

Muktis play India in Independence Cup opener

Sports Reporter
Muktijodha Sangsad Kripa Chakra, who will represent Bangladesh in the upcoming six-nation Independence Cup Invitational football tournament, starting from September 14 in Doha, Qatar, take on India in the inaugural match at the Khalifa International Stadium.

Muktijodha, who open their second leg of the Star Premier Division league against Public Works Department on September 11, play Yemen in their second and final preliminary group match on September 16.

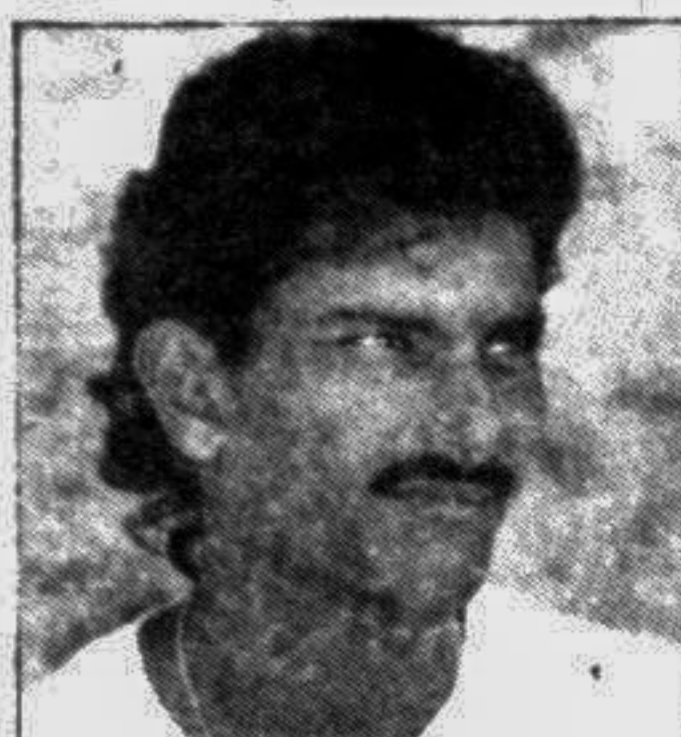
The Federation Cup winners leave Dhaka for Qatar on September 12.

Ravi Shastri signs off

COLOMBO, Sept 8: Ravi Shastri, one of India's greatest cricket all-rounders, announced his retirement from first-class cricket Thursday, reports AFP.

The 32-year-old Shastri, here as a television commentator for the four-nation limited-overs tournament, told reporters he was not motivated to play any longer.

Shastri is the only Indian cricketer besides veteran all-rounder Kapil Dev to achieve



RAVI SHASTRI

the rare double of 3,000 runs and 100 wickets in both Test and one-day cricket.

He played 80 Tests for India since his debut in 1980, scoring 3,930 runs and taking 151 wickets. His 206 against Australia in the 1992 Sydney Test was his highest score in 11 Test centuries.

In 150 one-day internationals, Shastri scored 3,180 runs and took 129 wickets. He was named the man-of-the-tournament in the 1985 World Championship of cricket series in Australia.

Shastri won the only Test in which he captained India when debutant Narendra Hirwani took 16 wickets to defeat the West Indies in Madras in 1988.

Germany beat Russia

MOSCOW, Sept 8: Germany beat Russia 1-0 on Wednesday in a friendly international, as they took the first positive steps towards putting their disappointing World Cup performance behind them, reports Reuter.

And the winning goal came from a player who saw only four minutes of action in the United States, 31-year-old Stefan Kuntz.

But the Germans lacked creativity in midfield, with neither Mario Basler in the first half nor Andy Moeller in the second providing the drive that coach Bert Vogts was desperately seeking.

Kaiserslautern striker Kuntz, who made just a brief substitute's appearances at the World Cup where the defending champions were knocked out by Bulgaria in the quarter-finals, rocked the Russians with 12 minute goal.

Shearer's double downs US

LONDON, Sept 8: Striker Alan Shearer scored twice in the space of seven minutes on Wednesday as England beat the United States 2-0 in a friendly that went some way towards avenging one of English soccer's darkest days, reports Reuter.

