

India may delay

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with Pakistan under pressure from the International Cricket Council (ICC), immediately agreed to play a Test series in March.

The Pakistan Cricket Board, which hopes to make 20 million dollars from the money-spinning series, was flooded with offers to sponsor what is regarded as one of the sport's greatest rivalries.

The Indian cricketers, who have just ended a gruelling 10-week tour of Australia, said they were willing to go to Pakistan provided adequate security was given to them.

"We are not worried about touring Pakistan but about the security," captain Sourav Ganguly said this week on his return from Australia.

Australia and the West Indies refused to play in Pakistan due to security fears after the US-led strikes in neighbouring Afghanistan in 2001.

New Zealand were forced to abandon their tour of Pakistan in 2002 after a bomb blast outside the team hotel in Karachi on the morning of a Test match.

But matches by Bangladesh, South Africa and New Zealand in Pakistan this season passed off peacefully.

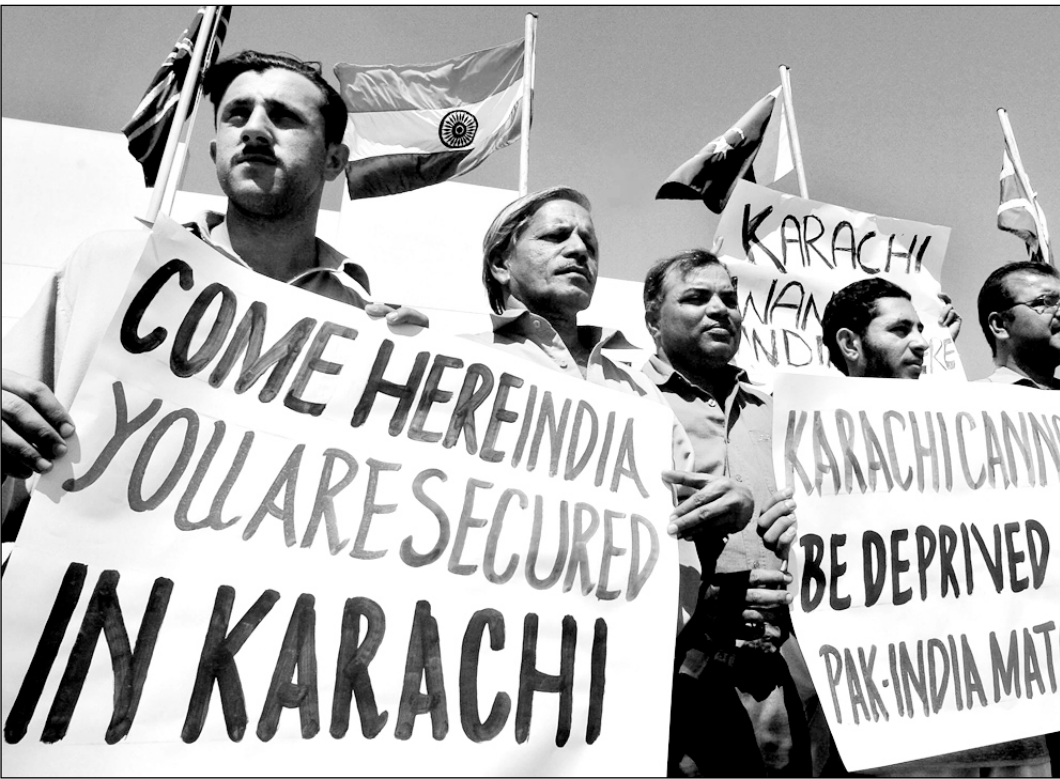


PHOTO: AFP
Karachiates, holding posters urging India to undertake the tour of Pakistan, stand outside the National Stadium yesterday.

Warming up

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After skittling the New Zealanders for 179 in 45.3 overs, the BKSP skipper Ashraf-ul-Islam led from the front with an unbeaten 76 as his side topped the score in 34.5 overs.

Scotland took on CCGM Red at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium and were all out for 129 in 35.5 overs. The Red side got there in 28.1 overs for the loss of six wickets.

CHITTAGONG ZONE WARM-UPS

England skipper Alastair Cook and his opening partner Ravinder Bopara saw their team to a massive 10-wicket win against the Chittagong Divisional Team 'B' in at the MA Aziz Stadium.

Cook scored 69 while and Bopara 34 as they promptly knocked over the 134 for victory.

South Africa, overcame Chittagong Divisional Team 'A' by 28 runs at the port city's new venue Chittagong Divisional Stadium.

