

Sourav signs county deal

AFP, London

Former India skipper Sourav Ganguly agreed on Thursday to join English county side Northamptonshire on a short-term deal to replace Chris Rogers who has been selected for Australia.

Anti-Dalmiya meeting held

PTI, Kolkata

In the first indication of an anti-Jagmohan Dalmiya combine taking shape ahead of the elections of the Cricket Association of Bengal in July, the city police commissioner and several former Ranji Trophy cricketers on Friday held a meeting at a club here to discuss ways of forging an alternative to the ruling group.

Dalmiya, who has had an uninterrupted run as CAB president since the early 1990s, also held parleys with his loyalists at the Eden Gardens, that houses the CAB headquarters. State Sports Minister Subhas Chakraborty went to the CAB in the evening and met Dalmiya.

'Scandal won't

FROM PAGE 20 the AC Milan striker. "Doing well depends on lots of factors including good performances, of course. But there is a great atmosphere among the players whether we are at the dining table or on the training field - all of the rest we have managed to keep outside."

Inzaghi said the damaging scandal meant the players had added responsibility at the World Cup. "We need to be an example on every level, including that of behaviour, I am convinced of that," he said.

"The national team has nothing to do with this (scandal) but we have a great responsibility now at the World Cup."

Old mistakes

FROM PAGE 17 much time to organise their defence and deny the Spanish forwards space to attack. Coach Luis Aragones has plenty of experience and clearly has the respect of the squad who have grown in maturity since their disappointing first-round exit at Euro 2004.

Their 19-match unbeaten run since the 67-year-old took charge after the European Championship has given further grounds for confidence and not being among the pre-tournament favourites is also likely to work in their favour.

On paper they should have an easy task reaching the knockout stages after being drawn to play Ukraine, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia in Group H. If Aragones gives new recruits such as Fabregas and striker David Villa a chance by using form rather than reputation as a guide for selection then Spain could cause a few upsets.

If not their traditional role of tournament under-achievers beckons once again.

Ankle scare

FROM PAGE 17 Ballack, who recently signed for English champions Chelsea, is Germany's top player with an impressive 30 goals in 63 international matches. Germany's assistant coach Joachim Low said that the injury wasn't serious and that Ballack just needed to rest for a few days.

"There is no risk to Michael's participation at the World Cup," said Low after the match against a junior side from Swiss club Servette which Germany won 12-0. "He will rest for two to three days." The World Cup begins on June 9 with Germany hosting Costa Rica in Munich.



England batsman Kevin Pietersen works the ball on the on-side on way to scoring a century on the second day of the second Test at Edgbaston on Friday.

Murali puts brakes on Eng

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stand of 69 with England 238 for five. Pietersen, on 104, appeared fortunate to survive a confident lbw appeal from Muralitharan although Australian umpire Darrell Hair in fact gave him a single. Undeterred, Pietersen on-drove Kulasekara for six, the second time he'd cleared the ropes after lofting Muralitharan on Thursday. Pietersen, using his feet, later struck Murali for three straight fours and then flamboyantly reverse-swept him for an extraordinary six. But two balls later Murali had Pietersen plumb leg before, sweeping.

England captain Andrew Flintoff was then bowled by Lasith Malinga for nine before Murali removed Liam Plunkett and Geraint Jones cheaply. Monty Panesar was last man out, lbw to Malinga for nought. England, after wet weather had delayed the start by 80 minutes, resumed on 138 for three, just three behind. Their position owed much to paceman Plunkett's haul of three for

43 on Thursday. Pietersen was 30 not out and nightwatchman Matthew Hoggard unbeaten on two. Hoggard had added just one to his overnight score when Chaminda Vaas knocked back his off-stump to end his 50-minutes innings. SCOREBOARD Scoreboard at close of England's first innings and tea on the second day of the second Test against Sri Lanka at Edgbaston on Friday: SRI LANKA: First innings 141 (Vaas 30 not out, Dilshan 27, Malinga 26, Sangakkara 25; Plunkett 3-43, Mahmood 2-25, Hoggard 2-32) ENGLAND: First innings (overnight 138-3) Trescottick c Sangakkara b Muralitharan 27 Strauss run out 30 Cook lbw b Muralidaran 23 Pietersen lbw b Muralidaran

Table with 3 columns: Player, Runs, Wickets. Includes players like Hoggard, Flintoff, Malinga, Plunkett, Panesar, Vaas, Muralidaran.

