

ITF masters' semis today

The semifinals of the masters' tournament in the Gold Leaf ITF Thailand-Bangladesh Satellite Circuit tennis tournament will be held today at the Ramna Tennis Complex, reports BSS.

Top seed Bom Martin of the Netherlands will face Dimitri Muzyka of Ukraine in the first semifinal at 2 pm followed by the second semifinal between Malaysian Selvam Veerasingam and Dennis Schepplingen of the Netherlands.

The doubles final will take place on Saturday at 2 pm.

Meanwhile, the tennis teams from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka arrive today to take part in the first ITF Central Asian tennis circuit.

The five-day tournament, organised by the Bangladesh Tennis Federation in Co-operation with the International Tennis Federation, begins at the Ramna Tennis Complex here on Saturday at 9:30 am.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Sadeque Hossain will inaugurate the tournament as the chief guest.

Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and hosts Bangladesh will take part in the tournament.

Japanese kabaddi team arrives Dec 26

A Japanese kabaddi team arrives here on December 26 on a four-day visit to Bangladesh, sources said yesterday, reports BSS.

The team will play two exhibition matches in Dhaka on December 27 and 28.

A rehearsal for England

LONDON, Dec 8: World champions Brazil, Sweden and Japan join hosts England in a four-team tournament to be staged next year as a dress rehearsal for the 1996 European Championship, reports Reuter.

The June 3-11 event opens with Brazil-Sweden — a repeat of the World Cup semifinal — at Aston Villa and England-Japan at Wembley.

England's Football Association are keen to use grounds that will stage European Championship matches but the venue for Brazil-Japan on June 5, remains in doubt.

Liverpool has been earmarked, but if ground redevelopment at Anfield is incomplete then the match will be transferred to neighbouring Everton's Goodison Park headquarters.

England will play Sweden at Leeds, the national team's first home game away from Wembley since they met Poland at Everton in preparation for the triumphant 1996 World Cup campaign.

Schedule:
June 3: England v Japan, Brazil v Sweden
June 5: Japan v Brazil
June 6: England v Sweden
June 8: England v Brazil
June 9: Sweden v Japan
June 11: Third place playoff and final

Russian juniors lead Chess Olympiad

MOSCOW, Dec 8: Russia's junior team, Russia-2, took the lead after the seventh round of the Moscow Chess Olympiad on Wednesday, beating Lithuania 2.5-1.5, reports AP.

Meanwhile, the favourites Russia-1, moved into a share of second place by routing France 3.5-0.5. World champion Garry Kasparov won his first game of the event, defeating France's top player Joel Lautier.

An eighth round pairing between Russia-1 and Russia-2 is now possible.

Holland fell out of a first-place tie with Russia-2 after losing to Bosnia 2.5-1.5. Bosnia now shares second with Russia-1, Estonia, Armenia and Yugoslavia.

The US men's team lost to the republic of Kyrgyzstan 2.5-1.5. The US squad must now score heavily in the second half of the event to qualify for a medal in the 14-round tournament.

In the women's second round, Georgia extended its lead by beating Romania 2.5-1.5. The Hungarian side, which has two of the three Polgar sisters, could only manage a 2-1 defeat of Estonia.

The third and strongest Polgar sister, Judit, drew against former world champion candidate Nigel Short of England in the men's section.

No stopping Susanti

BANGKOK, Dec 8: World number one Susi Susanti of Indonesia moved within a match of a semifinal berth in the World Grand Prix badminton final after a convincing 11-4, 11-3 victory in her first match on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Abahani on a hatrick

Damal Summer final today

Sports Reporter



Curtain comes down on the curtain-raiser of the domestic cricket season today.

Holders Abahani Krira Chakra (toned up by the arrival of the mercurial Pakistani all-rounder Wasim Akram who arrived yesterday to sign up for the Dhamondi outfit, take on surprise pack Victoria Sporting Club in a bid to achieve a hatrick of titles in the memorial trophy named after late Dr Mazharul Islam Damal.

While popular support and statistics uphold five-time champions Abahani as the firm favourites in today's finale, Victoria one of the oldest names in country's sporting arena and one of the finest combinations in domestic cricket until 1975 will be simply agog to give their best shot to a probable resurgence of rich legacy.

