

IPL set for March 22 start

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The much-anticipated Indian Premier League is set to begin on March 22 and will be held entirely in the country despite the coinciding general elections, league chairman Arun Dhimal told PTI on Tuesday.

The elections are expected to be held in April and May and that is the main reason why the schedule for the IPL's 17th edition has not been unveiled yet. Speaking to PTI, Dhimal said to begin with, only the schedule of the first 15 days will be announced and the roster for the remaining games will be decided after the announcement of the general election dates.

The dates of the Lok Sabha polls are expected to be announced early next month. "We are looking at a March 22 start for the tournament. We are working closely with the government agencies and we will first release the initial schedule. The entire tournament will be held in India," said Dhimal.



Only in 2009, the IPL, in its entirety, was held overseas (South Africa) while the 2014 edition was partially held in the UAE due to the general elections. However, in 2019, the tournament was held in India despite the elections.

Considering the T20 World Cup begins within days of the cash-rich league's conclusion, the final is likely to be held on May 26.

India will play their opening World Cup fixture against Ireland in New York on June 5 while the ICC showpiece begins with the USA and Canada clash on June 1.

As is the norm, the IPL opener will be played between the last year's finalists, the winners Chennai Super Kings in this case and runners-up Gujarat Titans.

The players' auction for the 2024 season was held in December last year and Australian pacer Mitchell Starc became the most expensive player in the history of the league after being bought by Kolkata Knight Riders for Rs 24.75 crore.



England captain mulls bowling against India

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Back-to-back heavy defeats against India have compelled England captain Ben Stokes to consider an early return to bowling with head coach Brendon McCullum admitting that although it's a good sign, they don't want the all-rounder to push himself unnecessarily. Stokes, who is still recovering from a knee surgery, hasn't bowled since the second Ashes Test in June last year. "Well, it's good that he's actually getting into a state where he thinks he might bowl," McCullum was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo on Monday.

"But Ben is clever; he's really clever as well. He won't bowl unless he thinks he's legitimately able to bowl. The problem would be if he starts getting into a spell and then he can't get out of the spell. So we'll see what unfolds. "If he does get that bit between his teeth, then let's see where the danger lies there and try and pull him away from it. But it's a good sign," McCullum added. Ahead of the Rajkot Test, Stokes had said he "pinkly promised" his physiotherapist he won't be bowling in the ongoing series. But when asked if he will be reprising his all-rounder's role after the 434-run defeat in the third Test on Sunday, Stokes said, "I'm not saying yes, I'm not saying no."

"Me being me, I'm always

very optimistic about most things. That will be a more detailed chat with the medical team about what workload I have done to pass me off as not being a massive risk."

During the Rajkot Test, Stokes had even trained at 100 per cent intensity and conceded that he felt pretty good. "I managed to bowl at 100 per cent in one of the warm-up days here which made me feel pretty good. I felt like I could have bowled in the game but that would have been stupid."

After winning the series opener by 28 runs, England fell to a 106-run defeat followed by one of their worst losses in Rajkot to go 2-1 down in the series with matches left in Ranchi and Dharamsala.

The England team would benefit immensely if the pace all-rounder started bowling again. The visitors opted to field just one seamer in the first two Tests. They dropped Shoaib Bashir to pick both James Anderson and Mark Wood in the third game. England's "Bazball" approach has also backfired big time in the third Test which they lost by a massive 434 runs, their largest defeat in terms of runs since 1934.

But McCullum said while the defeat is definitely hurting the visitors, they will continue with their attacking 'Bazball' approach in the remainder of the five-match series.

I have worked really hard to reach this level: Ashutosh

PTI ■ MOHALI



IPL side Punjab Kings' new pick Ashutosh Sharma says he wants to make an impact with the bat for his franchise if he gets the opportunity, given that he has worked really hard — even punished himself — to reach this stage of his cricketing career.

Ashutosh, who has so far played four first-class games for Madhya Pradesh and scored a century, was picked up by the Punjab franchise for ₹20 lakh ahead of the upcoming IPL.

