

National tennis from tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER The Phillips national tennis tournament will begin at the National Tennis Complex at Ramna tomorrow.

Ilias and Harun pair from Chittagong Customs Club were made top seeds in the veteran's under-50 doubles event.

Interested players have been requested to register their names in other events today.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman is expected to inaugurate the meet.

Arjuna against Peace!

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's former World Cup-winning captain Arjuna Ranatunga Wednesday announced he would join a march organised by ultra nationalists to protest the island's peace process with Tamil Tiger rebels.

Ranatunga, 39, said he was supporting the newly-formed "Patriotic National Movement" and participating in its five-day march starting Saturday from the central hill resort of Kandy.

"I am here because I stand for what I believe in... I want to make my contribution to protect the country," said Ranatunga, who is a legislator from President Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA).

The marchers are to cover 72 miles (112 kilometres) and make their way to the capital Colombo for a rally opposing the Norwegian-backed peace process which is aimed at ending ethnic bloodshed that has claimed over 60,000 lives since 1972.

The Patriotic National Movement (PNM) argues the peace initiative is damaging the country by opening the floodgates to foreigners to exploit the island's meagre natural resources.

The PNM is joined by the main Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front, which is opposed to the peace process.

The JVP and President Kumaratunga's PA tried but failed to enter into a grand alliance this month following differences in their approach to the peace process and devolution of power.

ICC critical

FROM PAGE 13 before the initial decision not to tour was taken.

"This meant that both the ICC and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) were not given the opportunity to provide relevant information to the UCB as it considered its position."

Mani said one solution could be to introduce a standard protocol for similar situations whereby the touring country would be obliged to consult with the ICC and the host country before reaching a decision.

"In that way every country would retain its right to determine where and when its team plays but it would also ensure that all parties affected by its decisions would be able to have their views considered and discussed," Mani said.

But the president praised the way that the PCB and UCB had worked together to revive the tour.

"Since the decision not to proceed with the tour was first announced the ICC, the PCB and the UCB have been in constant discussions," said Mani.

"I am very pleased that through this process the PCB and the UCB have reached this in principle agreement."

The new tour, from October 1-28, is expected to consist of two Tests and five one-dayers.



Captain Saurav Ganguly holds a World Cup bat signed by the Indian team members during an auction in Kolkata yesterday. The event was organised to raise funds for a government-run children's hospital in the city.

Up against the unknown

Cricket

AFP, Visakhapatnam

New Zealand's cricketers are being drilled in the sights and sounds of India as they prepare to challenge for their maiden Test series victory in the country.

"The fear is the unknown," said New Zealand's in-charge coach Ashley Ross ahead of three-day tour opener against the Indian Board President's XI team here on Friday.

"A lot of our preparation has been geared towards diminishing the unknown. If you know yourself and the enemy, then you need not fear a thousand battles."

Stephen Fleming's Black Caps will play two Test matches and a triangular one-day series also involving world champions Australia during the seven-week tour.

Ross, deputing as coach till John Bracewell takes over in November, arrived with computer analyst Zach Hitchcock a week ahead of the rest of the squad to observe the Indian stars in action in an important domestic match.

The duo braved the heat and

humidity of Madras for five days to watch Saurav Ganguly's Rest of India team defeat reigning Ranji Trophy champions Mumbai, led by Sachin Tendulkar, by three wickets in the Irani Cup match.

"We were concentrating on checking whether players can cope with the kind of conditions you can expect in India," Ross said. "We saw a few things that we liked."

"It was a public game and I suppose we could have turned up anyway. Really, there are no secrets now. Everyone knows each other and how they play. In the end I suppose it improves the standard of cricket that we play."

"We have information on all our opposition over the last four or five years. That puts us in a great position to give Fleming information about field settings, where to bowl and that sort of thing."

Ross revealed the team had trained in Australia and at home in conditions simulated to meet the requirements in India.

"In Christchurch and Brisbane, we played on wickets that were specifically prepared to mirror Indian conditions and the heat as well."

New Zealand have won just two of

'A draw will suffice'

Cricket

AFP, Perth

Simply achieving a draw against world champions Australia in October's two-Test series would be a significant triumph, Zimbabwe skipper Heath Streak said here Wednesday.

"Obviously, you never walk on the park without the expectation of trying to win that's the prime objective," he said after Zimbabwe's arrival here to prepare for Tests in Perth and Sydney.

"But I think for us, to be realistic, if we can set our goals to walk away with a draw it would be a huge achievement."

"If we have the opportunity to win, obviously we are going to go for it, but that's the way I look at it."

