

HK's historic runs today

HONG KONG, May 3: A record field of over 5,500 local and international runners are making their final preparations for the historic Swire Group Tsing Ma Bridge marathon and 10-km race slated for Sunday, reports Xinhua.

The field, comprising over 900 marathoners and 4,600 runners, will inaugurate the bridge — the world's longest suspension bridge carrying both road and rail traffic — in a spectacular style, the organizers claimed here Friday.

Over 20 international runners from 15 countries and regions have arrived in Hong Kong to compete in the landmark event.

Belgium's national champion Peter de Vocht, 36, leads the men's race, boasting a personal best time of two hours, 14 minutes and 54 seconds he created in 1992.

While for the women's division, it is Germany's Susan Bitzer, a 31-year-old pharmacist, who came out to be the hottest favourite for the title. Bitzer's personal best is 2:41:00.

But both felt the warm weather and higher humidity in Hong Kong pose a threat to their efforts for a better show.

"I'm used to cold climate and the temperature back to my home town in Germany was just five degrees centigrade," she said.

"We had a snowfall two weeks ago and temperature at early morning was below zero," said the former cross country skier.

"It's hard to run or even to improve the personal best," admitted De Vocht. But he promised to give his best shot here.

Tsing Ma Bridge, the Kap Shui Mun Bridge and the Ma Wan Viaduct, which connects them form the Lantau Link, which is one of the key projects in Hong Kong's new airport programme project.

Tsing Ma Bridge has a main span of 1,377 metres long and total length of 2.2 kilometre. A grand opening ceremony was held at the bridge to celebrate the completion of construction of the Lantau Link.

Reysol rout Antlers

TOKYO, May 3: Brazilian forwards Edison and Jamelli scored three goals in eight minutes to lead Kashima Reysol to a 4-0 victory over favourites Kashima Antlers in the J-league today, reports AFP.

The defending champions Antlers, who had yet to be beaten this season, controlled the game for most of the time in the first half.

But the Reysol capitalised on a rare chance when defender Shigenori Hagimura nodded home on a right corner in the 40th minute, leaving a hapless keeper watching the ball fly over his head into the net.

Edison then got off to the goal avalanche seven minutes into the second half. Jamelli made it 3-0 in the 58th minute and Edison completed the scoring one minute later, giving the Antlers their first defeat of the season.

With the result, the Antlers were tied with the Reysol and Gamba Osaka on 12 points.

Gamba Osaka stopped their match-losing streak by beating Cerezo Osaka 2-0 with Yugoslav striker Nejsa Krupnikovic getting off to a sparkling start to the second half with a 46th-minute goal.

Sanfrecce Hiroshima whitewashed Kyoto Purple Sanga 1-0, while Yokohama Flügels had a rest day Saturday.

Nagoya Grampus Eight, one of the pre-tournament favourites with the Antlers, continued struggling as they suffered a fifth straight defeat of the season without a win, losing to Jubilo Iwata 0-2.

In other games, Urawa Red Diamonds ran out 2-0 winners over Vissel Kobe, while two-time champions Verdy Kawasaki defeated Avispa Fukuoka 2-1.

A matter of principle

MANCHESTER, England, May 3: Angry players were poised to stage a lightning strike at the World Table Tennis Championships here today, reports AFP.

The players are upset because teammates have been banned from watching in the main arena.

Organisers said all tickets have been sold out and no seats have been set aside for players to support their countrymen.

Sweden's Jorgen Persson, the 1991 world champion, said he had never known players not being allowed to watch teammates in his senior international career dating back to 1985.

"It's a real phenomenon," said Persson. "I have never heard of it before. Players are having to watch teammates on television and they can't go into the main arena," he said.

And when asked did he think players will strike, Persson added: "It could happen. This is not fair on them."

It has been suggested men's players will come out on court for their singles matches but refuse to start playing.

This latest problem has followed 10 days of organisational problems.

Coaches and players have been complaining they didn't know when matches were to be played and who against. On some occasions, players have not even turned up for matches because they had not been notified.

And results and information on matches have often been made public more than 12 hours late.

Pak stars shine in England



LONDON, May 3: Leg-spinner Mushtaq Ahmed snapped up a match-winning seven for 24 for Somerset on Friday just 24 hours after he arrived from Pakistan's tour of Sri Lanka, reports Reuter.

Mushtaq turned down the chance of missing the game to rest and, despite heavy strapping on his right leg, bowled Somerset to a comprehensive 221-run victory over Ireland in the Benson and Hedges Cup.

The Irish, who had beaten an English county in the 50 overs competition for the first time earlier this week, were routed for 128 in the face of Somerset's imposing 349 for seven.

