

VI SAF GAMES SCHEDULE FOR TODAY

Following is the schedule of today's events in the sixth SAF Games: Boxing — Quarter-finals at 9 am at the National Stadium. Table Tennis — Men's and women's team events at 9-30 am at the Dhanomdi Indoor Gymnasium. Tennis — Men's team event semifinals at 8 am at the National Tennis Complex: — Bangladesh vs India — Sri Lanka vs Pakistan Women's team event semifinals: — Bangladesh vs India Men's and women's team events finals at 1-00 pm. Shooting — Air pistol (men) 9 am — Air rifle 40 shots (women) 11-15 am — Air rifle 60 shots (women) 1-30 pm Swimming — 100 M Free Style 1-00 am heat — 200 M Breast Stroke 11-30 am final — 200 M Butterfly 12-00 noon heat — 100 M Back Stroke 12-30 pm heat — 1500 M Free Style 1-00 pm heat — 4x100 M Freestyle Relay 2-00 pm final Volleyball — Four matches at 1-00 pm, 3-00 pm, 5-00 pm and 7 pm.

Hosts, Pakistan in tennis semifinals

Bangladesh set up a semifinal date with top seeds India when they beat minnows Maldives in their first encounter of the South Asian Federation (SAF) Games tennis at the Ramna National Tennis Complex yesterday. The day began well for the hosts when national number four Nawaz Amin got his country off to a resounding start, drubbing Hassan Shaam in straight sets. The hapless Maldivian could not win a single game in the 35-minute affair. Hira Lal, the Bangladesh national champion, however, had to sweat a little in the second set before walking out a straight sets victor. Lal after winning the first without conceding a game came up against a much more determined Shaam in the second.

Eventually, Lal won the set with a break to round off the match 6-0, 6-4 in 45 minutes. The doubles began in a similar fashion with Faisal and Amin racing to a 6-2 victory in the first set. But the maldivian pair of Shaam and Mansoor produced a better blend of tennis in the second, stretching the host pair to tie-breaker before bowing down 6-7 (7-1). The encounter spanned one hour and 15 minutes. In the other match of the day, Pakistan, with a similar margin win over Nepal, booked their place in the semifinal. Pakistan takes on Sri Lanka at eight this morning, the same time Bangladesh go up against India. Both India and Sri Lanka received first-round byes. Pakistan national champion gave his country a flying start when he thrashed Nepalese Sriram Nagar Thapa 6-1, 6-0 in 55 minutes. Khalik's compatriot Rashid Malik, the national number two, needed 25 minutes more to get rid of Krishna Ghale 6-1, 6-4. Hameedul Haq and Mushaf Za were quick and gave Subha Ratna Shahi and Sriram Nagar Nagar no space at all. Haq and Za rounded off the tie with a 6-1, 6-1 triumph in only 40 minutes. In the women's team event, the hosts takes on India today in the semifinals. The winners play against Sri Lanka, who are directly placed in the final for being the top seeds.

Forty-eight players, including 16 women from six SAARC nations are taking part in the tournament. Both the men's and Women's team finals are scheduled for a 1 pm start today. Best on Prime Sports The STAR TV Network will commemorate the 1993 sporting scene with a 'Best of Series' from December 25th to January 2nd, 1994 on Prime Sports. Programmes vary from 30 minutes to two hours long, beginning with 'The Best of Athletics' on Saturday, December 25th at 4:00 pm (BST). Please check local listings for exact dates and times, says a press release. During the series viewers can also relive the moving moments of Steffi Graf and her climb to the top with the unfortunate absence of Monica Seles; Americans Pete Sampras and Jim Courier as they battled for the number one ATP ranking all year long; action from the Ryder Cup; Damon Hill capturing his first race in the Formula One series; and Kevin Schwantz taking the 1993 Motorcycle GP title.

Stumbling start for hosts

Bangladesh, still in quest of their first ever gold SAF Games soccer gold, made an unpromising start in their Group B opening match, drawing goalless with Maldives at the Mirpur Stadium last night. The hosts, who play their last group match against Nepal at the Dhaka Stadium tomorrow, squandered several chances including a spot-kick in the dying moments of the first half. Sri Lankan referee Mohsen Arif awarded Bangladesh a penalty when a Maldivian defender handled the ball on the goal line in the last minute of the first half.



