

Abhishek, bowlers help India thrash England

Arshdeep makes history, surpasses Chahal to become India's leading T20 wicket-taker with 97 scalps

PTI, KOLKATA: Abhishek Sharma's scintillating 34-ball 79 powered India to a comprehensive seven-wicket victory over England in the first T20I at

Eden Gardens on Wednesday. The win gives India a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

On a day when Gautam Gambhir's coaching set-up

made headlines by delaying Mohammed Shami's much-anticipated return to international cricket, India bundled out England for a paltry 132 at Eden Gardens, where the average first-innings score is around 195.

Mystery spinner Varun Chakravarty was at his devastating best, returning figures of 3/23, ably supporting left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh's record-breaking spell of 2/17.

Arshdeep not only rattled England with his precision but also etched his name in the record books, surpassing Yuzvendra Chahal (96 wickets) to become India's leading wicket-taker in T20Is with 97 scalps. Axar Patel (2/22) and Ravi Bishnoi (0/23) also added their names.

But Abhishek's clean hitting, including five fours and eight sixes, in a 20-ball half-century, took the game away from England as India cruised to the target in commanding fashion with 43 balls to spare.

England's innings relied heavily on captain Jos Buttler, who scored a composed 68 off 44 balls. Despite his efforts, the visitors failed to build partnerships as reckless shot selection and sharp Indian bowling dismantled the batting lineup. Chakravarty's dismissal of Harry Brook (17), Liam Livingstone (0), and Buttler sealed England's fate.

In the chase, Abhishek

SCOREBOARD

England: Philip Salt c Samson b Arshdeep 0, Ben Duckett c Rinku b Arshdeep 4, Jos Buttler c Reddy b Chakravarty 68, Harry Brook b Chakravarty 17, Liam Livingstone b Chakravarty 0, Jacob Bethell c Sharma b Hardik 7, Jamie Overton c Reddy b Patel 2, Gus Atkinson st Samson b Patel 2, Jofra Archer c Yadav b Hardik 12, Adil Rashid not out 8, Mark Wood run out (Samson) 1. **Extras:** 11. **Total:** 132 all out. **FOW:** 0-1, 17-2, 65-3, 65-4, 83-5, 95-6, 103-7, 109-8, 130-9, 132-10. **Bowling:** Arshdeep Singh 4-0-17-2, Hardik Pandya 4-0-42-2, Varun Chakravarty 4-0-23-3, Axar Patel 4-1-22-2, Ravi Bishnoi 4-0-22-0

India: Sanju Samson c Atkinson b Archer 26, Abhishek Sharma c Brook b Rashid 79, Suryakumar Yadav c Salt b Archer 0, Tilak Varma not out 19, Hardik Pandya not out 3.

Extras: 6. **Total:** 133 for 3. **FOW:** 41-1, 41-2, 125-3. **Bowling:** Jofra Archer 4-0-21-2, Gus Atkinson 2-0-38-0, Mark Wood 2-5-0-25-0, Adil Rashid 2-0-27-1, Jamie Overton 1-0-10-0, Liam Livingstone 1-0-7-0

Man-of-the-match: Varun Chakravarty

Sharma's breathtaking knock, laced with five fours and eight sixes, turned the target into a formality. He shared an 84-run stand with Tilak Varma (19 not out) at a strike rate of 200, guiding India home with 43 balls to spare.

Abhishek's range of strokes, including a stunning hook off Jamie Overton and an uppercut for six, highlighted his brilliance. He capitalised on a dropped chance by Adil Rashid, punishing the leg-spinner with two sixes and a four in consecutive deliveries.

Stand-in captain Suryakumar Yadav managed his bowlers expertly, rotating

them effectively despite dewy conditions. Gambhir's decision to field three spinners paid off, with the spin trio conceding just 67 runs in 12 overs and claiming five wickets. Hardik Pandya, though expensive early on, finished with figures of 2/42 and dismissed youngster Jacob Bethell (7) during a tight spell at the death.

England were bowled out on the final delivery, with Mark Wood run out for 1, marking a forgettable outing for the visitors. Despite some early aggression from Brook and Buttler, they never recovered from Chakravarty's crucial strikes after the powerplay.

Bumrah continues to top ICC Test ranking for bowlers



PTI, DUBAI: India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah continued to remain the undisputed No. 1 Test bowler, while Ravindra Jadeja maintained his top spot in the all-rounders' category, in the latest ICC rankings released on Wednesday.

