

Marat makes progress

PARIS, Nov 16: ATP Championships Race leader Marat Safin moved into the last 16 of the Paris Masters Series on Wednesday, but it was midnight by the time he ousted gritty Swiss qualifier George Bastien.

Safin came through 7-5, 6-4 in 1hr 19min with a single break in each set as he rounded off a packed programme on centre court that saw the Russian's evening match start some two hours later than scheduled.

He next faces French hope and 16th seed Sebastien Grosjean, who breezed past Tommy Haas of Germany 7-5, 6-4.

One of the matches delaying Safin's entrance saw Spanish eighth seed Alex Corretja oust Frenchman Arnaud Clement 6-2, 6-7 (2-7), 6-3.

Crocodile tears

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Moreover, Zimbabwe became the only debutant side to have drawn the first Test they ever played against India in 1993.

Ramchand himself should have been a little more prudent.

The fact that Bangladesh could stretch mighty India into a fourth day was a morale victory for the home team. And what about the performances of century-maker Aminul Islam and skipper Naimur Rahman who claimed six wickets? These were no miracle happenings but essentially the product of hard work and determination. He should remember that 'Rome wasn't built in a day'.

The chance to rub shoulders with a team that boasts three of the leading batsmen in the game today was a great honour. And yes, it was because of our lack of experience that we crumbled in the second innings. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that one learns from one's mistakes. And it is accepted that defeats like the one Bangladesh suffered will continue for some years. Think about the urn that contains the 'Ashes' Australia has held on to for as long as we remember, but it doesn't stop England from trying to regain it every four years since 1986.

Another thing that Ramchand hasn't taken into consideration is the commendable results of the last first-class fixtures before Bangladesh entered the Test arena. Both matches against England 'A' and West Indies were drawn. And manager of the England 'A' team Mike Gatting was very impressed by the standard of facilities. This was one of the factors that led to the sport's governing body making us the tenth Test-playing country.

Above all, the arrival of Eddie Barlow made all the difference. He has worked day and night to bring the standard of cricket up to ICC requirements. His role was crucial in convincing the original nine members to support our Test plea.

Our results in South Africa were frankly to be expected because the players never encountered bouncy and fast tracks at home.

Even as we speak measures are already in place to make the adjustment to five-day matches smoother. By that I mean from this season the National League (first class competition) will be of four days' duration. On the final day a one-day match will be played. Under such a method players can understand the benefits of both the long and short versions of the game. Numerous age-group tournaments will be held throughout the country. The Bangladesh Cricket Board is also developing venues of international standard outside the capital.

Four Sri Lankan coaches are working at the moment for different age-group cricket. Besides, several specialised foreign coaches are going to be hired. The ICC itself is helping to raise umpiring standards through a special clinic being run by one its most respected officials Steve Bucknor of Jamaica.

Acquiring Test status is not the end of our journey. Rather it's just begun.

Azhar comes

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alist Hindu organisations have recently attacked a beauty parlour owned by the wife of former cricketer Manoj Prabhakar and stormed a press conference held by Ajay Jadeja after they were named as possible suspects in the match-fixing scandal. The Hindu groups accuse the cricketers of tarnishing India's image.

"We cannot disregard his concern for security, especially when he has done something good for the country in the past," Madhavan said of Azharuddin, before their meeting began.

The other player named in the report — Nayan Monga — and physiotherapist All Irani met Madhavan in Madras last weekend.

But former Test cricketer Ajay Sharma, who ducked the Madras meeting citing health reasons, failed to make an appearance before Madhavan in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Madhavan is expected to submit his report to the BCCI on November 25. All five cricketers have been suspended from first-class cricket pending Madhavan's recommendations.

On November 3, the BCCI temporarily banned Azharuddin, Jadeja, Prabhakar, Monga and Sharma from playing domestic matches until the investigation is completed.

The Board finalised a code of conduct for cricketers and officials in August that detailed severe punishment, including a life ban, if they were found involved in betting and match-fixing.

