

India Secures Historic Cricket Victory

SYDNEY, Australia: India celebrated an historic test series victory in Australia after the weather-affected fourth match at the Sydney Cricket Ground finished in a draw.

Captain Virat Kohli's team entered the final day with hopes of a 3-1 series victory and also its first win at the SCG since 1978, but rain meant there was no play on Monday and umpires called it off early. The draw gave India a 2-1 series win.

"A very proud moment," Kohli said. "More so because for the last 12 months we understand what we have gone through as a team, we understand the kind of cricket we have been able to play. But the fact that the reward has come in the most historic series for Indian cricket is the cherry on the top of the cake."

Six hours of play was also lost on Sunday because of poor weather, but Kuldeep Yadav still had time to take his second five-wicket haul in tests as India rattled through Australia's lower order with only a late 42-run rally by Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood taking the hosts to 300 for just the second time this series.

Marcus Harris top-scored for the hosts with 79, Australia's highest individual score in the series. Leading by 322 runs, Kohli had little hesitation in enforcing the follow-on and Australia reached six without loss in its second innings _ with Harris un-



The victorious Indian cricket team with their trophy in Sydney.

beaten on two and Usman Khawaja on four _ when bad light stopped ended play on day four.

The last time Australia was required to follow-on at home was in a 1988 drawn match against England at the SCG.

"We're really disappointed," Australia captain Tim Paine said. "We know we had some guys missing but we honestly felt coming into this series that in Australia, we could beat India.

"Throughout the series, more often than not when those big moments came up, Virat (Kohli) scored a century or (Chetweshwar) Pujara scored one or (Jasprit) Bumrah bowled a great spell and got them through those

moments." India, which only needed to avoid a defeat here to clinch the series, effectively ended this match as a contest by scoring 622-7 declared over almost two full days after Kohli won the toss and batted. Man-of-the-series Pujara (193) scored his third century of the tour and Rishabh Pant made 159 not out as the India squad demonstrated it was a class above an Australian team weakened by the absence of the banned senior batsmen Steve Smith and David Warner.

Underscoring the current malaise of Australian cricket without its star players, Australian batsmen have scored only one century _ Khawaja's 141 against Paki-

stan in Dubai _ in a year, while India had five centuries in this series alone.

India won the first test at Adelaide by 31 runs and last week's Boxing Day test in Melbourne by 137 runs to retain the Border-Gavaskar trophy. Australia won the second test in Perth by 146 runs.

It was also the first time ever Australia has gone through a four-test home series without a single batsman scoring a century.

While India celebrates and travel to New Zealand for an ODI and T20 series, Australia's selectors have to consider an overhaul of the batting lineup for the two-test series against Sri Lanka in Brisbane and Canberra.

40 Killed As Afghan Gold Mine Caves In

KABUL: At least 40 people have been killed as a gold mine caved in on Sunday in northern Afghanistan, authorities said.

Ten others were injured in the incident, which happened as they searched for gold in the Kohestan district of Badakhshan province, Afghan parliament member Fawzia Koofi said in a statement, CNN reported.

Provincial official Nek Mohammad Nazari said all of the victims were mine workers.

Earlier reports quoting provincial head of Natural Disaster Management Authority Sayed Abdullah Hamayon Dehqan said several people were killed and injured as a landslide hit Kohistan district.

"The tragic incident happened around 10:30 a.m. local time in Shipo area of Kohestan district when more than 50 people were busy in illegal digging of a gold mine there and almost all of them were buried alive and so far 20 bodies and seven injured persons have been discovered," Dehqan told Xinhua.

In the insurgency-plagued Afghanistan where the central government's control is poor especially in the rural areas and countryside, illegal armed men are often involved in illegal digging of natural treasures including gold, coal and lapis lazuli.

Nepal Plans India-China Rail Link

KATHMANDU: Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli said here that the Himalayan country has been working on developing cross-border railways linking China and India in cooperation with the two neighbouring countries.

Addressing the lower house of parliament, Oli said the Nepal government was preparing to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China for preparing a Detailed Project Report (DPR) of a proposed cross-border railway connecting Chinese border town of Kerung (Geelong port) and Nepal's capital Kathmandu.

"Its pre-feasibility study has already been conducted with Chinese assistance," he said, Xinhua reported.

Officials of Nepal's Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport and the

National Railway Administration of China have held discussions on the development of the proposed project in Kathmandu during the second of week of December.

According to Oli, the Nepali government is also preparing to sign an MoU with China to conduct pre-feasibility study of two other railway lines -- one connecting Kathmandu and Pokhara, a tourism city in western Nepal and another linking Kathmandu and Lumbini, southwestern city of Nepal.

The Oli also said that Nepal has signed an MoU with India to conduct detailed study by the Konkan Railway Corporation on a cross-border railway linking Kathmandu and the Indian border town Raxual - which will include a preliminary engineering and traffic survey.

Colombo To Build Light Rail Transit

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's Cabinet of ministers has granted approval to commence work on a Light Rail Transit (LRT) project here and its surrounding areas in order to ease the traffic congestion in the populated Colombo district, the island's media has reported..

Following a proposal by Finance and Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera, the Cabinet granted approval to enter discussions with Japan International Cooperation Agency in order to obtain a loan of \$1.8 billion to begin construction of the project, Xinhua news agency reported. The construction of the project is expected to start this year and covers

a distance of 17 kilometres. Sixteen LRT stations will be constructed along the route which covers Borella, Rajagiriya, Battaramulla and Thalalena areas in the Western Province.

Dimantha De Silva, a senior lecturer at the University of Moratuwa and a Megapolis transport planner, earlier said that by 2035, Sri Lanka's forecast was 30,000 passengers per hour per direction in some transport corridors in the Colombo Metropolitan Region.

Planners have forecast that by 2035, the number of passengers in the main transport corridors with the CMR would rise from 1.9 million to 4.5 million.

Hasina Gets A Huge Cabinet

DHAKA: A 47-member new cabinet of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was announced on Sunday, Xinhua reported.

Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiqul Alam told a press conference that the cabinet included 25 ministers, including Prime Minister Hasina, 19 ministers of state and three deputy ministers.

According to the cabinet secretary, Hasina has inducted 31 new faces into her new cabinet.

Members of the next cabinet, including the prime minister, are slated to take the oath at 3:30 p.m. local time on Monday at the President's Office.

The announcement was made days after the 288 newly elected members of Bangladesh's parliament from Hasina's ruling coalition were sworn in amid an opposition boycott on Thursday.

Hasina's Awami League now forms its third five-year term government straight in a row since January 2009.

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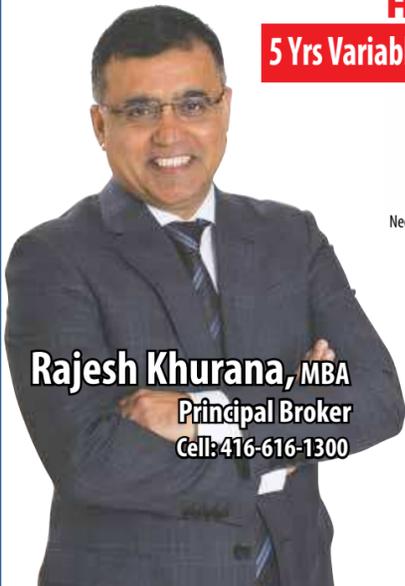
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