

'Huge mess': Electric fans used in bid to save Afghanistan-NZ Test

AFP – Ground staff used electric fans in an increasingly desperate bid to dry out the pitch with the Test between Afghanistan and New Zealand stalled for a second day Tuesday and one cricket official calling it “a huge mess”.

The one-off Test at Afghanistan's adopted home near New Delhi was supposed to start on Monday but the toss is yet to take place because of rain and the poor condition of the Greater Noida ground.

On Tuesday groundsmen dragged out tarpaulin to cover areas of the pitch in anticipation of more rain, while others held electric fans over some of the worst wet patches.

Ground staff also dug up a wet patch – in the cover-point and mid-wicket region – and were filling it with dry soil and fresh turf.

Umpires are due to hold another inspection at 3:00 pm (0930 GMT) to assess a possible start time at a venue which is hosting its first Test and where drainage is basic.

The Times of India newspaper called the ground “ill-equipped”.

Despite sunshine on Tuesday the outfield remains soaked after days of monsoon rain, and chances of play appeared slim for a second successive day.

On Monday, the New Zealand players threw rugby balls around as they waited for play, but the teams spent the morning on Tuesday marooned at their hotels.

Afghanistan have hosted several T20 and one-day internationals

since 2017 at the venue.

'Huge mess'

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has offered Afghanistan venues to train and host matches at outside their troubled nation, including in the northern Indian cities of Lucknow and Dehradun.

Lucknow and Dehradun were preferred options for this Test by Afghanistan, but those grounds were busy with local leagues.

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The press box at Greater Noida was initially an open-sided tent with a rug and chairs, without internet or power, but were shifted after complaints.

Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) officials have been cautious about criticism, fearing it could spoil relations with the BCCI, but said they were disappointed.

“This is a huge mess. We are never coming back here,” an ACB official was quoted as saying by Indian media.

It is only Afghanistan’s 10th Test match.

There has been no public reaction from Tim Southee’s New Zealand side, who will next travel to Sri Lanka for two Tests before returning for three more against India.