

No better time

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major activities. Astrologers normally consult horoscopes of prospective partners to determine the best day for their marriage.

However, because of a rare planetary line-up Thursday, all marriages would be deemed auspicious, regardless of horoscopes.

But in the day boded ill for families trying to marry off children in the desert state of Rajasthan, in line with local beliefs dating back to the era of medieval maharajhs, as authorities prepared to break up the forced weddings.

Meanwhile, star Indian batsman Sehwag, 25, was due to wed Delhi resident Aarti Ahlawat at the residence of Law Minister Arun Jaitley -- a cricket fan who offered his sprawling premises to the young couple.

The celebrations come barely five days after the 25-year-old Sehwag returned from a triumphant tour of Pakistan.

Sehwag, who was man-of-the-series in Pakistan after smashing India's first triple century in Test cricket at Multan, got engaged to Ahlawat, daughter of a family friend, just before the tour began on March 8.

Cricket captain Sourav Ganguly and other teammates are expected to attend the reception, during which the 30th birthday of master batsman Sachin Tendulkar will also be toasted.

Olympic hockey draw

India, Pakistan avoid each other



AFP, New Delhi

Arch-rivals India and Pakistan have been placed in separate preliminary pools in the Olympic men's field hockey tournament, according to the draw released by the sport's governing body on Thursday.

Pakistan have been drawn in Pool A alongside world champions Germany, South Korea, Great Britain, Spain and Egypt, the International Hockey Federation (FIH) announced in a media release.

Pool B comprises defending champions the Netherlands, India, Australia, Argentina, New Zealand and South Africa.

Two teams from each pool will qualify for the semifinals.

South Africa's participation in the tournament is subject to approval by the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS), which is considering an appeal by the Greek hockey body to be granted automatic qualification as the hosts.

Greece, an unknown entity in field hockey, were denied a direct berth in its own Olympics after it failed to qualify for last year's European Nations Cup and lost a

best-of-three play-off series with Canada.

The CAS will rule on Greece's appeal on May 19. If the appeal is rejected, South Africa will take part in the 12-nation competition by virtue of finishing seventh at the Olympic qualifiers in Spain in March.

Meanwhile, Argentina, China, Japan, New Zealand and Spain were drawn in Pool A of the women's tournament. Defending champions Australia are grouped with Germany, South Korea, the Netherlands and South Africa in Pool B of the 10-nation competition.

POOLS

MEN

Pool A: Pakistan, Germany, South Korea, Great Britain, Spain and Egypt.

Pool B: The Netherlands, India, Australia, Argentina, New Zealand and South Africa.

WOMEN

Pool A: Argentina, China, Japan, New Zealand and Spain.

Pool B: Australia, Germany, South Korea, the Netherlands and South Africa.

Kenyan cricket boss quitting

AFP, Nairobi

Jimmy Rayani, the Nairobi lawyer who has headed the Kenya Cricket Association (KCA) for the past 10 years is to step down during next month's national elections.

"Ten years is long enough. I will not defend my post," Rayani told AFP on Wednesday.

However, he said he would seek a position on the African Cricket Board in order to continue supporting the growth of the sport in the continent.

During his tenure, Kenya gained promotion from minnows in the East Africa region to One Day international status, as well as qualifying for three successive World Cup tournaments.

The country also hosted a series of international competitions, including the 1994 International Cricket Council (ICC) Trophy and the Knock-Out tournament in 2000.

But his committee has had run-ins with the authorities, forcing the government to dissolve the association in 2002 after a revolt by national team players.

It was only after an intervention by the ICC that the matter was settled.

However, differences between various groups and lack of transparency in the governance of the sport in the country have led to a stalemate which may threaten the country's bid to become a Test-playing nation by 2005.

Raja refuses

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said. "They are wrong because my chairman has reposed his full confidence in me. If someone thinks that I will be stepping down due to the negative criticism on me after defeats to the Pakistan team, he is wrong. I do not have such plans."

