

MCC due in Dhaka Feb 2

A 16-member Marylebone Cricket Club team will arrive here on February 2 to play six matches in Bangladesh, a press release of the Bangladesh Cricket Control Board (BCCB) said here yesterday, reports BSS.

The team will play five one-day matches — two in Dhaka and one each at Sylhet, Rajshahi and Chittagong.

Besides, the visitors will play a four-day match in the capital from February 16 to 19.

The members of the team are: Alan Fordham (captain), Jonathan N Batty, David J Capel, Nicholas R Gaywood, Robert P Gofton, Christopher J Hollins, Angus J Mackay, Colin P Metson, Gordon Morgan, Adrian Pierson, Laurie Potter, Ian D K Salisbury, Nicholas P Tubbs and Kelvin C Williams.

Donald O Oslear and John A Jameson will accompany the team as umpire and manager respectively.

THE ITINERARY

Feb 2: Arrival of the team.
Feb 5: 50-over match against Bangladesh 'A' in Dhaka.

Feb 7: 50-over match against Bangladesh under-19 in Sylhet.

Feb 9: First one-day match (50-overs) against Bangladesh in Dhaka.

Feb 11: Second one-day match (50 overs) against Bangladesh in Rajshahi.

Feb 13: Third one-day match (50-overs) against Bangladesh in Chittagong.

Feb 16-19: Four-day match against Bangladesh in Dhaka.

Feb 20: Departure for London.

Boca left

broken hearted

BUENOS AIRES, Dec 11: Boca Juniors missing Diego Maradona because of a stomach upset, saw their Argentine championship hopes virtually blown away when they lost 2-1 away to Estudiantes de La Plata, reports Reuter.

Five players including Boca goalkeeper Carlos Navarro Montoya, were sent off in Saturday night's match. He was dismissed with Estudiantes forward Martin Palermo in the 36th minute after the pair were involved in a scuffle.

Boca, who boasted a six-point lead three weeks ago, must now rely on leaders Velz losing their final two matches an unlikely scenario with Velz meeting bottom club Belgrano Cordoba on Sunday.

Velz went into the match with a one point lead over Boca. Boca took the lead against Estudiantes Nestor Fabbri scoring from a corner in the 33rd minute. Estudiantes had been reduced to 10 men as early as the 10th minute when Claudio Paris was sent off.

But Estudiantes captain Egardo Pratola equalised with a header in the 45th minute and Silvano Marciel struck the winner with barely a minute left.

Venables opts for Shearer, Les in attack

LONDON, Dec 11: Les Ferdinand will join Alan Shearer upfront for England on Tuesday's exhibition against Portugal at Wembley, uniting the Premier League's top two scorers on the national side, reports AP.

It will be Ferdinand's first start for England in two years, his last coming before Terry Venables took over as coach.

The Newcastle striker, a surprise absence from the club under Venables, has scored 20 goals, one fewer than Blackburn's Shearer. Venables has resisted starting two central strikers but seemed to be forced into it when Tottenham forward Teddy Sheringham withdrew with an injury.

Shearer hasn't scored in his last nine England games but was impressive in a 3-1 win over Switzerland last month.

Venables wasn't expected to name the rest of his starters until just before the Tuesday game.

Portugal have left several regulars off their team, opting for a younger squad. Midfielder Paulinho Santos will miss the match with a strained tendon. Regular keeper Vitor Bala will also skip the game, as will midfielder Oceano Cruz and the Portuguese league's top scorer, Domingos Paciencia.

But Costa of Italy's Fiorentina also won't play after the Italians declined to release him.

Two of Portugal's young forwards to watch will be 19-year-old Dani Carvalho and 21-year-old Jose Dominguez, both from Sporting Lisbon.

Atherton leads from front



PAARL, South Africa, Dec 11: England captain Mike Atherton, recalled from a fishing trip, led his team to a comfortable 74-run victory over lowly South African province Boland in a one-day game on Sunday, reports Reuter.

Atherton's 77 provided the backbone of England's 244 after he had chosen to bat first and then watched his Lancashire teammate Peter Martin claim 4 for 35 as Boland slumped to 170 all out.

But Atherton was unsure about Saturday's decision to abandon the scheduled four-day game in Roder to play a one-day fixture.