Although Abahani of late are

more like a team befitting the champions particularly after knocking out arch-rivals Mohammedan Sporting Club on their way to the final. Victoria who had earlier provided season's biggest upset by beating Abahani have got the balance and confidence in their ranks to attain should that really happen, a remarkable distinction of emerging as the only unbeaten side of the 20-team tournament.

Victoria launched some sort of an *annus mirabilis* by beating last two years champions Abahani by three wickets to mark the beginning of the tournament's second round on November 28.

It considerably jeopardised the semifinal chances of an otherwise strong, star-studded Abahani who recovered just in the nick of time roping in a few Pakistani cricketers.

Leg-spinner Iqbal Sikander, a member of Pakistan's World Cup-winning squad alongwith Manzoor Akhtar bore Abahani a

hand in crushing GMCC for a semifinal place.

Then another seasoned Pakistani—Kamal Merchant joined Abahani to help them to a 32-run victory over Mohammedans.

Victoria on the other hand reached the final with some convincing and reassuring performances. After beating Abahani and GMCC in their group matches the traditional club, led by the former national cricketer Azhar Hossain got past Brothers Union by three wickets in the semifinal.

Although Victoria have an excellent blend of youth and experience they will look forward to the two Indians—Test discard Chetan Sharma and Rajinder Singh for inspiration in today's match.

Meanwhile, the authorities have announced the rate of tickets for the final.

VIP Gate No: 1 Taka 75
VIP Gate No: 3 Taka 40
Galleries: Taka 15

Aussies amerce Zimbabwe



HOBART, Dec 8: All-rounder Stuart Law justified his promotion to opener with a fine 110 to lay the foundation for Australia's crushing 84-run victory over Zimbabwe in their World Series one-day match on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Law followed his superb 110 with an economical and effective spell of bowling as the home side romped home by 84 runs at Bellerive Oval.

The Queenslander, drafted into the side as a replacement for Steve Waugh, received outstanding support from David Boon, who remained unbeaten on 98.

The pair added 159 off 196 balls for the third-wicket as Australia reached a daunting 254 for three.

In reply, the tourists struggled to a disappointing 170 for eight from their allotted 50 overs.

It was Australia's third consecutive victory and Zimbabwe's third defeat in a row in the quadrangular tournament.

Law, who normally bats in the middle-order for his state, welcomed the opportunity to open the innings for the first time in his senior career.

"It's a good top order to bat with," Law said. "I was pleased with the way it went as I'm not hitting in the air as much these days."

Australia captain Mark Taylor, who elected to bat after winning the toss, demoted himself from his normal position as opener to give Law an opportunity for a lengthy stay at the crease.

Law responded by hitting six fours and one towering six, which brought up his century, from 135 balls.

He was eventually dismissed when he attempted to hit another six off spinner Mark Dekker only to be caught near the boundary by Grant Flower.

Boon maintained the mo-

mentum for Australia but failed to match Law's achievement by reaching three figures, much to the disappointment of spectators on his home ground.

Law made absolutely sure of his award as man-of-the-match by bowling 10 overs at a cost of just 25 runs.

Zimbabwe, chasing a run rate 5.1 an over to win, never appeared capable of overthrowing the Australian total.

Opener and captain Andy Flower, who made his side's top score of 39, expressed his frustration afterwards.

"It's not totally unexpected

Series Cup limited overs match between Australia and Zimbabwe today.

AUSTRALIA:
M. Slater c Whittall b Brain 10
S. Law c G. Flower b Dekker 110
M. Waugh c G. Flower
B Whittall 12
D. Boon not out 98
M. Bevan not out 11
Extras: (b-5 lb-2 w-5 nb-1) 13
Total: (for three wickets, 50 overs) 254
Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-55: 3-214.

Did not bat: M. Taylor, I. Healy, S. Warne, T. May, D. Fleming, G. McGrath.

Bowling:
Brain 10 1 51 1
Streak 9 0 55 0
Whittall 7 1 22 1
Dekker 10 0 42 1
Strang 9 0 51 0
G. Flower 5 0 26 0

ZIMBABWE:
A. Flower c Healy b May 39
G. Flower c Healy b McGrath 8
A. Campbell b McGrath 1
D. Houghton b May 4
M. Dekker run out 11
G. Whittall c Healy b Fleming 35
W. James c Healy b Warne 15
I. Butchart b Fleming 10
P. Strang not out 21
H. Streak not out 12
Extras: (lb-6 w-7 nb-1) 14
Total: (for eight wickets, 50 overs) 170
Fall off wickets: 1-15: 2-24: 3-47: 4-64: 5-73: 6-117: 7-129: 8-136.

