

Ranatunga being optimistic

COLOMBO, Jan 9: Sri Lankan skipper Arjuna Ranatunga has said the forthcoming series against India would be "very tough", but he was confident his side would rise to meet any challenge on foreign soil, reports AFP.

"It will be a very tough tour, no doubt. But we are confident and ready for any challenge," Ranatunga said of his determined band of players who leave for India on Monday.

Ranatunga observed that India were currently riding high after a string of victorious Tests against England, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

"India were going through a fine spell at the moment. India also have the advantage of playing in home conditions," said Ranatunga, veteran of 46 Tests.

He said that more importance was attached to the tour since it would provide an opportunity for the players to prove that they can perform well at Test level both at home and abroad. Sri Lanka are yet to win a Test match overseas.

"Recently all away matches have been one-day internationals. We now have to prove ourselves in the Test matches," Ranatunga said. Sri Lanka returned home in November after a poor show in one-day internationals in Sharjah and India.

The 30-year-old captain, however, said that Sri Lanka had the potential to upset their neighbouring giants who will field virtually the same side that scored a 1-0 Test series win during their five-

week tour of the island in 1993.

Ranatunga was particularly happy with the selection of the 16-member squad to India but he also had words of encouragement for four Test players who have been dropped from the Indian tour.

"I cannot ask for a better side than this. But those who have been left out should not think their career is over. They should work hard to get back into the side," said Ranatunga.

The four Test players — Asanka Gurusingha, Chandika Hathurusinghe, Champaka Ramayake and Romesh Kaluwithana had featured in



RANATUNGA

THE ITINERARY:

Jan 11: Arrival in Delhi
v Board President's XI at Delhi
1st Test at Lucknow
2nd Test at Bangalore
v Ranji Trophy champions at Nagpur
3rd Test at Ahmedabad
1st one-day international at Rajkot
2nd one-day international at Hyderabad
Feb 18: 3rd one-day international at Jallandur
Feb 20: Departure
February 21:

Romario makes Real suffer

MADRID, Jan 9: Brazilian striker Romario hit a hat-trick as Barcelona thrashed Real Madrid 5-0 in the clash of Spain's soccer titans on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The defeat in Barcelona's Nou Camp Stadium was the most humiliating Real Madrid have suffered at the hands of the Catalans since the 1944-45 season when they were also trounced 5-0 away.

Real, who have not won in the Nou Camp Stadium for 10 years, dominated the opening 20 minutes as the First Division champions were looking unsettled and feeling the absence of Danish international Michael Laudrup on the left flank.

But after Bulgarian striker Hristo Stoichkov switched with

Juan Goicoechea, moving from right flank to left, Barcelona's fortunes were transformed.

Romario turned his first touch of the ball into a smooth goal when he took a pass from Josep Guardiola and gracefully slotted it past Real goalkeeper Paco Buyo in the 25th minute.

Barcelona were rampant after halftime, extending their lead within three minutes when Dutchman Ronald Koeman blasted home an unstoppable spot kick.

Koeman's penalty seemed to demoralise Real and from then on the game belonged to the home team, whose fans in the 117,000 crowd celebrated joyously with red and blue flags.

Laudrup replaced Stoichkov in the 48th minute while Real's Luis Milla made way for Emilio Butragueno in the 54th.

Deportivo, however, will be looking to restore their lead when they meet humble Logrones at home on Sunday.

Venables to get Taylor's job?

LONDON, Jan 9: The list of candidates for the position of England's next soccer manager was officially narrowed to three Wednesday, but officials said there would be no immediate announcement of a successor to Graham Taylor, reports AP.

Jimmy Armfield, appointed as a special adviser to the Football Association's international committee, turned in a list of three candidates at the FA headquarters. No names were released, but reports were unanimous in naming Terry Venables as the prospective No 1 choice.

"We hope to resolve the situation sooner rather than later but no announcement or decision is imminent," FA chief executive Graham Kelly said. "Nothing will happen this week. There will be further meetings."

Taylor resigned in November after a disastrous World Cup qualifying campaign that ended with England failing to make the finals for the first time since 1978.

In addition to Venables, Queens Park Rangers manager Gerry Francis and Leeds Howard Wilkinson are also thought to be leading candidates.

Newspaper reports indicated that Venables was discussing with the FA an arrangement

under which he could accept the job.

The Daily Telegraph reported that the former Tottenham manager and chief executives will be told he must give up outside commercial interests before taking on the position. The FA would not comment on the report.

Venables has been the subject of television documentaries investigating his business affairs as well as alleged financial irregularities while he was chief executive at Tottenham. None of allegations have been proven and no official charges have been made.

Should the FA choose Venables or another unemployed manager, he would be

able to take over the post in time for England's upcoming exhibition games against Denmark and Germany. Otherwise, an interim manager would be needed to run the team until the English regular season ends in May.

In addition to Tottenham, Venables has managed English teams Wimbledon, Crystal Palace and Queens Park Rangers, and Spanish Club Barcelona. He became chief executive at Tottenham in 1991, but was fired last year by team chairman Alan Sugar in a bitter dispute that ended up in court.