Mushtaq struck with his second delivery to have Hansie Cronje lbw, a vital blow as the

South African captain had played a key role with an unbeaten 94 in Ireland's historic cup success over middlesex on Tuesday.

The Pakistani wrist-spinner baffled the Irish with his googly as their last seven wickets tumbled for 57, only opener Andrew Patterson resisting with the top score of exactly 50.

Mushtaq's Pakistan skipper, Wasim Akram, marked his first appearance of the season for his adopted county Lancashire with a telling all-round performance to keep the holders in the cup.

Akram struck Lancashire's top score of 52 not out from 73 deliveries, then captured two for 54 to help snatch a last-ball victory over Warwickshire at Edgbaston.

Lancashire won by losing fewer wickets after the scores were level. The holders scored 208 for eight, South African fast bowler Allan Donald taking five for 25, and dismissed the home county for 208 in exactly 50 overs.

After being beaten in their first two Group A Games, Lancashire's win kept alive their hopes of qualifying for the quarterfinals, though they need to win their remaining two matches.

There was also a pulsating climax at derby where both Yorkshire and Derbyshire scored 260 for seven, the visitors getting the verdict by virtue of their higher run rate over the first 25 overs.

Fast bowler Chris Silverwood rescued Yorkshire after almost giving the match away when his last delivery of the contest was ruled a no-ball.

That left Derbyshire requiring only two to win but former England paceman Phil DeFreitas was restricted to a single to leave the scores tied.

But Yorkshire took victory on the county-back ruling after 25 overs when they had scored 116 for two against Derbyshire's 103 for two.

Kent made it three wins out of three in Group C as pace bowler Dean Headley led the way in overwhelming Sussex by six wickets at Canterbury.

Headley's brilliant new ball spell of 10-5-14-2 sent Sussex sliding to 18 for three. They were subsequently 60 for six, and only reached 153 thanks to a maiden limited-overs half-century from tailender Paul Jarvis.

The top teams in the four groups qualify for the quarterfinals.

AKRAM... all-round show

MUSHTAQ... 7 for 24



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ENGLAND CHRONICLES

By Nizamuddin Ahmed

Britain's football clubs are making huge business and profits in selling replica shirts, a report on a secret survey reveals.

Current league leaders Manchester United are tops in the shirt trade, selling an estimated 850,000 shirts annually at an average price of £40, giving a revenue of £34 million.

Apart from Man United, the main benefactor is manufacturer Umbro who pays a hefty royalty to United for every shirt sold. But, its £50 million six-year deal still looks a bargain.

Other top shirts-selling clubs are: Newcastle United — 600,000 (Adidas); Liverpool — 600,000 (Reebok); England — 500,000 (Umbro) and Glasgow Rangers — 500,000 (Nike). Perhaps our garments manufacturers can take the cue.

The war between Germany and England is on. Although having confirmed earlier to send a delegation, the Germans have decided not to attend the Soccer Exhibition which began at Wembley last Tuesday.

The German move could be linked to their tussle with England to win the right to host the 2006 World Cup. The English bid is one of the exhibits at the exhibition.

Overseas players are not only a big attraction of the English county cricket championship but most often saviours of the clubs they represent; more so because of the continuing falling performance of local players.

Warwickshire, eighth last

Norway ahead of Nigeria

OSLO, Norway, May 3: Jan Frode Andersen and Christian Ruud won the opening singles in straight sets Friday to give Norway a 2-0 lead over Nigeria in their Euro/African Zone (Group two) Davis Cup match, reports AP.

Andersen started the day with a 6-1, 6-0, 6-4 win over Sule Lavito while Ruud, Norway's winningest tennis player ever, only dropped one game in a 6-0, 6-1, 6-0 rout of Ganiyu Adelekan.

Norway can wrap up the best-of-5 match series by winning the doubles on Saturday. Reverse singles are set for Sunday.

Blondeau wants to leave Monaco

PARIS, May 3: Monaco defender Patrick Blondeau confirmed he wanted to leave the club after virtually winning the French First Division championship on Tuesday but said he was still hesitating between an English and an Italian club, reports Reuter.

"I was impatient to win this title because it's my first and because it will allow me to look towards Italy or England," said the 29-year-old Blondeau, effectively denying reports that he might join Marseille next season.

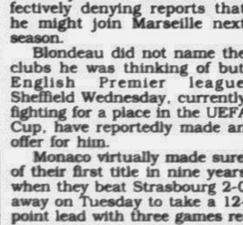
Blondeau did not name the clubs he was thinking of but English Premier league Sheffield Wednesday, currently fighting for a place in the UEFA Cup, have reportedly made an offer for him.

