

## V-Day tennis

UNB, Dhaka

Ranjan Ram advanced to the semi-finals of the men's singles in the Pacific Pharmaceutical Victory Day tennis competition beating Majharul Islam by 7-6, 6-4 sets in the quarterfinal at the Ramna Tennis Court Complex yesterday.

In the women's quarterfinal matches, Hejo Fusako and Sathi Sarkar moved into the last four eliminating their respective opponents.

In the boys' singles (16 yrs group), Omar Faruque Sunny beat Ratul by 6-1, 6-0 sets while Mozammel Hossain defeated Nurul Islam 6-2, 6-3 to book the semifinal berths.

In the girls' singles (16 yrs group), Ma High Ching outplayed Khustu 6-0, 6-2 while Sadia outclassed Masuma Sultana 6-4, 6-1 in the semifinals to reach the final.

In the boys' singles (13 yrs group), Hasibul Haq beat Jamil 6-1, 7-6 while Arif defeated Munna 3-6, 6-2, 6-0 in the semifinals to confirm the final berth.

Earlier, in the day's men's singles pre-quarterfinal matches, Alamgir, Kanchan Ram, Ranjan Ram, Anwar Hossain, Niranjana Ram and Dipu Lal beat their respective rivals to move to the quarterfinals.

## Barmy Army flock to Test

BBC ONLINE, undated

Thousands of England fans are expected in Melbourne, as part of a record crowd of 100,000 for the first day of the fourth Ashes Test.

Despite ticket restrictions, England have been followed by large groups of vocal fans in their first three games.

Around 2,500 supporters shared a Christmas Day barbecue organised by the Barmy Army by Melbourne's Yarra River.

"They are going to Australia for a party," said Barmy Army co-founder David Peacock.

"We lost the Ashes at Perth and it was the Barmy Army who were singing for over an hour until the boys came out."

Captain Andrew Flintoff wants England to repay the support by avoiding an Ashes whitewash.

"They have supported us over the three games -- it would be nice to give them something back," he said.

"As well as playing for ourselves and the country we want to play for the supporters who have made the trip.

"The occasion of Boxing Day at Melbourne is huge and we want to show we can win out here."

Flintoff has plenty of experience of Christmas Day on tour in the past and does not expect the festivities to affect team preparations for the game the following morning.

Players' wives and families have been with the touring party since the start of the series.

"I'll get up on the 25th and open presents with the kids and then put my kit on and go and practice -- that's just the way it happens," Flintoff stressed.

"It's Christmas, but we're here to do a job and we're here to play cricket and we'll enjoy our Christmas Day but the focus will be Boxing Day rather than my turkey!"

## Botham hails 'greatest' Warne

PTI, Melbourne

Legendary England all-rounder Ian Botham believes Shane Warne is the greatest player to have set foot on a cricket field.

"In my opinion Shane Warne is the greatest cricketer who's ever lived," Botham said.

Warne, who announced his retirement after Australia reclaimed the Ashes from England taking a 3-0 lead in the five-Test series, is being described as the second greatest cricketer of all time behind Sir Donald Bradman, but Botham said the spin-wizard deserved the highest accolade.

"I'm sorry, but I can't judge people who played 30 or 40 years before I was born because I think you can only really comment on what you've seen first hand.

"And of the players I've seen, Warne is out on his own," Botham was quoted as saying by the 'Herald Sun'.

Botham appreciated Warne for signing off in style when he was still on the top of his career.

"Just like the showman he is, with the job done, the stage set and the applause raining down he is making his exit and all I can say is well done mate," he said.

"He made the difficult choice once the Ashes were won and I think that is absolutely right. He has given cricket and Ashes cricket in particular everything he could have and he is going out on top, as he deserves," he added.

## Naimur, Joy

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It was learnt that Awami League president Sheikh Hasina personally intervened in the matter after taking into account their sporting background.



PHOTO: INTERNET

England batsman Kevin Pietersen tosses the ball back to the bowler during a Christmas day training session at the MCG on Monday.

## Avoid whitewash

Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

England will be looking to stave off the first Ashes whitewash since 1920-21 when the fourth Test starts at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Boxing Day today.

But with Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath retiring from Test cricket at the end of the series, Australia will be fully focused on a clean sweep.