South Africa made 218 on winning the toss with captain Divan Van Wyk's 77 being the top score. The local side gave it their best shot before losing their last wicket for 190 in the 48th over.

Nepal outplayed Chittagong District Team 'A' by six wickets at the Dampara Police Lines ground after surpassing their opponents' 178 in 47.4 over. Munik Shrestha scored the highest 86.

RAJSHAHI ZONE WARM-UPS

Australia thumped Rajshahi District U-19 side by 131 runs. The tournament favourites amassed 306 for six with Theo Doropoulos hammering 106 with 12 fours and three sixes. The home team were dismissed for 175 in 42.3 overs at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium.

At the Rajshahi Stadium, Canada were handed a seven wicket defeat by the Rajshahi Mayor's U-19 selection. Canada were all out for 100 in 32.2 overs which the Mayor's XI easily sailed past in 18.2 overs.

KHULNA ZONE WARM-UPS

The West Indies recorded the day's biggest win. After making 333, the men from the Caribbeans shot out Khulna Divisional Sports Association for 149 at the newly renamed Bir Shrestha Maitur Rahman Stadium.

Minnows Papua New Guinea lost by the barest of margins against Khulna District Sports Association XI who overtook the 128 required for victory losing nine wickets at the Khulna Stadium

Ricky best Aussie



AFP, Melbourne

New Australian Test cricket captain Ricky Ponting won the Allan Border Medal here on Thursday as the country's top international cricketer for the past 12 months.

Ponting finished well clear in the voting for his first Border Medal in the award's five-year history, polling 139 votes with opening batsman Matthew Hayden second on 91 and wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist third on 71.

Ponting also took out his second-successive Test player of the year award.

But Gilchrist denied Ponting the third leg of the sweep when he won the international one-day player of the year category announced at a gala dinner here.

Gilchrist led the one-day voting for the second-straight year with 28 votes, four ahead of Ponting and Brett Lee.

The 29-year-old Tasmanian run machine topped the Test voting with 13, three clear of Hayden.

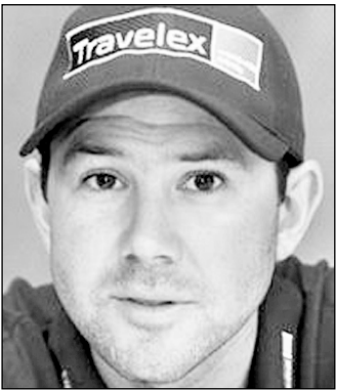
Ponting played in 11 of Australia's 12 Tests for the voting period, starting with the West Indies tour last April.

He scored 1,557 runs at an average of 103.8, with a top score of 257.

Last year he became the first Test batsman since Sir Donald

Bradman to score three double centuries in a calendar year.

Ponting was the only Australian to play in all 37 one-dayers for the voting period, starting with last year's World Cup, and posted the



RICKY PONTING

second-highest run tally with 1,317 at 43.90 and a strike rate of 81.64.

Gilchrist led the Australian one-day run aggregate with 1,463 runs in 33 games at a strike rate of 105.63 and an average of 45.71. He scored two centuries, with a highest score of 172.

Former Test players Alan Davidson and Hugh Trumble were officially inducted into the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame.

The Australian team leave here on Friday for a one-day series in Sri Lanka.

Sumathipala trial begins

CRICINFO, undated

The trial of Thilanga Sumathipala, president of the Sri Lankan Cricket (SLC), began on February 10.

Sumathipala, held in police custody since January 19, has been charged under the Immigration and Emigration Act after allegations that he helped Amarasinghe, a known underworld gangster, travel to England to watch the 1999 World Cup on a false passport.

The opening day of the case centred on the medical state of Sumathipala. He missed two earlier court appointments before being taken into custody, and was then held at National Hospital Merchant's Ward rather than Welikada Prison because of kidney problems and a spinal condition.

Sumathipala appeared in court in a wheelchair.

Div I v'ball

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Three matches were decided in the First Division Volleyball League at Khulna Outer Stadium on Wednesday.

In the first match, Khulna Biddut Club beat Amvita Adarsa Club 3-0, while Young Abahani Kirra Chakra defeated Junior Winners Club by the same margin.

Fair World Club defeated Pratiba Sporting Club 5-2.

Foreman plans a comeback

AFP, Houston

Former world heavyweight champion George Foreman told a television station here he was training for a return to the ring, American press reported on Tuesday.

The 1968 Olympic champion, who as world champion lost to Muhammad Ali in the famous Rumble in the Jungle fight in 1974, has been training since his 55th birthday on January 10 and said if he can get down to 100kg he will return.