"I believe it is going to be a huge learning curve for a lot of us on this tour. If we can take some big positives out of this tour, Zimbabwe cricket will be the better for it."

"Hopefully, we can come back in a couple of years' time as a more experienced side and one that can maybe play in a three-Test series."

Streak, who leads one of the least experienced sides fielded by Zimbabwe, said he was sure the team's fighting spirit would pull them through their first Test tour of Australia.

"We have always tended to lift when we play the top sides, so hopefully we can do that again," he said.

"We enjoy being the underdogs, but the guys do not enjoy losing, so they don't want to be embarrassed they will be going out there and giving it their best during this series."

It was frustrating that Zimbabwe would be without the Flower brothers, Andy and Grant, and other quality

players, Streak said. Andy Flower has quit Zimbabwe after his controversial protest during this year's World Cup against his Government's human rights record.

Grant, the side's most accomplished remaining batsman, has been ruled out of the current tour with a broken thumb a setback Zimbabwe coach Geoff Marsh described as "a huge blow".

Murray Goodwin, who now plays in Australia with Western Australia as well as in the English county Championship was not chosen for the tour because of past differences with the Zimbabwe management.

"It's pointless looking behind," Streak said. "We always have to look to the future."

"I know the International Cricket Council (ICC) are working towards improving things, so that countries like Zimbabwe don't lag too far behind in the Tests."



HEATH STREAK

FIFA rankings No catching Brazil

AFP, Paris

World champions Brazil remained top of the FIFA rankings released Wednesday narrowly ahead of European champions France.

The Czech Republic's big win over the Netherlands in the Euro 2004 qualifiers catapulted them into the top 10 level with Germany, while Argentina and England are both up two slots to fourth and sixth respectively.

FIFA World rankings (position changes in brackets):-

Table with 3 columns: Rank, Country, Points. Brazil 855 pts, France 829, Spain 767, Argentina 750 (+2), Mexico 746 (-1), England 745 (+2), Netherlands 744 (-3), Turkey 743 (-1), Czech Republic 736 (+3), Germany 736, United States 731 (-2), Italy 726 (-1), Cameroon 710, Ireland 708 (-1), Denmark 708, Belgium 692 (+2), Portugal 687 (-1), Sweden 684 (+2), Costa Rica 681 (-2), Romania 663 (-1).

Navy soccer

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts BNS Issa Khan handed Khulna Squadron a 5-1 thrashing in the opening match of the annual football championship of Bangla-desh Navy at the Area Sports Complex in Chittagong yesterday.

The other match between BNS Haji Mohsin and BNS Shaheed Moazzam ended 2-2.

Eight teams are taking part in the six-day competition.

Pakistan beat India

FROM PAGE 13 and keeper Devesh off guard. Sohail Abbas confirmed Pakistan's win by converting a penalty corner in the 68th minute.

In another match South Korea finally found their form to trounce Japan 6-0.

Seo Jong Ho and Kim Kyung Seok scored two goals each and You Hyo Sik and Lee Jung Seon took one each.

South Korea topped Group A and will now face India while Pakistan, who top Group B, will play Japan in Friday's semifinals.

Earlier Wednesday, Malaysia continued their dismal run in the Asia Cup when they struggled to defeat Hong Kong 2-1.