Houghton set for India job

AFP, New Delhi

Indian football officials were shortly expected to appoint Englishman Bob Houghton as their new national coach, officials said. "The decision has more or less been taken but the announcement will be made only after a meeting of the All India Football Federation (AIFF) this evening," a federation official told AFP. Houghton, 58, was in the reckoning for the job along with former Ireland manager Brian Kerr, both of whom were interviewed on Wednesday and Thursday. Two other candidates, former Chelsea manager Ian Porterfield and Dutchman Clemence Westerhof, had also been shortlisted but failed to show for the interviews. "The other two (coaches) said they would not be able to make it this month but we did not want to wait any longer," the official said. The decision to hire a foreign coach was made after the former Asian Games gold medalists put up a dismal performance in Asian Cup qualifiers, crashing 6-0 against Japan and losing 3-0 to Yemen under coach Syed Nayeemuddin. Houghton's experience with Asian teams gave him the edge after he had stints with China, Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia.

Players scared of Flintoff: Boycott

PTI, London

Former batsman Geoff Boycott says England players refrained from criticising the captaincy of Andrew Flintoff in the drawn Test against Sri Lanka as they were scared of losing their places in the team. Writing in his column for 'Daily Telegraph', Boycott said no player had been brave enough to come out in the open against Flintoff. "I wasn't surprised to find so many players coming to the defence of Andrew Flintoff over the last week. I would expect them to support a colleague, especially the captain, who has a say in team selection," he wrote. "England's players have a vested interest, so nobody dare come out and admit that they weren't as focused as they should have been. "Who is going to be brave enough to say that Flintoff could have moved the fielders around more, or pressurised the batsmen with a bat-pad catcher or a leg guy? And God forbid that anyone might suggest he should have given Monty Panesar more overs!" Boycott said any player stating the obvious would have committed "career suicide". Not sparing the coach either, he said Fletcher put loyalty to the team above everything, "even above common sense and honesty."

Laxman looks for WC place

REUTERS, Mumbai

Indian batsman Vangipurappu Laxman says his omission from the one-day side touring the West Indies has motivated him to excel in the Test series and force his way into contention for next year's World Cup in the Caribbean. "Playing in a World Cup is one of my dreams," he told Reuters before leaving for the four-Test series starting on June 2. The 31-year-old is making his third trip to the Caribbean and a good performance will both help a team missing injured talisman Sachin Tendulkar and ease the pressure being put on him by talented youngsters. Laxman led his team's batsmen with 474 runs (at an average of 79) on the previous tour in 2001-02 and wants to replicate that form to help India claim a first major Test series victory outside the sub-continent for 20 years. A solid display would also improve his chances of securing inclusion for the March-April World Cup four years after he was surprisingly omitted from the last tournament. Pierce missed French Open

Hard work key for Hiddink

AFP, Sydney

Guus Hiddink will continue to pump the work into his Australian players in a weeklong training camp as he builds on transforming the Socceroos into a competitive force at next month's World Cup in Germany. The Australians brushed aside European champions Greece 1-0 in a winning farewell to their 95,000 fans in Melbourne Thursday and have two more warm-up games against the Netherlands and Liechtenstein before their opening match with Japan in Kaiserslautern on June 12. The master Dutch coach left with his squad Friday for a training camp in Mierlo, Netherlands, where he will put the finishing touches to the Australians as they gear up to make their first World Cup finals appearance in 32 years. Hiddink is putting his squad through intense training to have them physically ready for what faces them in Germany.

After Japan, the Australians have further group matches against five-times champions Brazil and 1998 World Cup semifinalists Croatia. Hiddink, who coached Holland and South Korea to the semifinals at the last two World Cups, is typically thorough in his preparations and will focus on what he feels is needed to further improve the Australian challenge. "For me, it's important that things are decided on details," Hiddink said after Thursday's match decided by a spectacular 16th-minute long-range volley from midfielder Josip Skokoc. "I don't want to focus on the 70 percent we did well (against Greece). I want to focus on what we didn't do well. "I want to focus on what has to be improved on for the World Cup." Australia's performance was all the more impressive for the players who didn't face the Greeks - injured trio Harry Kewell, Tim Cahill and John Aloisi - who all played leading roles in the Socceroos' qualifying win over Uruguay last November. Kewell stayed behind in England for treatment on a groin injury and is scheduled to meet up with the Australian squad when they arrive in Holland this weekend, while Cahill and Aloisi may be fit to face the Dutch.