The Blackburn marksman, taking his international tally to five goals in 11 appearances, ripped through the ragged-looking US defence with a powerful shot in the 33rd minute and a superbly athletic diving header in the 40th.

The score was scant reward for a rampant England team, bolstered by the reappearance of a fitter and lighter John Barnes, that never looked in danger of conceding a goal let alone losing and that could easily have doubled its tally at Wembley.

But, as far as the 38,629 fans were concerned, it was enough to erase the memory of the two countries' last meeting in Boston in June 1993 when former manager Graham Taylor's England went down 2-0 to the inexperienced 1994 World Cup hosts.

As well as avenging that loss, the victory maintained England's record of not conceding a goal in the four games since Terry Venables took over as coach.



Two female judokas in action on the opening day of the 18th national championships at the Mirpur Indoor Stadium yesterday. The two-day meet ends today. — Star photo

Agassi too good for Muster

Sports Reporter
NEW YORK, Sept 8: Andre Agassi is building confidence with every success against a seeded player at the US Open.

Agassi blasted his way into the semifinals Wednesday night, wiping out a seeded player for the third time, then admitted his sights are set higher.

"I've said it a lot, probably too much, to be quite honest, but I feel like I can win these matches," Agassi said. "And I feel like I'm good enough to do it."

Agassi simply outgunned 13th seed Thomas Muster 7-6 (7-5), 6-3, 6-0 to grab a semi-final berth against ninth-seeded Todd Martin 6-4, 7-6 (9-5), 4-6, 6-4 winner over Germany's Bernd Karbacher, reports AP.

With the victory, Agassi became the seventh unseeded singles player to beat three seeded men in the same tournament. He defeated No. 6 Michael Chang and No. 12 Wayne Ferreira before Muster.

No unseeded man has ever defeated four seeded players, which Agassi could do by winning his next match against Martin.

The last unseeded male to defeat three seeded players was Australian Fred Stolle in 1966. Ironically, the first to do it was Francis X. Shields in 1930, the grandfather of Agassi's current girlfriend, actress Brooke Shields.

Saturday's other semifinal pairing is to be decided Thursday and Thursday night as Peru's Jaime Yzaga plays Karel Novacek of the Czech Republic and No. 4 Michael

Stich, the highest seeded player remaining in the men's field, takes on Sweden's Jonas Bjorkman.

The Agassi-Muster clash was just that — two heavyweights slugging it out.

There were very few drop shots or net approaches — the two instead reverting to raw power. Side to side, baseline to baseline, corner to corner.

When Agassi broke his Austrian foe in the seventh game to take a 5-2 lead, for all practical purposes the match was over. Muster won only one more game, by breaking Agassi in the eighth game.

"He raised his game, definitely," Muster said of Agassi. "I had a couple of chances to break back to 1-1, but I never really had the feeling I could get on top of him."

At deuce in the final game of the second set, Agassi blasted a backhand service return that was ruled long, giving Muster ad point. But Muster overruled the linesman and replayed the point.