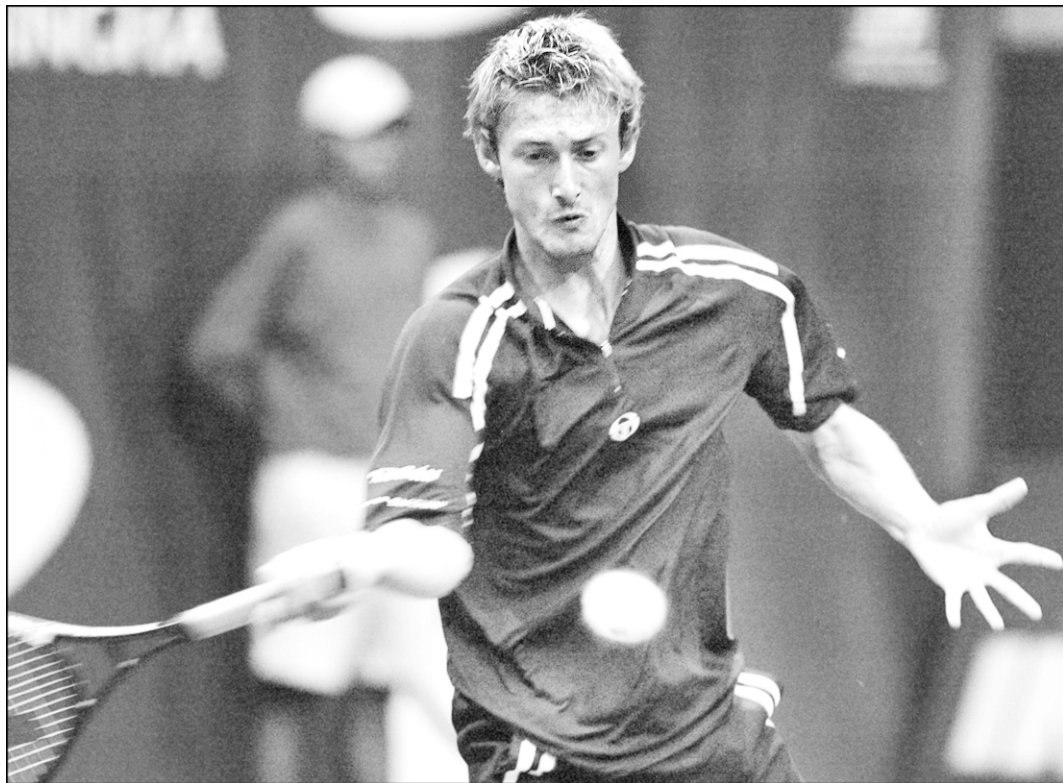
And in the fourth match of the day, China trashed Bangladesh 8-0 with Song Yi netting seven of their goals and Yu Hailao scoring in the 17th minute.

Bangladesh earlier lost both their matches against Pakistan (8-0) and India (10-0).

Cricket season

FROM PAGE 13 Panchagar, Jhalakathi and Sunamganj didn't make their entries for the seventeenth version of the competition.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday arranged a press conference in this regard at a local hotel. BCB advisors Shah Nurul Kabir Shaheen, Khandakar Jamil Uddin, Reazuddin Al Mamun, Aziz Al Kaiser Titoo and Area Manager of Emirates Airlines Ahmed Al Falasi attended briefing.



Spaniard Juan Carlos Ferrero plays a forehand against Dick Norman of Belgium at the Thailand Open yesterday.

Ferrero survives a scare

Tennis

AFP, Bangkok

World number one Juan Carlos Ferrero twice survived a set point on his way to a 7-5, 7-6 win over lofty Belgian Dick Norman in the first round of the Thailand Open on Wednesday.

Norman, who is more than two metres tall, fired down 17 aces and struck some blistering returns. But his lack of consistency often worked to Ferrero's advantage in the rallies.

The Spaniard earned an early break to lead 2-1 but dropped his

serve in the next game. He then faced a set point at 5-4 after a Norman return clipped the net cord but the left-handed Belgian netted a forehand.

Ferrero then broke to lead 6-5 when Norman double-faulted, and in the second set, Ferrero broke to lead 1-0 but a double-fault allowed Norman to level at 3-3. Ferrero then

faced another set point when a lob fell long but Norman again missed his chance when he netted his return off a second serve.

"It was tough and great to win because I only arrived yesterday from the Davis Cup and it was not easy to play today," said Ferrero.

Ferrero will next play Alex Bogomolov after the American beat Italy's Giorgio Galimberti 6-3, 6-3.

Eighth seed Taylor Dent used his huge serve to overcome Wesley Moodie of South Africa 6-, 6-4 but seventh seed Fabrice Santoro was beaten 3-6, 7-6 (10-8), 6-1 by Gregory Carraz in an all-French battle.

Hewitt eyeing Aussie Open

Tennis

AFP, Sydney

Australia's Davis Cup hero Lleyton Hewitt is returning to the Sydney International tournament to improve his chances of becoming the first home player to win the Australian Open in 28 years.

The former world number one was among a high-class field announced here on Wednesday for the January 11-17 mixed Sydney International tournament a week before the first tennis grand slam of 2004 in Melbourne.

In what is shaping as an encore to

the November 28-30 Davis Cup final in Melbourne, Spaniards Juan Carlos Ferrero and Carlos Moya will do battle with Hewitt and Mark Philippoussis in a strong 32-man draw.

Hewitt, a former two-time champion, skipped Sydney last year in a bid for a lower-key preparation for the Australian Open.

The Hopman Cup in Perth over the New Year period was his only appearance during the two months between his Shanghai Masters Cup triumph in November and the Open in mid-January.

As top seed, Hewitt reached the fourth round at Melbourne Park this

year but has never progressed beyond the last 16 of his home Grand Slam.