Pragmatic Hiddink knows what lies ahead for his team and is plotting another gruelling schedule of training sessions for the players over the next week ahead of their second warm-up game with Holland in Rotterdam on June 4. "The spin-off of the tough work we did this week will be there at the end of next week," Hiddink said. "If we don't go very deep in our training sessions physically and just think of this game (Greece) then we will lose the power we need later on. "The pay-off time in the coming week will be gathering more physical strength." Hiddink has transformed the Australian team into a vibrant attacking force, packing the midfield with clever passing players and forcing teams into errors with pressing defence. "The team now knows exactly what position each player has to do. I can shuffle around some of the players in various positions and that's nice, but the foundations must be good physical strength," he said.



An eight-and-a-half-metre statue of Australian cricketer Shane Warne, that will appear around London to promote the forthcoming Ashes, is transported on a truck near Buckingham Palace in London on Friday.

Luck smiles on Federer

AFP, Paris

Roger Federer gained an early psychological edge in his eagerly-awaited French Open duel against Rafael Nadal when he enjoyed the lion's share of fortune in Friday's draw. The world number one, bidding to become the first man in 37 years to hold all four Grand Slam titles, was handed a comfortable looking passage to the quarterfinals. In contrast, defending champion Nadal faces potential minefields at every turn. Swiss star Federer will face French veteran Arnaud Clement in the first round with his first tricky assignment possibly coming in the third round where he could face Olympic champion Nicolas Massu of Chile. Nicolas Keifer, the 13th seed, is a possible fourth round opponent, but the German has won just three of his 11 meetings against Federer, with his last win coming back in 2002. Tommy Robredo, the seventh seeded Spaniard, could be waiting in the quarterfinals where he will be buoyed by his victory in the Hamburg Masters last weekend. However, the Spaniard has lost all his six career clashes with Federer. "There's a little bit of pressure on me because I'm after the fourth Grand Slam but I always feel tense

before the first match," said Federer who has lost both his clay court finals this year in Monaco and Rome, both to Nadal. "But I feel good and I am pleased with the level I am at." Nadal will face Sweden's Robin Soderling in the first round where victory would hand him a record 54th successive triumph on clay. But the Spanish teenager, who has proved to be Federer's nemesis with five wins in their six career meetings, could face Australia's former world number one Lleyton Hewitt in the fourth round. Big-hitting Chilean Fernando Gonzalez, the ninth seed, is also in Nadal's section of the draw. Gonzalez takes on Russia's former world number one Marat Safin in the first round. Nadal's section also features compatriot Nicolas Almagro, who won the Valencia clay court tournament this year. Fellow teenagers Gael Monfils of France and Andy Murray of Great Britain, who meet in the first round, are also in Nadal's path as is Serbian 19-year-old Novak Djokovic. Third seeded Argentinian David Nalbandian starts against Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka and is seeded to meet Federer in the last four. Women's top seed Amelie Mauresmo of France, the Australian Open champion, begins her campaign against America's Meghann Shaughnessy with Wimbledon champion Venus Williams a possible

last eight opponent. Williams meets Austria's Sybille Bammer in the first round. Second seed Kim Clijsters of Belgium faces France's Virginie Razzano in her first round match and could take on Martina Hingis in the fourth round. Swiss Hingis, the 12th seed, the runner-up in 1997 and 1999, is playing her first Roland Garros for five years. She faces America's Lisa Raymond in the first round. Hingis comes into the French Open on a high after winning the Italian Open last week. "She's a threat," admitted Mauresmo. "She has improved physically compared to three years ago and she has only been losing to top 10 players. That's a good sign." Third seeded Russian Nadia Petrova faces Japan's Akiko Morigami while fourth seed Maria Sharapova starts against the United States' Mashona Washington. Defending champion Justine Henin-Hardenne of Belgium, the fifth seed, faces Estonia's Maret Ani in her opener. France's Mary Pierce, the 1995 champion and a runner-up in 2005, pulled out of the tournament on Friday with a right foot injury. The action at Roland Garros gets underway on Sunday.