Foreman surprised everyone at the age of 45 and a 10-year absence from the ring to beat 26-year-old Michael Moorer to win the WBA and IBF heavyweight titles in November 1994. He has not fought however since losing to fellow American Shannon Briggs in 1997.

Foreman was one of the most powerful punchers in boxing history and became the undisputed heavyweight champion on January 22, 1973 with a devastating second-round technical knockout of Joe Frazier.

He made two successful defenses before getting knocked out by Ali.

Foreman had a career record of 76-5 with 68 knockouts.

McGrath runs

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proving his fitness and equally unlikely the selectors will rely on a hunch he is ready to add to his 95 Tests and 430 wickets with no cricket behind him.

NSW will name its Shield side on Monday, but a team spokesman said on Thursday McGrath would not be considered for a four-day match without having played either a club match or a one-day match.

McGrath has not played a Test for Australia since last July's second Test against Bangladesh in Cairns.

Australian chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns this week admitted McGrath might be too ambitious in aiming to return in the Sri Lanka series.

Kenya eyes

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For many of the Kenyans, the Caribbean tour is their first stab at four-day cricket, and Moles admitted that the transition was proving tricky.

"In the one-day game the batsmen can concentrate for an hour-and-a-half," he said, "but to stay in for three or four sessions is more difficult for them. Surprisingly, the wickets have been slow and low all the batsmen are eventually getting out caught in the covers and things. But the more cricket we are playing the better we get."

Most of the Kenyan World Cup squad were over 30, but now they have bled four or five players under the age of 22. It is a sign of definite progress, according to Moles, but he has greater ambitions for his charges.

"We should play with Zimbabwe, Bangladesh and another new Test nation," he admitted. "It wouldn't be full Test status, but when you see how Bangladesh and Zimbabwe have struggled recently you cannot imagine the sponsors rushing to support some of these matches."

"But the four countries in the second tier would be strengthened by playing more competitive cricket," he added, "rather than being on the wrong end of a good hiding every time."

And if Moles' idea was followed to the letter, then the top team in the second tier would play against the bottom-ranked Test nation in a series every three years, to assess their progress.

Kiwis look

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since breaking his ankle in England last July, finished with two for 19 off 10 overs, and Peterson took three for 17 off 9.3.

From the New Zealand squad which beat Pakistan there are two changes, with prolific batsman Michael Pappas coming in at the expense of Craig Cumming and pace bowler Michael Mason replacing Andre Adams.

Although Mason is the form bowler in domestic cricket, coach John Bracewell has to decide whether he or Ian Butler should be dropped from the squad of 13.

Playing for Northern Districts against South Africa, Butler went for 28 off his first three overs but came back to take three for 21 in his pacy second spell of four overs.

TEAMS

SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Herschelle Gibbs, Jacques Kallis, Jacques Rudolph, Boeta Dippenaar, Mark Boucher, Shaun Pollock, Nicky Boje, Lance Klusener, Makhaya Ntini, Andre Nel, Robin Peterson, Albie Morkel, Ashwell Prince.

NEW ZEALAND (from): Stephen Fleming (captain), Michael Pappas, Hamish Marshall, Scott Styris, Craig McMillan, Chris Cairns, Jacob Oram, Brendon McCullum, Kyle Mills, Daniel Vettori, Daryl Tuffey, Michael Mason, Ian Butler.



PHOTO: AFP

France's Mary Pierce makes returns during her match against Arantxa Parra of Spain at the Paris Indoor Open on February 11.

Pierce progresses



AFP, Paris

Russian second seed Elena Dementieva survived a scare against French wildcard Stephanie Cohen-Aloro before advancing to the quarterfinals of the 585,000-dollar Paris Indoor Open on Wednesday.

Dementieva gave an error-strewn performance before scraping past 80th world-ranked Cohen-Aloro 7-5, 1-6, 6-4 in their second round battle which lasted 2hr 11min at the Pierre de Coubertin stadium.

The 22-year-old Muscovite had the crowd gasping in surprise as she double faulted 15 times and committed a string of unforced errors.

"It wasn't my best match that's for sure," said world number eight Dementieva.

"I was a bit nervous because it was my first match and Stephanie played at a very high level. But I'm happy to be through to the quarter-finals and hope to do better later this week."

Dementieva was struggling from the outset with her serve letting her down from the opening game and

she was 1-4 down before fighting back and sealing the first set in 45 minutes.

The mistakes continued in the second set as the Russian lost her serve to love in the first game and won just one game before her 21-year-old opponent forced a third set.