Kaiser Hamid, the tall former national captain, rolled the ball wide outside the post, to the utter dismay of the local fans. Earlier Monem Munna missed two chances — the first went slightly over the cross-piece while the second, a fierce drive, came back into play after hitting the post. Bangladesh were deprived of a chance to go up when Rupu's shot also hit the bar. Ahmed Ibrahim is the player Bangladesh boater can blame apart from themselves for not winning despite dominating the match right from the word go. The nimble Maldivian goalie came to his side's rescue in no less than five occasions. At the other end of the ground, Saidur Rahman, the Bangladeshi goalkeeper, had a peaceful day with hardly any intruder in the penalty zone. The few chances that Maldives got were from lapses in the Bangladeshi defence but they were not sharp enough to pose any serious threat. The result puts the hosts in a rather delicate situation. They will have to win their match against the Nepalese. A draw in that encounter can blow Bangladesh hopes of winning the gold off.

Mamun Joarder, the speedy winger of the Bangladesh football team which opened their campaign for the gold in the sixth SAF Games with an uninspiring goalless draw against the Maldives at the Mirpur Stadium yesterday gets a consolatory hug from assistant coach Chand, after it is all over. — Star photo

The goal line in the last minute of the first half. Kaiser Hamid, the tall former national captain, rolled the ball wide outside the post, to the utter dismay of the local fans. Earlier Monem Munna missed two chances — the first went slightly over the cross-piece while the second, a fierce drive, came back into play after hitting the post. Bangladesh were deprived of a chance to go up when Rupu's shot also hit the bar. Ahmed Ibrahim is the player Bangladesh boater can blame apart from themselves for not winning despite dominating the match right from the word go. The nimble Maldivian goalie came to his side's rescue in no less than five occasions. At the other end of the ground, Saidur Rahman, the Bangladeshi goalkeeper, had a peaceful day with hardly any intruder in the penalty zone. The few chances that Maldives got were from lapses in the Bangladeshi defence but they were not sharp enough to pose any serious threat. The result puts the hosts in a rather delicate situation. They will have to win their match against the Nepalese. A draw in that encounter can blow Bangladesh hopes of winning the gold off.

Seles still worried

NEW YORK, Dec 20: Fear and uncertainty envelope Monica Seles as her return to tennis nears; reports AP. Seles, who has not played competitively since being stabbed in the back during a match at Hamburg, Germany, in April, might launch her comeback next month at the Australian Open, a Grand Slam event she has won the past three years. 'I still have days when I look back and go over the whole day in my mind, but since I've gotten into my practice routine, I almost don't think about it,' she said in Sunday's edition of The New York Times. 'I don't know how I'll react my first match back. Probably I'll be afraid to sit down during change-overs, since that's what I was doing when he stabbed me. Probably I'll be nervous still playing my match after being away so long.' 'I've always been able to block out everything when I play, but if I get emotional, I shouldn't be afraid of letting it show.'

TEAMS

BD/BAH: Arif Hossain, Moon, Jewel Rana, Masud Rana, Arman, Rupu, Rumi, Nakib, Kaiser Hamid, Munna, Saidur Rahman and Rakib. MALDIVES: Ahmed Ibrahim, Ahmed Halem, Shaahu Islam, Abdullah Waheed, Ahmed Amir, Ali Shaahn, Ismail Asif, Abdul Latheef, Yusuf Azem, Mohamed Rasheed and Ibrahim Hameed. Referee: Mohsen Arif (Sri Lanka).

Shri Lanka shock champs

Two-time gold medalists Pakistan met their Waterloo right on the first day of the SAF soccer when they suffered a 1-2 defeat against Sri Lanka at the Mirpur Stadium yesterday, reports UNB. All the three goals came in the first half. Pakistan took off well and stole a march over the Sri Lankans when Nauman scored the first goal in the 18th minute, lobbing the ball into the net over custodian Weerasinghe (1-0).

The goal galvanised the Lankan squad into the offensive once and Ranawera of Shri Lanka's Renown Sporting Club restored parity in the 32nd minute, by a ground shot from the left wing (1-1).