"I was in the mountains fishing when the decision was made," he said. "It is not a precedent I would like to see followed. The idea of a four-day game is to prepare for the Test."

The two sides agreed on Saturday the lifeless pitch offered no chance of a result with England early into their second innings.

Although Atherton's opening partnership of 84 in Sunday's one-dayer was dominated by John Crawley, who made a brisk 48 on the difficult and slow wicket, the England captain gathered momentum and helped repair the damage of

four quick wickets and a slump to 124 for four. Graeme Hick and Graham Thorpe both fell cheaply to Boland captain Adrian Kuiper, while Mark Ramprakash added more anguish to his tour when he was caught and bowled by seamer Billy Stelling for a third ball duck.

Jack Russell continued his South African habit of remaining unbeaten, carving 29 from 28 balls. Only captain Kuiper threatened to challenge England's total with a typically hard hitting 54 off 52 balls.

But Martin maintained splendid control, capturing wickets at regular intervals. Dominic Cork and Angus Fraser claimed two wickets each and may now be joined by Martin in the third Test if England decide to replace the injured Darren Gough with another seamer.

Atherton commented: We obviously have a psychological advantage going into the third Test but then again, South Africa know they played the better cricket for four out of five days in Johannesburg. Nobody really holds the upper hand.



ATHERTON...77

Counting down to the WC



NEW DELHI, Dec 11: World Cup cricket officials began a two-month countdown to the mega-event Monday, working overtime to prevent a repeat of last month's stadium disaster which killed 12 and left 60 injured, reports AFP.

The collapse of a stadium wall in Nagpur on November 26 during a one-day international between India and New Zealand cast a gigantic shadow over the preparations for the game's greatest showpiece.

Hectic work is in progress to upgrade facilities at the 17 Cup venues in India before the month-long extravaganza gets underway with a hi-tech opening ceremony at Calcutta's Eden Gardens on February 10.

The first match in the tournament, to be co-hosted by India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, will be played between England and New Zealand in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad on February 14.

Pakistan will host 16 matches, including the final in Lahore on March 17, and Sri Lanka four.

Indian organisers have sanctioned three million dollars to renovate players' dressing rooms, construct new stands and install floodlights in a bid to ensure that cricket's premier limited-overs tournament gets the

state it deserves. Many centres have decided to sell fewer tickets to prevent overcrowding in the stands, a factor largely responsible for the Nagpur accident.

Former Test cricketer Shival Yadav, in-charge of the West Indies-Zimbabwe match in Hyderabad on February 16, said he had dropped the idea of erecting a temporary stand for an additional 10,000 spectators after the Nagpur accident.

The Indian section of the tournament's organising committee (INDCOM) will meet in Calcutta this week to review preparations, amidst media speculation that some centres were in danger of losing their Cup matches.

INDCOM will take a decision on Nagpur, which is scheduled to hold the Australia-Zimbabwe match on March 1, after receiving an enquiry report on the accident from the Maharashtra state government.

New Delhi's Ferozeshah Kotla, venue of the India-Sri Lanka match on March 2, came under a cloud when the federal government, which holds the lease to the stadium, objected to renovation work there without permission.

A senior INDCOM official said the match could be shifted to the Brabourne Stadium in Bombay if the impasse was not resolved.

INDCOM will name venues for night matches later this month, but it is expected that the two quarter-finals allotted to India, and both the semifinals, will be played at night.

Bangalore and Madras, venues for the quarter-finals, and Chandigarh, which hosts the second semifinal, have ordered lights to be installed. Eden Gardens, the other semifinal venue, already has lighting facilities.

Three league matches in India may also be played at night: West Indies-Zimbabwe at Hyderabad on February 16, India-West Indies at Gwalior on February 21 and India-Australia at Bombay on February 26.

Of the three, only Hyderabad's Lal Bahadur Shastri Stadium has lights at present. Bombay and Gwalior are expected to have floodlights installed before the tournament starts.

There were no day-night matches when the World Cup was held in India and Pakistan in 1987. The trend was started by Australia, which co-hosted the last World Cup in 1992 with New Zealand.

The 12 countries taking part in the latest edition of the four-yearly event are: Defending champions Pakistan, Australia, England, New Zealand, West Indies, South Africa, India, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Kenya, United Arab Emirates and the Netherlands.