Mexico 1986: The Hand

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had crushed a fine Denmark debut run with a 5-1 win but went out to Belgium on penalties too. France v Brazil promised much and Brazil could have won by four or five though it ended 1-1. The great Michel Platini scored France's equaliser and though he missed a penalty in the shoot-out, France went on to a meeting with Germany in the semis. But the quarter final that stole the headlines was Argentina's 2-1 win over England. A mis-kicked clearance was looping into the arms of England 'keeper Peter Shilton when Maradona leapt into the air and seemingly punched the ball into the goal. Despite outrage and protests from the English the goal stood, with Maradona later claiming it was the "hand of God". Just minutes later Maradona scored a goal of sublime brilliance dribbling past five defenders to put Argentina 2-0. Although golden boot winner Gary Lineker gave England hope with a late goal, Maradona had done the damage to set up a semi-final against Belgium. Maradona was again the catalyst as Argentina beat Belgium 2-0 while on the other side West Germany ousted the exhausted French for the

second straight tournament, also 2-0, to set the stage for a South America-Europe final. Beckenbauer, who admitted he didn't have the players to win the title, put Matthaus on Maradona, hoped for the best, and might have got it if he hadn't been undermined by the sudden fallibility of Schumacher, until then the best goalkeeper in the competition. After three consecutive clean sheets, he suddenly charged out for Burruchaga's free kick and was stranded in mid-air when Brown headed in. Urged by his teammates to stay back (according to his autobiography) he allowed Valdano to run in from the right and push the ball past his outstretched foot. Then Burruchaga was clean through, only to be called back for a non-existent offside. Still, 2-0 seemed to be enough -- but ye of little faith should have remembered that this was West Germany, and they do things differently there. Dull side though they were, with Rummenigge still unfit and Magath invisible in midfield, they hauled themselves back into it, releasing Matthaus from his marking duties and scoring twice from Brehme's left-wing corners. The first was helped on by Voller for Rummenigge to slide in and force it home, the second was headed back by Berthold for Voller to get this head

bravely in front of Pumpido's fists. Hard for Argentina to defend against these with Brown having cracked a bone in his shoulder. The Germans felt they lost it there and then. Intoxicated by the comeback, they pressed forward instead of playing for extra time, leaving themselves thin at the back when Maradona threaded a pass through to Burruchaga in the inside-right channel. He ran on and shot across Schumacher, who again stayed on his line. Seven of the Germans weren't capped again, including Briegel and all-time greats like Forster (who retired from international football at 27) and Rummenigge, the only player to captain the losing team in two Finals. West Germany might have won at least one if he'd been fully fit either time, or if Schuster had played. Meanwhile his opposite number had a relatively quiet match but still made the winning goal, just reward after the frustrations of 1982. No other World Cup tournament has been so dominated by a single player, with a left foot in the Puskas class and that cheating left hand.

End it like Beckham: A possible

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This will most likely be Beckham's last tournament as England captain. One of his greatest supporters, coach Sven-Goran Eriksson, is leaving the job after the tournament. His successor, Steve McClaren, has hinted he might not keep Beckham as captain, a position he has held since 2001. Liverpool's Gerrard and Chelsea's John Terry have been mentioned as suitable captains. In April, former England captain Bryan Robson said Beckham wasn't a natural leader; England World Cup winner Bobby Charlton agreed. "For now, I am the captain and I will lead the team into this World Cup and hopefully be successful," Beckham said. "After that, we'll have to wait and see." It hasn't helped that Beckham hasn't always played well at international tournaments. At the 1998 World Cup in France, he was sent off for petulantly kicking Argentina's Diego Simeone. Down to 10 men, England lost the second-round game on penalty kicks. Beckham played in England's disappointing European Championship campaign in 2000, when the team went out in the first