During his days of struggle, Ashutosh, who hails from Ratlam in Madhya Pradesh, even started umpiring so that he could afford lunch.

"When I left home, I did not have enough money. I used to go to a camp and I started umpiring in matches to afford lunch. We were a family of limited means, and it was hard to do everything on my own so early. But I never let it affect my family about my struggles as I did not want them to worry," he said.

Ashutosh began his cricketing journey at a young age but due to lack of opportunities in Ratlam, he moved to Indore when he was just eight years old and started to train at the Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association's residential academy.

Such was his determination to excel that the youngster even punished himself by doing household chores if he hit a rough patch while playing U-19 cricket.

He felt the "punishment" would bring discipline in his life and remind him of the "sacrifices" he had made to reach this level.

"After doing so (household chores) for a month, I scored a hundred," he said.

Last year, during the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy tie against Arunachal Pradesh, the right-handed batter smashed an 11-ball fifty, breaking Yuvraj Singh's record for the fastest half-century in the shortest format.

was one of the most memorable moments of my career, along with getting picked for Punjab Kings," Ashutosh said. Now with an IPL contract in hand, Ashutosh wants to excel in the lucrative league and help the franchise win its maiden title.

"I want to express myself. I have worked so hard to reach here. I will work even harder now so I can help Punjab Kings win their first trophy," the right-handed batter said. Recalling the day of the auction, Ashutosh said the atmosphere in his house was tense and the moment he was picked in the "acceleration round," he immediately switched off the TV set and went into a celebration mode. "Even though I was confident I would be picked, I was unable to sit in one place and completely skipped lunch. I stayed up with my friends till 5 am. My phone kept ringing and eventually stopped working.

"Our relatives and family brought crackers and sweets. It was a great atmosphere. I called my coach and told him that the hard work has paid off," he said.

Ashutosh is happy that he can now train with his childhood hero and former India cricketer Sanjay Bangar, who is the head of cricket development at PBKS. "He (Bangar) was delighted when I showed my 12-year-old selfie alongside him," said Ashutosh, of the picture taken when Bangar was a part of the now-defunct Kochi franchise over a decade-and-a-half back when he was a ball boy.

Chappell urges Root to play his natural game

PTI ■ MELBOURNE



Former Australia captain Ian Chappell has urged out-of-form England batter Joe Root to shun the 'Bazball' approach and get back to playing his natural game. Senior batter Root has struggled for runs in the ongoing five-match series against India, registering a set of low scores across six innings.

Keeping up with England's aggressive Bazball approach, Root has mostly lost his wicket playing outlandish shots in India.

"Root had a bloody fine record playing normally, and he was a quick scorer playing normally," Chappell told 'Wide World of Sports', describing Bazball as "bullshit".

"I don't see why he's trying to change things drastically, and

I've never believed you should play premeditated shots," Chappell added.

Root, who has over 11,000 Tests runs, copped up a lot of criticism for his dismissal in England's first innings in the third Test, as he attempted to reverse sweep Jasprit Bumrah but only ended up edging to slip.



His dismissal led to a batting collapse. England were 224/2 when Root got out. The tourists then lost eight wickets for 95 runs to be bowled out for 319, handing India a 126-run first-innings lead.

England eventually lost the Test by a mammoth 434 runs, their largest defeat in terms of runs since 1934.

Chappell argued that while a top-order batter must look to score aggressively, the players must adjust according to the match situation.

"You can't always do it -- it's got to be according to the conditions and also who's bowling," he said. Bumrah has dismissed Root on nine occasions in Test cricket now.

"Some bowlers you can score off a lot quicker than others, but when a really good bowler is bowling a good spell, you've got to be prepared to try and battle it out and think to yourself 'Well, when he goes off, it'll get a bit easier'."

"You're always trying to score runs -- that's got to be your prime aim. But, you've also got to realise in some conditions, against some bowlers you can score quicker than others."