Johansson's coup de maitre



PARIS, Dec 11: FIFA president Joao Havelange denied here on Sunday the acceptance of UEFA's proposals for World Cup qualifying in Europe was a political failure by the world governing body, reports Reuter.

Earlier, FIFA revealed Europe's 49 countries would be split into nine groups with a further qualifying round, and not seven groups of seven advocated by FIFA.

"I'm neither a winner nor a loser," said Havelange at a press conference at the Carrousel du Louvre. He added the World Cup Organising Committee had no criticism of UEFA's plan and it was therefore taken on board.

However some observers may see it as a coup for UEFA president Lennart Johansson of Sweden, who was being the nine-group system. Early last month, Johansson threw down a challenge to Brazilian Havelange's 20-year reign at the head of world football.

The 66-year-old Johansson said that Europe, needed a voice at the top and that he had been asked by UEFA's executive body to be the man.

UEFA's system comprised five groups of four teams and four groups of six. The group winners and the best second-placed team qualify while the other eight group runners-up would play off for the four remaining places.

UEFA's system involves 284 matches, FIFA's 294, but more importantly, the calibre of opposition changes for the top teams.

Seven teams would have been seeded under FIFA's system and under current world rankings they would have been Germany, Spain, Italy, Russia, Norway, Denmark and Holland. UEFA's system will include Sweden and Romania as seeds.

Under FIFA's system Germany would have had the likes of Holland, England,

Finland, Croatia, Wales and Armenia as opponents.

UEFA's system will now give them the calibre of Romania, Turkey, Northern Ireland, Albania and the Faroe Islands.

Either case the Dayton peace agreement allows Bosnia-Herzegovina to make their World Cup debut. However, if by cruel luck they are drawn against the Serbs of former Yugoslavia they have no choice but to play or withdraw.

FIFA confirmed Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia would play their first ever World Cup qualifying, with Bosnia-Herzegovina being officially accepted on Monday to play their first ever competition.

Yugoslavia, of course, have played many times.

Croatia and Slovenia did have national football associations between 1940 and 1944, but there were no World Cup matches during these years.

Africa has the next contingent biggest of qualifiers

England plan to play two friendlies in SA

LONDON, Dec 11: Hosts England could play two matches in South Africa as part of their build-up to next year's European Championship finals, reports Reuter.

When he announced his 23-man squad on Tuesday for the Wembley friendly against Portugal on December 12, England coach Terry Venables said he had asked commercial director Trevor Phillips to investigate the possibility of playing in Johannesburg and Sun City.

England have never played the South Africans in a senior international. The last official visit was by a Football Association (FA) XI in 1958

with five places. Cameroon, Nigeria and Egypt were given first round byes and will be joined by 17 first round survivors in five groups of four. The group winners qualify for France.

Nine South-American countries play a round-robin championship and the top four teams join Brazil, who qualify automatically as champions, in the finals.

Canada, Costa Rica, United States, Honduras, Mexico and Salvador, plus three Central American and three Caribbean qualifiers, will be split into three groups in the CONCACAF zone. The top two from each group will play a final round to decide which three qualify for 1998.

For the first time in Asia, the teams will not be divided into east and west but all drawn together into 10 groups. The winners will split into two groups of five each and the top two from each group will contest the Asian finals in a neutral country.

The best three of these four will qualify for France and the fourth will play off against the Oceania winner.

Australia and New Zealand will be seeded in the Oceania zone and the remaining eight teams drawn into each group. The eventual winner of a play-off between the top team in each group will play off - home and away against the fourth-best Asian team for a place in the 1998 finals.

This is one stage less than Australia had to take to qualify for USA '94. In 1993 they had play-offs against first Canada, the second-best team from CONCACAF, and then against the fourth-best South American team.

Diego Maradona made one of his many comebacks to lead Argentina to a lucky win in Buenos Aires.

Altogether, the 171 countries will play more than 700 matches to qualify for France where for the first time there will be 32 countries.

India A to take on Pak A in final

SHARJAH, Dec 11: India 'A' will clash with Pakistan 'A' which moved into the final of the four-nation interface Cup cricket tournament here after the last match with Sri Lanka was abandoned yesterday following rain, reports PTI.