Bumrah, who had made history ahead of the fifth and final Border-Gavaskar Test against Australia in January by recording the highest-ever ICC Rankings rating for an Indian bowler at 907 points, is currently on a career-best points tally of 908.

Australia's Pat Cummins (841) and South Africa's Kagiso Rabada (837) are placed second and third respectively.

Pakistan's Noman Ali (761) broke into the top-10 after an impressive six-wicket haul in the first Test against the West Indies in Multan.

There was no movement to the top-10 all-rounders list in the Test format, with Jadeja (400 ratings points) retaining the top spot, followed by South Africa's Marco Jansen (294) and Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan (263).

India will adhere to ICC's dress code at Champions Trophy: BCCI Secy Saikia

PTI, NEW DELHI: The Indian cricket team will adhere to the dress code set by the ICC during the upcoming Champions Trophy, BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia told PTI on Wednesday, rejecting speculation that the Board had objected to host Pakistan's name on the side's official jersey.

The Champions Trophy will be held from February 19 and India will play its share of matches in Dubai after citing security concerns as the reason for refusing to travel to Pakistan.

"BCCI will follow every uniform-related ICC rule during Champions Trophy," Saikia told PTI.

"Whatever the other teams will do regarding the logo and dress code, we are going to follow in true letter and spirit," he added.

However, Saikia said that whether national captain Rohit Sharma participates in the ICC's pre-tournament engagements, including a press conference and an official photo shoot in Lahore, is something that is still being discussed.

"Whether Rohit Sharma travels to Pakistan for ICC media engagements is something that's still not decided," Saikia added.

There were some unconfirmed media reports that the BCCI had objected to the host nation's name being embossed on their jersey, which is an established practice for all ICC events, owing to the tense political ties between the two countries.

It is understood that there was never any doubt about following the logo guidelines and the BCCI did not raise concerns with the

global body. When Pakistan came to India in 2023 for the 50-over ICC World Cup, Babar Azam and his men duly sported the host country's name on their jerseys as part of the tournament protocol.

The Champions Trophy is being conducted under a 'Hybrid Model' for the first time as BCCI didn't get permission from the Indian government to travel to Pakistan.

India will play all its matches, including the marquee league match against the arch-rivals from across the border, in Dubai. In case, the Indian team reaches the semi-final and subsequently final, the two matches will be played in Dubai as well.

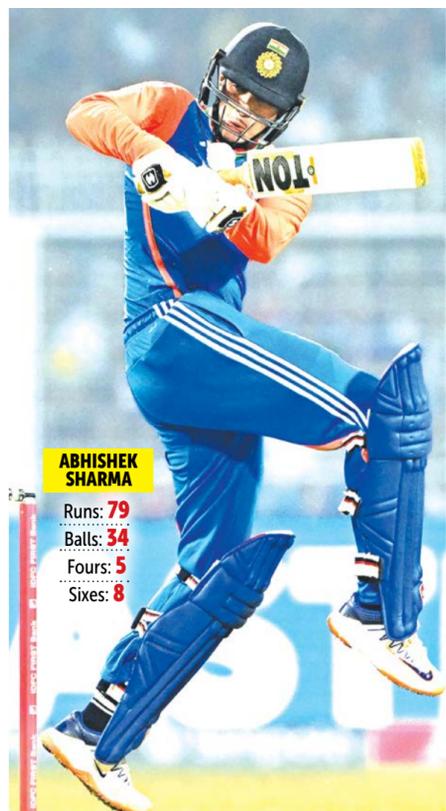
As far as Rohit Sharma visiting Pakistan is concerned, the matter is still under consideration and there are certain issues that the Indian cricket board needs to consider if its captain visits Pakistan for a customary photo-shoot and pre-event press conference.

It remains to be seen if the ICC decides to hold these events in Pakistan or shift the pre-tournament captains' engagements to the UAE.

Even that would be a massive logistical task for all other teams, which are playing in Pakistan.

The opening match of the tournament between hosts Pakistan and New Zealand will be held in Karachi on February 19.

India will start their campaign against Bangladesh a day later.