Rameez had been severely criticised for performing the dual role of both the CEO and a TV commentator.

Meanwhile, the PCB has initiated disciplinary action against Rashid Latif for making match-fixing allegations during the one-day series. In a letter to Latif, Shaharyar said that his case has been referred to the disciplinary committee for investigation as well as follow-up action. Latif, reputed for his whistle-blowing, responded by threatening to reveal a lot more on match-fixing and exposing many more players.

Latif was quoted as saying by The News that he had certain 'details and information' which had led him to question the result of the fourth one-dayer at Lahore.

"If the board wants to open the Pandora's Box, then I cannot help it. But I have been in constant touch with the Anti-Corruption Unit of the ICC on this issue and have already given them whatever information I had with me."

Waqar could

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Younis played a key role in Glamorgan's County Championship-winning season in 1997, taking 68 wickets.

He returned to Sophia Gardens in 1998, but saw his year spoiled by injuries.

He has also represented Surrey and Warwickshire.

For Pakistan, Waqar claimed 373 wickets in 87 Tests at an average of 23.5 and 416 wickets in 262 one-day matches.

Following his retirement, Younis had seemed uncertain over his plans, saying: "I have not decided on my future. It could be media work or coaching, but something definitely related to cricket."

Maradona out

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Maradona's illness has provoked a wave of sympathy from him in Argentina where he is still hugely popular despite all the controversies that have tarnished his name.

Thousands of fans have posted vigil outside the private clinic where he is being treated chanting his name and exhibiting pictures of the player in his prime and religious icons.

With journalists, photographers and curious tourists all adding to the swarm of activity outside the building, hospital officials have been forced to call for quiet and respect for all the other patients being treated.

Ole newspaper reported that a hospital employee had been caught red-handed late Tuesday attempting to take a bedside photograph of the bloated former star, to sell to newspapers.

Medical technician Horacio Jorge Fernandez tried to get pictures of Maradona hooked up to his respirator in intensive care by using a mobile telephone equipped with a camera.

Argentine President Nestor Kirchner was being kept informed round-the-clock on Maradona's condition, his spokesman said.

Kirchner said the player had "brought tears of joy to we Argentines" by his genius on the football field.

Coria reaches quarters



AFP, Monaco

Argentine third seed Guillermo Coria and former world number one Marat Safin of Russia stayed on course for a semifinal showdown after both men moved into the last eighth of the Monte Carlo Masters on Thursday.

Coria clinched a 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 win over Romania's Andrei Pavel while Safin, battling his way back up the rankings after a 2003 decimated by a wrist injury, cruised past Australian veteran Wayne Arthurs 6-4, 6-2.

Coria now faces either French wildcard Fabrice Santoro or fellow Argentine David Nalbandian, the seventh seed while Safin, the Australian Open finalist in January, faces either Agustin Calleri of Argentina or Spain's Alberto Martin.

Safin took just 67 minutes to wrap up victory allowing the 33-year-old Arthurs, who came into the main draw as a replacement for top seed Andy Roddick, just two break points in the entire match.

The Russian broke in the third game of the first set which he clinched in 35 minutes and then broke again in the first and fifth games of the second before wrapping up the match with a majestic forehand lob.

Safin, runner-up in Estoril last weekend, has now matched his best performance here after making the last eight in 2002.

"Arthurs is a difficult player on hard courts and on grass but on clay he is too slow," said the Russian.

Coria, runner-up in 2003, is the highest seed left in the tournament following the withdrawal of top seed Roddick and the defeat of defending champion Juan Carlos Ferrero.

Nikolay Davydenko of Russia

reached his first career Masters quarter-final with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Croatia's Ivan Ljubicic in a battle of Monte Carlo residents.

He will now play fifth seed and 1998 champion Carlos Moya of Spain or Argentina's Juan Ignacio

Chela, the winner of the Estoril title last weekend.



