

## Messi demands calm after chaotic 2 months for Barcelona

Press Trust Of India

**BARCELONA** : Barcelona has been hit recently by a series of setbacks on the field and conflicts inside the club. And Lionel Messi has had enough of it.

"We have only had problem after problem since January. What we need is some calm and to think about soccer, to think about the games, and to try to improve," Messi told Spanish sports daily Mundo Deportivo in an interview on Thursday.

"At least we need to isolate ourselves (from the noise) because, if not, there are going to be complicated months ahead. ... We must be patient and hopefully we can turn this around." Since the start of the year, Barcelona has lost the Spanish Super Cup, been eliminated from the Copa del Rey, and ceded the lead in the Spanish league to Real Madrid.

The run of poor results has not been stemmed by a coaching change. Quique Setién replaced Ernesto Valverde and so

said Thursday he should't have talked publicly about the team's problems.

"I've learned that internal issues need to be resolved within the club, not in the media," the former player said.

Then came the oddest of all the Barcelona maladies when earlier this week the club severed its contract with an Internet services company that made negative comments on social media about people within the club. Reports by Spanish radio Cadena SER said those online comments included Messi, fellow player Gerard Piqué, as well as former coach Pep Guardiola. Messi said that he was still not sure what had happened.

"The truth is that I find it strange that something like that could happen," the Argentine said. "But they (Cadena SER) also said there was evidence. We will have to wait to see if it is true or not." Barcelona President Josep Bartomeu said Thursday an investigation remains open and the club will publicly talk about



far the team has struggled to adapt to the physical demands of his high-pressure playing style.

Injuries have also played their part. Striker Luis Suárez is out for several weeks and winger Ousmane Dembélé for the rest of the season, forcing the club to make the curious signing of Denmark forward Martin Braithwaite to give it fit bodies in a depleted attack.

But the rest of the chaos has been created by the club.

Messi himself has been embroiled in a public spat with sports director — and former teammate — Eric Abidal, who has accused some players of not playing hard for Valverde. Messi responded on social media by demanding that Abidal name names and to take full responsibility for the firing of Valverde.

Two weeks later, Messi maintained his position that he had felt "attacked" by Abidal as a member of Barcelona's squad and its captain.

"It bothered me that a club official, a sports director, had put the squad in middle of the firing of coach. That seemed crazy to me," Messi said. "He takes the decisions. That's why I decided to clarify things. I knew that I couldn't let the sports director attack me like that." Abidal

the results when it's completed.

"We are working internally and analyzing everything," he said. "When we have anything else to say, we will let everybody know." Messi made the call for his club to put its house in order ahead of an important stretch of matches for the defending league champions. After hosting Eibar on Saturday, Barcelona travels to Italy to face Napoli in the Champions League on Tuesday. It will then visit Real Madrid on March 1 in a "clásico" that could determine who leads the league.

Messi, however, also sent a message to Barcelona's fans that he has no plans to abandon the club that has been his home since he was 13 years old.

"I have said many times that my plan (is to finish my career at Barcelona) and as long as the club and our fans want the same thing there will never be a problem," Messi said. "I have also said many times that I would like to be here and for all of us, the club, and our fans to be happy with the team we have and for us to be winners." The 32-year-old Messi is Barcelona's all-time leading scorer with 622 goals. He has helped it win more than 30 trophies, including four Champions Leagues and 10 Spanish league titles.



INDIA VS NEW ZEALAND 1ST TEST

## Rain n' Ruins: INDIAN BATSMEN FALTER ON CHALLENGING TRACK

Press Trust Of India

**WELLINGTON** : India's top-order batsmen performed woefully on a challenging track as the side crawled to 122 for 5 with New Zealand's towering pacer Kyle Jamieson rattling the visiting big guns on his debut on a rain-hit opening day of the first Test here.

Friday's play was called off after tea due to a heavy downpour, the gloomy conditions typifying India's batting blues with only Ajinkya Rahane (38 batting off 122 balls) matching wares when it came to winning the mental battle.

The 6'8" Jamieson could not have asked for a better start, picking up 3 for 38 in 14 overs and his prized scalps included two of India's best long-form batsmen — skipper Virat Kohli (2) and the dogged Cheteshwar Pujara (14 off 42 balls).

He also took a lovely catch in the deep to cap off a day he will remember forever.

What Jamieson did wonderfully well was mix up the back of the length stuff with fuller deliveries in between.

He bowled the natural back of the length deliveries that climbed on the batsmen, pegging them on backfoot.

