

G-14, FIFA meeting on Mar 27

MADRID, Feb 10: Presidents of Europe's 14 top club (G-14) said here on Tuesday they will be working with football's world governing body FIFA over the possibility of financial compensation for releasing players for international duty, reports AFP.

The G-14 are expected to negotiate the proposal during a meeting with FIFA on March 27 in Zurich.

Real Madrid and G-14 president Lorenzo Sanz gave examples of both Real Madrid and Barcelona who this week lost many players due to internationals.

The G-14 set up in November last year, are also going to discuss FIFA's proposal for a World Cup every two years and the idea of a player able to play for two different clubs in the European Cup. Now, when a player plays in the European Cup and moves to a different club, he becomes ineligible for the competition.

A proposal has already been raised by the G-14 with European football's governing body UEFA over enlarging the player list for the European Cup from the current limit of 25 to 35.

Discussions also went ahead on how the 430 million dollars of television cash will be shared out among the European Cup competitors during this third meeting of the G-14.

The G-14 comprise Real Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, Inter Milan, AC Milan, Juventus, Liverpool, Manchester United, Marseille, Paris Saint Germain, Porto, Ajax and PSV Eindhoven.

Iwata hold Pohang

CHONGQING, China, Feb 10 (Reuters/Internet): Champions Pohang Steelers were held to a 1-1 draw by J-League side Jubilo Iwata in their opening match of the eastern quarter-final group stage of the Asian club championship on Wednesday.

The South Koreans, who have won the title for the past two years, equalised after Toshiya Fujita was sent off three minutes into the second half.

Within seconds of the dismissal Pohang had cancelled out Masashi Nakayama's 28th minute header, Lee Hyun-dong finally punishing one of the Japanese side's numerous defensive errors with a low drive.

But though Park Sang-in and Park Tae-ha went close for the champions they were unable to capitalise on their one-man advantage.

It was also a day of missed opportunities for last year's beaten finalists, Dalian Wanda.

Protest against non-payment

CORDOBA, Spain, Feb 10: Players from the Spanish Third Division club Cordoba staged a lock-in on Tuesday in protest at not been paid for the last two months, reports Reuters.

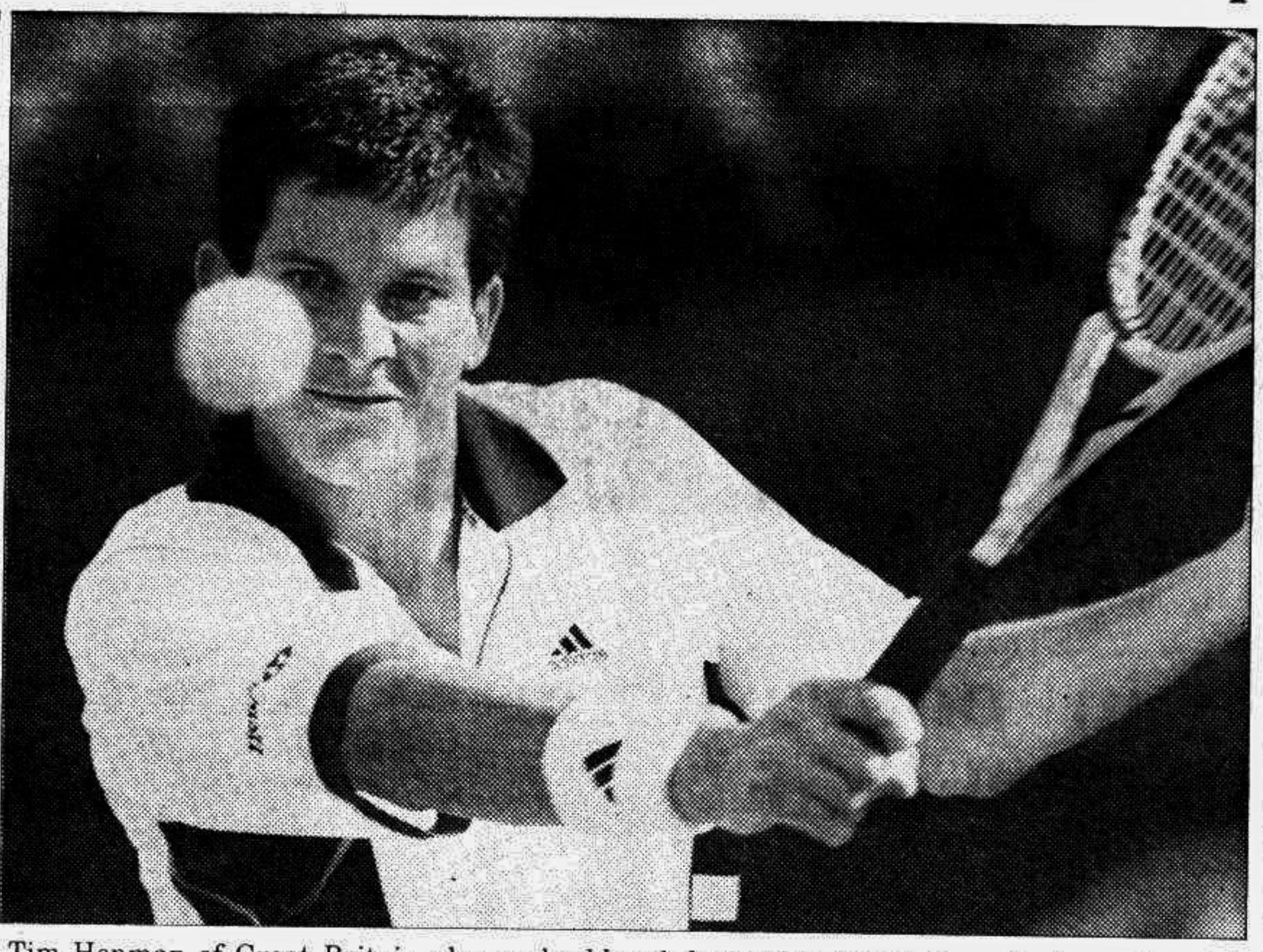
A players' spokesman said that the squad were owed around 50 million pesetas (342,000 dollars).