PHOTO: AFP

Argentina's Guillermo Coria bends low to hit a return against Romania's Andrei Pavel at the Monte Carlo Tennis Masters Series yesterday.

Safin's new image



AFP, Monaco

world after reaching the final of the Australian Open and hammering home his clay court ability by finishing as runner-up in Estoril last weekend.

"It's very annoying when people come up to you and try to explain: 'You should be calmer, you should better.'"

"But these people are losers

"Sometimes you are playing against yourself. Sometimes you have to fight yourself. It's difficult to push sometimes, sometimes you are scared, you are choking, not feeling confident."

Safin, whose next task here is a third round clash against Australia's Wayne Arthurs, insists his new regime should stand him in good



MARAT SAFIN

because they don't know how much time, how much dedication, how much it takes to be where I am right now.

"At the end of the day, I will be who I will be and I will win as much as I can win.

"People come to me and say: 'You should have won five Grand Slams by now.' Sorry, but for some reason I couldn't. I wish I had but it doesn't work that way.

stead ahead of the French Open where he was a semi-finalist the last time he played there in 2002.

"I just want to keep it cool, go match by match. I have long months ahead of me, long tournaments. If I get too excited right now, maybe I will be burned out by the time of the French Open."

Jayasuriya goes

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Bowler
Hondo 8 1 51 0
P'gara 6 1 40 1
C'bura 2 0 12 0
M'yere 2 0 20 0
Utseya 2.5 0 11 0

Result: Sri Lanka won by 9 wickets.

Man-of-the-match: Chaminda Vaas.

Toss: Sri Lanka.

Third match: April 25, Harare.

No joy for

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(Mashud 54, Salim 51, Jamal 30; Neeyamur 2-37, Nadif 2-44)

BEXIMCO: 197 all out in 46.5 overs (Asad 36, Moniruzzaman 27, Sajjad 26, Azam Iqbal 26, Masud 25, Parvez 20; Fahim 3-42, Jamal 2-30, Rubaiyat 2-47, Arafat 2-48, Nazmul 1-24)

Result: Araf Apparels won by 49 runs.

Partex Group vs Aktel EC

Venue: Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium
Partex: 227 for 8 in 50 overs (Tariq 39, Mizanur 28, Ashraful 27, Rezaul 25, Extras 33; Rafique 2-26)

Aktel: 197 all out in 45.4 overs (Uttam 48, Mowla 36, Manjarul 25, Anwar Hossain 25 not out; Tariqul 4-26, Rezaul 2-18)

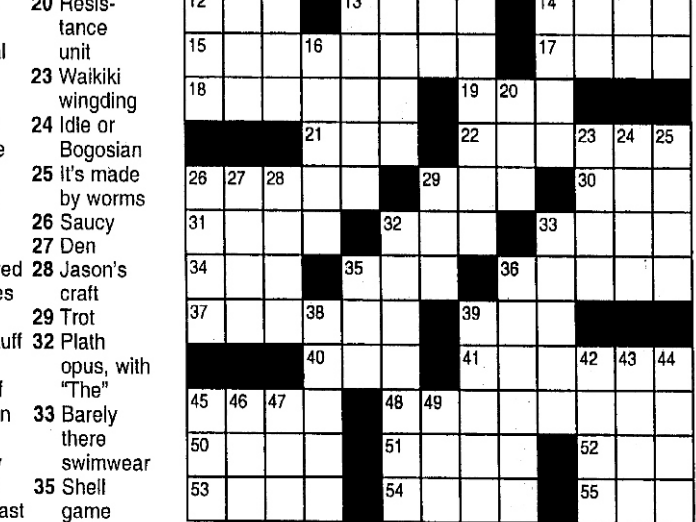
Result: Partex Group won by 30 runs.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 TVA structure
4 Unkempt one
8 Farm roof
12 With 53-Across, comered
13 Pig holder
14 Grad
15 "My Prison Without Bars" author
17 Trawler gear
18 Mob-scene group
19 Trinity member
21 Complete
22 Pod critters
26 Unadorned
29 Bottleneck
30 Spoon-bender
31 Deserve
32 Take on Holyfield
33 Do surveillance on