Warne, playing on his home ground, needs just one more wicket to become the first man to take 700 in Tests.

A world record crowd of 100,000 is expected on the opening day.

All tickets have been sold for Boxing Day to surpass the 90,800 for the second day of the fifth Test against the West Indies at the MCG in February 1961.

And Warne, who can expect an emotional send-off in his 144th Test, is keen on another humiliation of England.

"As far as I'm concerned we've got two Test matches to play and I just want to finish the series on a high," Warne said.

"I think if we can win 5-0 that would be a fantastic achievement for a great team."

With team departures dominating headlines ahead of the Melbourne Test, coach John Buchanan said he would work on keeping his team focused on

the task in hand.

"With a range of news around us it might be a bit of a distraction but hopefully we are a better team than that," said Buchanan.

"Our mission here is not only to win the Ashes but also establish a huge gap between us and England."

Australia, who should be unchanged for the fourth Test, took just 15 days to seize the urn off England and the much-anticipated series has been a huge let-down.

Australia have only been dismissed twice in six innings and the sorry England performance has left coach Duncan Fletcher under intense pressure going into the final two games.

One casualty in Melbourne is likely to be wicketkeeper Geraint Jones, who registered a pair of ducks in Perth and has scored only 63 runs at 10.50 in the series.

Nottinghamshire's Chris Read is expected to be behind the stumps, while Middlesex all-rounder Jamie Dalrymple could replace Saj Mahmood with a view to strengthen the batting.

Flintoff says the ankle problem that has stopped him bowling long spells so far in the series has been eased by pain-killing injections.

And he is determined his side will bounce back, especially with a large proportion of the crowd expected to be England fans.

## Khan's self-satisfaction

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Younis Khan, the Pakistan vice-captain, believes that the possible comeback of three key fast bowlers including Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif would make Pakistan the best bowling team in the world, even ahead of world champions Australia.

Younis said that his team would gain a huge pace advantage once Shoaib, Asif and Shabbir Ahmed -- whose action has been cleared by the ICC -- return to international cricket during next month's tour of South Africa. The trio have been included in a list of 25 probabilities invited for a conditioning camp starting in Lahore from tomorrow in preparation for the tour of South Africa.

"We would have a bowling attack stronger than Australia's if Shoaib, Asif and Shabbir return

to the squad," Younis told The News at the National Stadium in Karachi. "We are already equipped with some good bowlers but once these three are back our attack would be awesome. All these three are valuable bowlers for their wicket-taking abilities and you need such players to win Tests against strong opponents."

Shoaib and Asif are available for selection for the tour of South Africa starting from January 4 after being cleared of doping offences by a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) appeals committee earlier this month.

Pakistan rode on a good showing from pacers Umar Gul, Shahid Nazir, Abdul Razzaq and leg-spinner Danish Kaneria to beat West Indies 2-0 in a home Test series this season.

"The one thing that makes me very optimistic about our team's future is that bowlers like Umar Gul, Shahid Nazir and Mohammad Sami have been

performing impressively in recent times and Navedul Hasan is also regaining good form," he remarked. "I must say that once we have all our pacers ready for national duty we would be better off than even Australia in this department of the game."

Younis, who led Peshawar Panthers into the semifinals of the ongoing Twenty20 Cup believes Pakistan would be in a good position to win the series in South Africa but was quick to add that the players will have to really apply themselves in what would be demanding playing conditions in South Africa. He played down fears that the Pakistan batsmen would flop on bouncy South African wickets.

"The South Africans are a top side but we are good enough to beat them. By applying ourselves and showing self-belief we can do it. The going would be tough but I am confident we would be ready for the challenge."

"It hurts a lot, but we have to get over losing the Ashes and we've got two big Test matches still to play," he said. "There are a lot of lads who want to prove they can win a Test match in Australia and prove they can play against Australia. "As well as playing for ourselves and the country we want to play for the supporters who have made the trip."

Meanwhile, England seamer Matthew Hoggard admitted another Australia win could have deep psychological repercussions.

"We have got to prove to the guys on the tour, to ourselves, that we can beat Australia," Hoggard said.

"We have shown glimpses of what we can do, we have had some good performances, some good individual performances over three games.