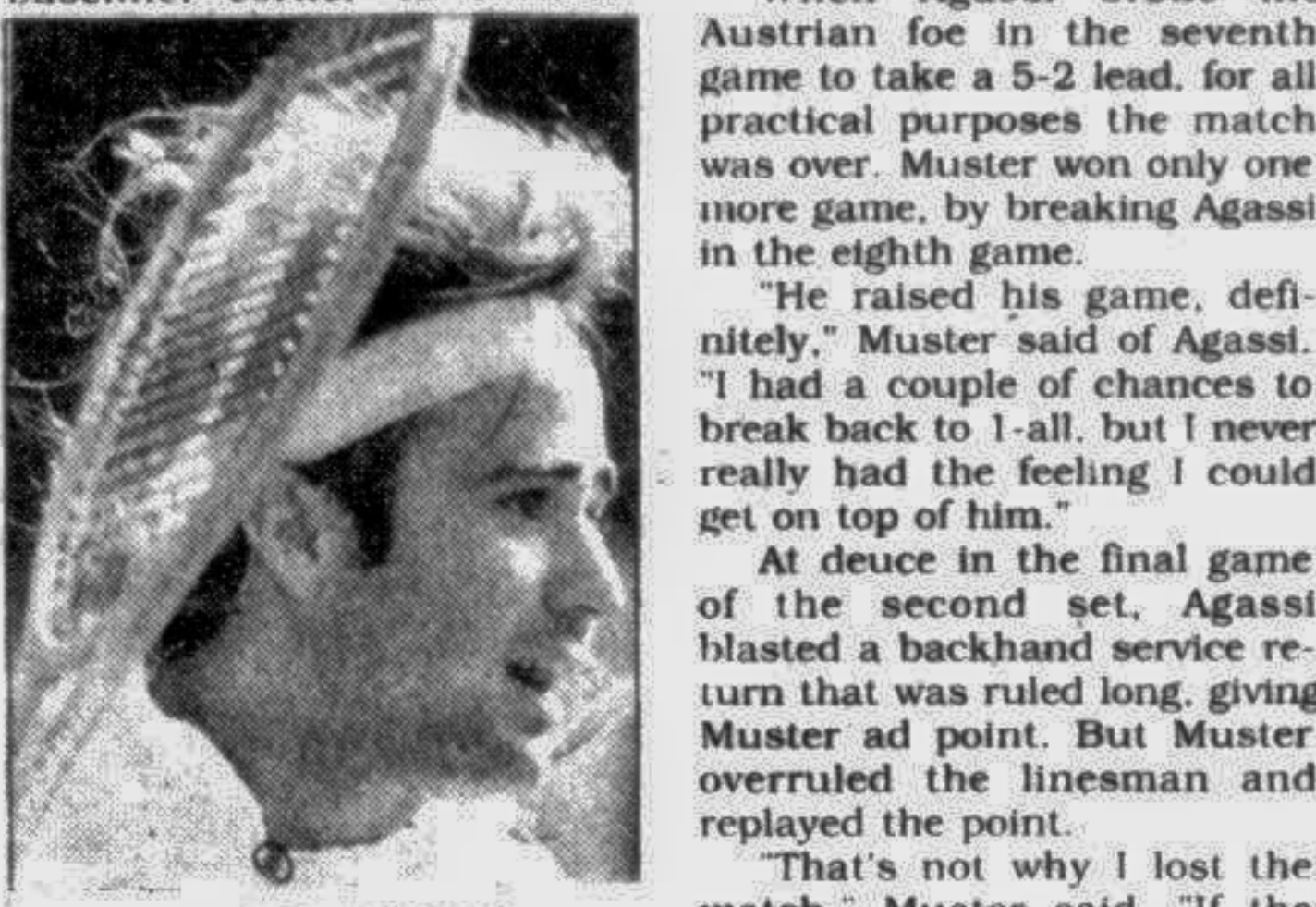
"That's not why I lost the match," Muster said. "If the ball is that far in, even if it's 5-3 or deuce, whatever, it is, I can't look at it because (the call is) just so bad. That's why I gave it to him. We're good friends and I don't think I should steal a ball like that."

Agassi won the next two points to close out the set and begin his seven-game match-ending streak.

"He was obviously playing better," Muster said. "It is not a question of one shot."

Agassi's next opponent, Martin, didn't much impress the player he beat Wednesday.

"If you ask me for a prediction, I won't bet money on Todd Martin," Karbacher said.



ANDRE AGASSI

Muster drew first blood, breaking Agassi in the third game. And it was the blond Austrian who had the easier time holding serve, at least in the early going. It turned out to be Muster's final lead in this year's tournament.

Agassi, finding the range with both his forehand and backhand, began moving Muster from side to side, controlling the points, making his opponent work for every shot.

"I weathered a storm in the first set, and I felt good from there on in," Agassi said.

After Agassi broke Muster's serve to begin the second set,

European Championship qualifying round Champs, Italy fumble early

LONDON, Sept 8: Title holders Denmark and World Cup finalists Italy were held to humbling draws in European Championship qualifiers on Wednesday by Macedonia and Slovenia, international newcomers from old Yugoslavia, reports Reuter.

Italy, beaten on penalties in the World Cup final, could salvage only a 1-1 draw in Maribor against new neighbours Slovenia in one of the major shocks of the night when 12 nations made their European debuts in the qualifying series for the 1996 finals in England.

Slovenia led through a 13th minute goal from Sasa Udovic, but Alessandro Costacurta equalised two minutes later in the Group Four game.