The players did not say how long they expected the lock-in at the club's facilities to last but said they would continue training.

This weekend Cordoba are scheduled to travel to Seville to play Real Betis B in a league fixture.

Cordoba, Spanish First Division club in the 1960s and early 70s, have fallen on hard times in recent years. They have remained in the regional Third Division for the last 14 seasons, although during that time they made the play-offs five times.

This season results have raised hopes of another tilt at the play-offs and Cordoba currently lie sixth in their division.



Tim Henman of Great Britain plays a backhand during his Dubai Open first round match against Zimbabwean Wayne Black on February 9. Henman won 6-0, 6-4. —AFP photo

Sampras back to business

SAN JOSE, California, Feb 10 (Reuters/Internet): In his first match back on tour after the longest layoff of his career, world number one Pete Sampras routinely dispatched Spaniard Galo Blanco 6-4, 6-4 on Tuesday to move into the second round of the \$325,000 Sybase Open.

"I felt my tennis was going to be a little bit up and down tonight but it's like riding a bike, you don't forget how to do it," said the 27-year-old Sampras, a two-time champion in San Jose.

"But I've been training and practising pretty hard and I played real solid."

Third seed Mark Philippoussis of Australia barely survived his first-round tussle with Armenia's Sargis Sargsyan, prevailing 6-7 (2-7) 7-5 6-3. Philippoussis could meet Sampras in the semifinals.

Sampras, who had not played since the ATP Championships last November, showed little rust in countering the Spaniard's heavy topspin ground attack, frequently chipping and charging and dominating his own service games. He won 97 per cent of his first-serve points.

"If there's one shot that I don't lose over a long span of time it's my serve and I relied on it tonight," said Sampras, who faced no break points in the match and delivered 11 aces.

"As the match went on I started to feel the ball pretty good and hit my groundies pretty clean. I was a little surprised because I thought I might struggle a little bit, so it was a good start."

During his layoff, the 11-time Grand Slam champion put down his racket for a month and travelled to Hawaii on his first vacation in 10 years.

"That's not what I'm playing for and I realise it would be close to a miracle for it to happen again, but I'm not going to rule it out altogether," Courier said.

Van Lottum reached the semifinals here last year but spent the latter part of 1998 battling an ankle injury. He said that despite Courier's low ranking, notching a win over a four-time Grand Slam champion is still huge.

"On a day when he plays well, he can still beat a lot of good players," said Van Lottum, who added that the game has changed since Courier bullied the tour as its top dog in 1992.

"You cannot win just hitting as hard as you can from the back. You need to be able to mix it up, play some serve and volley."

Van Lottum exploited Courier's weaker backhand side and took over the net in key situations.

"Jim plays the same rhythm so if you know how to control his rhythm, give him some slice and high balls, he has difficulty," Van Lottum said.

In a mild upset, Justin Gimelstob took down fellow American Jan-Michael Gambill 6-3, 7-6 (8-6).

The plans of former number one Jim Courier to re-enter the top 50 in San Jose hit a road-

block when he was upended by Dutchman John Van Lottum on Tuesday 6-4, 7-6 (7-4).