"We need to not get mentally scarred, saying Australia are unbeatable, because it's going to be a different story in 2009, and different personnel."

With attendances of more than 95,000 likely over the opening three days, the record of 350,354 -- set in the third Test of the 1936/37 Ashes series -- is under threat.

However, with showers forecast for the first day followed by overcast conditions, that record -- and an Australian whitewash -- could be under threat.

## Ramprakash dances to glory!

CRICINFO, undated

Mark Ramprakash has proved that he can cut it on the big stage after all when he was crowned BBC TV's Strictly Come Dancing champion on Saturday night.

Both the judges and the public voted for Ramprakash ahead of the rugby player Matt Dawson in the final, with each competitor performing five dances with their professional partner.

Ramprakash made some difficult lifts in the final dance, the free-style, and later confessed to some nerves at performing the manoeuvres with his partner Karen Harding: "Being a cricketer," he said, "I might have dropped her." Instead his footwork was immaculate and the pressure told only one story: he can handle it.

The title caps a staggering year for Ramprakash, helping Surrey to bounce back immediately to the top flight of the Championship with a phenomenal 2,278 runs at 103.54. At 38 he could not earn a recall to the England Test squad for the Ashes, although he had accepted way before this series that his days at international level were way over.

But his victory has at last provided some cheer for cricket fans in England.

"It's been incredible," he smiled as he became the second cricketer behind Darren Gough to pick up the silver, sparkly glitter-ball trophy with 'Strictly Come Dancing' emblazoned on it in pink writing.

He had started the dancing series a 15 to 1 outsider, but soon became established as the favourite -- and in the end victory was a walk.

## Irfan's mission

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return home immediately to get some practice in domestic matches.

"Because Pathan is a key player in our one-day side, and because we won't play any more one-day cricket on this tour, it makes sense to send him home where he can play in Ranji Trophy games," Dravid told a news conference.

"He's an important player for the World Cup and we need to try and make sure he is in form for the tournament."

Pathan will be available for a couple of Ranji Trophy matches next month before India face West Indies and Sri Lanka in a home one-day series in January and February.

## Murali can take

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matches. It's not that I don't like one-day cricket, but it's just too hectic.

"There are a couple of other spinners and the selectors should take a look at them as well."

"I am really impressed with Malinga Bandara, he's done a good job for us."

"Even Rangana Herath was doing well when I was injured and Upul Chandana has come up with some good efforts at 'A' team level."

## Donadoni

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The Milan defender was rumoured to be considering his international retirement, while Cassano is finding life tough at Real Madrid.

"Nesta went through a difficult moment with regards to his fitness, he just needs to get back in the right shape," he added.

"Cassano? He needs to play and perform to a level which would put him in a position to be called up by me."

## Hahnemann

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"We want to go and express ourselves."

The match takes centre stage on a full day of Premiership football, as the first fixture between the two clubs at the Madejski Stadium saw Petr Cech carried off on a stretcher with a fractured skull following a challenge by Stephen Hunt.

Hunt has since received death threats, as has Ibrahima Sonko after the centre-back injured substitute goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini later in the match.

## Mourinho

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Lomana LuaLua is out with a thigh injury, while Andy Cole has only recently returned to training after an Achilles problem.

West Ham are missing suspended captain Nigel Reo-Coker. Meanwhile Tottenham striker Jermain Defoe (knee) is doubtful for the match against Villa.

Manchester City midfielder Joey Barton will be available to play against Sheffield United despite being sent-off against Bolton.

Struggling Charlton are at home to London rivals Fulham on Wednesday.

## Lara might quit ODIs

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

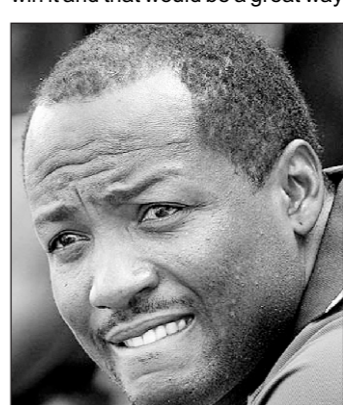
Brian Lara, the West Indies captain, has said that he could prolong his Test career till the age of 40, at the same time also indicating that his one-day career could end after the World Cup next year.