The Italians, looking leaden footed and clumsy, were fortunate to escape with a

draw against inspired opponents who had a second-half effort scooped off the line.

Denmark, winners two years ago in Sweden when they were substitute entrants for the banned Yugoslavia, needed a goal three minutes from time by Flemming Povlsen to rescue a point in the Macedonian capital Skopje.

Mitko Stojkovski had put the home side ahead after four minutes on an historic night for the former Yugoslav state which saw their under-21 team thrash the Danes 5-3.

Norway, who knocked 10 goals past San Marino almost to the day two years ago to start their successful World Cup qualifying campaign, needed a last-gasp goal to squeeze a 1-0 home win over newcomers Belarus.

The former Soviet Union state held out in the Group Five encounter until substitute Seir Fergaud scored an 88th

minute winner as Norway suffered a taste of their own medicine against a defensive-minded side.

In another shock, Lithuania won 2-0 against fancied Ukraine in Kiev in a Group Four showdown between two former Soviet states.

Spain were made to struggle to take all three points away from Cyprus, with two first half goals from Francisco Higuera enough for a 2-1 win.

Belgium also found the going tough against another of the debutants, grabbing a 2-0 home win, thanks to a fourth-minute own goal from Yervand Krbashian and a 73rd minute strike from Marc Degryse.

The Faroe Island, one of two debutantes in the last qualifying series, failed to repeat their shock of four years ago when they beat Austria. They went down 5-1 at home to Greece.



American striker Cobi Jones (R) crosses a ball as England's Barry Venison (L) flinches and Graeme Le Saux looks on during the first half of their friendly match at Wembley Stadium on Sept 7. England won 2-0. — AFP photo

India-Aussies match on BTV

Sports Reporter
Bangladesh Television (BTV) will telecast live the third match of the ongoing four-nation Singer World Series cricket tournament between Australia and India from R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo today.

The day and night encounter involving the two former World Cup winners starts at 2-25 local time.

Ansars judokas start well

Sports Reporter
Bangladesh Ansars were off to a resounding start in the 18th national judo championships, which began yesterday at the Mirpur indoor stadium, winning all the seven golds on offer in the women's event.

Probhati Samang, who won gold in the 36 kg category, set the pace in the morning with Mina Akhter, Nurun Nahar, Jahannara Akhter, Mitali Samang, Kamala Akhter and Rokeya Yasmin following suit.

Earlier, Anwar Hossain, president of the Bangladesh Judo and Karate Federation, declared the two-day meet involving 140 competitors including 59 women open.

India bank on spin

COLOMBO, Sept 8: India, fighting to stay in contention in the four-nation World Series one-day tournament, are expected to unleash three spinners on Australia in Friday's crucial match, reports AFP.

Left-arm Venkatapathy Raju is likely to join off-spinner Rajesh Chauhan and leggie Anil Kumble in the bowling attack for the match India must win to keep their hopes alive.

Raju is expected to replace seamer Javagal Srinath in the team that lost the rain-hit tournament opener against Sri Lanka on Monday.

India must win both their remaining matches against Australia and Pakistan to qualify for the final of the two-week event.

Indian manager Ajit Wadekar said Thursday he will finalise the playing eleven for the day-night international just before the toss, but indicated the likelihood of using three spinners.

"The wicket at the Premadasa Stadium is a slow turner, so we may play an additional spinner," he said. "I believe the Australians will have trouble picking the turn."

Wadekar said he did not read too much into Monday's defeat against Sri Lanka, saying the shortened 25-overs-a-side match was like a lottery.

The result may have been different if he had won the toss and fielded first when the outfield was drying up. Sri Lanka had the better of the conditions right through the match," he said.

But Wadekar urged his team to lift their game if the Australians were to be defeated.

"The Australians must be very confident after their victory over Pakistan on Wednesday. They are a very competent one-day side, but we will not give in easily," the Indian manager said.

His Australian counterpart Bob Simpson said his team was well-prepared to take on the Indians.

"We are getting into the groove after the long lay-off. But the Indians cannot be dismissed easily. There are no easy outings in one-day cricket," he said.