Now ranked 68th, the American still thinks he has an outside shot of reaching the top again, but realises that at age 28 it may only be a pipe dream.

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PETE SAMPRAS



CYCLING IN PARADISE: Cyclists of the Kuantan to Kuala Terengganu race pedaling past a sea shore at Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia yesterday.

Becker for revving up ATP Tour

DUBAI, Feb 10 (AFP/Internet): Boris Becker said on Tuesday he's determined to revolutionise the ATP Tour while continuing to prolong his tennis career.

The 31-year-old German tennis legend, who wants to create a higher-profile world series of elite tournaments, was speaking after he lost 6-3, 6-4 to Sweden's Jonas Bjorkman in the first round of the Dubai Open.

Becker, hopeful of playing for Germany in the Davis Cup next month, conceded the ATP Tour was pressing ahead with its own plans for reforming the circuit next year.

But he added: "Rome wasn't built in a day. It will take time for everyone to agree on the concept. It's a question of time."

Becker has linked up with motor racing mogul Bernie Ecclestone in proposing a plan to hive off a group of elite tournaments to act as the sport's shop window.

The ATP Tour and tennis' governing body, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) was a more gradual approach to creating an elite tour.

Becker added: "A lot of things are happening behind the scenes, but it would be wrong for me to talk about it."

On court Becker, having not played competitively for three months, struggled against the tour-hardened Bjorkman.

But he believes that by playing at Rotterdam next week and London the week after he should pick up enough match practice to be ready to play Davis Cup doubles next month.

"I usually expect that I will be the best so it is hard for me to lose," Becker admitted.

"That is a fact of life but with tournaments next week and the week after that I can start winning again."

Corretja upstaged

DUBAI, Feb 10: Austrian Andrej Ilie staged an upset 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 victory over world number two Alex Corretja in the 1 million US dollar Dubai Open on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

The Spanish top seed looked poised for the second round when he led 3-1 in the deciding set, but he squandered his advantage as world number 54 Ilie broke back to square at 4-4.

Ilie then saved five match points in a tense tie-break before clinching his first major career win.

Tim Henman finally broke his desert jinx when he scored his first victory in three attempts in Dubai.

Henman beat Zimbabwe's Wayne Black 6-0, 6-4 in the first round but the world number eight made hard work of the second set where he faced break points in two of his three service games.

"I am happy to win," said the third seeded Britton, "It's been really frustrating the last two years to come here and play so badly."

"There is really no excuse because it's good surface for me, and that showed today."

Former Dubai Open champion Wayne Ferreira of South Africa lost a cliff-hanger against Francisco Clavet 3-6, 6-3, 7-6. The Spaniard edged through 13-11 in the third set tie-break.

2-year ban on Van Rooyen

SYDNEY, Feb 10: Australian weightlifter Duncan van Rooyen was suspended today for two years after testing positive to a banned anabolic steroid, reports AFP.

The Australian Olympic Committee said Van Rooyen tested positive to clenbuterol in an out of competition check on August 14 last year.

The two year ban from competition started on the date which means he cannot qualify in time for the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

Howard sticks to his point

SYDNEY, Feb 10: Australia's monarchist Prime Minister John Howard today dismissed suggestions he had insulted the Queen Elizabeth II by deciding he should open the 74-year-old monarch or one of her representatives.

His comment led to an editorial by Britain's conservative broadsheet, the Daily Telegraph, which said Howard would be fit substitute for the 74-year-old monarch or one of her representatives.

Howard, who opposes Australia having its own head of state, denied any snub and said through a spokesman that proper protocols had been followed and Buckingham Palace had been informed of the situation.

"At the very least, they should be opened by her representative such as the Olympic Princess Royal (Princess Anne). But Mr Howard will not do."