Monaco virtually made sure of their first title in nine years when they beat Strasbourg 2-0 away on Tuesday to take a 12-point lead with three games remaining.

Even if Paris St Germain beat Lille on Wednesday to close the gap to nine points, they can snatch the title only by winning all their remaining matches — with Monaco losing all theirs — and overcoming a goal deficit of 11.

Barcelona's Inaki Urdangarin (R) having a drink during the half-time of their basketball match against Biorussia near the Spanish capital of Madrid on May 2. It is reported that Urdangarin will officially ask for the hand of Cristina, daughter of King Juan Carlos of Spain at the Zarzuela Palace today.

— AFP/UNB photo



Nat'l age-group athletics on

Sports Reporter

The Milk Vita 15th national age-group athletic championships commenced at the Mirpur Stadium yesterday.

The two-day meet involving 546 athletes from forty-five different schools across the country was inaugurated by Kamal Ahmed Majumdar, MP, in the afternoon.

Russell goes unpunished

LONDON, May 3: England wicketkeeper Jack Russell is not to be punished by his country's cricket authorities over the publication of his forthcoming controversial autobiography, reports Reuter.

Russell upset the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) by refusing to make any changes to the text ahead of a serialisation in a British newspaper this week and publication of the book on May 19.

The book contains criticism of former chairman of selectors Ray Illingworth and current England captain Mike Atherton, but is also considered fair comment from a respected Gloucestershire player.

However, after referral to ECB discipline committee chairman Gerard Elias QC, the authorities have clearly opted to let the matter rest in a bid to dissolve the furor surrounding the book.

Elias said in a statement on Friday, "Jack Russell had provided the board with a copy of his book in March, albeit at a late stage before proposed publication, and in the circumstances the board is not disposed to take any action over the question of the application for prior approval of the text."

"In relation to these extracts actually published I have no present intention of recommending that any disciplinary proceedings be taken."

Sidot moves into semis

HAMBURG, May 3: French teenager Anne-Gaelle Sidot swept into the semifinals of the 450,000 dollars WTA tournament here on Friday when she defeated Petra Langrova of the Czech Republic in three sets, reports AFP.

The fiery 17-year-old stormed home 6-1, 4-6, 6-1 against the player who put out defending champion Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario in the previous round.

She now faces Romania's Ruxandra Dragomir, who beat Austria's Barbara Schett, for a place in Sunday's final.

French number-one Mary Pierce came close to joining Sidot in the last four. But she was finally beaten 6-2, 4-6, 4-6 by Croatia's Iva Majoli.

Majoli now plays Spain's Maria Sanchez-Lorenzo, Friday's shock winner over compatriot and world number six Conchita Martinez. Sanchez-Lorenzo scored a 7-5, 5-7, 6-2 win.

FIFA furious against 'em

ZURICH, May 3: Ireland wing-back Jason McAteer was suspended for three games on Friday as FIFA continued to crack down on violent play in World Cup qualifiers, reports Reuter.

McAteer, who has already served one match, received the ban for assaulting an opponent during a Group Eight qualifier against Macedonia on April 2.

Macedonia's Mitko Stojkovski was also suspended for two matches.

Joel Groff of Luxembourg was handed a two-game ban for kicking an opponent from behind against Israel on March 31.

Ecuador's Luis Capurro was suspended three matches for violent conduct during a qualifier against Peru on April 2.

Hong Kong's Chan Chi Keung and Thailand's Loneswang were both suspended two matches for assault during their World Cup qualifier on April 30.

Canada's Paul Peschisolido will sit out two games for rough play in a match against El Salvador.

Tuadles' killer jailed for life

MANILA, May 3: A former government official was sentenced Wednesday to life in prison in the widely publicised murder of a basketball star, reports AP.

Alberto Antonio, former chairman of the Games and Amusement Board, was convicted of murdering Arnulfo Tuadles in an argument last November over bets in a poker game.

Tuadles, a retired professional basketball player, was shot between the eyes at a sports club in metropolitan Manila.

Tuadles played in the 1980s for Toyota, one of the country's most famous teams in the national basketball league. He also played bit roles in a number of Philippine films.

Tuadles' wife cried and hugged her three sons after the verdict was announced in a courtroom packed with journalists and relatives.

The court also ordered Antonio to pay damages of more than 10 million pesos, (380,000 dollars).

In addition, it sentenced Antonio's bodyguard, who was present during the shooting, to up to eight years in prison.

Antonio's lawyer said he would appeal the decision.