Scene from yesterday's SAF football opener between Shri Lanka and Pakistan. Shri Lanka beat two-time champions and reigning holders Pakistan by 2-1. — Star photo

The equaliser sent a wave of excitement in the field and both the contending sides started playing a desperate game to snatch the winner. And three minutes later, Ranawera scored the decider with his second goal when he unleashed a powerful 20-year-old past the Pakistan goalie (2-1). After conceding the second goal, defending champions Pakistan went all out to get the equaliser but failed in the face of strong defence by the Lankans. Shri Lankan booters were groomed by two Brazilian coaches — George Ferreira and Marcos Fardinand — for the last 11 months. Shri Lanka will meet India on Wednesday at 2-45 pm at the Dhaka Stadium while Pakistan take on arch rivals India on Friday at 5-30 pm at the same venue. Pakistan will have to beat India to keep their chances alive. Ifukhar Ghand of Pakistan was cautioned with the yellow card.

TEAMS

SHRI LANKA: Weerasinghe, Haseemdeen, Ferdinand, Sampath Perera (captain), Ananda Kumar, Di Steinwall, Shanika Kumar, Wanbeck, Anton Silva (Roshan Perera), Ranawera (Sirisina) and CN Steinwall. PAKISTAN: Taj Din, Tanveer Husnain, Adeel Butt (Haroon Yusaf), Muhammad Azhar, Muhammad Tariq (captain), Ifukhar Ghand, Tahir Mahmood, Muhammad Zubair (Tahir Agha) and Muhammad Nauman (Ghauhar Zaman). Referee: Jindamat Russamee (Thailand).