Lara, now 37, was speaking after two of Australia's bowling spearheads -- Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath -- announced that they would quit Test cricket after the Ashes series concludes in Sydney. While McGrath will continue playing till the World Cup, the Sydney Test will be Warne's last as an international player.

In an interview to The Sunday Mail in Australia, Lara admitted that one-day cricket was starting to take a toll on him, especially since taking over the captaincy. West Indies have just completed a gruelling tour of Asia -- the DLF Cup tri-series in Malaysia, the Champions Trophy in India and the tour of Pakistan, which included three Tests and five one-dayers. Lara was at his devastating best in the Tests, scoring a double century

at Multan, but his form dipped in the ODIs, compiling just 71 runs in four matches.

"I'm not sure how much one-day cricket I'll be playing after the World Cup," Lara said. "Hopefully we can win it and that would be a great way



BRIAN LARA

to go out. I don't know if I'll get to 40 but I want to play as long as I can. I still have the competitive spirit. My enthusiasm is still there. I know I still have some Tests ahead of me, and hopefully some more big innings.

"It (quitting one-day cricket) is

looking that way. Since taking over the captaincy again, it has had an effect on me mentally and physically. A one-dayer is now as tough as playing two or three days of a Test match."

Lara's career coincided with the period in which West Indies were on the decline, and he admitted that he would be willing to relinquish his runs and records to be part of a world-beating unit.

"Unfortunately, my career has been through the declining years of West Indies cricket and at times it's given me great sadness," he said. "There is a sense of unfulfillment. To be honest, I would give up any runs, any record just to be a part of the current Australian cricket team or the West Indies team of the 1970s and 1980s."

When asked about Warne and McGrath, Lara said that their decision took him by surprise, one that would leave a big void in the Australian team.

"I want to speak to Shane and Glenn before I say anything publicly. But, yes, I was surprised. I didn't see it coming. Australian cricket will miss them. Shane and Glenn are as good as anyone I have played against."

## Proteas under pressure

Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

Careers will be on the line when South Africa take on India in the second Test in Durban, beginning on Tuesday.

South Africa coach Mickey Arthur has had to endure a newspaper campaign for him to be sacked after India's upset victory in the opening Test.

Home captain Graeme Smith has made only 453 runs in nine Tests and will be under pressure for his place.

And India openers Virender Sehwag and Wasim Jaffer failed in the opening match, with selectors mulling a change.

India were underdogs coming into the series, with a perceived weakness against pace bowling, but secured a 123-run win in Johannesburg -- their first ever in South Africa.

Shanthakumaran Sreesanth

and Zaheer Khan made better use of the conditions and dismissed the hosts for 84 in their first innings.

While India celebrated, Arthur was put in the spotlight as South Africa have now won seven and lost 11 Tests since his appointment in May 2005.

Their three series wins have come against lowly Zimbabwe, West Indies and New Zealand.

Smith's form has dipped since the heights of 2003 when he hit two double centuries against England and 1,198 runs in the calendar year at an average of 63.05.

In the last 12 months, Smith has passed 50 just twice, in the same match against New Zealand at the end of last season.

However, it was fellow opener Herschelle Gibbs who took the most blame for the Johannesburg debacle as he registered a pair.

Gibbs will be moved to bat at six in Durban, with AB de Villiers moved up to open with Smith.

"There's no doubt that we can

turn it around," said Smith.

"We know we played badly and we know we have the ability to turn it around."

The home side will make a late decision over the fitness of fast bowler Dale Steyn, who suffered a thigh injury during the first Test.

Morne Morkel is on standby to make his debut, while left-arm spin bowler Paul Harris could take a Test bow if the pitch looks suitable.

Kingsmead is usually a seam-friendly ground, though. In 1996-97 India were blown away for 100 and 66, with Allan Donald claiming match figures of 9-54.

India's opening win came despite opening stands of just 14 and 20, and Jaffer's place came under more pressure when Gautam Gambhir scored 79 in a two-day practice match this week.

The tourists seem likely to strengthen their pace attack, with Munaf Patel, recovered from injury, set to replace VRV Singh, who was not impressive in Johannesburg.

