sent by the President to offer a pardon. The pardon would come on the condition that

Mr. Assange complied with the U.S. by saying that the Russians were not involved in the email leak, which hurt Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in 2016, Mr. Rohrabacher's statement said.

Mr. Assange, 48, who spent seven years holed up in Ecuador's embassy before he was dragged out last April, is wanted in the U.S. to face 18 counts, including conspiring to hack government computers and violating an espionage law. He could spend decades behind bars if convicted there.

At Wednesday's hearing, Mr. Assange spoke only to confirm his name and date of birth.

Pak. court nullifies minor Hindu girl's marriage

She claimed the wedding was not forced

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KARACHI

In probably the first of its kind judgment, a Pakistani court has nullified the marriage of a minor Hindu girl, who was converted to Islam and married off to a Muslim man in the country's Sindh province.

Mehak Kumari, a Class IX student, was allegedly abducted from Jacobabad district on January 15 by Ali Raza Solangi, who later married her. Her father filed an FIR, claiming that Solangi had abducted and forcibly married her. He also said that her daughter was 15-year-old when she was abducted.

The girl, however,

claimed that she embraced Islam at a shrine after which she married Solangi out of her own free will.

The judge, citing evidence and documents, ruled that the girl was underage and was not fit for marriage under section 3 and 4 of the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act.

He directed Larkana's police officials to take action against all those involved in conducting, facilitating and abetting the child marriage.

Heavy security was witnessed in and around the court for the hearing to quell any unrest.

Hindus form the biggest minority community in Pakistan.

A test of skill and character for Kohli & Co.

The India captain is confident that his batsmen would be upto the task

INDIA IN NZ

S. DINAKAR
WELLINGTON

Virat Kohli and his men face a searching examination of skill and character as the first Test, beginning on Friday, approaches.

There is grass on this Basin Reserve surface and the New Zealand pacemen will be relentless in their quest for scalps.

However, Neil Wagner, that battering ram, who huddles batsmen with well-directed short-pitched bowling, could miss the first Test since he is awaiting the birth of his child. Matt Henry has been called in as a cover for Wagner.

Kohli was confident that his batsmen would be upto the task. The Indian skipper was also gung-ho about his own pace pack where Ishant Sharma appears to have put fitness troubles behind.

The Indian captain said, "He looked pretty similar to how he was bowling before the ankle injury and was hitting good areas. Really good to see him bowling with pace. He has the experience too."

Tactically flexible
The Indian team, Kohli said, would be tactically flexible. "We are going to look to adapt to what's in front of us rather than having a set template."

Playing in New Zealand had its own challenges but Kohli said his team would focus on its own strengths. "We have to show more patience than our opposition. If the opposition plays the waiting game, we are gonna play the waiting game. If they counter-attack, we have the opportunities to take wickets and score runs [and] vice-versa."

There is bound to be pressure on the not-too-experienced opening pair of Mayank Agarwal and Prithvi Shah against the moving ball on the greenish track here.

Kohli felt the fairly experienced Mayank understood



The prize: Kane Williamson and Virat Kohli will vie for sole possession of this trophy after the two-Test series, beginning on Friday. •TWITTER/BLACKCAPS

Kohli to play all formats for three years

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
WELLINGTON

How long can Virat Kohli continue playing all three formats considering India's hectic schedule right through the year?

The India skipper answered, "I think it's been

eight or nine years that I have been playing almost 300 days a year with the travelling and practice sessions. And the intensity is right up there all the time. So it does take a lot out of you." He added, "It's not that easy. Then being

captain and having intensity in practice sessions and discussing the game, so it does take a toll on you. So I am not in that space at the moment. So periodic breaks for me seem to work pretty okay." Kohli said, "At a time

when the body doesn't respond as well, maybe when I am 34 or 35, you might have a different conversation. But for the next two-three years, I have no issues at all. Can keep going on with the same intensity."

his game in red-ball cricket and the disciplined mode of batting.

Prithvi, he revealed, had been given the freedom to play his own game. "He is a talented player and we want him to follow his instincts. Look, these guys have no baggage of having failed overseas in the past. A bunch of new guys can play the kind of fearless cricket that can give the whole team confidence."

Role of the wind
The wind blowing across the Basin Reserve would play a massive role in the outcome,

said Kohli. "We have to decide who bowls into the wind, who bowls with it. If the breeze is blowing across the stadium, then who is more effective bowling the in-swingers or the out-swingers."

The wind would impact the batsmen too, Kohli said, "The ball might not travel in the air a lot more when you are hitting against the wind. So you need to be prepared to run a lot more. It's something we learnt the last time."