He also mixed it up with fuller deliveries when the batsmen were just a tad unsure of their footwork.

Bowling at barely 130 kmph, he troubled the visitors making it easier for senior pros Tim Southee (1/27 in 14 overs) and Trent Boult (1/44 in 14 overs) to bowl a more probing line.

"The last couple of weeks has been pretty surreal. Pretty pleased and from a team perspective we're in a pretty good position as well," said Jamieson

at the end of the day's play.

Such was the disciplined effort from the Black Caps bowlers that India managed only 43 runs in the second session.

Rahane played 122 balls, hitting four boundaries on a heavy outfield. Rishabh Pant was at the other end on 10.

Mayank Agarwal (34 off 84 balls), who did the hard work of surviving the first session, was out after lunch as he tried a pull shot off Boult just after surviving a tough caught and bowled chance. "As a batsman, it's not easy, especially first day, on this track. I thought they bowled good areas and they kept testing us. They didn't give us anything loose," Agarwal, who was the only other batsman who looked a bit comfortable said.

"As a batsman, you never felt that you were completely in because even after lunch, it was

doing a little bit," he added.

Hanuma Vihari (7) was Jamieson's third victim when he edged a pitched up delivery.

"With my height, I can afford to go a fraction fuller, especially out here with the extra bounce. I try to make guys commit to play off the front foot...and if it does swing or seam you have a chance of bringing the edge in," Jamieson revealed his simple gameplan.

Once Kane Williamson called it right under the overcast conditions, it was a challenge for the Indian batsmen.

Young Prithvi Shaw's loose technique and tendency to close the bat face was always going to cost him.

Southee bowled one that looked like angling in and Shaw closed the bat face as the ball moved a shade away after

pitching, brushing his pad and then the off-stump.

Pujara was ready to show a lot of patience as he started leaving deliveries outside the off-stump.

However, Jamieson, coming in as the second change, bowled his back of length delivery on the off-middle channel and he had no option but to jab at the rising delivery which kissed the outside edge of his bat and was taken by BJ Watling.

Kohli was playing Jamieson for the disconcerting bounce that he generated from back of the length but in between, the bowler decided to slip one fuller delivery on the fourth stump channel.

Kohli lunged into the drive and the thick edge was taken by the '100 Test man' Ross Taylor, standing at the first slip compounding India's troubles.

## PM Modi to launch first ever Khelo India University Games

Press Trust Of India

**CUTTACK** : Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the first-ever Khelo India University Games at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium here on Saturday. The Prime Minister will launch the multi-disciplinary sporting event through a video conference facility.

As many as 3400 athletes from 159 universities across the country will vie for top honours across 17 disciplines, including rugby which is among the six team events.

Ace sprinter Dutee Chand, who is a student of KIIT, the host university, is excited to be part of the event.

"I may make the grade on the strength of my world ranking (currently no. 54 in 100m and no. 43 in 200m) but I really want to make it to the Olympic Games by achieving the qualification standard," she said.

There are other talented athletes like Mangalore University's triple jumper Jay Shah, his team-mate long distance runner Narendra Pratap Singh, Pune University's long distance runner Komal Jagdale and Acharya Nagarjuna University's



sprinter Yarraji Jothy, who can lift the quality of competition in track and field sport.

## TAYLOR becomes first player to play 100 matches in all three formats

Press Trust Of India

**WELLINGTON** : Veteran New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor on Friday made history when he took the field against India in the opening Test here as he became the first player to play 100 matches in all three formats of the game.

The ongoing match at the Basin Reserve is his 100th Test.

Taylor was presented his 100th Test cap by former New Zealand wicketkeeper Ian Smith before the match.

"Really excited about the occasion. It's very nice for the team and the family to experience something they might never do again," he said.