The Sri Lankans were not happy as their 'A' team had to shape points with Pakistan in the rain-hit match and their team manager Mahalingam Shivrathnam felt a 25 overs match could have been played.

He accused the umpires of laid back attitude as his team and Pakistan 'A' finished with three points apiece and Pakistan got into the finals with a better run-rate.

India topped the league with five points and Pakistan had a higher run-rate of 4.63 compared to the Sri Lankan figure of 4.01.

"I think we could have played a 25 overs a side match," Shivrathnam, who hit out at the umpires' decision to call off the match said.

"We pointed out a wet patch near the wicket earlier in the day but umpires did little to speed up drying process," he said umpire Farid Malik however denied the charge and said "We were really helpless, the wicket was handed over to us at 1.30 pm and after a close inspection we decided play was not possible at all."

The tournament is held to give the UAE preparing for the World Cup some practice. UAE will play Sri Lanka tomorrow for the third place.

Beijing may bid to host 2004 Games

BEIJING, Dec 11: Beijing, a narrow loser to Sydney in bidding to host the 2000 Summer Olympics, will decide by mid-January whether to seek the 2004 Games, Chinese sporting officials said on Monday, reports Reuter.

"It has not been decided. We are still considering whether to host or not to host the 2004 Olympics," Chinese Olympic Committee spokesman Lu Kewen said.

The International Olympic Committee reported at the weekend in Switzerland that China's capital was not among 10 cities that had already applied or were known to be planning bids.

The Chinese spokesman insisted that Beijing should not be counted out for 2004.

"We are actively soliciting the views of various sectors," he said. "We will make an announcement to the media before January 10 next year. We can't be ruled out."

In September 1993 Beijing failed by just two votes in IOC balloting for the millennium Olympiad.

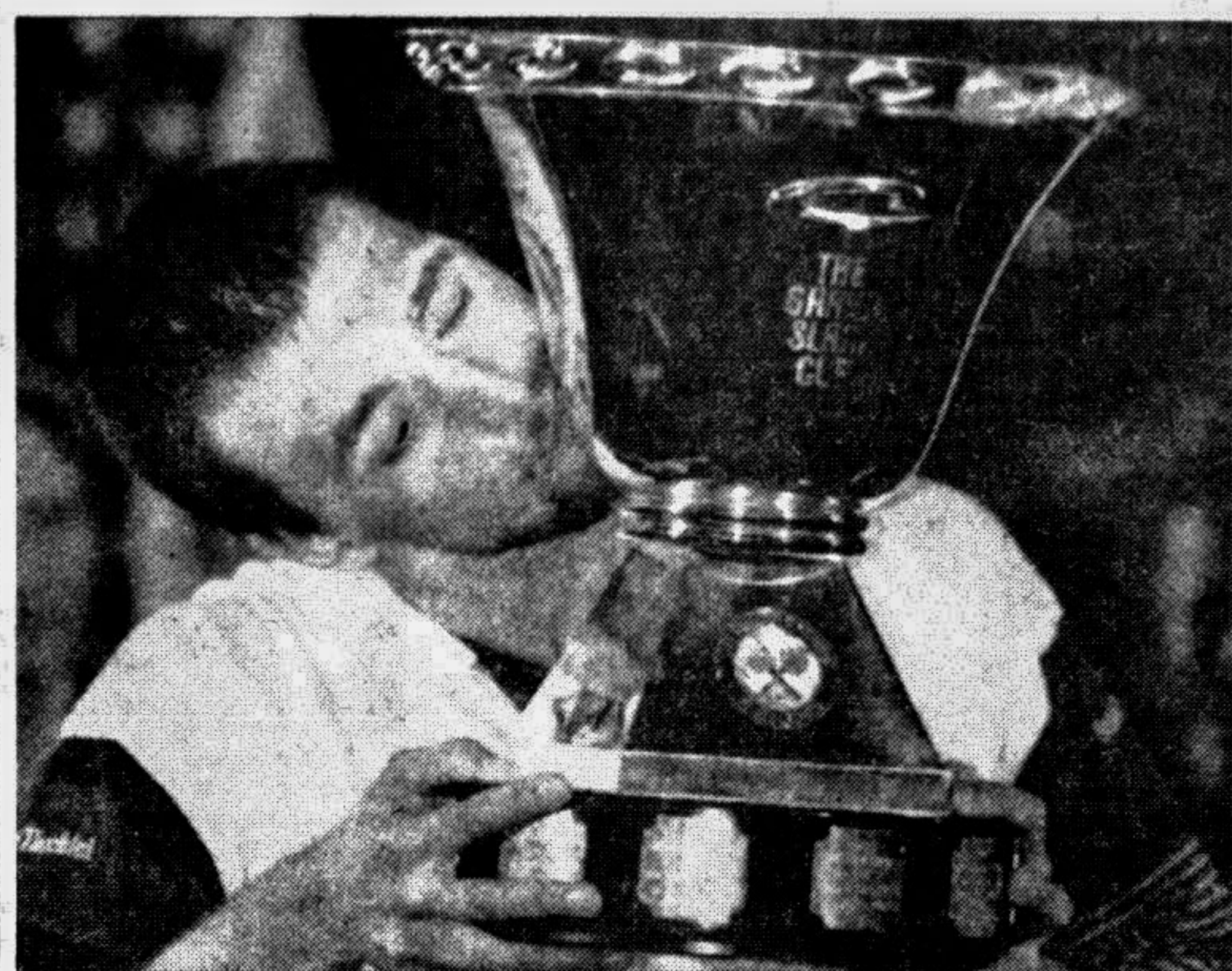
Many politicians and human rights activists in the United States and Europe opposed Beijing's bid, saying China did not deserve the honour until it improved its human rights record.