The 22-year-old is trying to become the first Australian since Mark Edmondson in 1976 to win the national title.

Hewitt is a two-time former Sydney International champion and boasts a 15-2 win-loss record at Homebush.

"It's a fantastic event and it's nice to be coming back in 2004," Hewitt said via a television link on Wednesday.

"I won in 2000 and 2001. I've played some of my best tennis on the Homebush centre court at the Olympic site."

Money not talking

Tennis

REUTERS, London

Britain and Germany's proud tennis pedigrees could not save either country from being condemned to the lower echelon of the Davis Cup last weekend.

Their defeats in the World Group playoffs were a clear indication that both countries are suffering from a dearth of talent that the millions they invest in developing young players has failed to address.

For three-times champions Germany, being beaten by Belarus and demoted to the zonal competitions in the men's team event for the first time in 20 years signalled that the golden days of German tennis were well and truly over.

It was only four years ago that Steffi Graf capped off her career with her 22nd grand slam singles win at the French Open.

Graf, Boris Becker and Michael Stich may have captured 29 grand slam crowns between them in the 1980s and 1990s, but the state of German tennis has been spiralling downwards since then.

Rainer Schuettler's run to the Australian Open final in January offered the country's fans a glimmer of hope, but that proved to be a false dawn and the world number eight has achieved little since.

Stich, whose brief reign as Davis Cup captain came to an end last year, said: "We've got to where we belong at the moment."

"It will be no cakewalk to get out from down there now."

For nine-times Davis Cup winners Britain, the situation is even worse.

While the Lawn Tennis Association invested 25.6 million pounds into British tennis in 2002, the results tell their own story.

Even two of the best men's players the country has produced, Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski, could not prevent them falling to defeat at the hands of Morocco.

Virginia Wade was the last British player to win one of the four major tournaments at Wimbledon in 1977.

The emergence in the mid 1990s of Henman and Rusedski, who have both been ranked as high as fourth in the world, gave rise to fresh hopes that the barren spell was about to end.

With injuries hampering both, it now appears unlikely that either will be able to get their hands on a grand slam trophy.

More worryingly, with Henman the only Briton in the world's top 100, there is no sign of anyone moving up to replace them.

In Davis Cup, even a country like India, which has yet to produce a singles grand slam champion, is now ranked higher at 15th than Germany and Britain.

As both nations struggle to find an answer to their lack of young talent, they could do worse than to check out the tennis production manuals of Argentina and Croatia.

Neither country has the financial wherewithal to make huge investments in facilities, but both have managed to produce gifted players who are landing major trophies.

Goran Ivanisevic's Wimbledon win two years ago sparked a boom in Croatia and Argentina now has six players in the men's top 50, including world number five and Hamburg Masters champion Guillermo Coria.

"(My victory in Hamburg) is very important for tennis in Argentina," Coria said in May. "The economic situation is bad in Argentina, so junior players don't get a chance to travel and fulfil their talent."

"They don't have the opportunity. So maybe if we keep winning, we keep the door open for them to continue their career."

His compatriot Agustin Calleri added: "It's our own sacrifice that have helped us to make it to the top, because we never really got much help from the Argentinean tennis federation."

"There is not really a junior tennis scheme in Argentina."

If, as it seems, money is not the main criteria for producing champions, Germany and Britain are unlikely to find a quick fix to their current plight.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes solution time: 27 mins.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CLYPTOQUIP

H E Q W X V G A C Q W X C H X W

L H S Y J Q . B R G Z U W X B E

Q J W K ' X W S C W U A K H L V H R -

W Z E G X L W U W Z Q H Y W Z L K .

Yesterday's Cryptquip: I DON'T BELIEVE THAT MY CALENDAR CAN LAST VERY MUCH LONGER. ITS DAYS ARE NUMBERED.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: L equals C

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Mushtaq eyeing

FROM PAGE 13

Qayyum in May 2000. Mushtaq said despite going through hard times he never thought of leaving the game he loved.

"I never got disappointed and thought that hard times are for good times, so I am back in contention again," he said.

Former Pakistan captain Imran Khan, who also played for Sussex, last week promoted Mushtaq's case for a recall in Pakistan team.

"Taking over 100 wickets in England is no joke and proves Mushtaq has international cricket left in him," Khan said last week.

Mushtaq feels he can play three to four years after Sussex renewed his contract for two more years.



Participants of the ACC Sports Medicine and Fitness seminar pose with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Ali Asghar at a local hotel yesterday.