Jaiswal has learned from his upbringing and not from Bazball, says Nasser

PTI ■ LONDON



Former captain Nasser Hussain has lashed out at Ben Duckett for suggesting that Yashasvi Jaiswal's aggressive batting in the Rajkot Test was influenced by England's 'Bazball' strategy, saying it is the visitors who need to learn from the young Indian sensation. At the end of the third day's play in Rajkot, Duckett had praised Jaiswal for his attacking century and suggested that the current England team should receive credit for influencing teams to bat more aggressively in Tests.

England eventually went on to lose the match by a record margin of 434 runs to concede a 1-2 lead to India in the five-match series.

Reacting to Duckett's remark, Hussain said, "His (Duckett's) comment on Jaiswal that he has learned from us, I am going to touch on that. He (Jaiswal) has not learned from you (Duckett), he has learned from his upbringing and all

the hard yards he has put in while growing up, he has learned from the IPL.

"If anything, I would look at him and learn from him," Hussain said during a discussion with another former England captain Michael Atherton on Sky Sports.

Hussain urged the England players to do some self-introspection and make necessary adjustments ahead of the fourth Test in Ranchi. "Whatever they are saying in public and in that dressing

room, I hope they are going back to their rooms, do a little bit of self-introspection game, like 'I can look back and learn and make improvement'."

"Otherwise, it becomes a cult, doesn't it? At times, Bazball in this regime has been described as a cult where you cannot criticise either within or externally. Even in this regime, there is room for learning and improving," Hussain said.

"I can go back to the Ashes series, and I reckon they (England) changed (strategy)."

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant remains on course for a much-anticipated comeback in the IPL after taking part in a practice game organised by his franchise Delhi Capitals in Alur, Karnataka.

Pant, who met with a horrific car accident in December 2022, has been undergoing rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy and is working hard to regain match fitness before the start of the

IPL in the second half of March. The southpaw had also featured in an exhibition game last year.

"The match was part of assessing his mobility basically. He has been batting at nets for a while and playing in a practice game was more like an extension of it," said a NCA source referring to the intra-squad game in Alur near Bengaluru.

Earlier this month, Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting had given a major

update on Pant, saying the game changing cricketer was confident about his return in the IPL.

However, Pant may not be ready for wicketkeeping duties in the competition, as suggested by Ponting at an event in Melbourne. "Rishabh is very confident that he's going to be right to play. In what capacity we're not quite sure yet," Ponting had said.

"You would have seen all the social-media stuff, he's up and about and running well.

Final round of Santosh Trophy to begin with match between Meghalaya and Services

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

The final rounds of 77th National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy 2023-24 will begin with a match between Meghalaya and Services here on Wednesday.

A total of 12 teams will compete in the final rounds of the Santosh Trophy, which is being held in Arunachal Pradesh for the first time. While hosts Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Goa, Assam, Services and Kerala are clubbed in Group A, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi, Manipur, Mizoram

and Railways are placed in Group B. The tournament will take place in Yupia, Itanagar from February 21 till March 9.

The final four stage of the nation's premier state tournament last year was held in Saudi Arabia where Karnataka won the title after 54 years. A total of 37 matches will be played due to the expansion of the knockout stage. The top four teams from each group will progress to the quarter-finals. The ongoing I-League 2 season has taken a break to allow players to represent their states in the Santosh

Trophy.

In other matches on the opening day, Assam will take on Kerala while Goa will play hosts Arunachal Pradesh.

"The importance of the Santosh Trophy cannot be stressed enough as it gives young players the chance to shine. Clubs can identify and unearth talent. It's great to see the tournament spread to new places, and I can't wait to come to Arunachal Pradesh and witness the excitement," AIFF Technical Committee chairperson IM Vijayan said.

While head coach Khilan Pyrkhat Syiemlieh will miss a few key names who are part

of Shillong Lajong squad in the I-League, Meghalaya still have a bunch of players from last year's team like Sheen Stevenson Sohtkung, Dawanchwa Carlos Challam, Damolang Pathaw and Brolington Warlarpih.

The group also contains strong sides like Goa and Kerala. Goa have one of the most experienced squads in the final round, with most of their players coming from I-League 2 sides Sporting Clube de Goa and Dempo SC.

Services and Assam will also hope to make it to the knockouts.



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Place : Jaipur Date : 21-02-2024

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