Kohli elaborated, "And if you have a light bat, then you are in trouble. You need to

be firm with your stance and where your bat is, because it can really swing around. I experienced it the last time"

Intense and fit guys
On the New Zealand team, Kohli said, "They are intense and very, very fit guys and they can keep going all day and test your patience, really skilled with what they do as both bowlers and batsmen and are obviously brilliant fielders. So they don't give you a lot within the game to sort of bank on or pounce on. They could bounce back from the 0-3 reverse in Australia."

Talking about the Test championship, Kohli noted, "The Test Championship, as an ICC tournament, should be right up there. All the other tournaments, for me, start under that."

"This is going to be the biggest of them all. And every team wants to make it to the final at Lord's."

Even in these conditions, Kohli spoke about the advantages of having a world-class spinner in the attack.

India was close to finalising the eleven, he said. From what one gathered, R. Ashwin and Rishabh Pant are likely to play.

Taylor on verge of a special ton

Will become the first to play 100 matches in each format

TRIBUTE

S. DINAKAR
WELLINGTON

He's a modern batsman with bat speed and whiplash hits who can also play the delicate strokes. Ross Taylor can wait for the ball to land, turn it off the surface and essay the late-cut.

Of course, some of his horizontal bat shots can be fierce too. Not many batsmen have put the slogsweep to such devastating effect as Taylor has done.

Touch of class
From 2007, when he made his Test debut against South Africa in Johannesburg, Taylor has been with this New Zealand side through the seasons, often making his mark with a touch of class.

How wonderful it would be then that this Wellington-born charmer would be playing his 100th Test, in front of his family, friends and fans, when he steps on the field against India on Friday at the Basin Reserve, his home ground.

He is versatile, across formats. Taylor, in fact, is on the verge of becoming the first batsman to play 100 matches in Tests, ODIs and Twenty20 Internationals. He has played 231 ODIs and 100 T20Is. "It's satisfying. People now-a-days give up on a format to focus on the others," he said.

Natural strokemaker
He has indeed been a natural strokemaker, galloping on his skills when the going is good, conjuring moments of magic. And he has shown the heart to survive periods of struggle. His appetite for runs hasn't diminished a tad. "I am still as hungry as ever to score runs. After my first series, I wouldn't have been putting much money on myself to be playing 100 Tests, that's for sure."

Cricket, for Taylor, was a passion and not a job. "I guess it's a proud milestone, more so in Tests. I love playing cricket, first and foremost. It's not a job, it's something you love doing," he said.

Asked about the key to defeating India, the 35-year-old Taylor said, "They are the world's best side and leading the World Championship. To win Test matches, you got to be good in all three facets."



True servant: Ross Taylor has long been carrying the hopes of New Zealand cricket. •TWITTER.COM/BLACKCAPS

I am still as hungry as ever to score runs. After my first series, I wouldn't have been putting much money on myself to be playing 100 Tests, that's for sure

Not surprisingly, he got a call from another Kiwi in the 100-Test club - Brendon McCullum. Soon a message from Daniel Vettori, one more century-of-Tests man, arrived.

India captain Virat Kohli paid his tribute. "He's one guy who has made an impact a lot of times for New Zealand. I have been fortunate enough to play with him in the RCB. Lovely guy, I get along really well with him. Really hardworking and a very keen thinker of the game."

Looking at the forthcoming Test, Taylor pointed out that the Indian attack was not about Jasprit Bumrah alone. He said the pitch at the Basin looked the same every time but played differently each time. He looked at the series against India as a sort of redemption after the debacle against Australia.

He's still full of beans. Ask Taylor and he will tell you that life begins at 100!



	Mat	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100s	50s	Ct
Tests	99	175	7174	290	46.28	60.05	19	33	145
ODIs	231	215	8570	181*	48.69	83.47	21	51	138
T20Is	100	92	1909	63	26.51	122.68	0	7	46

Australia targets fifth title at Women's T20 WC

The home team opens the 10-team tournament against India on Friday

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
SYDNEY

Mighty Australia goes into its home Twenty20 World Cup this week as overwhelming favourite as it looks to cement its superiority in women's cricket and draw a world-record crowd in the process.

Meg Lanning's defending champion, and four-time winner, was rarely tested through the second half of 2019 when it whitewashed an injury-ravaged West Indies and a developing Sri Lanka team in the short format.

Giving a glimmer of hope to its rivals, it surprisingly slumped to defeat against India and England this month, before rallying to win the warm-up tri-series.

"To be put under pressure like this heading into a World Cup is extremely good preparation," Lanning insisted.

Despite the recent losses, Australia is widely expected to contest the March 8 final at the MCG. Along with Lanning, Australia boasts wicket-keeper-batswoman Alyssa Healy, all-rounder Ellyse Perry and bowling sensation Jess Jonassen, all among the world's best.



Ready to get going: India's Veda Krishnamurthy and Harmanpreet Kaur and Australia's Ellyse Perry and Annabel Sutherland are geared up for the opener. •GETTY IMAGES

Australia has been dominant since the World Cup was introduced 11 years ago, winning four of the six tournaments so far and crushing England by eight wickets in the 2018 final in the West Indies.