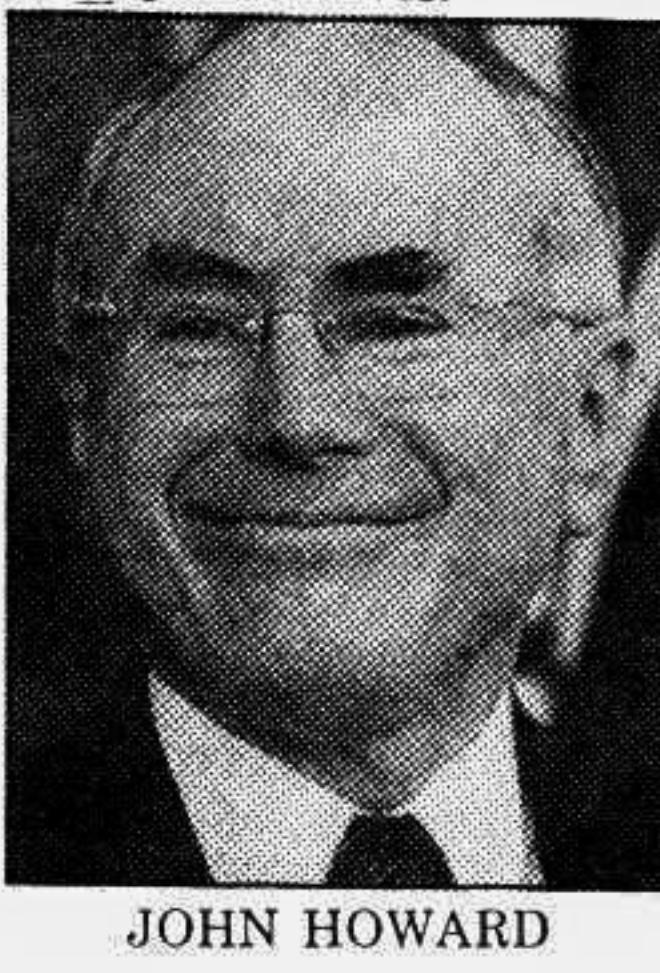
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"My position for some years, dating back to before becoming opposition leader in 1995 was that the most appropriate person to open the Games was the prime minister at the time."

Opposition Labour leader Kim Beazley supported the Telegraph, saying it was standard practice for the head of state to open the Olympics.

Dutch prince, IOC break up temporarily

THE HAGUE, Feb 10: Crown Prince Willem-Alexander, the heir to the Dutch throne, has suspended his work with the scandal-hit International Olympic Committee until after a special IOC meeting in March, Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok announced Tuesday, reports AP.



JOHN HOWARD

The paper pointed to the International Olympic Committee charter which states that the Olympics shall be proclaimed open by the head of state of the host country.

"If the queen is queen of Australia it is preposterous that she should not open the Games," it said in the editorial which also attacked Howard's cabinet for making its decision public before informing the queen.

Ethics report released

SALT LAKE CITY, Feb 10: Local officials trying to bring the 2002 Winter Games to Utah lashed Super Bowl trips, kitchen appliances, a violin and cash on International Olympic Committee officials, according to an Ethics Committee report released on Tuesday, says Reuters.

"Some of the most disturbing findings of the Ethics report provide examples of disgusting and disguised transactions and phony contracts," Salt Lake City Organising Committee chairman Robert Garf said in a news conference.

"Many of the large disbursements lacked complete documentation," Garf said after a two hour closed door meeting of the SLOC board.

The keenly anticipated Ethics report laid much of the blame on two top bid committee officials, Tom Welch and Dave Johnson, saying they acted without the knowledge of other board members.

The Ethics Committee, led by former Utah Supreme Court Judge Gordon Hall, had no substantial power and no access to bank records, Garf said.

Garf said the bid committee examined only ethical not criminal behaviour, David Jordan, committee member and former federal prosecutor, said.

The 300-page report com-

plied by five independent investigators examined more than 50,000 pages of financial documents, official files, budgets and correspondence.

The report named 13 people, including Olympic officials Jean Claude Ganga of the Congo and Charles Mukora of Kenya as being on the receiving end of the bid.

Mukora has already resigned and Ganga was suspended last month by the IOC in Switzerland because of their role in the scandal.

According to the report, some of the payments to Mukora were for his personal use. "From November 1993 through May 1995 Mr Mukora received direct payments of bid committee funds in the amount of 34,650 US dollars, the report said.

Garf said Salt Lake City at least a half dozen times, relating either his wife or other relatives, including his mother-in-law, the report said.

Since 1990 the total amount paid to Ganga for travel amounted to more than 115,000 US dollars, the report said.

Utah Governor Mike Leavitt tried to put the best face on the list of transgressions. "Let the world hear the truth and let it see how this state and its people stepped forth," Leavitt, a member of the SLOC board, said.

Beth Wilkinson, a former federal prosecutor and attorney for SLOC, said the report showed unethical actions but

nothing criminal.

Garf said the Ethics Committee could not find any evidence that the bid committee enticed IOC officials with the services of escorts as had been alleged in some newspaper reports.

Loye hits a ton for England A

BULAWAYO, Zimbabwe, Feb 10: A painstaking century by Mal Loye of North Hampshire enabled England A to take command against Zimbabwe A after the first day of their match here on Tuesday, reports AFP.

Loye batted through all but six overs of the day for his unbroken 122, which included 17 fours.

His effort on an easy-paced wicket enabled England A to reach 256 for four by the close.

Loye improved on his 90 against the Zimbabwe President's XI two weeks ago.