ABHISHEK SHARMA

Runs: 79
Balls: 34
Fours: 5
Sixes: 8

Big wins for England, Australia in U-19 Women's T20 World Cup

PTI, JOHOR (Malaysia): Opener Davina Perrin smashed a fine half-century and Trudy Johnson put up a fine all-round show as England crushed the United States of America (USA) by eight wickets to climb to the top of Pool B in the U-19 Women's T20 World Cup, here Wednesday.

Bangladesh, New Zealand and Australia were the other winners on the day. Bangladesh overcame Scotland by 18 runs, New Zealand defeated Samoa by 67 runs, while Australia were menacing in their 83-run win over Nepal.

England flexed their muscle by chasing down 120 in 14.2 overs with opener Perrin scoring a 45-ball 74, studded with nine boundaries and three sixes.

Johnson hit an unbeaten 44 after taking two wickets for 17 runs. Pritisha Thanawala (2/20) also contributed in restricting USA to 119/5.

USA captain Anika Kolan led the charge with the bat, shoring their

innings with an unbeaten 46 off 42 balls.

Bangladesh outlasted Scotland in Group D after managing 121/9 and then restricting the opponents to 103/8 in the allotted overs.

Captain Sumaiya Akter top-scored for Bangladesh with an unbeaten 29 off 36 deliveries. She was supported by Afia Ashima Era (21 off 19) and Juairiya Ferdous (20 off 32).

Scotland were courageous in their chase with Pippa Sproul scoring a 41-ball 43 but they couldn't get over the line.

In another match, New Zealand sealed a 67-run win against tournament newcomers Samoa.

Australia had an easy outing against Nepal, defeating the Asian side by 83 runs after scoring 139/6. Nepal could only muster 56/8 in 20 overs with Lily Bassingthwaite (2/4), Juliette Morton (2/10) and Hasrat Gill (2/9) taking two wickets each.

AB de Villiers hints at comeback, says wants to play casual cricket somewhere

PTI, JOHANNESBURG: AB de Villiers wants to play 'real cricket' again. Not in the high-pressure environment of IPL but somewhere 'casual' to have a bit of fun and please his children.

De Villiers retired from all forms of cricket in November 2021 to spend more time with his family. The 40-year-old former South Africa captain is now involved with multiple projects in charity and broadcasting.

He is also the brand ambassador of the ongoing SA20. But in a chat with Melinda Farrell on her YouTube channel, de Villiers let it slip that he wishes to play the game again.

"I might still play cricket one day. No confirmation whatsoever. My kids are putting me under a bit of pressure and I feel like I could go to the nets with them," de Villiers said referring his three children -- two sons Abraham and John, and daughter Yente.

Is this the end of the road for Chahal in Team India?

AGENCIES, MUMBAI: Yuzvendra Chahal, once a key figure in India's white-ball setup, seems to have been sidelined from the national team.

His omission from the recent ICC Champions Trophy squad, despite India selecting four spin-bowling options, has fuelled speculation about the end of his international career.

Retired Indian opener Aakash Chopra describes this decision as the 'final nail in the coffin' for Chahal's career with Team India.

This exclusion is not an isolated setback for the 34-year-old Indian wrist-spinner. Haryana also overlooked him for the Vijay Hazare Trophy, and although the Punjab Kings made him the most expensive spinner in IPL auction history, he has not represented India since January 2023.

Meanwhile, his former spin partner Kuldeep Yadav, has cemented his place in the ODI side alongside Ravindra Jadeja, with Axar Patel emerging

as a strong all-round option.

'He last played in January 2023. So it's been two years for him. His numbers are also very good. He has picked up a lot of wickets and was consistently doing well,' Chopra said on his YouTube channel, questioning why Chahal has been consistently sidelined despite his performances.

Chopra also elaborated on why Chahal's return may now be implausible. 'Because it's been two years since it (Chahal's file) has been closed, there is no place for Yuzi also here because as

soon as you suddenly pick him out of the blue, it will be seen as a regressive step.' India's selectors have clearly established Kuldeep and Jadeja as their lead spinners in ODIs, a combination that proved effective during the 2023 ODI World Cup. Axar's impressive performances, have pushed him ahead of Chahal in the pecking order.

Washington Sundar's inclusion as a fourth spinner for the Champions Trophy raised eyebrows, with some viewing his selection as a move that trumped pacer Mohammed Siraj rather than directly competing with Chahal.