The only other teams to lift the trophy are England on home soil in 2009 and

the West Indies in 2016.

Lanning's side open the 10-team tournament here on Friday against an Indian side which includes teen batting sensation Shafali Verma.

Australia and India are 2-2 across their last four meetings and Indian skipper Harmanpreet Kaur said her side had improved markedly since the last World Cup, when it lost to England in the semifinals.

"If I look back two years, India's 50-over side was doing well and our T20 was struggling. But in the past two years, we have transformed as a T20 team and are very positive going to Australia," she wrote in a column. "All of the teams have strengths - but so do we. Our strength is spin," she added, with the dangerous Radha Radav and Poonam Radav in the ranks.

'Shafali is a very important part of team'

Skipper Harmanpreet is counting on fan support to boost morale

ASHWIN ACHAL
SYDNEY

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur pointed to Shafali Verma as the pick of the youngsters in India's ICC Women's T20 World Cup squad. Exciting opening batter Shafali, 16, is expected to play a crucial role in India's campaign at the mega-event.

India takes on host Australia in the tournament opener at Sydney Showground Stadium here on Friday.

"This year, we have a few new faces in the team. Shafali has been doing very well, and we are very happy for her. She understands her game very well. She is a very important part of the team," Harmanpreet said at the official welcome event for the Australian and Indian teams at the Sydney Opera House here on Thursday.

"Everyone starts on an even keel; there is no real advantage or disadvantage to playing at home. It's going to be a massive challenge, starting with the match against India on Friday. We're hoping for a big crowd and lots of support."

"I love the fact that whe-



Shafali Verma. •AFP

rever we play in the world, we always have Indian fans in the stadium," Harmanpreet said.

Pressure
Australian captain Meghann Lanning spoke about the pressures of playing at home.

"Our players have had a chat about handling the pressures of playing at home. But there will always be pressure involved in playing a big event like the World Cup, regardless of where it is played."

'Massive challenge'
"Everyone starts on an even keel; there is no real advantage or disadvantage to playing at home. It's going to be a massive challenge, starting with the match against India on Friday. We're hoping for a big crowd and lots of support."

"The teams were welcomed by Stuart Ayres, MLC Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney, Bronnie Taylor, MLC Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women and ICC T20 World Cup CEO Nick Hockley.

Meghann and Harmanpreet were presented with commemorative cricket bats painted by Wollongong indigenous artist Zachary Bennett-Brook.

In light of the recent bushfires, 30 junior players from Camden Cricket Club presented each player with an annual koala adoption from Port Stephens Koalas, a gift that helps with the rescue and treatment of sick and injured koalas in the region.

(The writer is in Sydney on invitation from Destination NSW)

Sania-Caroline pair bows out

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DUBAI

Zeng Saisai and Barbora Krejcikova breezed past Sania Mirza and Caroline Garcia combination 6-4, 6-2 in the women's doubles pre-quarterfinal match at the WTA Dubai Championships on Wednesday.

In the singles quarterfinals Karolina Pliskova and Garbine Muguruza re-established order among seeds.

While No.2 Czech Pliskova strolled in barely an hour to a 6-1, 6-2 defeat of qualifier Kristina Mladenovic, it took No. 9 Muguruza almost two-and-half hours to get past Russian Veronika Kudermetova 7-5, 4-6, 6-4.

Vintage Atletico stifles Liverpool; Haaland upstages star-studded PSG

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

Champions League holder Liverpool will need to summon another famous European comeback at Anfield next month after it was beaten 1-0 away to Atletico Madrid in their last-16 first leg on Tuesday.

Spain midfielder Saul Niguez struck the only goal of the game in the fourth minute by bundling into the net from close range following a corner.

Liverpool missed a series of chances to equalise in the second half, with Mohamed Salah and captain Jordan Henderson coming closest to scoring.

Atletico's Wanda Metropolitan stadium was the

scene of Liverpool's 2-0 triumph over Tottenham Hotspur in last year's final but it faced a very different type of atmosphere this time around.

But on Tuesday Atletico produced a vintage defensive display, sitting deep and barely giving Liverpool any space for its attacking trident of Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane to work their usual magic.

Mane was fortunate not to be sent off late in the first half after clashing with Sime Vrsaljko while on a yellow card and he was swiftly substituted by Klopp.

Meanwhile, Borussia Dortmund teenager Erling Haaland scored twice in eight minutes to lead his team to a 2-1 victory over Paris St. Germain.

The Norwegian, 19, stabbed in from close range after a quick-fire passing move in the 69th minute.

He then thundered in an unstoppable shot for his second goal in the 77th, two minutes after Neymar had levelled for PSG.

