

Sports

Pakistan cricketers 'positive' for COVID-19 in New Zealand

Team receives 'final warning'; 6 squad members test positive

WELLINGTON: Pakistan's cricket tour of New Zealand was in the balance yesterday after six squad members tested positive for COVID-19 and the team received a "final warning" for flouting quarantine rules. New Zealand health authorities revoked the Pakistan players' ability to train while in isolation at their Christchurch hotel, making clear they would not tolerate risky behavior in a country that has largely eradicated the virus. "It is a privilege to come to New Zealand to play sport, but in return teams must stick to the rules that are designed to keep COVID-19 out of our communities," director-general of health, Ashley Bloomfield, said in a statement.

The health ministry said Pakistan's 53-member tour party, led by skipper Babar Azam, tested negative before leaving Lahore and were swabbed again after arriving for a spell of managed isolation on the South Island on Tuesday. Six tests came back positive and those affected were moved into stricter quarantine, it said, with New Zealand Cricket adding that four cases were new and two were regarded as "historical".

"While this is disappointing for the Pakistan squad, the testing outcomes and the actions taken show the government system is working," NZC said. Bloomfield said CCTV showed members of the tour party breaching social distancing protocols. "The team as a whole has been issued with a final warning," he said. "It's important to note that all incidents of breaches occurred within the facility and there is no risk to the public." The West Indies cricket team were also reprimanded by New Zealand health authorities for similar breaches earlier this month when they were in managed isolation.

Opportunity knocks as Pumas passion faces second All Blacks test

SYDNEY: Argentina were written off by everybody but themselves before the start of the makeshift Tri-Nations tournament but will put one hand on their maiden southern hemisphere test title if they can find a way to beat New Zealand again this weekend. The Pumas sent shockwaves around the rugby world two weeks ago when they deservedly earned their first win over the three-times world champions with a 25-15 victory in their first test in more than a year.

They followed that with a battling 15-15 draw with Australia last week in Newcastle and, equal on points but with a game in hand over their rivals, have their first major international silverware within their grasp. The odds would still have to be stacked against them but the Pumas have been defying expectations with missionary zeal and an iron will since landing in Australia.

Their economically struggling homeland, which is still reporting thousands of new cases of COVID-19 every day, suffered another blow on Wednesday when football great Diego Maradona died. "He's a big figure in our country and he epitomized a lot of the way the Argentineans are," coach Mario Ledesma said yesterday.

'Robust procedures'

New Zealand has largely eradicated community transmission of coronavirus recording just 1,684 cases and 25 deaths in a population of five million. Aggressive testing, snap lockdowns and effective contact tracing mean domestic life has largely returned to normal, but border control remain strict. All overseas arrivals must undergo two weeks in quarantine, although New Zealand Cricket negotiated special privileges to allow the tourists to train together.

Health authorities said these had been revoked after several team members were seen on CCTV "breaching managed isolation rules, despite clear, consistent and detailed communication of expected behaviors". The tour is scheduled to be with the first of three Twenty20 internationals in Auckland on December 18, followed by two Tests, but will be in jeopardy if there are any further breaches. NZC said it was having discussions with the tourists to ensure they understood the quarantine requirements. New Zealand's military helps manage border virus accommodation and air commodore Darryn Webb said there were robust procedures in place to deal with positive tests. "Our focus is on keeping the rest of the squad and our staff safe," he said. "For that reason, all other team members must remain in their rooms while investigations continue." Even before Pakistan arrived on Kiwi soil the tour had been hit by ill health, with Pakistan's dashing opener Fakhar Zaman ruled out at the 11th hour with a persistent fever. The 30-year-old left-hander tested negative along with the rest of the squad. —AFP

day. "We'll try to remember him the best way possible, on the field representing the colors." A second victory over the All Blacks, however unlikely it would have seemed just a few weeks ago, would plunge New Zealand rugby further into crisis.

Ian Foster is under huge pressure after his first five games in charge netted two wins, a draw and two defeats, and should the All Blacks suffer three successive losses for the first time since 1998 it could well signal a premature end to his tenure. Flyhalf Nicolas Sanchez has scored every point in Argentina's two matches, all but five from the kicking tee, so discipline will be essential if the All Blacks are to end their losing run, which includes a 24-22 loss to Australia. Sanchez was one of only five players retained in the starting side for Saturday's match as the Pumas face four matches in four weeks against top quality test opposition. [

Foster resisted the temptation to do the same, handing 12 of the players who started at Western Sydney Stadium two weeks ago the chance to redeem themselves. Flanker Akira Ioane, lock Scott Barrett and prop Nepo Laulala are the new faces as New Zealand look to end their season with a bang and a bonus point victory. "We have got another opportunity to finish the year on the level we want to," Foster said on Thursday. "We have got a chance to win the championship and that means a lot to us." —Reuters



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti shooter Uqab Al-Shammari takes aim during the Crown Prince's annual shooting tournament at the shooting club in Al-Sulaibiya, north of Kuwait City yesterday. - Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ICC probes Lanka T20 league over alleged match-fixing

COLOMBO: The International Cricket Council is investigating an alleged attempt to fix Sri Lankan Premier League matches due to start yesterday, a media report said. The complaint alleges a former national cricketer approached a Lanka Premier League player, and is being looked at by the ICC's Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU), the mass-circulating Lankadeepa said. "The former national player who allegedly made the approach is currently overseas," the newspaper said, adding that he had once been accused, but later cleared, of match-fixing charges by the ICC.

The ICC said it would not discuss any ongoing investigation. The Sri Lanka board's anti-corruption unit too declined comment. The Twenty20 tournament opens Thursday without spectators, but under the close scrutiny of the ICC anti-

corruption officials, the national board and the sports ministry. Last week, Sri Lanka's former fast bowling coach Nuwan Zoysa said he would appeal a decision of an ICC-appointed tribunal which found him guilty of three offences relating to match-fixing after a two-year investigation.

Cricket-crazy Sri Lanka introduced a law against corruption in sport last year after then-sports minister Harin Fernando declared that the ICC considered the Indian Ocean island the world's most corrupt cricket nation. The Sri Lankan board and the ICC has conducted anti-corruption programs for players and officials and set up a 24-hour hotline to report any "suspicious or corrupt activity."

The tournament will be Sri Lanka's first top cricket since England abruptly pulled out of a two-match Test series in March as the coronavirus pandemic spread. The start was delayed three times because of coronavirus restrictions imposed by authorities to contain the virus which has claimed 94 lives and infected nearly 21,000 people. —AFP