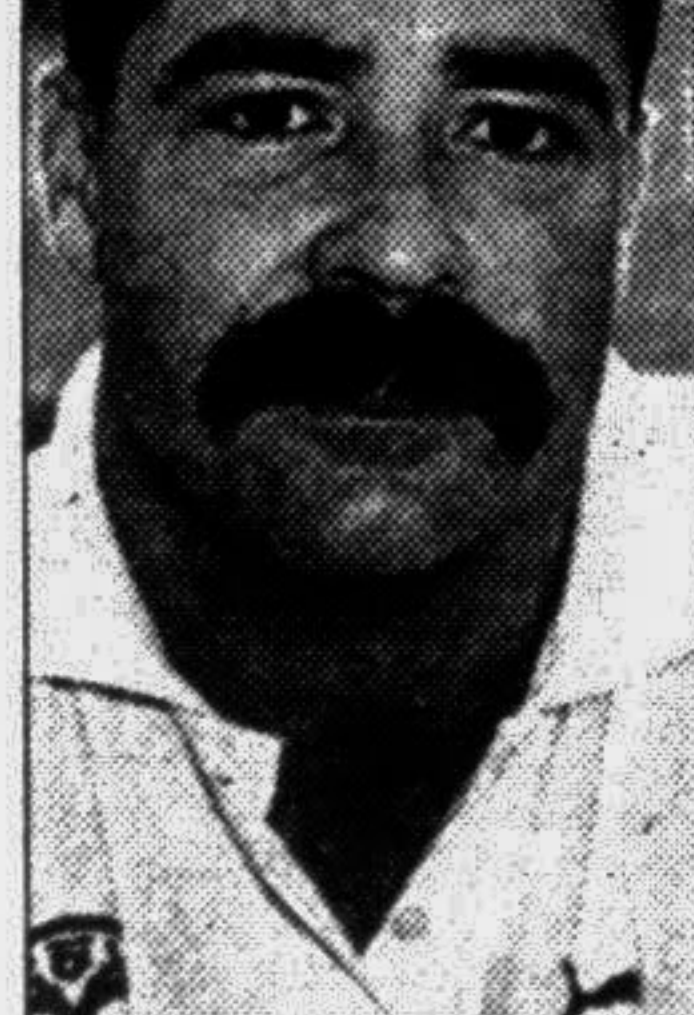
Bowling:
McGrath 8 2 18 2
Fleming 10 0 42 2
May 10 1 34 2
Law 10 1 25 0
Warne 9 0 23 1
Boon 2 0 11 0
Slater 1 0 11 0

Result: Australia won by 84 runs.

Man-of-the match: Stuart Law (Australia).

Standings in the World Series Cup after Thursday's match tabulated under (games, wins, losses, points):

Australia	3	3	-	6
England	1	1	-	2
Zimbabwe	3	-	3	0



BOON... 98 not out

but it's disappointing. I thought we'd put up a lot better showing," he said.

"We were totally outplayed by a better side today. It's as simple as that."

England and the second-string Australia 'a' side complete the line-up for the tournament, which culminates in a best-of-three finals series next month.

Scoreboard of the World

Ijaz ignites Transvaal

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 8: Ijaz Ahmed blazed 112 from 118 balls to set up Pakistan's 51-run win over a Transvaal Invitation XI on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The touring team's 50-over total of 262 for seven proved well out of the reach of the Invitation XI despite opener Dean Laing's aggressive knock of 40 from 41 balls.

With the exception of captain Mark Rushmere, who made a fluent 55 from 66 balls, the rest of the top order failed to come to terms with a tidy, but rarely threatening attack and the Invitation XI were bowled out for 211 in the final over.

Wicketkeeper Rashid Latif, who captained the Pakistan side in the absence of Salim Malik, claimed five catches but was upstaged by Ijaz.

He followed his century, which included 10 fours and three sixes, with three fire catches in the deep.

Ijaz shared partnerships of 70 with opener Shaheel Ahmed and 76 with Asif Mujtaba. Shaheel hit 58 off 83 balls.

Maldini player of the year

LONDON, Dec 8: AC Milan defender Paolo Maldini has been selected as player of the year by World Soccer magazine, upstaging fellow Italian Roberto Baggio and Brazilian striker Romario, reports AP.