Haaland has reached 10 goals in seven games in Europe's elite competition this season, including eight for Salzburg in the group stage, faster than anyone.

He is only the second teenager to net 10 Champions League goals, after Kylian Mbappe, and is the first teenager to score 10 in a single campaign in the competition.

The results: Atletico Madrid 1 (Niguez 4) bt Liverpool 0; Borussia Dortmund 2 (Haaland 69, 77) bt PSG 1 (Neymar 75).



On a roll: Erling Braut Haaland is the quickest to react and stab home Borussia Dortmund's opener past PSG custodian Keylor Navas. •REUTERS

Saina advances

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BARCELONA

Saina Nehwal advanced to the women's singles pre-quarterfinals of the \$170,000 Barcelona Spain Masters with a 21-16, 21-14 win over Germany's Yvonne Li here on Wednesday.

The results: Men: Singles: K. Srikanth bt Subhankar Dey 23-21, 21-18; Ajay Jayaram bt Christo Popov (Fra) 21-14, 21-12; Daren Liew (Mal) bt H.S. Prannoy 21-18, 21-15; Ygor Coelho (Bra) bt P. Kashyap 9-21, 21-18, 14-12 (ret'd); Sameer Verma bt Lucas Claerbot (Fra) 21-12, 21-9.

Women: Singles: Saina Nehwal bt Yvonne Li (Ger) 21-16, 21-14.

Mixed doubles: Pranaav Jerry Chopra & Sikki N Reddy bt Mathias Christiansen & Alexandra Boje (Den) 10-21, 21-16, 21-17.

TV PICKS

Ranji Trophy: Star Sports 3 & SS Select 1 HD, 9.30 a.m.
ISL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.
Europa League: Sony Ten 1, 2, 3, Six & ESPN (SD & HD), 11.30 p.m.
New Zealand v India: 1st Test, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 4 a.m. (Friday).

RANJI QUARTERS

- Gujarat v Goa, Valsad
- Bengal v Odisha, Cuttack
- Karnataka v J&K, Jammu
- Saurashtra v Andhra, Ongole

All matches start at 9.30 a.m.

Raghav excels in Sona-Sphiro's narrow win

NEW DELHI: Raghav Rao scored two goals, including the match-winner in the sudden death sixth chukker, to guide Sona-Sphiro to a 7-6 victory over Garcha Hotels in a league match of the Sujana Northern India 16-goal polo championship at the Jaipur Polo ground here on Wednesday.
The results (league): Jindal Panther 4-1/2 (Simran Shergill 3, handicap 1-1/2) bt Golden Globe Hotels 3 (Chris Mackenzie 3); Sona-Sphiro 7 (Raghav Rao 2, Gerardo Mazzini 2, Siddhant Sharma 2, Dhruvpal Godara) bt Garcha Hotels 6 (Manuel Llorente 4, Satinder Garcha, Angad Kalaan).
Army Championship: RVC 9 (Anant Rajpurohit 4, Ramvir Singh 3, Vijay Singh 2) bt Artillery 5 (Karamat Ali 2, RK Gautam, handicap 2); Cavalry 'A' 3 (Vishal Chauhan, Aman Singh, Mritunjay Singh) bt ASC O.

Bopanna advances

SPORTS BUREAU MARSEILLE

Rohan Bopanna and Canada's Denis Shapovalov beat Simone Bolelli and Jannik Sinner of Italy 6-7(6), 6-3, [10-6] in the doubles first round of the €769,670 ATP tennis tournament here.
Other results:
€46,600 Challenger, Koblenz, Germany: Singles (second round): Sasi Kumar Mukund bt Lucas Miedler (Aut) 7-6(1), 6-4.
\$15,000 ITF, Monastir: Men: Singles (first round): Manish Sureshkumar bt Louis Tessa (Fra) 6-2, 7-6(5).

Churchill moves to third

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MARGAO

Churchill notched up a 2-1 victory over Real Kashmir FC and rose to third in the I-League on Wednesday.
Willis Deon Plaza (11th minute) opened the scoring before Lalkhawpuimawia (20th) added the second with a stunning strike. Robin Singh (82nd) reduced the margin.

Goa swamps Jamshedpur

Becomes first Indian club to play in AFC Champions League group stage

ISL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA JAMSHEDPUR

FC Goa on Wednesday became the first team from the country to qualify for the group stage of the AFC Champions League, the continent's top-tier club competition, after beating Jamshedpur FC 5-0 in an Indian Super League match here.
Ferran Corominas (11th), Hugo Boumous (70th and 90th), Jackichand Singh

Bengal keen to continue the good run

Resurgent Odisha determined to give the visitors a run for their money

RANJI TROPHY

Y.B. SARANGI TANGI

Hardened by a gruelling pre-season under the guidance of an old-school teacher Arun Lal, Bengal has displayed some miraculous performances in Ranji Trophy group matches and hopes to continue its good run in the quarterfinal clash against Odisha, starting at the DRIEMS ground here on Thursday.