In its weekly information bulletin, the IOC said seven cities had launched formal bids for the 2004 Olympics — Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Istanbul, Rio de Janeiro, Seville, Rome and St Petersburg.

It said three others were expected to do so by the January 10 deadline — Lille in France, the Puerto Rican capital of San Juan and Stockholm.

In May IOC chief Juan Antonio Samaranch was quoted by official Chinese media as telling Beijing mayor Li Qiyang that the Chinese capital should try for the 2004 Olympics.

The United States is hosting the 1996 Games in Atlanta.



Goran Ivanisevic of Croatia kisses the trophy after beating Todd Martin of the United States in the final match of the Grand Slam Cup in Munich on Dec 10. Ivanisevic won the match 7-6, 6-3, 6-4. — AFP/UNB photo

All's well that end well



MUNICH, Dec 11: Few things will lighten up a bad year like a 1.625-million dollar Christmas bonus.

If 1995 began badly for Goran Ivanisevic, it ended with a windfall.

Behind a barrage of 28 aces, Ivanisevic overwhelmed Todd Martin 7-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the final of the Grand Slam Cup Sunday and collected the 1.625 million dollars that goes with the title, reports AP.

It is the biggest winner's prize in tennis.

The 6-million dollars tournament is the richest in the world and invites 16 players with the best records in the four Grand Slam events of the year — the Australia, French and US Opens, and Wimbledon.

Ivanisevic, 24, qualified with his semifinal showing in Wimbledon, although he had lost in the first round of the three other events.

The Croatian missed several weeks after undergoing knee surgery in February and

had not won a title on the tour this year, slipping from No 5 in the rankings to No 10.

Since there are no points to be earned at the Grand Slam Cup, Ivanisevic's ranking will not improve.

Apart from bolstering his bank account the victory is likely to boost Ivanisevic's

Thungwane wins Honolulu marathon

HONOLULU, Hawaii, Dec 11: South Africa's Josiah Thungwane edged defending champion Benson Masya of Kenya to win the closest finish in the 23-year-history of the Honolulu marathon here Sunday, reports AFP.

Thungwane's time of two hours 16 minutes and eight seconds was 11 seconds better than Masya who was left behind by Thungwane's finishing kick over the final 20 metres.

"When I began my surge, Benson didn't respond and I knew I could outkick him," Thungwane said.

Rumini sets SEA Games' mark

CHIANG MAI, Thailand, Dec 11: Indonesia's barefoot teenage distance runner Ruminio Sudragni surprised herself and her coaches when she set a Southeast Asian (SEA) Games record in the women's 10,000 metres today, reports Reuter.

Rumini, a soft spoken but animated 16-year-old from central Java, said after the run that she had not expected to win.

"I feel so happy," Rumini said after her 35-minute, 21.43-second win. "My target was for a bronze, not a gold."