Not everything's Wright



NEW DELHI, Nov 16: John Wright took charge as Indian cricket's first foreign coach on Thursday, diving head on into uncharted territory that resembles a snakepit, reports AFP.

The former New Zealand captain will not only have to contend with a mediocre national team, but also ensure quick results to tide over anger among former players over a foreigner usurping the job that was till now, theirs by right.

With the game clouded by match-fixing sleaze, Wright could not have hoped for a worse time to start his stint with an administration that is known to lose patience with coaches very quickly.

As many as five Indian coaches have been dumped in the last five years as the team stuttered from one defeat to another, and remained without a Test win outside the sub-continent since the England tour in 1986.

The procession began with Ajit Wadekar's ouster after the World Cup in 1996, followed by Sandeep Patil, Madan Lal, Anshuman Gaekwad and Kapil Dev in quick succession.

Wright starts an initial one-year term with the two-Test series against Zimbabwe from Saturday, but his big test comes next February when Australia undertake a six-week tour.

The genial 46-year-old said his primary task was to instill a sense of pride in the players.

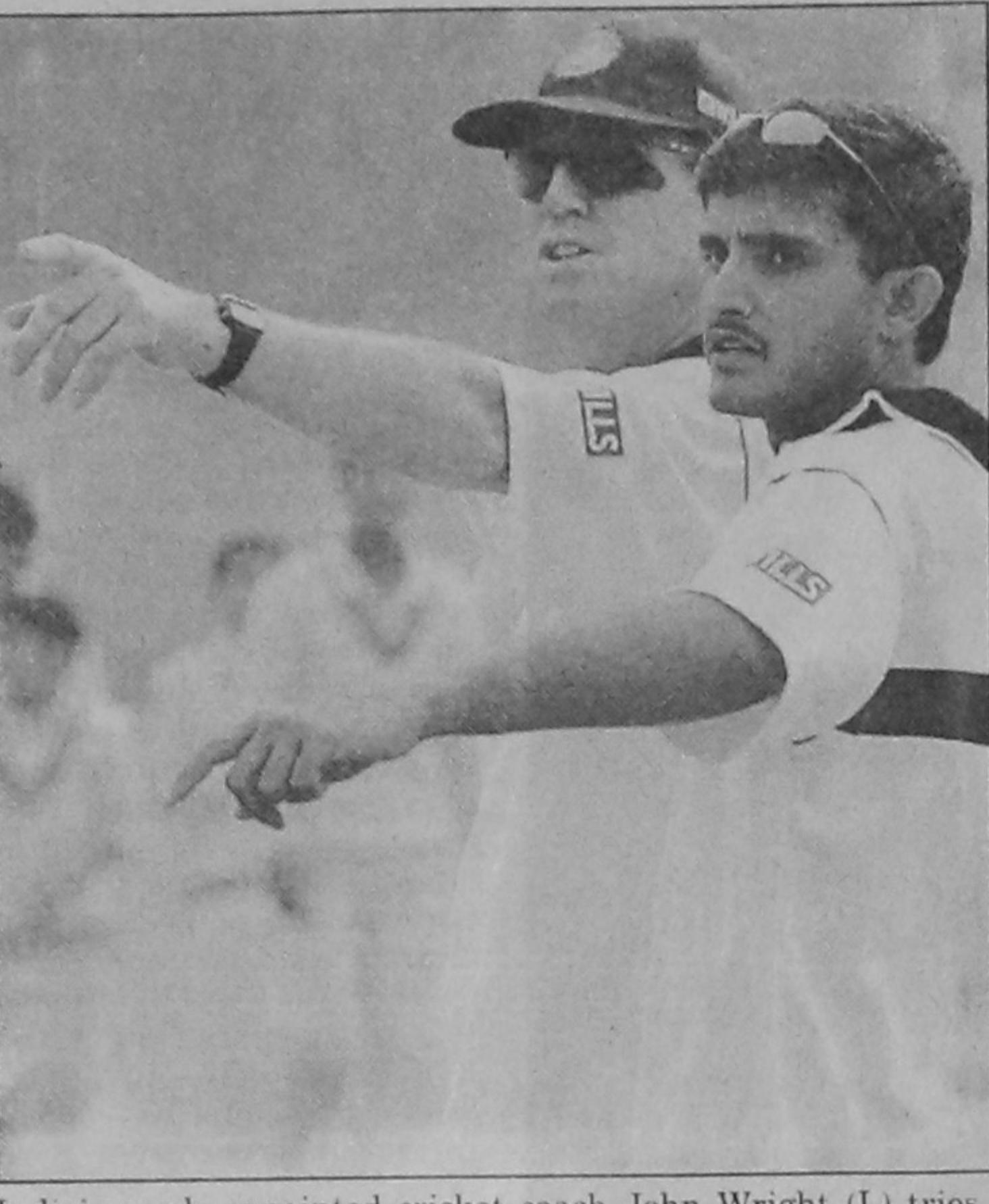
"Incorporating the pride of playing for the country will be my prime agenda," Wright said during his first training session with the Indians ahead of Saturday's first Test.