The Bengal story, which includes six debutants, rests on its self-belief and team work. The team has found several match-winners with the bat and the ball.

If Abhishek Raman stepped forward early in the season, Manoj Tiwary lived up to his reputation in crucial situations. The experienced Anustup Majumder chipped in with important knocks, while the big-hearted Shahbaz Ahmed performed with the bat and the ball.

Lesser-known pacers like Mukesh Kumar and Akash Deep bowled with responsibility. Ishan Porel, despite his limited availability, deli-



Good hand: Bengal has found several match-winners with the bat and the ball and someone like Mukesh Kumar has bowled with responsibility. *FILE PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

vered his best and is ready to serve his state again.

Arun Lal, who scorned 'molycoddling' and 'load management,' could see Bengal's transformation and expected better things in future. "We have the best bowling side in the country," He

said, unperturbed by the uncertainty over Akash Deep.

For this match, he believed that his team – which last reached the quarters in 2017-18 – has the wherewithal to blunt Odisha's challenge on a green and hard track. Bengal will pray for im-

pressive shows from its captain Abhimanyu Easwaran and top-order batsman Sudip Chatterjee.

Dreaming big
For Odisha, which previously played the quarterfinals in 2016-17, this season has been

a leap of faith too. Coach Rashmi Ranjan Parida, who played for five states and lifted the Ranji Trophy with the Rajasthan team, convinced his players to dream big and got a good response.

"I told the boys that they don't belong to Group-C. We have to stick to our strength, play fearless cricket and treat this one as another match," said Parida, who witnessed the side earn four seven-pointers – including three here – in the season.

The biggest positive for Odisha – which has capable seamers like Basant Mohanty, Suryakant Pradhan and Debabrata Pradhan – has been its resurgence in batting. Batsmen like Shantanu Mishra, Debasish Samantray, Anurag Sarangi, Govinda Poddar and captain Subhan-shu Senapati have gathered runs and confidence.

Even though one of its main weapons, speedster Rajesh Mohanty, was ruled out due to injury, Parida believed that others could do the job well enough.

The underdog tag may suit Odisha, which is determined to give Bengal run for its money.

Karnataka favourite, but would do well to be wary

Hungry J&K will be no pushover

SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA JAMMU

The erstwhile Prince of Wales College is an unusual setting for a Ranji Trophy quarterfinal. By the Geology block, students sip tea on benches, lost in conversation. Over in the 115-year-old main block, with its glorious arcades, young boys sprint to class. On the front lawns, students lie on the grass, poring over their books in the shade of tall pine trees. In a far corner of the 65-acre campus, past the hostel block and the library, Karnataka and Jammu & Kashmir will battle each other from Thursday for a place in the semifinals of the country's premier domestic tournament.

As the two teams trained at the Gandhi Memorial Science College – as it is now

known – on match-eve, there was no escaping the presence of security forces. "Too close for comfort," said Karun Nair, as armed police casually stood around the nets. Karun Nair's men, though, will still be favourites. This is a strong, well-rounded side, and any concerns over form were swatted aside last week as Karnataka booked its spot in the last-eight in emphatic fashion.

Manish Pandey's arrival is a boost. It remains to be seen who makes way for Pandey. Pavan Deshpande would seem the likely candidate but Shreyas Gopal has been poor this season. The all-rounder could sit out if the team management feels Deshpande's off-breaks are reliable. Karnataka has its full pace-

'Our boys are mentally strong'

SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA JAMMU

Ashiq Hussain Bukhari tells a story from August, soon after the state of Jammu and Kashmir had gone into virtual lockdown. With no other means of reaching his players, Bukhari, CEO of the JKCA and a former DIG, sent word to police stations in the districts. They were to reach out to certain Ranji Trophy probables in their towns, and ask them to assemble in Jammu, from where the group was to fly out to Baroda for a pre-season camp. As a patrol vehicle reached one player's house, he got out and ran, afraid that he was going to be detained. He returned only after the police had explained the situation to

his father. "It was a difficult time because phones were blocked," says the J&K captain Parvez Rasool. "I didn't even know if my neighbour was there. In that situation, what do you do? Credit should go to CEO saab."

That J & K recovered from that painful interruption to pre-season and has now gone on to reach the quarterfinals of the Ranji Trophy says much about the team's mental strength. During the team's training camp in Baroda, mentor Irfan Pathan and coach Milap Mewada made it a point to talk to their Kashmir-based players every day. "We were worried for them because they could not reach their families.

But they were fine," says Mewada.

"This is a chance to create history," says Rasool. "I was telling our players that this game can prove to be a turning point in their career."