DOWN
34 Predetermine the outcome
35 Mrs. Al Bundy
36 Discard
37 Brick-laying tool
39 — Canals
40 "2001" computer
41 Chat
45 Kind of Oriental cuisine
48 "Cabaret" star
50 Mr. Ginchir
51 "— of Green Gables" gear
52 Hockey legend
53 See 12-Across
54 Clarinetist's need
Solution time: 25 mins.

ALPS MASH GUM REAP OBEY ANY CALIBRATE LIT SPECIFIC NEATH EG CLAIM DOCS JAIL NITGH EVA ALL NEO WALL PLY PETE OSEHA HT VERDI BEREFT AMT KALAMAZOO LIE EYES TRUE ETS SEAS EARS



CRYPTOQUIP

K I K I U H B Q U C R ' Z V P K K Q Y G

I T P E G X Q B V E G Q R P E Y A

Z P Y : " X Q ' Z B Q I C C R

T B H A X G U P B X H Z I A Q ! " Yesterday's Cryptquip: WHEN MY DAD GOES TO THE SANDWICH SHOP, I USUALLY PREFER TO COME ALONG FOR THE RYE.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: B equals R

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Ferrero takes time out

BBC ONLINE, undated

Juan Carlos Ferrero has turned down a wildcard for next week's Barcelona Open in order to help his recovery from a bout of chicken pox.

The French Open champion returned after a month out for Spain's Davis Cup quarterfinal against the Netherlands.

Ferrero won both of his singles matches but was then beaten in the first round of the Monte Carlo Masters on Tuesday.

His coach Antonio Martinez Cascales said: "The best thing is to stop and return to action when he is 100 per cent."

Ferrero risks missing the other clay court Masters Series events in Rome and Hamburg in the build-up to the French Open.

Henin advised to rest

BBC ONLINE, undated

Doctors have told Justine Henin-Hardenne to rest after the world number one succumbed to a viral infection.

She will be reassessed in Belgium at the beginning of May to see when she can start playing again.

Henin-Hardenne is due to defend her title at the French Open, which begins on 24 May.

The 21-year-old Belgian withdrew from the Family Circle Cup in Charleston saying that low blood sugar was causing light-headedness.

She also pulled out of the Antwerp Diamond Games in February with a respiratory illness.

ICC has an eye on Zim

AFP, London

Talks between the International Cricket Council (ICC) and the Zimbabwe Cricket Union (ZCU) ended here Wednesday with the world governing body promising to monitor the player dispute which threatens the sport in the troubled African state.

Fifteen white cricketers, led by former captain Heath Streak, are refusing to play for Zimbabwe, amidst claims a racist selection policy is in place.

ICC chiefs, in a statement said they would be holding further talks on the issue after a meeting here Wednesday involving ICC president Ehsan Mani and chief executive Malcolm Speed and ZCU chairman Peter Chingoka and board member Ozias Bvute.

Mani said he accepted that national boards were right to be responsible for relations with their own players.

"At the same time, the ICC recognises and has discussed with the ZCU the international implications of this dispute and its potential effect on international cricket," he said.

"International cricket is built upon the best teams from each country taking part."

However, Mani stopped short of endorsing allegations of racism within the ZCU.

"The ZCU has provided assurances that the dispute is not about race or politics as it has sometimes simplistically been portrayed," he said.

On Tuesday Chingoka also had meetings with his England counterparts over the future of their planned October tour to Zimbabwe while on Wednesday leg-spinner Stuart MacGill withdrew from Australia's tour there next month on moral grounds.