Sinner races into semis as Swiatek closes on first Melbourne crown



Iga Swiatek

AFP, MELBOURNE: Defending champion Jannik Sinner raced into the Australian Open semi-finals on Wednesday in imperious fashion after Iga Swiatek was equally ruthless to close on a first Melbourne crown.

Italian world number one Sinner swept aside an out-classed home hope Alex de Minaur 6-3, 6-2, 6-1 to silence Rod Laver Arena and set up a meeting with 21st seed Ben Shelton.

The other semi-final is between 10-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic and world number two Alexander Zverev, with both taking place on Friday.

Sinner had dizzy spells in the scorching heat of the afternoon during his four-set win against

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Holger Rune on Monday.

But in much cooler evening conditions the 23-year-old was back to his brilliant best against eighth seed De Minaur, who has still never beaten Sinner in 10 matches.

SEMI-FINAL LINE-UPS

MEN'S SINGLES
Novak Djokovic vs Alexander Zverev; Jannik Sinner vs Ben Shelton

WOMEN'S SINGLES
Aryna Sabalenka vs Paula Badosa; Madison Keys vs Iga Swiatek

Sinner is bidding to defend a Grand Slam title for the first time after beating Daniil Medvedev in the final last year. He also won the US Open last year.

The 22-year-old American Shelton booked his place in the semi-finals in Melbourne for the first time with a battling 6-4, 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4) win over unseeded Italian Lorenzo Sonego.

Left-hander Shelton put in

an all-action display to match his best performance at a major, having reached the US Open semi-finals in 2023.

Shelton unleashed the joint-fastest serve of the tournament, a monster ace clocked at 232kph (144mph), and afterwards turned his fire on the post-match televised interviews that the winners do on court.

Five-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek edged closer to a first Australian Open crown with an emphatic 6-1, 6-2 victory over American eighth seed Emma Navarro on a gusty Rod Laver Arena.

The 23-year-old world number two, who is building up a head of steam, plays American 19th seed Madison Keys in the women's semi-finals, which both take place on Thursday.

Two-time defending champion and top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka plays Spain's 11th seed Paula Badosa for the other final berth.



Jannik Sinner

Crasto-Kapila enter mixed doubles second round

PTI, JAKARTA: Young Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila started their mixed doubles campaign at the USD 75,000 Indonesia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament on a bright note, progressing to the second round with a straight-game win over their rivals, here, on Wednesday.

Crasto and Kapila defeated the Indonesian combination of Adnan Maulana and Indah Cahya Sari Jamil 21-18 21-14 in their opener to set up a clash against Malaysia's Pang Ron Hoo and Su Yin Cheng next.

On Tuesday, Crasto also entered the second round of the women's doubles partnering seasoned Ashwini Ponnappa. The pair defeated Thailand's Ornnicha Jong-sathapornpan and Sukitta Suwachai 21-6 21-14 and will next meet Malaysia's Pei Kee Go and Mei Xing Teoh.

The other Indian mixed doubles pair of Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde, however, bowed out in the first round, losing 9-21 13-21 against England's Gregory Mairs and Jenny Mairs.

The start to the day was far from rosy for India as both 2023 Odisha Masters runner-up Ayush Shetty and Kiran George lost their men's singles opening-round matches.

Shetty gave a tough fight to world

INDONESIA MASTERS

No.1 and twin Asian Games gold medallist Shi Yu Qi of China before going down 19-21 19-21, while Kiran George lost 12-21 10-21 against Jeon Hyeok-jin of Korea.

Later in the day, Lakshya Sen will be up against Takuma Obayashi of Japan, while Priyanshu Rajawat will play another Japanese in Kodai Naraoka.

It was not a good start for India in women's singles too as Rakshitha Sree Santhosh Ramraj lost 17-21 19-21 against Japanese Tomoka Miyazaki in the opening round, while Tanya Hemant bowed out 14-21 11-21 to Thailand's Ratchanon Intanon.

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu will open her campaign against Vietnam's Thuy Linh Nguyen later in the evening.

Star Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty sailed into the second round with a clinical 21-16 21-15 win against Chinese Taipei's Chen Zhi Ray and Lin Yu Chieh.

The Asian Games champions, who reached back-to-back semi-finals at Malaysia Super 1000 and India Super 750 in the last two weeks, will face the Thai combination of Kittinupong Kedren and Dechapol Puavaranukroh next.