That Jammu is hosting a game of this magnitude could prove to be hugely significant for cricket in the state. "You can see how much passion for cricket exists," says Rasool, still the only cricketer from the state to have played for India. "There is no infrastructure in Kashmir but you go to any alley there, you will see that they are playing only cricket. All these external things do not affect us. Our boys are mentally very strong."

bowling attack of Prasad Krishna, Ronit More and Abhimanyu Mithun available, with the left-arm pace of Praateek Jain an added option. J & K, though, will be no pushover.

Parvez Rasool's men finished on top of Group C with six outright wins, advancing to the quarterfinals for only the second time in their state's history.

This is a young team: six of the 11 that featured in the previous game, against Haryana, had played fewer than 10 First Class matches.

The 18-year-old middle-order batsman Abdul Samad is an exciting prospect: he is the team's top-scorer this season, with 547 runs at a strike rate of 116. He has smashed 35 sixes so far this season.

With Irfan Pathan's mentorship and the administrative changes that have taken place over the last year or so, J & K has found a renewed zeal. Karnataka will do well to be wary.

Given limited resources, Delhi did well: Bhaskar

Frontline bowlers' poor returns cited as one reason for failure

RAKESH RAO NEW DELHI

After being a credible finalist, Delhi failed to reach the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals for a second season in succession. The reasons for this slide were not hard to seek. The infamy of the Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) is just one of them.

With Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant on National duty, Delhi had the services of Shikhar Dhawan for just one match while speedsters Ishant Sharma and Navdeep Saini were available for two. Add to this, injuries suffered by bowlers like Pradeep Sangwan, Vikas Tokas, Pawan Suyal and Vikas Mishra meant Delhi played its league by fielding a second string team.

No wonder, Delhi could win only two games – both at home. Compared to the previous season when Delhi finished with 14 points, this year the tally stood improved to 21.

"For me, that jump of seven points is nothing but a zero because we did not qualify," reasons Delhi's coach K.P. Bhaskar, the soft-spoken man who guided Delhi to the final two seasons ago during his first stint.

Key moments

"Given the limited resources we had throughout the season, I think we did well. I know, had Delhi played a few key moments better, held on to a couple of more catches, especially in the slip-cordon, a place in the

last-eight was not beyond us."

A look at Delhi's bowling performances throws up only one name – Simarjeet Singh. The hard-working seamer took 31 wickets from seven matches. Ishant (11) and all-rounder Kunwar Bidhuri (10) were next best.

"For a team to do well, at least three of your bowlers have to account for 20-25 wickets each. Unfortunately that was not the case," says Bhaskar.

Delhi's batting suffered owing to the inconsistency of the top-order. Nitish Rana and skipper Dhruv Shorey, the batting mainstay, had their moments but could not finish with a flourish.

Lack of faith

Another key factor was the lack of faith shown by the Delhi selectors in some of the players. Kunal Chandel, fellow comeback-man Kulwant Khejroliya, Lalit Yadav, Vikas Mishra and Subodh Bhati were among those dropped for different reasons. This, in turn, led to a sense of insecurity in the unit.

Looking forward, Bhaskar says, "There are a number of talented players, both at under-23 and senior level. If Delhi teams can travel to play in tournaments, say in the southern part of the country or even play abroad, this move could help the youngsters a great deal. With more self-belief to go with their immense potential, Delhi stands to gain a lot more."

PGTI, WGAI sign pact

GOLF

RAKESH RAO GURGAON

In a move that has potential to help professional golf in the country for both genders and attract new sponsors, Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) and Women's Golf Association of India (WGAI) have signed an "Affiliation Agreement."

PGTI President Gautam Thapar and WGAI President Kavita Singh signed the agreement here on Wednesday and sounded confident of raising the profile of country's professional golfers.

Clarifying that this was no merger of the two bodies that govern professional golf, Thapar said, "Since the PGTI

events carry world ranking points, we are looking at ways to get similar points for our women professionals.

"In the long run, we want to see more money for professionals of both genders, more prize-money tournaments for women and events that could attract quality players from around the world. We are looking at the novelty of the mixed field (where both men and women professionals get to play), attracting new sponsors. Also, a single body that deals with professional golf makes it easier for the Government and other stakeholders, too."

Kavita said, "this partnership with PGTI is sure to help make the sport attractive for more girls to turn professional."