INDIA (from): Mohammad Azharuddin (captain), Sachin Tendulkar, Navjot Sidhu, Manoj Prabhakar, Vinod Kambli, Atul Bedade, Nayan Mongia (wicketkeeper), Kapil Dev, Anil Kumble, Rajesh Chauhan, Venkatapathy Raju, Javagal Srinath, Ajay Jadeja.

AUSTRALIA (from): Mark Taylor (captain), Michael Slater, David Boon, Mark Waugh, Steve Waugh, Michael Bevan, Ian Healy (wicketkeeper), Craig McDermott, Glenn McGrath, Shane Warne, Tim May, Jo Angel, Damien Fleming, Justin Langer, Gavin Robertson.

Olympic solidarity tennis coaches' course on

The Olympic solidarity tennis coaches' course, organised by the Bangladesh Olympic Association and Bangladesh Tennis Federation began at the National Tennis Complex yesterday, reports BSS.

Vice president of the Bangladesh Olympic Association Siddique Ahmed, inaugurated the two-week course.

Tyson denied once again

INDIANAPOLIS, Sept 8: A US District Court judge has denied boxer Mike Tyson's claims he is being wrongly held because of his conviction by a Marion County court, reports AP.

Novotna makes Pierce rue

Sports Reporter
NEW YORK, Sept 8: Mary Pierce was all set to face Steffi Graf. Jana Novotna had other plans.

"I'm very disappointed because I was looking forward to playing Steffi again," said Pierce, who upset Graf in the French Open semifinals earlier this year. Instead, she lost to Novotna for the second time in two career meetings, 6-4, 6-0, reports AP.

With the victory, Novotna won a US Open semifinal meeting with Graf, who crushed Amanda Coetzer 6-0, 6-2 in today's first quarterfinal.

"If I can stay with her, I have a very good chance," Novotna said. "If she plays the way she played against Coetzer, it will be very hard."

"She's still No. 1. She's serving well and there's variety in her game. It will be hard. I have a chance."

Neither Novotna nor Pierce took command in the opening set, which featured five service breaks while the two held only four times. And in the end, it was Pierce who couldn't control her own power game.

"She was hitting quite well in the beginning of the match," Novotna said. "But it didn't work so she changed her game."

For Pierce, it was a change for the worst as Novotna, growing more and more con-

dent, ripped through the final six games.

"I was very confident that I had the game to beat her," Novotna said. "I didn't really serve and volley all the time. I just mixed up my game, was very aggressive all the time."

Novotna, who never made it past the US Open fourth round until this year, moved Pierce from side to side and from the baseline to the net, waiting until her opponent made a mistake. And that Pierce did in abundance, committing 37 unforced errors, 15 more than Novotna.

"She never gave me any free points and I made too many mistakes," Pierce said.

The top-seeded Graf, seeking her second straight and fourth overall title at the National Tennis Centre, took only 55 minutes to eliminate her 11th-seeded South African foe.

"Time is something I don't really care too much about," said Graf, who hasn't been kept on court more than 55 minutes by any of her four victims.

Eight minutes into the day's first match, Graf had as many games as Coetzer did points, building a 3-0 lead. In the next game, Coetzer reached game point for the first time. It, along with the game, were quickly victims of Graf's relentless power game.

The top seed lost her perfection eight games into the match when Coetzer held at 30, earning an ovation from the crowd in Louis Armstrong Stadium. Four games later, she lost a 40-0 lead before finally holding serve again.

Then came the seventh game when Coetzer threatened to break Graf's Serve, twice reaching ad point.

It was just a speed bump in Graf's road to the semis as the world's top-ranked player held with an inside-out forehand passing shot, then broke Coetzer at 15 to close out the victory.

Second-seeded Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and No. 4 Gabriela Sabatini are the first two in the women's semifinals. Sanchez-Vicario advanced with a 6-3, 6-0 drubbing of No. 5 Kimiko Date of Japan, while Sabatini ousted unseeded Gigi Fernandez 6-2, 7-5.

A day of Chinese dominance

ROME, Sept 8: China's women smashed the 4x100 metres freestyle relay world record on Wednesday to bring a triumphant end to a day on which they dethroned swimming queens Janet Evans and Kristzina Egerszegi, reports Reuter.