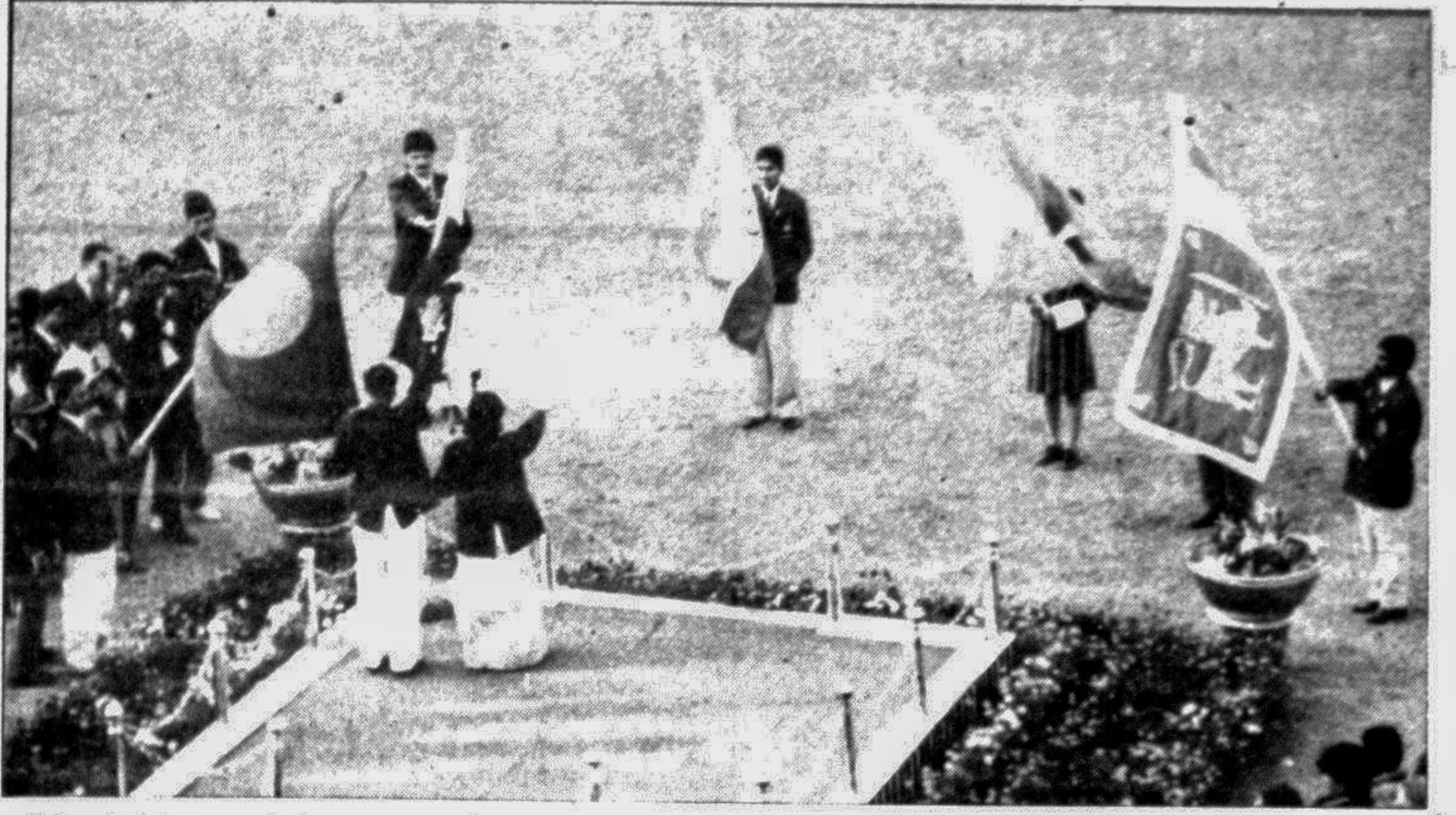
PCA marching strongly on

GRONINGEN, Netherlands, Dec 20: The 'breakaway' Professional Chess Association (PCA) formed after a row between the ruling world body FIDE and world number one Garry Kasparov, announced plans on Sunday for its own World Championship cycle, reports Reuters. FIDE stripped Kasparov of his world title and removed both players from the world ranking list. It also held an official title match in which Russia's Anatoly Karpov easily defeated Jan Timman of the Netherlands. The PCA tournament in Groningen is taking place despite the disapproval of the Dutch Chess Federation which recognises Karpov as the only world champion. But the world's leading players have given strong support to the tournament and five of the top 10 in the latest world rankings have decided to compete for a match against Kasparov. The 240,000 prize fund in Groningen — greater than the sum offered by the equivalent FIDE international tournament — has also helped to attract most of the world's top 50 players.

Many players appeared optimistic that they would be able to compete in both World Championship cycles and PCA officials deigned that any attempt would be made to induce players to drop out of the official FIDE cycle. English Grandmaster Michael Adams, who has already reached the last 12 of the FIDE championship, was pragmatic. 'Let's just see what happens here,' he said. Play in Groningen will continue until December 30. The top seven finishers will then join Short in knock-out matches to be played in 1994.

Hendry gets it at last

ANTWERP, Belgium, Dec 20: World champion Steven Hendry won six of the last seven frames to capture the European Open snooker title with a 9-5 victory over fellow Briton Ronnie O'Sullivan on Sunday, reports Reuters. The Scot, trailing 4-3 after the first session of the final, took the title for the first time and avenged the beating he suffered by O'Sullivan, an 18-year-old Englishman, in the United Kingdom final last month.



Golam Ambia, country's fastest man and ace shooter Kazi Shahana Parveen taking the oath on behalf of the athletes at the Dhaka Stadium during the opening ceremony of the SAF Games yesterday. — Star photo

Clean sweep for Indonesia

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 20: Indonesia completed a clean sweep of all four titles at the World Grand Prix badminton finals when Joko Suprianto and Susi Susanti claimed the men's and women's singles titles on Sunday, reports Reuter. Suprianto showed why he is ranked number one in the world, beating his athletic 21-year-old compatriot Heryanto Arbi 11-15, 15-2, 15-1. Susanti also justified her world number one ranking by coolly dismissing China's Ye Zhaoying in straight sets 11-3, 12-9 to take the women's singles title. The men's final saw Heryanto, the 21-year-old all-England champion fail to repeat his emotional semifinal victory over Malaysia's Rashid Sidek on Saturday. Employing his trademark leaping smashes — reminiscent of another Indonesian badminton great of decade ago, Liem Swie King — Heryanto raced to a 7-0 lead and held on to win the first set. In the second set, though, Joko seized the initiative as Heryanto faltered badly at the net and then took a commanding 8-1 lead in the decider. Heryanto desperately tried to smash his way back into game but couldn't pick up a single point as he kept sending the shuttle long and wide, later blaming a devilish draught in the stadium for his collapse. 'In the first set I had the wind in front of me and though I was hitting the shuttle hard it was landing in. But in the second set, the wind was behind me and everything I hit went long.'

The veteran Joko, who had an easy time on Saturday when his semi-final opponent Alan Budi Kusuma of Indonesia retired after losing the first set 4-15, said he knew Heryanto was tired after his gruelling match with Rashid.