Venables has also been named as a possible candidate for manager of the Welsh and Nigerian national teams.



British ice dance champions Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean hold their trophies after winning their seventh British title in Sheffield on Jan 8.

Eire plan to get adjusted

DUBLIN, Jan 9: The Republic of Ireland football squad will acclimatise for the World Cup finals with a two-week stint in Florida, reports AFP.

Manager Jack Charlton and his men will spend 12 days in Orlando before opening their campaign against Italy in New York on June 18.

Charlton had originally planned to delay departure from Ireland until the last possible stipulated date but has changed plans on medical advice. No build-up matches, however, will be played in Florida.

"Everyone was picked on form. We need the best possible side because it is always tough when playing away. Against Italy it is tougher," Charlton said.

The new players have to do well. It is their baby. It is up to them to make best use of this opportunity," he said.

Shri Lanka have also included their spin weapon Muttiah Muralidharan, the off-break bowler who has been unplayable on his day. Muralidharan will have support from left-arm spinners Don Arunaratna and Sanath Jayasuriya.

The squad: A Ranatunga (capt), P A de Silva; R S Mahanama, D Samaraweera, H P Tilkeratne, M S T Jayasuriya, R S Kalpage, P B Dassanayake, M Muralidharan, G P Wickremasinghe, D K Liyanage, S D Anurasiri, A Gunawardena, R Pushpakumara, N Fernando, M Atapattu.

The 22-man squad, who fly out from Dublin on June 6, take on Norway in their final first phase game on June 28 in New York.

The Irish have arranged five friendlies before they leave: March 23 v Russia, Dublin; April 20 v Holland, Utrecht or Eindhoven; May 24 v Portugal, Dublin; May 29 v Germany, Hanover; June 5 v Saudi Arabia, Dublin.

The Dublin-based Football Association of Ireland (FAI), who met with Foreign Minister Dick Spring on Wednesday, said some agencies in New York were asking 250 Irish puntas (357 dollars) for tickets, with a face value of 25 puntas (35.71 dollars) for Ireland's match with

Charlton said: "These are crazy, exorbitant prices and they are still climbing. It's becoming a wind-up by the touts. Our advice at present is don't touch these tickets with a bargepole."

Spring urged fans: "Have nothing to do with these prices. Wait for more information, and don't panic."

The FAI expects to get about 8,000 tickets for each of Ireland's three scheduled first round World Cup matches in New York and in Orlando, Florida, in June, but predict up to 20,000 Irish fans could go to the United States.

An Irish government-appointed World Cup steering committee, involving representatives of the FAI, travel agents and the United States embassy in Dublin, as well as government departments, will consider the tickets issue at its first meeting next week.

Radcliffe pulls off another surprise

BELFAST, Jan 9: Paula Radcliffe claimed another notable scalp on Saturday when she defeated twice world silver medalist Catherine McKiernan in a World Series cross-country meeting, reports Reuter.

The 20-year-old Briton, who outpaced South Africa's twice world champion Zola Pieterse last week, came through strongly off the last hill 500 metres from the finish.

"I could sense she was tired and decided to go for it," said Radcliffe, who won by seven seconds from the Irishwoman in 15 minutes 40 seconds over the 4,800 metres course.

McKiernan, last season's World Series champion, said: "I'm not surprised, Paula's a good athlete."

Kenyan Ismael Kiru, third in last year's World Championships, won the men's race, clocking 23.44 for the 8,000 metres course. Briton Dave Lewis followed him home a second behind after a strong finish.

Henkel hopes to return soon

BONN, Jan 9: Germany's Olympic high jump champion Heike Henkel, who is due to give birth to her first child in March, hopes to return to athletics in time for the European Championships in August, reports Reuter.

Henkel, who had to drop out of the final stages of last year's World Championships in Stuttgart after a season plagued by injury, said on Wednesday that her break from training during the pregnancy had given her an extra boost.

"Of course I want to compete at the European Championships. I think I have got a new appetite for high jumping through the baby break," Henkel, 29, said in an interview with the German newspaper *Die Zeit*.

"Last year it was exactly the opposite. I wanted to have a baby so much that sport became less interesting."

Henkel, formerly Heike Redetzky, is married to former world swimming champion Rainer Henkel.

Their second dance, the starlight waltz, drew marks as high as 5.8 on a 6.0 scale. But Punsalan-Swallow's performance of the dance placed first in the waltz, forcing a tie heading into Wednesday's original dance, in which all couples chose the rhumba.

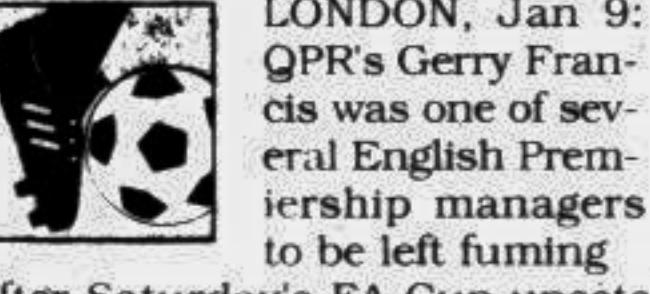
The final part of the competition, the free dance, will be Friday.