round. That came after an outstanding season with Manchester United, which won the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup titles. He scored the final-minute free kick against Greece to secure England's qualification for the 2002 World Cup. He was rushed back onto the team after breaking his foot two months before the tournament and scored on a penalty kick in a group game against Argentina. But England was eliminated by Brazil in the quarterfinals. Beckham left Manchester United, the club he joined as a youth player, in 2003 after falling out with manager Alex Ferguson and went to Spain. His glitzy life with former pop star "Posh Spice" Victoria has meant Beckham remains a mainstay of the tabloids. But "Becks" has been overshadowed as England's most luminous star by Rooney. At the 2004 European Championship, the Manchester United striker -- then 18 -- was outstanding and scored four goals in four games. Beckham had a mediocre tournament and didn't appear to be fully fit. He missed a penalty kick in the 2-1 loss to France and sent England's first penalty kick over the bar in the quarterfinal shootout loss to Portugal.

Things weren't any better off the field. Beckham's clean-cut family image was tarnished by accusation of infidelity he never outrightly denied. He has also lost his place as the world's highest-paid player to the talented but less photogenic Ronaldinho of Brazil. The April edition of France Football put Ronaldinho's annual revenue at \$29 million, including salary and sponsorship, pushing Beckham off the top spot for the first time in three years. Beckham earned \$22.5 million, down from \$31 million. Beckham needs a good tournament to secure his future at Real Madrid. The club is in flux because the man who signed him, chairman Florentino Perez, resigned in March, and his replacement quit two months later. Elections are planned for July 2 -- when England hopes to still be alive in the World Cup. Beckham said he wants to finish his career in Spain, then concentrate on his family and his youth soccer academies in Los Angeles and London. "I believe there's at least four or five years left in my legs," he said. "Hopefully, that will be as an England player as well as a Real Madrid player."



Cahill fit, say Australia

REUTERS, Melbourne

Everton midfielder Tim Cahill has fully recovered from a knee injury and is clear to play in Australia's World Cup campaign, team officials said on Friday. Cahill, 26, suffered ligament damage in a collision with Birmingham City's Damien Johnson in a Premier League match on April 22 and has not played competitively since. He missed Australia's 1-0 win over Greece in a friendly on Thursday but is expected to reach full match fitness for the Socceroos' friendly against Holland in Rotterdam on June 4. "Timmy is fine. He trained yesterday with the group that didn't play against Greece," Australia's assistant coach Graham Arnold told reporters. "He'll train fully as soon as we get to Holland." Australia's other major injury headache involves Liverpool's Harry Kewell, the only member of Guus Hiddink's 23-man squad not in Melbourne this week. Kewell was

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allowed to continue his recovery in England from a groin strain picked up in the FA Cup final. "Reports back from our physiotherapist Arno Philips have been that he is coming along well," Arnold said. "We'll have to see how he is when we get there because he hasn't done anything physical with the team in the six days he's missed here." Striker John Aloisi, whose decisive shootout penalty against Uruguay in November saw Australia qualify for the finals, has also recovered from a foot injury that ruled him out of the Greece game. Australia are in Group F at the World Cup finals with Japan, Brazil and Croatia. Carson gets call-up INTERNET, undated Only a few weeks ago Scott Carson was involved in a battle to survive in the Coca-Cola Championship. Now he is heading for the World Cup with England after Robert Green's groin injury in the 'B' international against Belarus. Carson was on stand-by for Germany but has been promoted

into the final 23 as the third keeper behind Paul Robinson and David James after Green's nightmare scenario at the Madsjeski Stadium. The Norwich number one had only been on the pitch five minutes as a second-half substitute when his left leg gave under him as he attempted to take a goal-kick. Green was stretched out and replaced by Carson, who spent the second half of last season on loan from Liverpool to Sheffield Wednesday - who managed to stave off the drop into League One. His future is in the balance, with Owls boss Paul Sturrock still waiting to find out if a permanent move can be clinched. But now on the agenda is being part of the England squad heading for Germany and Eriksson has faith in the former Leeds player. Eriksson said of Green: "He's almost certainly out. He's got a scan tomorrow and that will confirm it. That is bad news for him. It is a bad groin injury. "It's a pity for him but Scott Carson is a good keeper, he's played at Under-21 level and done well and he showed he is a good keeper when he came on.