Rumini, who has been running for only three years, was expected to finish after compatriot Triasih Handayani. Triasih barely had time to recover her breath after placing fourth in the 1,500 metres 20 minutes earlier and could manage only seventh place.

Burma's 16-year-old distance runner Pa Pa, who also ran barefoot to take the silver medal, said she was upset with her "slow" performance of 35:57.86.

In other events, Filipino track star Elma Muros picked up her second gold and third medal of the SEA Games in the 200 metres, winning in a time of 24.00 seconds. Muros, the SEA Games record holder in the long jump, took gold in that event and won silver in the 100 metres hurdles on Sunday.

Host Thailand continued to head the medals count, scooping a total of 52, including 22 golds, about halfway through the third day of the nine-day biennial event.

Defending SEA Games champions Indonesia are second in the medals count with a pot of 29, including six golds.

Indonesia's athletics manager Pieter Noya said he thinks the team will still do well, despite Thailand's dominance.

After a disappointing finish on Sunday in the springboard competition, Indonesia took gold in men's one-metre springboard event today. Temmy Kusuma scored 375.21 points to edge hometown favourite Suchat Pichi, who had earlier won the three-metre event.

Singapore swimmer Joeselin Yeo, crowned by the media as the "queen of the golds" at the last SEA Games, today showed signs she could be set for a repeat performance.

In preliminary heats Yeo broke her own 100-metre butterfly SEA Games record, clocking one minute, 01.85 seconds. She also qualified first in the 200-metre individual medley.

More than 3,000 athletes from 10 countries are participating in the Chiang Mai SEA Games, which officially opened on Saturday in a gala celebration of fireworks, traditional Thai dancing and a musical light show.

morale. "This year has had many ups and downs and injuries. I hope to keep the momentum for next year," he said.

"I came here without pressure and I was finally able to play my best tennis in a big final."

Martin, ranked No 18, was unable to repeat his semifinal performance, when he ousted home favourite Boris Becker.

But he refused to blame nagging stomach muscle problems and hand blisters for his lacklustre display. "Goran simply played better today."

The match between two big servers failed to inspire 11,000 fans in Munich's Olympic hall.

On the very fast carpet surface, the match was reduced to a serve-and-volley slugfest with few rallies.

Ivanisevic, after going a break up in the third set, finished off the match in typical fashion — by blasting four aces in a row.

Martin had to settle for 812,500 dollars given to the runner-up.

The athletes will vie for a total of 334 gold medals, 334 silver medals and 421 bronze medals in 28 sports.

Indonesia, who won the most medals at the 1993 Games in Singapore, are expected a tough fight with Thailand to take the overall medals crown this year.

Thailand, which was second on the medals list in 1993, have the largest contingent of 640 athletes, followed by Malaysia and Indonesia, officials said.

Other countries represented are Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam.

The Japanese art of bidding

PARIS, Dec 11: Japan's bid to stage the World Cup finals in 2002 leans heavily on an innovative technologic twist and on a big cash injection to benefit the game, reports Reuter.

Bid spokesman Jim Trecker told a news conference on Sunday that Japan would promise the creation of the virtual stadium for the finals to allow four million fans to see matches or almost.

The virtual stadium concept would convert stadia not being used for matches into three dimensional threats with gigantic 80 X 35-metre dome shaped screens carrying 3-D pictures of Games in progress at other locations.

"This is a pioneering project which can be used worldwide for matches taking place elsewhere," Trecker said.

Trecker said cash raised from selling tickets at virtual stadia would be put into a trust fund for FIFA to use to develop the sport during the 21st century.

Former England international Sir Bobby Charlton who is backing Japan's bid said the growth of soccer in Japan had been mind-boggling since the creation two years ago of the professional J-League.

Japan 2002 will probably be the greatest sporting event ever held," he said.

Japan and South Korea are competing for the right to host the 2002 finals the first held in Asia. FIFA will decide the venue in June next year.

Both countries are promoting their bids this week in the French capital where the draw for the qualifying competition of the 1998 finals in France is being held on Tuesday.



Athletes-of-the-year Briton Jonathan Edwards and American Gwen Torrence pose with their trophies during the IAAF gala in Monaco on Dec 9. — AFP/UNB photo