Maldini, who was captain of the AC Milan team that crushed Romario's Barcelona 4-0 in the European Champions Cup final, is the first defender to win the annual award in 13 years of voting by World Soccer readers.

Maldini polled 27.36 per cent of votes, Baggio, the 1993 winner, placed second with 23.45 and Romario was third with 14.55 per cent.

Carlos Alberto Parreira, who coached Brazil to a record fourth World Cup title this summer, was voted manager of the year. AC Milan won the team award.

Jansher in final

KARACHI, Dec 8: World squash number one Jansher Khan removed a major hurdle in his way to a fourth title when he beat Australian Rodney Eyles today to move into the Pakistan Open final, reports AP.

The Pakistani defending champion was kept on court for 55 minutes and also lost a game against the fourth seeded Eyles on his way to a 15-10, 15-11, 13-15, 15-7 victory.

Jansher seemed to be headed for a victory in straight games when he was leading 13-11 in the third game, but a stroke and three winners helped Eyles to take the game.

Eyles fought well early in the fourth game, but at 6-6 Jansher unleashed a flurry of deadly nicks and effective volleys to take a 13-6 lead, enough to decide the match in his favour.

"I am always looking forward to playing in the Pakistan Open final in front of my own people and will try my best to keep the title in the country by winning the final tomorrow," said Jansher, who has won all the major titles on the international circuit this year.

It was Jansher's second victory over Eyles within a week as the world champion also defeated the Aussie in the Qatar Open final in Doha. He meets Peter Marshall in the final tomorrow.

Marshall, the world squash number two earlier became the first Englishman to reach a Pakistan Open final, beating compatriot Del Harris in the semifinals.