Student of Mirpur Shiddhanta High School performing during the opening ceremony of the two-day Milk Vita 23rd national age-group athletics championships yesterday.

Rivals' gaysome gesture



KARACHI, May 3: Pakistan cricket team's forthcoming participation in a four-nation tournament in a bid to attract a large number of visitors from Pakistan, cricket circles believe.

"We (our group) followed our team to different tours but never went to India due to visa problems but now we are preparing to cheer our team in India," said cricket lover Mushahid Ali.

Pakistan captain Rameez Raja said: "We are going to India with open hearts to participate in their independence celebration."

The visit comes amid growing signs of a thaw in bitterly strained relations between the South Asian neighbours, locked in 50 years of mutual hostility, including three wars since their independence in 1947.

Pakistan and India resumed political dialogue late March after a gap of more than three years, the first meeting between their prime ministers in eight years is due in the Maldives during the May 12-14 South Asian summit.

The Indian embassy in Islamabad said today it would issue quick visas to Pakistani nationals wishing to watch Independence Cup matches.

The Indian High Commission will be "happy" to accept visa applications by Monday, which will be processed "expeditiously," according to a statement from the embassy.

It underlined "the policy of government of India to promote people-to-people contacts and exchanges in the fields of sports" between the two countries.

Sachin stays in hot seat

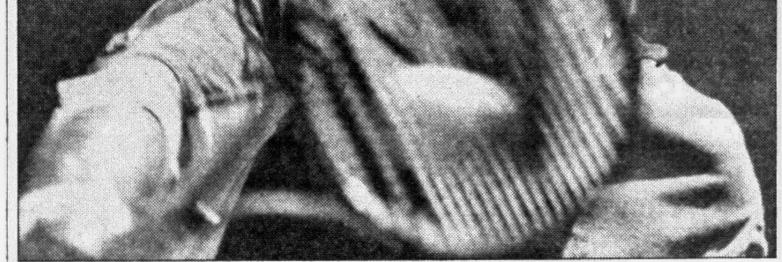
CALCUTTA, May 3: Sachin Tendulkar has been retained captain of the Indian cricket team for the forthcoming four-nation Independence Cup limited-over tournament to be held from May 9 to 28, reports PTI.

The decision to retain Tendulkar as the captain of the squad was taken after a telephonic conference by the national selection committee, the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), Jagmohan Dalmiya, said here today.

Dalmiya said that the team for the first one-dayer against New Zealand would be selected on May 6 through a tele-conference with the Indian team management in Bermuda. The Indian team will proceed to Bermuda to play two one-dayers after completing their engagements in the West Indies.

Mark Philippoussis of Australia makes a backhand return against Italian Andrea Gaudenzi during their match of the ATP tournament in Munich on May 2. The Aussie won 7-5, 4-6, 6-4.

— AFP/UNB photo



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Kanu's new lease of life



MILAN, May 3 (AFP): Inter Milan's Nwankwo Kanu, whose career looked over after undergoing heart surgery, has been cleared to play football again.

Kanu, the hero of Nigeria's victorious 1996 Olympic football side, had surgery in the United States five months ago after a pre-season medical test revealed a congenital heart disease.

But Inter who had bought him from Ajax Amsterdam last summer, issued a statement on behalf of Ohio's Cleveland Clinic Foundation on Friday which gave the 20-year-old the all clear.

"Kanu had a very successful surgery and was able to undergo intensive rehabilitation," said Cleveland cardiologist John R. Kramer.

"Based on the results of metabolic stress testing this week, we are removing all limitations and allowing him to return to full normal activities, including his professional activities."

Kramer paid tribute to Kanu's adherence to the rehabilitation programme and said,

"He is stronger now physically than he was before the operation."

The Nigerian was born with a deformed heart valve, which had begun to leak and affect the functioning of his heart. In

November, he underwent a four-hour operation to repair the valve.

His manager Franklin Sedoc said Kanu's desire to play football again had been the source of his motivation during the four-month rehab programme, adding that he was keen to return to Inter.

Sedoc said Kanu was grateful for the support of the government and people of Nigeria, and the support of Inter and its president Massimo Moratti.

"He is particularly thankful to God for making this possible and for giving him the faith to believe in him because with God, and if you believe in him, all things are possible."

"He also thanks his fans for their prayers and continued support. They truly helped him persevere throughout this personal ordeal."

"He now looks forward to what we hope will be a long career in professional soccer and to a long and healthy life."

He also expressed his deep sense of gratitude to the Cleveland Clinic staff.

Inter gave no indication as to when Kanu might play for them, saying that their optimism "still had to be moderated by a sense of caution that was only logical."



KANU