In the men's races, there was double gold for Russia as Olympic champion Alexander Popov took the 100 metres freestyle title and Vladimir Selkov won the 200 metres backstroke final.

In the diving, Fan Shuping won the three-metre springboard title as the Chinese, ignoring doping rumours which dog them, took their gold medal tally to 10 at these championships.

Russia, with two golds, are a distant second in the medal standings.

Led off by newly-crowned 100 metres champion Le Jingyi and anchored by double Rome silver medalist Lu Bin, China clocked three minutes 37.91 seconds to lower the relay record of 3:39.46 set by the Americans at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992.

"Before the competition started we planned to break the world record in this event," Le said.

Yang Aihua clinched the 400 metres freestyle title as defending champion and world record holder Evans of the US finished back in fifth.

The second slowest qualifier for the final, Yang clocked 4:09.64 to take gold ahead of American Cristina Teuscher while Costa Rican Claudia Poll took her second bronze in successive days.

Olympic champion Dagmar Hase missed the final.

Hase, ninth quickest in the heats, found teammate Jana Henke unwilling to cede her

place in the eight-woman final as Hase has done so such telling effect for Franziska van Almsick 24 hours earlier. Henke finished out of the medals.

Hungarian Egerszegi slumped to her first major defeat for five years as China's He Cihong won the 100 metres backstroke title.

She swam 1:00.57 to lower the championship record for the second time in the space of a few hours.

Nina Zhivanevskaya took silver for Russia while American Barbara Bedford picked up bronze.

Popov struck gold for Russia in the 100 metres freestyle but was given a tougher fight than expected by American Gary Hall, the son of former American Olympian Gary Sr.

Popov overhauled Hall on the second length of the Foro Italico pool but his time of 49.12 seconds was well outside the record of 48.21 seconds he set in Monaco three months ago.

Brazilian Gustavo Borges, 1992 Olympic silver medalist, took bronze.

"There are competitions for breaking world records and competitions to win and the medal here means more than the time," Popov said.

"I will be in better shape in Atlanta (for the 1996 Olympics), I can promise that," he added.

Russian Selkov repeated his 1993 European Championships backstroke win over Olympic champion Martin Lopez-Zubero.

Selkov smashed the eight-year-old championship record as he came home in 1:57.42 and at one stage looked set to eclipse Lopez-Zubero's world record of 1:56.57.

The top-two Olympic placings were reversed as Lopez-Zubero ended with silver ahead of third-placed Ameri-

can Royce Sharp.

MEDALS TABLE
Medals table after the seventh day of the World Swimming Championships on Wednesday (tabulate under gold, silver, bronze):

China	10	6	1
Russia	2	4	1
United States	1	4	6
Sweden	1	2	-
Germany	1	1	4
Finland	1	1	-
Hungary	1	1	-
Australia	1	-	-
Poland	1	-	-
Zimbabwe	1	-	-
Spain	-	1	-
Belgium	-	-	2
Costa Rica	-	-	2
Brazil	-	-	1
Canada	-	-	1
Mexico	-	-	1
New Zealand	-	-	1