'I was hoping he would put up a little more fight, but probably in his attempt to get back into the game he made many errors' Joko said. Joko's victory represents the first time an Indonesian has won a men's singles title on their rival neighbour's homecourt since Luck Sugianto won the Malaysian Open in 1984. Heryanto's victory over Rashid ended an unbeaten three-year run for the wily Malaysian at Kuala Lumpur's Stadium Negara dating back to 1990, when he lost to China's Wu Wenkai in World Grand Prix finals. Susanti was pleased to avenge her defeat at the hands of Zhaoying earlier this year at the Indonesian Open. 'I was trying to wear her down in the first set and do the attacking in the second set. But to my surprise she fought back,' she said. Indonesia also claimed both the men's and women's doubles titles.

McEnroe drops out

PERTH, Australia, Dec 20: John McEnroe has withdrawn from the Hopman Cup team tennis tournament and will be replaced on the United States team by Ivan Lendl, tournament chairman Paul McNamee announced Monday, reports AP. McNamee said McEnroe had cited a leg injury as the reason for his unavailability. Czech-born Lendl was granted United States citizenship last year but never has played Davis Cup tennis for his adopted country. He will partner Mary Joe Fernandez on the United States team. McNamee said McEnroe had suggested Lendl as his replacement and had helped swing the deal. 'He spoke to Ivan and really helped us get a player of his calibre,' McNamee said. 'John went to great lengths to make sure we had a good replacement.'

The burden Graf had to bear

PARIS, Dec 20: World number one Steffi Graf said on Friday she had been put under extra pressure this year after the stabbing in April of her arch-rival Monica Seles, reports Reuter. With Seles out of action after the knife attack by a Graf fan, the German enjoyed her best season in a long time, regaining the number one slot and winning three titles in successive Grand Slam tournaments. But she told a news conference the stabbing had been an added burden. 'I felt I had something to do with it because it was a fan of mine who did it,' she said. 'I felt bad about it, though I could not have done anything about it. Then people were asking me a lot about it and it was difficult to answer. There was a lot of pressure on me. Later in the year people said I was winning because she was absent and that wasn't easy either.'

Graf said she had spoken to Seles recently. 'We talked a few weeks ago,' she said. 'We've been in touch. I don't want to talk about what we said. It was just a conversation between the two of us. But she said she hopes to be back in Australia (for January's Australian Open). It was a terrible thing which happened to her. It's difficult for her to react to what happened. I think that has been more difficult than anything else. That's what people have to understand. I had a problem of concentration after what happened in Hamburg. I wasn't on the court. It was difficult to be playing out there.'

Graf said she hoped the Yugoslav would get back to her old form despite her long lay-off. 'I'm hoping for that as much as other people do,' she said. 'I have no idea if she can get back to her best again. But she's always been very determined. She's always very well prepared. If she comes to Australia, she will be ready for the tournament in her mind. But she needs some time. I hope she will be in good shape.' 'Hopefully Monica will play in Australia and things will get back to normal.' Graf said she thought her own play had improved during the year. 'I've got more confidence in my game. I'm choosing my shots better,' she said. 'I think my backhand has got better and when I need to I can come in a lot more. I will work on that more in the next few weeks. I'll play more approach shots.' The German said she had no problem with motivation even though she had won all the titles she ever wanted to win. 'My only real goal is to get better,' she said. 'If there was no chance of getting better, I wouldn't want to be out there.'

Lewis has a heart

MELBOURNE, Dec 20: World athletics great Carl Lewis arrived here today from the United States after an impulsive decision to visit a seriously-ill Australian teenage athlete who idolises him, reports AFP. Lewis touched down today and left the airport immediately to meet 17-year-old Craig Sheppard of Melbourne. The teenager, a budding athlete, is suffering from a life-threatening heart disorder brought on by medication taken to combat muscle cancer which he has suffered since a baby. The sports-mad youngster from competing in athletics and his inspiration has been Lewis. The US sprint and long-jump champion was reportedly reduced to tears when he read reports faxed to him in Houston about the teenager and he made a spontaneous decision to make the long Trans-pacific flight to visit him. 'This young man's story was close to my heart,' Lewis said shortly before leaving home. 'People tell me I inspired him to go after his goals—but he is as much an inspiration to me as I hope I can be to him.'

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Swimmer Mosharraf Hossain (R) and sprinter Sufia Khatun, both aces of the yester years move cheek by jowl with the Games torch. — Star photo