"It's not that the players do not have pride now, but I expect some changes in the days to come."

I am honoured and delighted to get the assignment. I am here to give my best. The rest is up to the people to decide," he said.

The New Zealander, coach of Indian Test star Rahul Dravid's English county side Kent, was reportedly backed by senior players like captain Sourav Ganguly and Sachin Tendulkar.

But not many ex-players, including former captain Bishan Bedi, are convinced he is the solution to India's problems.



India's newly-appointed cricket coach John Wright (L) tries to draw the attention of skipper Saurav Ganguly to something during a practice session at the National Stadium in New Delhi yesterday.

—AFP photo

making a great sacrifice coming to India.

"At least Wright was sincere

he wanted to prove himself. But we have taken on Marsh as a consultant, who will guide us in restructuring our domestic cricket," he said.

The 46-year-old Wright played 82 Tests for New Zealand, scoring 5,334 runs at an average of 37.82.

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The Indian team, preparing for the first Test against Zimbabwe here from Saturday, refused to comment on the government's decision.

India last played a Test match in Pakistan in 1989, but crossed the border for a three-match limited-overs series in 1997.

This is the second time in three months that the Indian government has refused to clear a cricket series against Pakistan.

The annual Sahara Cup series in Canada in September was also cancelled for the second consecutive year at India's behest.

Pakistan, who stand to lose millions of dollars in sponsorship money because of the aborted tour, threatened to boycott all matches with India in future.

Former Test star Bishan Bedi, who captained India on a tour of Pakistan in 1978, said it was a "political decision, not a cricketing one."

"Things in Pakistan are not any different from what we saw in 1978," he said. "Although the government's decision was on expected lines, I disagree."

Pakistan won the match in front of empty stands after police were forced to evict all spectators, except officials and the media, from the Eden Gardens.

Another former Test cricketer Kirti Azad, a member of parliament from the ruling

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This puts us in a position where we would like to review our relationship with India and may not play them even in offshore tri-nation, one-day internationals," Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman General Taquiq Zia said on Wednesday.

The first event that could be affected is the Sharjah tri-series between Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka next April, Zia said.

The Indian government had earlier banned all bilateral

BCCI's hands are tied



NEW DELHI, Nov 16: Indian cricket chiefs said on Thursday they will abide by the government's decision to cancel next month's tour of Pakistan, despite the latter's threats to boycott all future matches, reports AFP.

"Such decisions are taken by the government in national interest and the Board has to abide by it," Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) president AC Muthiah said from Singapore.

"We are helpless in this matter," BCCI secretary Jayaram said. "At least the players will now be available for domestic cricket."

Official contact between the two South Asian rivals has been frozen since May last year when Indian troops began a bitter 10-week battle against Pakistan-backed forces along their disputed border in Kashmir.