TA faces Asian invasion

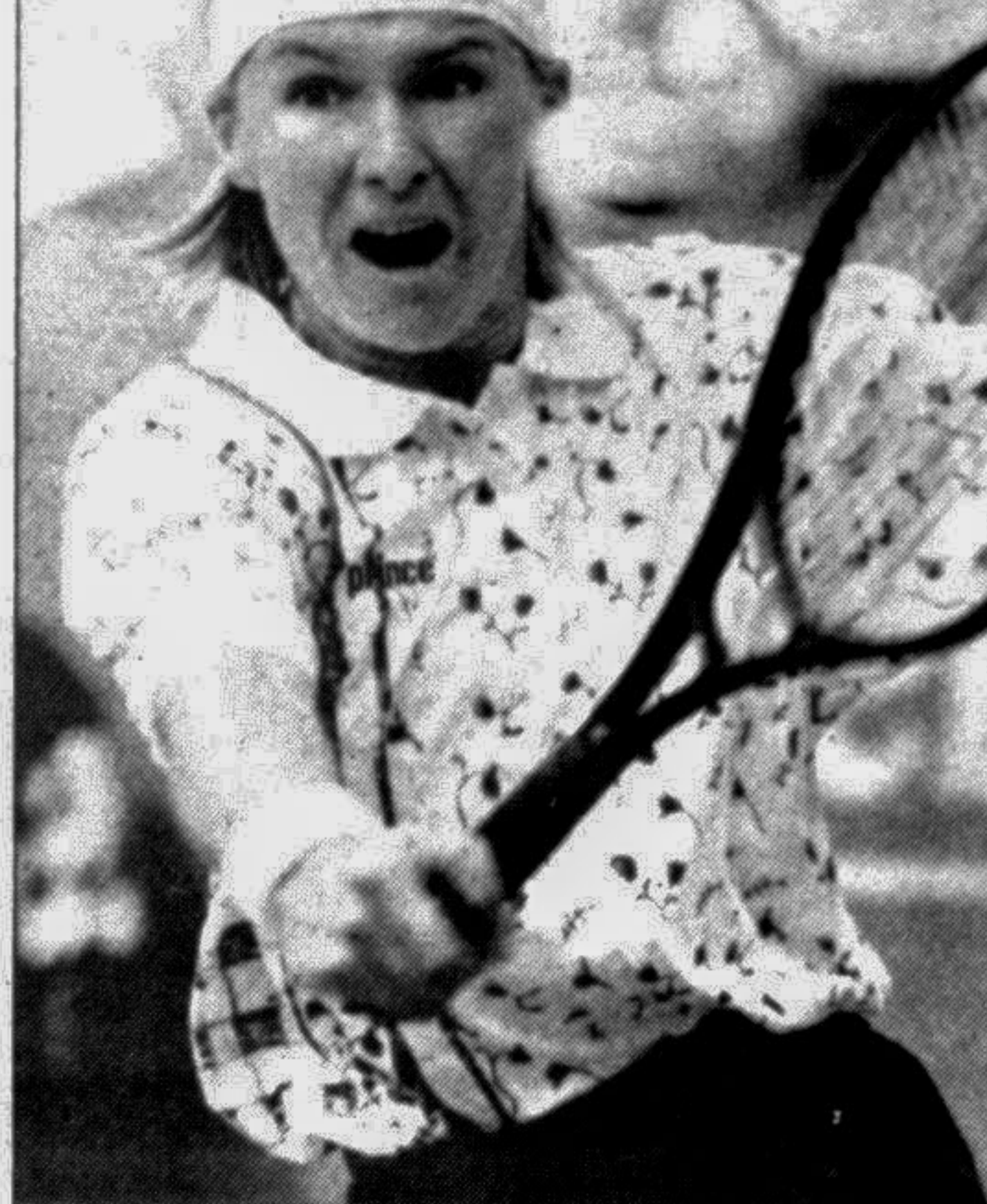
MELBOURNE, Sept 8: Asia is poised to capture another tournament on the world tennis circuit from Australia, officials said today, reports Reuter.

Tennis Australia (TA), the game's domestic governing body, said lack of government cash support at home meant the switch of venues to richer overseas competitors was inevitable.

The national women's hardcourt championship in Brisbane has already folded, to be replaced next year on the Women's Tennis Association Tour by an event in Jakarta, said TA.

TA president Geoff Pollard said he expected the national men's hardcourt championship in Adelaide to suffer the same fate next year with an Asian tournament filling the gap.

Both Hardcourt events have traditionally served as a warm-up for the Australian Open at Melbourne's Flinders Park in January.



Seventh-seed Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic makes a backhand volley against fourth-seed Mary Pierce of France during their quarter-final match at the US Open on Sept 7. Novotna advanced to the semis with a comfortable 6-4, 6-0 victory. — AFP photo

FABULOUS FOUR

(From L to R) Le Jingyi, Shun Ying, Le Ying and Lu Bin of China display their gold medals after winning the women's 4x100m freestyle relay at the World Swimming Championships in Rome on Sept 7. The quartet also created a new world record. — AFP photo



FABULOUS FOUR (From L to R) Le Jingyi, Shun Ying, Le Ying and Lu Bin of China display their gold medals after winning the women's 4x100m freestyle relay at the World Swimming Championships in Rome on Sept 7. The quartet also created a new world record. — AFP photo