Abahani sign Wasim Akram

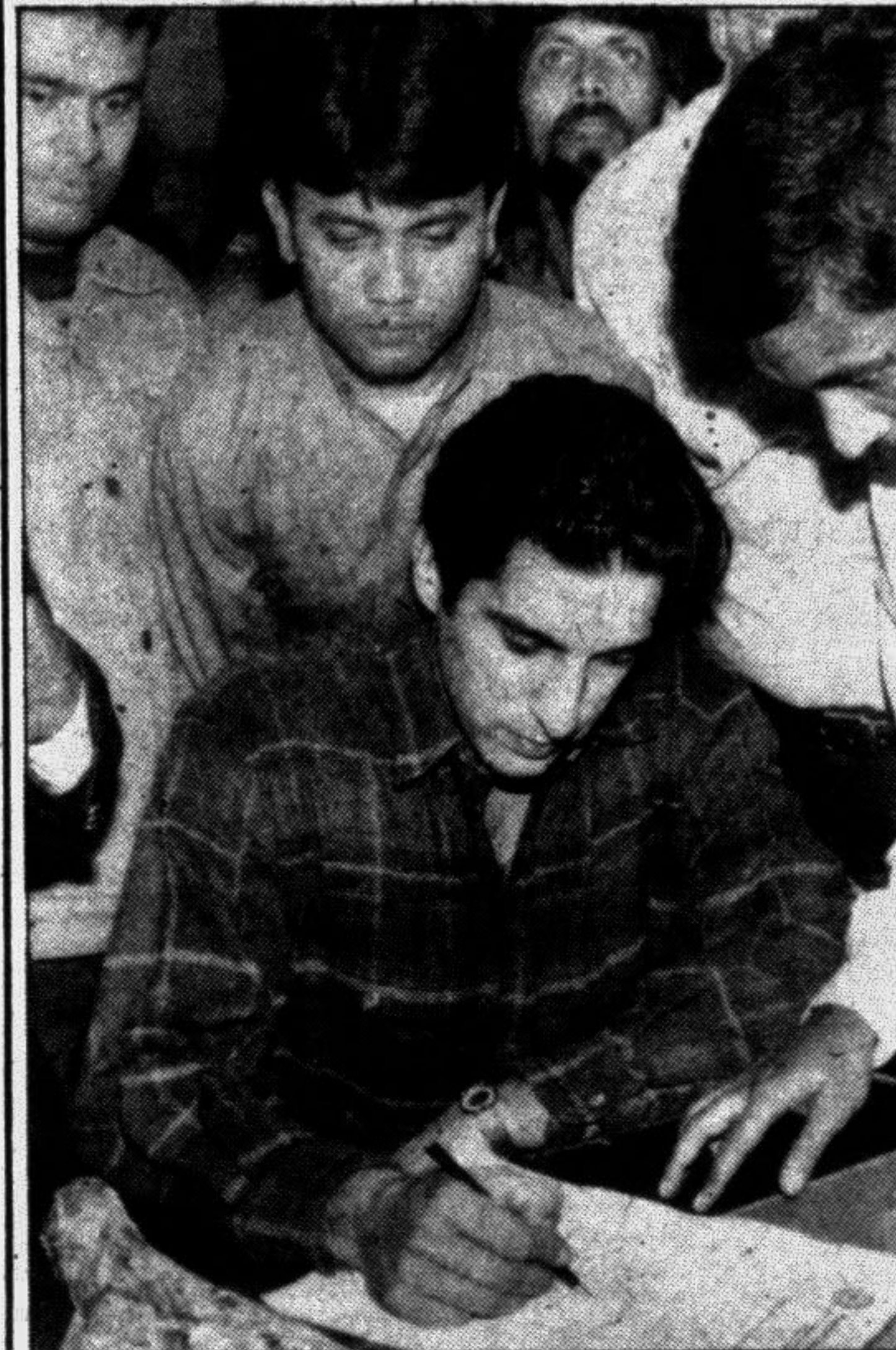
Sports Reporter



Celebrated Pakistani cricketer and arguably the world's most deceptive bowler Wasim Akram arrived yesterday to play for Abahani Krira Chakra.

Akram, who is currently

nursing a back injury and is expected to undergo surgery in London on Tuesday, completed the registration formalities at the Bangladesh Cricket Control Board (BCCB) office packed with photographers and ceaselessly illuminated by their flashes at around 7.30pm.



Wasim Akram, one of the hottest properties of world cricket, signs up for Abahani Krira Chakra. The celebrated Pakistani arrived in town last evening from London to ensure his service for Abahani in some matches of the forthcoming Navana Premier league. — Star photo.

For the ardent Abahani supporters it's certainly good news that he will play for the Dhamondi outfit but the immediate downer is that he will not appear in today's final of the 15th Damal Summer cricket tournament.

"I will play the Navana Premier super league for Abahani," said Akram who has come here yesterday afternoon from London. "Abahani is a popular team in Bangladesh and I'm very happy to be one of its member."

Although the brilliant all-rounder is going to miss the final for obvious reasons, he will watch the match. "I will be present there to cheer up my side," added Wasim Akram who is expected to leave Dhaka on Sunday. Wasim who is expecting a 12-day lay-off after the surgery is optimistic about joining the national team in South Africa.

Akram, who had visited Bangladesh twice — as a member of Umar Qureshi Eleven under skipper Imran Khan in 1986 and then in 1988 in the Asia Cup — was pursued by Abahani official Mustafa Kamal at his home in Lahore where they reached an agreement.

Asked what promoted him to play in a rather unfancied cricket championship Akram said "Obviously money is a factor. Besides, I have been told cricket pulls big crowd here, which is important for motivation". Terming the country cricket in England as sedate Akram said "Crowd there is very thin."

Akram apart, Iqbal Sikander, his fellow World Cupper also signed for Abahani yesterday.

However, Iqbal Sikander along with compatriot Kamal Merchant who displayed an all-round show in the second semi-final against arch-rivals Mohammedans will appear in the final today.

Malcolm returns to ground



SYDNEY, Dec 8: Powerful pace bowler Devon Malcolm will return to the England cricket team after an absence of almost three weeks when he plays in a three-day match against the Australian Cricket Academy at North Sydney from Friday, reports AP.

Malcolm, who has taken 98 Test wickets, has been sidelined since before the first Test in Brisbane, which Australia won comprehensively. He was diagnosed as suffering from chicken pox.

Malcolm, 31, bowled well during a training session Thursday, convincing the England management that he is ready to make his comeback. He wants to prove his fitness for the second Test to the Ashes series, which begins in Melbourne on Dec 24.

Joining him a new-look attack in Middlesex seamer Angus Fraser, who was placed on standby for the opening Test when Malcolm's illness was diagnosed.

Fraser, a surprise omission from the original English touring party, was called up Wednesday after fellow pacerman Martin McCague was found to have a stress fracture in his right shin. McCague will return home next week.

Fraser has been playing for Sydney club Western Suburbs and is highly-regarded by captain Mike Atherton.

