

Murali expresses gratitude

COLOMBO, Apr 19: Sri Lanka's controversial off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan took out a newspaper advertisement today to thank fans who had supported him after Australian umpires no-balled him for throwing, reports AFP.

Muralitharan, regarded as one of the best spinners in the world, in an advertisement in the Sinhala-language Lanka-deepa said he received hundreds of thousands of letters from fans and was grateful for their encouragement.

"To the print and electronic media and the hundreds of thousands of fans who sent letters encouraging me and the team I am very grateful," Muralitharan said.

"I am sorry I am unable to thank them individually."

The Sri Lankan cricket board had said that although Muralitharan had a unique wrist action he was not a cheat.

However, Muralitharan was called by Australian umpires earlier this year, causing a major stir.

Steffi denies any wrong-doing

STUTTGART, Apr 19: Tennis star Steffi Graf maintained her innocence as German prosecutors who filed tax evasion charges against her father vowed on Thursday to press ahead with their inquiry into her conduct, reports Reuter.

The Wimbledon champion, whose father Peter and one of his former advisers were charged on Wednesday with evading taxes on 42 million marks (27.9 million dollars) of her income, said she just wanted to concentrate on her tennis and had done nothing wrong.

"Any attempts to raise any doubts about this will come to no other conclusion," she said in a statement released to the Mannheimer Morgen daily in her home region of southwest Germany.

Mannheim chief prosecutor Peter Wechsung said he was still investigating whether Graf, who put all her financial affairs in the hands of her father, had failed over several years to provide a valid tax declaration.

"We have no evidence of any active (criminal) involvement by Stefanie Graf," he said. But he said his investigators would look again carefully at the statements she had made before deciding whether to bring charges against her.

He indicated that the signature on at least one of her tax forms might have been done by a machine for reproducing autographs.

Graf made no mention of that but denied she had given any false information to tax authorities.

"I hope that the original accusations against me will be dealt with by the relevant authorities and not by certain members of the press," she said. "I would like to be able finally to concentrate on my tennis once again."

Lawyers for Peter Graf said they had asked for a review of the arrest warrant, which has kept him in investigative custody in a Mannheim jail since last August.

But Wechsung said: "We believe that the reason for arrest namely that he may flee, is still there."

He applied for the warrant to remain in force when he filed charges against Peter Graf and his ex-adviser Joachim Eckardt accusing them of evading or trying to evade some 19.6 million marks (13 million dollars) in taxes.

A spokesman for the Mannheim court which will handle the case said it was still unclear when a trial could start. The accused face up to 10 years in jail if found guilty.

Pippig released

BOSTON, Apr 19: Boston Marathon winner Utta Pippig left the hospital Thursday after spending three nights undergoing tests and treatment following her record third consecutive victory in the race on Monday and said she would soon resume training, reports Reuter.

"I just should relax a little bit more and I can run again," the top-ranked women's marathoner told reporters.

Pippig overcame dehydration caused by diarrhoea and menstrual cramps to claim a come-from-behind victory in the 100th Boston Marathon, overtaking Kenya's Tegla Loroupe in the final mile (1.6 km).

The German medical student, looking healthy and smiling, said she was aiming next for the marathon at the Olympic Games in Atlanta this summer.

Pippig said she considered dropping out of the Boston marathon and said she never expected to win.

"If I lose, I would try to make it as close as possible ... 30 seconds, 29 seconds, and then when I took the lead it was more than I ever expected," she said.

"If you are an emotional person and you have a fantastic crowd, you can fly," she said.

Her coach and companion, Dieter Hogen, said pressure to win the race and from the media contributed to her illness and led to her stay at Boston University.

Hogen said they planned to spend a few days in the Boston and were looking forward to a four-month vacation following the Olympics.

INTERVIEW

Concern of an ex-cricketeter

Sports Reporter

In a world of evolution marked by rapidly changing patterns, the game of cricket has still remained committed to a particular trend or two. Professionalism is one such aspect that has had a holistic impact on the noble and traditional game and its intensity can only heighten in the days to come.

More than anywhere else, in the complex and diverse structure of cricket today, the need of professionalism is felt in the managerial job. Saddled

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