## Huge Test for us: Pollock

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Shaun Pollock, the local hero who picked up his 400th Test victim in the first Test at the Wanderers, admitted that South Africa would need to lift their game by at least "20 to 30 per cent" if they were to revive their fortunes in the three-Test series against India. Pollock accepted that he and his teammates had been well below their best in the 123-run loss, but was confident that they had the quality to turn things around.

"We have done very well in South Africa over the years," he said, alluding to a record of only 14 defeats in 71 home Tests since readmission to the international game. "But we lost here in Durban against the Pakistanis (1997-98) and managed to turn it around. It's always there in the back of our minds that we don't want to lose the series. In order to win it, we've got to win the next two. So it's a huge Test match for us. We need to level the series here, go on to Cape Town and hopefully win there."

Pollock said that the mood in the dressing room remained upbeat, and that the team would make the most of one further practice session on Monday morning before the Test starts on Boxing Day. Pollock will spend Christmas at home with his family, but was clear that the Indians shouldn't expect any belated presents once they cross the boundary line at Kingsmead.

"We're disappointed at having lost the Test match," he said. "It was a severe blow for us. It damaged our pride a little bit, so we need to get that back and we're very keen to set the record straight."

Though he himself had a fine game at the Wanderers, having Rahul Dravid caught behind for his 400th wicket, Pollock said that the collective performance had been a depressing one. "We're quite disappointed on the bowling front, we could have done better," he said. "On the batting side, he was knocked out for 84 is just unheard of for South African sides, especially back home."

"We haven't focussed too much on that. We're moving forward now, and we need to hit the right areas in the next Test match. It's a different kind of wicket, so what we discussed there doesn't really count here."

He defended his new-ball partner, Makhaya Ntini, saying that everyone was entitled to the occasional ordinary game, and expressed his doubts over whether Graeme Smith would opt for a spin option in the shape of Paul Harris. And when it was put to him that South Africa's bowling line-up had been predictable and one-dimensional at the Wanderers, he came back with a sharp response.

"It makes good stories, doesn't it?" he asked. "If you look at the five that played at the Wanderers, we've got the sheer pace of Dale Steyn who shapes it away, and Makhaya Ntini who shapes it in. Andre Nel is a tall bowler who has

got a different action, I'm the sort of the guy who hits areas, and Jacques Kallis is a genuine away-swinger bowler. If that's lacking variation, then I would hate to see a combination that has got variation. Probably the only thing we might have lacked was a spinner."

There was praise for Sreesanth -- "The ball comes out of his hand lovely, the seam is upright" -- but he hesitated to label India's attack the best to come out of the country. "I have played against an attack that had Jagavaj Srinath, and I think he was the best fast bowler that India has produced," said Pollock. "He was remarkable over the years, the way he got the ball to talk, not only in seamer-friendly conditions in South Africa but on some very flat wickets in India. So any attack that had him would probably be the best Indian fast-bowling attack that I have seen so far."

There has been the odd rumour doing the rounds that the upcoming Test series against Pakistan could be Pollock's last, but he insisted that such thoughts hadn't been given any serious thought in the midst of a season that will culminate with the World Cup in the Caribbean.

"I always re-assess at the end of each season and see where I'm going," he said. "I feel like I have got this one and another one, maybe, in me. So no, there's no retirement imminent."

The cricket fraternity, poised to lose two of its all-time greats at Sydney, will be relieved to hear that.

## Marvellous

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4) defeated Partex (112-7) by 66 runs at Fatullah Cricket Stadium and Brothers Union (132-9) registered 24-run victory against Young Pegasus (108 all out) in the day's other inconsequential matches.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ABAHANI: 173-6 in 20 overs (Nazmus 38, Mashud 28 not out, Mashrafe 65, extras 2; Ronny 2-18, Younus 2-36)

INDIRA: 83-6 in 20 overs (Tushar 42 not out, Moniruzzaman 21, extras 3; Mashrafe 5-5)

Result: Abahani won by 90 runs. VICTORIA: 137-8 in 20 overs (Riyad 64 not out, Wasel 22, extras 10; Shahadat 2-29, Razzak 4-12)

DOHS: 139-7 in 18.5 overs (Ehsanul 39, Mahmud 45, Razzak 22, extras 3; Shuvro 3-17)

Result: DOHS won by three wickets.