The head coach of the Cricket Academy, former Australian wicketkeeper Rod Marsh said his young squad, which has an average age of 21, would enjoy matching wits with England.

The Academy have proven to be a prolific breeding ground for Australian cricket, evidenced by eight graduates — Shane Warne, Michael Slater, Stuart Law, Glenn McGrath, Michael Bevan, Damien Martyn, Justin Langer and Ricky Ponting — representing their country this season.

Promising Victorian batsman Brad Hodge, who amassed

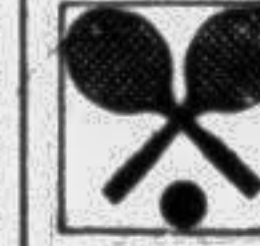
903 runs at 50.17 in the 1993-94 Sheffield Shield season, will look to enhance his already impressive reputation with a good display against the tourists.

England are looking forward to the game a lot less, with experience fast bowler Phil DeFreitas Thursday complaining about the team's schedule — which sees the tourists constantly switching between regular games and limited-overs fixtures.

TEAMS
ENGLAND: Mike Gatting, Alec Stewart, Graeme Hick, Craig White, Steve Rhodes, Mike Atherton, Shaun Udall, Angus Fraser, Phil Tufnell, Joey Benjamin, Devon Malcolm.

AUSTRALIAN CRICKET ACADEMY: Corey Richards, Ryan Campbell, Rob Baker, Brad Hodge, Ian Harvey, Richard Allanby, Dan Marsh, Nathan Ashley, Brett Swain, Shane Jurgensen, Mark Harjity, Matthew Nicholson.

Agassi blows Muster away



MUNICH, Dec 8: Andre Agassi swept aside fellow baseline specialist Thomas Muster in straight sets to advance to the quarter-finals of the Grand Slam Cup on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

After going a break down in the first set, Agassi held the upper hand in a game of ferocious ground-stroke duels to

win 6-3, 7-5. Victory assured him of minimum winnings of 500,000 dollars from the world's richest tournament. This included a 250,000 dollars bonus for being the reigning US Open champion.

Also in the first round, Sweden's Magnus Larsson ousted his Davis Cup teammate Stefan Edberg in a three-set thriller.

Larsson won 6-4, 6-7, 8-6 a few days after the pair's singles win had helped Sweden beat Russia in the Davis Cup final, earning a deserved reward for superior serving power.

On the super-fast carpet in Munich's Olympic Hall, Larsson rarely looked in trouble on his own service while the world number seven, for all the sweetness of his volleys, never managed to gain the ascendancy.

For Edberg, defeat capped a year of relative lack of success in the major events.

He said the Davis Cup win had also taken its toll. "There's nothing wrong with the tennis I'm playing. It's just that I've played 10 weeks in a row which is just too much for me," he said.

But he paid tribute to his friend Larsson. "He's a good player and he's got a big service which got him out of trouble a lot of times."

Larsson put that service to its best effect at 5-5 in the third set when Edberg briefly looked as though he could snatch victory.

Larsson produced two huge services, one of them an ace, to save two break points at 15-40. He fended off a third break point by following in his service for a rare volley winner and produced another ace to

take the game. Edberg had to fight off a match point in the next game and one service game later the pressure finally told as he overhit a simple drive at 30-40 to give Larsson his victory.

World number two Agassi, who will play Larsson in the quarter-finals, said he had been struggling with a cold but was still feeling in good form.

"When you're playing better, you take more chances and you make more shots," he said.

Muster, who put Agassi out of the French Open in a five-set epic lost to him at the US Open, was philosophical about a defeat which will still earn him 100,000 dollars.

He had reason to appreciate the loyalty of a sell-out 11,000 crowd which produced an ear-splitting cacophony of jeers and whistles when umpire Wayne Kkewen called out a brilliant Muster lob which appeared to nick the line in the second set.

Agassi eventually let the point be replayed but still took the game to make it 5-5.

One game later he exploited Muster's error-prone service, passing up two break points but clinching the break on the third with a blistering drive which coaxed an error out of Muster.

Masur seeks wild card

MELBOURNE, Dec 8: Australian tennis player Wally Masur has had to ask for a wild card entry into next month's Australian Open after plummeting down the rankings over the past 14 months, reports AP.



Paris Saint Germain striker George Weah skips a tackle by Spartak Moscow defender Yuri Nikiforov during a Champions' League match in Paris on Dec 7. Weah scored twice for PSG. — AFP photo