Steve Clarke of Chelsea (L) and Robert Mitchell (R) of Barnet engaged in a midfield tussle for the ball during their English FA Cup third round match on Dec 8.

— AFP photo

No luck for top guns in FA Cup



LONDON, Jan 9: QPR's Gerry Francis was one of several English Premiership managers to be left fuming after Saturday's FA Cup upsets saw Rangers bundled out by Second Division Stockport, reports AFP.

While Rangers went down 2-1, Chelsea finished goalless at home to Barnet and Tottenham Hotspur had a late strike by Jason Dozzell to salvage a 1-1 draw against Peterborough, currently bottom of the Second Division.

The only sad note for the third round minnows was the announcement that cash strapped Barnet are facing a winding-up order. The club from the north London suburbs, which needs a million pounds by Monday, has meanwhile brought in former England and Liverpool goalkeeper Ray Clemence as general manager.

However, time has already run out for QPR in English football's most prized tournament, and Francis was furious after the Premiership side squandered a 1-0 lead.

"In my three years as manager at the club, this has to be the most disappointing time," he said.

"In these sort of games you have got to battle and match the opposition for their effort and determination. We didn't do that, especially in the second half. Stockport deserved their win and I don't envy any other side having to come here."

Kidderminster manager Graham Allner paid tribute to his men after they beat First Division Birmingham City 2-1 — the only victory by a non-professional club.

Stockport manager Danny Bergara said: "At times we played like a Premier League side. The lads were magnificent and the whole of Stockport

should love them."

Andy Preece, the team's top scorer whose 74th minute winner was a spectacular volley, said: "It was a good job it didn't come to me on my right foot because it could have gone anywhere."

Chelsea chief Glenn Hoddle watched as his men were booted off the pitch after failing to destroy a team who were playing non-league football in 1991.

"To say I am disappointed is an understatement," Hoddle said. "I take nothing away from Barnet, they have produced probably their best performance of the season."

You need luck in the FA cup and we had it today. We didn't deserve anything but defeat."

Barnet may not be in business for the replay, though, following the news from club chairman David Buchler.

"Our financial position is dire," he said. "We need to find one million pounds by Monday — and that is simply not available. We are going to ask for a further adjournment."

Clephane, who left Spurs as a coach at the end of last season, said: "I think it is a wonderful opportunity people have said I must be mad to go to Barnet — but I've seen enough here today to know that we can climb out of trouble."

Kidderminster manager Graham Allner paid tribute to his men after they beat First Division Birmingham City 2-1 — the only victory by a non-professional club.

"To come to a club like this three league above us and win after going a goal behind is tremendous," he said.

Manchester United or Liverpool would be great in the

next round, but Wolverhampton Wanderers would be a massive game for us."

There were more happy managers at Leeds, Newcastle and Manchester City — all of whom had goal-scorers to be proud of.

Leeds boss Howard Wilkinson was delighted with 19-year-old Jamie Forrester, making his first start and scoring two great goals to help see off Crewe 3-1.

"Forrester's finishing was tremendous," Wilkinson said.

"His first goal was a super volley and the second was surely goal of the month."

Newcastle manager Kevin Keegan was full of praise for the strike duo of Andy Cole and Peter Beardsley after they scored a goal apiece in the 2-0 victory over Coventry City.

The pair have scored 37 goals in 19 games since teaming up at Newcastle in September.

Keegan said: "I thought today their partnership was about as exciting as I've seen it. They are on the same wavelength."

Manchester City's hero was Norwegian international midfielder Kari Ingebrigtsen, who hopes that his hat-trick in the 4-1 win over Leicester City will help earn him a World Cup place.

"I need to be playing first team football if I am to get into the Norwegian squad for the World Cup finals," he said, before thanking his teammates for giving him his chance.

"The rest of the team set me up for those goals today. They were perfect crosses from Terry Phelan for the first two."

There was mixed fortunes though for two teams in the spotlight on Friday after man-

Manchester goes for Commonwealth Games

LONDON: Jan 9: Manchester launched a bid for the 2002 Commonwealth Games on Wednesday, undeterred by its failure to win the 2000 Olympics, reports Reuter.

Sir Robert Scott, chairman of the bid committee, said: "We are very bullish and optimistic about both our chances and our future."

Manchester is competing against two other English cities, London and Sheffield, for the right to put forward its bid.

The Commonwealth Games Council for England must choose between the three on February 2 and the winner will then pursue its bid with the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF).

Sir Robert, who was knighted this year for his work in spearheading the city's Olympic bid, said: "We see our rivals Sheffield and London as formidable.

"Sheffield hosted the World Student Games and London is London. But Manchester is battle-hardened now."

Manchester, beaten by Sydney for the Olympics, is putting forward a programme of 12 sports, ranging from aquatics to wrestling and promises state-of-the-art facilities for them all.

Two sports venues are already being built