Good day for Sowjanya

SPORTS BUREAU JODHPUR

National champion Sowjanya Bavisetti had a good day as she beat fifth seed Valeriya Strakhova of Ukraine 6-3, 6-4 in the first round of the \$25,000 ITF women's tennis tournament in Ratanada, on Wednesday.
The results: Singles (first round): Ankita Raina bt Bojana Marinkovic (Srb) 7-5, 6-1; Sakura Hondo (Jpn) bt Nidhi Chilumula 7-5, 6-0; Nudnida Luangnam

(Tha) bt Vaidehi Chaudhari 6-1, 6-4; Anchisa Chanta (Tha) bt Caroline Romeo (Fra) 6-1, 6-4; Rutuja Bhosale bt Sri Vaishnavi Peddi Reddy 6-3, 6-2; Sowjanya Bavisetti bt Valeriya Strakhova (Ukr) 6-3, 6-4; Miyabi Inoue (Jpn) bt Zeel Desai 3-6, 7-5, 6-2; Berfu Cengiz (Tur) bt Karman Kaur Thandi 3-6, 6-3, 6-2; Manachaya Sawangkaew (Tha) bt Ekaterina Nikiforova (Rus) 6-4, 6-4; Sathwika Sama bt Saumya Vig 6-2, 6-4; Jodie Anna Burrage (GBR) bt Saha Sadiq 6-1, 6-2.

India claims three more bronze

Aditya, Ashu and Hardeep among the medal winners

ASIAN WRESTLING

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Having won his first two bouts comfortably, Aditya Kundu was favourite to become India's second Greco-Roman finalist at the senior Asian wrestling championship here on Wednesday. That did not happen but a semifinal setback was not enough to keep him away from the podium, adding to the host's medal tally with a bronze in the 72kg.

The 23-year old civil inspector from Chandigarh finished off his Japanese opponent Nao Kusaka in double-quick time, wrapping up an 8-0 win by technical superiority in under two minutes.

"Winning a medal in this manner in my first Asian Championship feels great. It adds to the confidence level," Kundu told *The Hindu*.

Shift in style

Like most Indian wrestlers, Kundu is a late convert to Greco-Roman but unlike others who make the shift due to their inability to break through in Freestyle, Kundu's was more out of compulsion.

"I have golds and bronze at the University Games in Freestyle but a knee injury around a few years back meant I was unable to put too much strength in my legs and decided to shift to Greco-Roman. A gold at the Commonwealth Championship in 2017 convinced me I could do well and today's win proves it was the right move," he added.

"My plan was to tire out my opponent and then attack him with my technique. I kept moving and holding him away and then went for



In control: Ashu overpowered Syria's Abdulkarim Mohammad Alhasan to give the local fans a lot to cheer about on Wednesday. • SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

the points, my plan worked perfectly," he said.

Trained by his father Ranbir Singh at Gulzar Akhada in Zirakpur, Kundu is now hoping to drop down to 67kg and get a chance at the Olympic qualifiers – 72kg is not an Olympic category. For that, however, he would have to contend with another youngster who won a 67kg bronze here – Ashu.

Confidence pays off

At 19 and in his first senior tournament, Ashu bettered Syrian Abdulkarim Mohammad Alhasan 8-1. The native of Panchi Jatan village in So-

nipat was confident of winning, having learnt from his semifinal defeat.

"I was in too much hurry in the previous bout. This time I knew I had to defend myself well. Wrestlers at the senior level are more intelligent and you have to plan accordingly. It's been a learning experience," he added.

Hardeep completed the host's medal tally for the second day with bronze in the 97kg as India finished the Greco-Roman competition with four bronze and one gold to be placed fifth on the table. Iran topped with five gold, one silver and three

bronze.

The results (Greco-Roman): 60kg: 1. Kenichiro Fumita (Jpn), 2. Zholaman Sharshenbekov (Kgz), 3. Islomjon Bakhrarov (Uzb) & Mehdi Seifollah Mohsen Nejad (Iri).

67kg: 1. Hansu Ryu (Kor), 2. Makhmud Bakhshilloev (Uzb), 3. Ashu (Ind) & Hosseini Nasrollah Assadi Kolmati (Iri).

72kg: 1. Amin Yavar Kaviyaninejad (Iri), 2. Ibragim Magomadov (Kaz), 3. Aditya Kundu (Ind) & Ruslan Tsarev (Kgz).

82kg: 1. Mahdi Asgar Ebrahimi (Iri), 2. Junhyeong Choi (Kor), 3. Jalgasbay Berdimuratov (Uzb).

97kg: 1. Mohammadhadi Abdollah Saravi (Iri), 2. Seyeol Lee (Kor), 3. Muhammadali Shamsiddinov (Uzb) & Hardeep (Ind).

Bengaluru FC loses to Maziya S&RC

AFC CUP

SPORTS BUREAU
MALE (MALDIVES)

Bengaluru FC suffered a 2-1 defeat away to Maziya S&RC in the first leg of the AFC Cup playoff round at the Maldives National Football Stadium here on Wednesday.

Cornelius Stewart scored with ten minutes left to give Maziya the advantage ahead of the return leg in Bengaluru next Wednesday.

After a goalless first period, Ibrahim Mahudhee opened the scoring for Mazi-

ya just after the hour mark, firing home from distance.