Back on court after a ten-minute break Dementieva showed more focus and determination and despite dropping her serve again in the fourth game came back and broke her opponent in the ninth and served out for victory with Cohen-Aloro hitting long.

France's Mary Pierce overcame a rusty start in her first match of the season before dispatching Spanish lucky loser Arantxa Parra, who replaced injured Nathalie Dechy of France, 7-5, 6-2 in their first round tie.

Former French and Australian Open champion Pierce, the 1998 winner here, lost two service games and was trailing 1-5 before winning six games in a row to take the first set in 39min. She took control of the second after breaking early and took the tie in 69 minutes.

"I think the fact that I hadn't played a match in a few months and was playing in Paris I was a little

tense and made a lot of faults. Then I calmed down and it went better," said 29-year-old Pierce, who next meets Spanish eighth seed Magui Serna for a place in the quarterfinals.

Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia advanced after France's Sandrine Testud, who was making her comeback after giving birth 12 months ago, retired with stomach pains while trailing 5-3.

Hantuchova meets French teenager Tatiana Golovin in the second round.

Earlier Italy's Silvia Farina Elia, the seventh seed, coasted past Slovenia's Tina Pisnik 6-0, 6-4 in their second round tie.

Farina Elia next meets either Belgian top seed Kim Clijsters or Spaniard Maria Sanchez Lorenz, who play Thursday, for a place in the final four.

Elena Bovina won her first round tie against Spanish qualifier Anabel Medina Garrigues 4-6, 6-2, 6-4, and next meets fourth seed Jelena Dokic of Serbia-Montenegro for a place in the quarterfinals.

Rusedski made to wait



BBC ONLINE, London

Greg Rusedski may have to wait until next week for the outcome of Monday's hearing into his positive drugs test.

Yves Fortier, the QC who chaired the Montreal tribunal, is away on business for the rest of the week and will give his conclusions to the ATP next week.

His secretary told The Independent newspaper: "Mr Fortier's back next week and will speak again to his colleagues before the tribunal can be concluded."

Rusedski may therefore be free to play in next week's ATP event in Rotterdam. But the British number two has yet to confirm his participation in the tournament.

On his return to London on Tuesday, he told reporters he was

"cautiously optimistic" that he would avoid a ban.

"I'm confident and we'll just have to wait and see," Rusedski said.

"I have no idea when I'm going to hear the verdict."

"It's anywhere between three to nine days, so all I can do is sit tight at the moment."

If the tribunal finds Rusedski guilty, the ATP will announce the verdict and the Briton will have 21 days to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

If Rusedski is exonerated, it will be up to him to make the findings known and the ATP will have the option of appealing to CAS.

Rusedski could be banned for up to two years if found guilty.

His legal team was ready to argue at the Montreal hearing that his sample had the same "unique analytical fingerprint" as seven other positive tests, which emerged last year.

Those seven players were cleared after the ATP were unable to prove that supplements handed out by their own trainers were not contaminated with nandrolone.

Magura football

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Dariapur Juba Sangha and Satyapur Juba Sangha shared points in the Econo First Division Football League at the Magura Stadium yesterday after their game ended 1-1.

After a barren first half Mohsin for Dariapur and Ahad for Satyapur scored the goals.

Sreerampur Friends Club will take on Young Eleven Star on February 18.

Roddick rolls, Dent dented



AFP, San Jose

Former world number one Andy Roddick advanced with ease in a first-round match here Wednesday at a 380,000-dollar ATP event but fellow American Taylor Dent was ousted in the second round.

Roddick advanced by defeating Belgium's Christophe Rochus 6-4, 6-2 in his first match since leading the US team past Austria in the Davis Cup.

"Earlier in the match I wanted to try to establish my wide serve so things would open up," Roddick said. "The first set it wasn't so great. The second set I picked it up."

Roddick, who fell from atop the rankings after a quarter-final loss last month at the Australian Open, fired a record 150 mph serve in the Davis Cup tie last weekend and had more than enough firepower to oust Rochus.

"I did what I could," Rochus said. "I never faced anyone that has served that fast."

Roddick booked a second-round date against another Belgian, Kristof Vliegen.

Fourth seed Dent, the son of a former Aussie star, was upset by American wild card Robert Kendrick 6-4, 6-4 in a second-round match. Kendrick will face American Robby Ginepri or France's Cyril Saulnier in Friday's quarter-finals.

South Korea's Lee Hyung-Taik defeated Belgium's Xavier Malisse 7-6 (7/1), 6-1 to book a second-



PHOTO: REUTERS

American Andy Roddick hits a forehand against Belgium's Christophe Rochus at the San Jose Open on Wednesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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