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Tiger Cup

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Indonesia enter final



BANGKOK, Nov 16: Indonesian striker Gendut Christiawan bounded in Indonesia's golden goal to the final minute of extra-time for a stunning 3-2 victory over Vietnam in the semi-finals of the Tiger Cup at the Rajamangala Stadium Thursday, reports AFP.

Christiawan was the toast of his country after he scored Indonesia's first goal in the 39th minute and the winning goal in the 120th minute.

Vietnam had the majority of possession but that counted for little as last year's losing finalists to Singapore were sent reeling from the tournament in front of over 2,000 flag-waving fans.

Christiawan dominated early on and took the game to the Indonesians with some superb build-ups. Star striker Le Huynh Duc was the main focus of the attacks.

He gave the Indonesian defence hell with his deceptive moves and very nearly gave Vietnam the lead in the 9th minute. But his shot was blocked by well-positioned Indonesian goalkeeper Komang Adnyana.

Indonesia looked dangerous during their quick counter-attacks but did not trouble Vietnam's goalkeeper Tran Minh Quang as his defenders skillfully cut off crosses from

both flanks. Vietnam continued to press the Indonesians and Nguyen Van Sy saw two of his free kicks saved by the Indonesian goalkeeper in the 15th and 19th minutes.

Then it was Nguyen Hong Son's turn to take potshots at the Indonesian goal, but both his attempts in the 27th and 29th minutes went wide.

Meanwhile, Indonesia continued with their sporadic raids and they began to look sharper, especially in midfield, with some neat moves and skillful

play. However it was Vietnam, boosted by the loud roar of their fans, who kept attacking in search of the elusive goal when suddenly Indonesia, in a fast counter-attack, took the lead in the 39th minute.

Uston Nawawi collected a pass from midfield and raced down the right flank. He then flicked over a superb cross which Christiawan jumped up high to nod the ball neatly into the far left, giving the Vietnamese goalkeeper no chance at all.

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WECCA president Fariduddin Khan speaking at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

ACC Trophy

Malaysia stay in the hunt

DUBAI, Nov 16: Malaysia kept their hopes alive at the Asian Cricket Council Trophy when they sneaked to a last-gasp victory over Kuwait in a Group A encounter on Thursday, reports AFP.

Kuwait chasing 237 to win, needed six runs off the last over, but their hopes were dashed when captain Taher Bastaki was clean bowled by medium pace bowler Munusamy Muniandy in the second delivery of the over.

The wicket brought a huge sigh of relief to Malaysia who were on the verge of being knocked out of a berth in the semifinals having lost their opening encounter to Hong Kong by 17 runs on Wednesday.

Hong Kong scored their second successive victory, romping to a 53-run win over Singapore. Put into bat, Hong Kong piled up 270 for eight with Rahul Sharma (95), captain Stewart Brew (50) and Saleem Malik (55) playing major roles.

They then restricted Malaysia to 217 or six in their 50 overs. Andrew Scott, who hit an unbeaten 108 against Kuwait, was once again in fine nick, top-scoring with 58 while Joshua Dearing scored 42. Zheng Renghun (48) and Kiran Dsilpande (41 not out) were also amongst the runs.

Meanwhile, minnows Japan were totally out of their depth as they crashed to an eight-wicket defeat to the Maldives in a Group B encounter.

Japan's batting first were dismissed for 59 in the 26 overs with fast bowlers Imad Ismail taking three for 11 and Ahmed Amir grabbing three for seven. Maldivian Islands then knocked off the runs, reaching 60 for two in 12 overs.

New Zealand's batting has looked sparse throughout the south African leg of their lengthy African junket. Roger Twose has opted to be a one-

ACC Trophy

NZ-SA begin Test rivalry

BELOEMFONTEIN, South Africa, Nov 16: Facing Allan Donald on his home ground as he hunts down his 300th Test wicket is not a prospect the injury-hit New Zealanders are relishing.