Substitute Deshorn Brown earned a penalty for BFC minutes later which Nili Perdomo converted to even matters.

But Stewart's strike meant that BFC had to be satisfied with just the away goal.

The club will play ATK in the ISL on Saturday before Maziya come calling for the second leg.

The result: Maziya S&RC 2 (Ibrahim Mahudhee 64, Cornelius Stewart 80) bt Bengaluru FC 1 (Nili Perdomo 71).

Amandeep Drall in the van

GOLF

SPORTS REPORTER
BENGALURU

Amandeep Drall, with three birdies in the last eight holes, secured the lead at the end of the first day of the fourth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour at the Bangalore Golf Club here on Wednesday.

Two-over after the first eight holes, Amandeep found birdies on 11th, 15th and the 16th to finish at one-under 69. It was the only under-par score of the day.

Vani Kapoor was two-un-

der through the first eight holes but dropped shots on ninth, 11th and 16th to finish at 71, two shots behind the leader.

Local amateur Asmitha Sathish had no birdies but dropped shots on second, fourth and 16th for a card of 73. Neha Tripathi (74) is fourth while Gursimar Badwal and Anousha Tripathi occupied the fifth spot together. Pranavi Urs, winner of last two events on the Hero WPGT, had a rough start with one birdie on the third and then had eight bogeys in the remaining 15 holes.

Football — India to host 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup

Championship to be expanded from eight to 12 teams

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KUALA LUMPUR

India will host the 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup. India was awarded the tournament by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC)'s Women's Committee here on Tuesday.

It was felt that India, which will also host the FIFA Women's U-17 World Cup later this year, was best placed among the three bidders – Chinese Taipei and Uzbekistan were the other competing candidates – to maximise the promotion of the women's game.

The venues proposed by

India – D.Y. Patil Stadium, Trans Stadia Arena and Fardada Stadium – are also being used in the FIFA tournaments, the AFC said.

Best opportunities

AFC's Women's Committee chairperson Mahfuza Akhter Kiron said: "India offers the best opportunities to build the event commercially as well as increasing the value and India is also committed to developing the women's game and while all three were strong bids, India stands out."

The committee decided that the expanded AFC Wo-

men's Asian Cup – from eight to 12 teams – will be played in three groups of four teams with a minimum of 25 matches with eight teams qualifying for the newly introduced quarterfinals.

The committee agreed that the minimum length of the competition would be 17 days and that the administration would be mandated to organise the relevant play-off matches depending on the AFC slots at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

The tournament dates are likely to be in late October and early November 2022.

Keshavan to promote winter sports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

Shiva Keshavan, the first Indian representative to compete in luge at the Winter Olympics, is aiming to build an academy to nurture talented youngsters and is in talks with a couple of State governments.

"My idea is to have a residential complex with all the multi-sports facilities and since (it will be) in the mountains, we will have access to the ski area, ice hockey," Keshavan told reporters here. "It can be built over time. So, I'm speaking to a couple of State governments to give land or get some sponsors."

The sport is getting bigger: Catherine

Says the Women's T20 World Cup will be a game changer

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

As a coach with the Ultimate Pace Foundation, Catherine Dalton has made quite a few trips to India, holding camps at Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad and Delhi. One of the few bio-mechanics expert to be associated with fast bowlers, she expects the forthcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup to be the game changer for women's cricket.

"There is high expectations as far as quality is concerned. The buzz can be felt worldwide," she told *The Hindu* from London. "It's going up. The game is getting bigger. With the World Cup coming up we are going to see some fantastic cricket. It's exciting time for women's cricket. There is place for women's cricket which has increasingly become competitive."

Catherine has had very pleasant experience of coaching in India. "I have never experienced any resistance as a woman coach. When I went to India I wasn't sure how I would be received by the players. The players warmed to me very quickly



Guiding force: Catherine Dalton says working with Deepak Chahar has helped both of them. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

because they could see they could learn something from me. I was fortunate to have a good understanding of the game, particularly of the bio-mechanics of the fast bowling."

Like many in India, Catherine also picked up the game watching her father and brothers play. "When I was younger I used to be taken to our local cricket club where my brother played lots of cricket. I decided to join and fell in love with the game. I was nine years old at that time. I just got hooked to cricket. I also played tennis and a huge amount of football. I just wanted to bowl

fast because I wanted to do things quickly," said Catherine, who also played football for West Ham Club.

"When I was 17, at a cricket camp, I decided to give cricket a full go. That was the turning point I switched from football to cricket."

The biggest highlight for Catherine was working with Deepak Chahar when she was invited by the Rajasthan Cricket Association a few years ago to do a specific fast bowling camp. "I learnt a lot from him and hopefully passed on some of my knowledge to him as well," said Catherine, named Middlesex Player Of The Year in 2013.