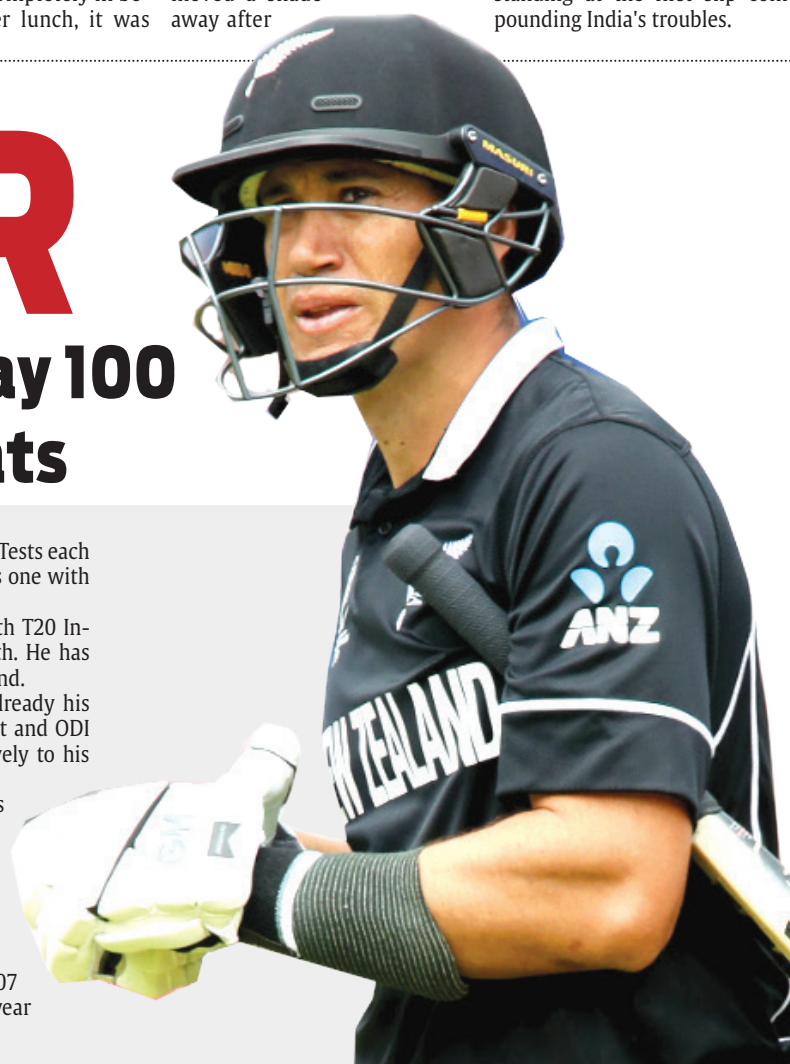
"I'll need some help drinking (the hundred bottles of wine), but they can be stored for a while. It keeps the tradition from Fleming, Brendon (McCullum) and Dan (Daniel Vettori) who all played over a hundred Tests each and hopefully we can celebrate this one with a win."

The 35-year-old played his 100th T20 International against India last month. He has also played 231 ODIs for New Zealand.

The right-handed batsman is already his country's leading run-scorer in Test and ODI with 7174 and 8570 runs respectively to his name.

In T20 Internationals, he has scored 1909 runs and former captain Brendon McCullum (2140 from 71 matches) and opener Martin Guptill (2536 from 88 matches) are the only two Kiwi players above him on the list.

Taylor made his Test debut in 2007 and played his first ODI match a year earlier.



## Asian Wrestling C'ships: Vinesh defeated by nemesis Mukaida, Sakshi in hunt for gold

Press Trust Of India

**NEW DELHI** : Vinesh Phogat yet again fell to Japanese nemesis Mayu Mukaida to go out of the gold medal race but Sakshi Malik will fight for the title after winning her semifinal bout at the Asian Wrestling championship, here on Friday.

Vinesh had lost twice to Mukaida in 2019 at World Championship and Asian Championships and the trend continued as the gritty Indian yet again struggled to break the strong defence of the Japanese.

In a tough opening round, Vinesh tried single leg attacks a number of times but every time

Mukaida blocked her move and eventually got the upper body lock to subdue the home favourite.

In her last two meetings, Vinesh had not scored a single point against the 2019 world silver medallist. She managed a takedown this time before eventually losing 2-6.



The hard-working Vinesh will now fight for bronze against Vietnam's Thi Ly Kieu but even a medal won't suffice to lift her mood as she and the fans have high expectations from her. Rio Olympic bronze medallist Sakshi Malik, who has been struggling of late, lost her opening round 1-2 to

Naomi Ruike from Japan but later overcame two weak opponents to eventually reach the final of the non-Olympic 65kg category.

She could hardly attack Naomi but outplayed Korea's Ohyoung Ha in the next round, winning by technical superiority.

In her semifinal against Uzbekistan's Nabira Esenbaeva, Sakshi led 5-0 but her rival pulled off consecutive two-point moves to make it 5-4.

Sakshi has been losing in closing stages of late but this time she managed to hold on to her narrow lead, surviving anxious last two seconds.