Laxman aims at ODI comeback

Having been ignored from India's one-day cricket squad for the last two tournaments, stylish batsman VVS Laxman is determined to fight his way back into the team by working on his game and fitness.

"It is off season and two-and-ahalf month time is good time to work on the fitness and my game. I will use it for that," Laxman, who has agreed to be the brand ambassador for the Association for Cricket for Blind in India, said here on Thursday.

Laxman, whose last ODI assignment was the BCCI Platinum Jubilee match against Pakistan at Kolkata in November where he made 43 off 44 balls, was left out of the ODI team for the series against Bangladesh in December and against Pakistan this

"It is disappointing, definitely. That is because I have won matches for India. It's difficult for me that I am not in the ODI team. Hopefully I'll come back," the Hyderabad batsman, who scored 107 against Pakistan in the fifth and last ODI in Lahore last year, said.

Laxman was speaking on the sidelines of the first one-day international match between blind players of India and Pakistan at the Jamia Milia grounds.

When asked why was he being kept out of the shorter version of the game, Laxman said "I always go with the mindset to win the match for the country. You should ask the selec-

Henin in gtrs

AFP, Warsaw

Justine Henin-Hardenne was tested by Venezuelan Maria Vento-Kabchi before earning a 6-3, 7-5 victory and a place in the quarterfinals of women's WTA tournament here on Thursday.

Playing in dull and uncomfortably cool conditions, the Belgian found it difficult to establish her superiority over an experienced and competent opponent, who often hit the ball deep and struck some fine crosscourt angles to keep Henin-Hardenne from settling into a

Although Henin-Hardenne took a 4-1 lead in the first set, she rarely looked comfortable and struggled to find any consistency on the heavy

The Belgian had the opportunity to consolidate winning the first set when she held a point to lead 3-1 in the second, but Vento-Kabchi continued to trouble her with an aggressive baseline game.

The unseeded Belgian had to wait until the 11th game and a break for 6-5 on her third break point to gain the upper hand, but Vento-Kabchi still held three break points to take the set to a tiebreak before an ace and a service winner clinched victory.

Third seed Vera Zvonareva continued her recent slide when she was beaten 6-2, 6-4 by 17-year old Serb Ana Ivanovic Although still ranked 10, the Russian has slumped against lowly ranked opposition such as Fabiola Zuluaga Evgenia Linetskaya, Nuria Llagostera Vives and Iveta Benesova in recent weeks.

5-ball Flintoff

FROM PAGE 16

been in the gym and training for the last 10 weeks so I was probably a bit nervous and eager. Flintoff's rehabilitation

programme after a bone spur was removed from his ankle has included regular running alongside former England physio Dave Roberts, but he still has some way to go before he can set a date for his return to bowling at full throttle for Lancashire and England.

"I don't know when I'll be back bowling again -- it's very much day to day at the moment," admitted Flintoff.

"I started walking through my bowling a couple of weeks ago and I've been bowling for 20 minutes at a time in the nets at around 50-60 per cent, but I couldn't say for definite

when I'm going to be bowling again. "I'm just pushing it more and more and seeing how I'm reacting to what I'm doing

"I've been doing quite a lot of impact work with Dave. I've been doing a lot of hopping, jumping off steps and all sorts landing on my left foot just to get it used to me banging down on it again.

"Everything I've done so far I've responded well to, so it seems encouraging. I've only had one setback during this period when I had a slight problem with my calf on my right side, probably because it was compensating for my left leg, so I got a bit of a twinge in there, but it's not been anything serious.'

Blatter coming

would begin in August. It has been decided that the Sher-e-Bangla Cup National Football Championship and the Suhrawardy Cup Youth Football Championship will be held in alternate years from now on.

"This year, we will hold the youth tournament." the BFF secretary said adding that the JFA Cup U-16 meet will take place in September.



India batsman VVS Laxman (L) speaks to blind Pakistani players after a one-day match against Indian blind cricketers in New Delhi on Thursday. The visually impaired cricketers from the two countries will play five one-dayers.

Shabbir flops on return

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan fast bowler Shabbir Ahmed made an unimpressive Twenty20 Cup debut on Wednesday as the Multan Tigers were thrashed by Sialkot Stallions on the third day of the tournament at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

Shabbir was returning after recovering from a knee injury, which he sustained last year, but the early signs weren't too promising. He was carted for 48 runs in his four overs and the Stallions easily overcame a target of 110 with seven overs to

Shabbir's knee injury had been detected before the Champions Trophy last year and a cartilage tear had ruled him out of action. After missing the Australian tour, Shabbir was in line to make it for the one-day series in India. Pakistan's secondstring bowling attack performed mpressively in India and with both Shoaib Akhtar and Umar Gul set for comebacks, Shabbir will need some incisive spells to return to the inter-

Gul is all set to prove his fitness for the tour of West Indies after having completely recovered from a back injury. Gul was diagnosed as having two stress fractures in his back last year and was treated by specialists in South Africa before returning to first-class cricket.

"I've recovered completely from

my back problem," Gul told the News, a Pakistan based daily, "and I've informed PCB chairman Shaharyar Khan and captain Inzamamul Haq that I'm ready to take any fitness test to be considered for the coming tour."

However, Wasim Bari, the chief selector, appears to have jumped the gun by ruling Gul out of the selection plans on Wednesday.

"Umar has not played for quite a while so we don't know anything about his match fitness." Bari had said without considering the fact that Gul was playing in the ongoing Twenty20 Cup. "At the moment he is not under consideration for selec-

tion for the West Indies tour." But Gul insisted he was match fit and had already played in a couple of practice games in which he bowled 10 overs and more. He added, "Even the South African trainer Grant Compton has, in his medical and fitness report, given me permission to start bowling again."

Gul elaborated more by saying that Compton had put him through a two-month rehabilitation programme before he began bowlng again. "I'm facing no back problems like in the past and I'm 100 per cent fit," he said.

"I'm ready to take any fitness test to satisfy the selectors. As it is I'll not make myself available if I was not sure about my fitness and there were chances of me breaking down

Gul last played a Test in April last year where his sensational spell of 5 for 35 had set up Pakistan's thumping win against India at Lahore. But he broke down after the game and disappeared into the injury maze.

Despite the absence of several of their top bowlers -- like Gul, Shoaib and Shabbir -- Pakistan managed to draw the Test series in India and dominate the one-dayers. The return of this trio, though, could result in a varied and exhilarating bowling attack.

Final Test starts today Juve won't

fellow fast bowler Monde Zondeki.

Following the huge defeat in the previous Test, the reputation of the West Indies in international cricket continues to plummet, and it has left people around the Caribbean clamouring for changes not only in the team, but in the administration of the game

Australia-born coach Bennett King is well aware that the honeymoon period is swiftly drawing to a close, and the need for better results is urgent.

"People have noticed an improvement in the way the players have been approaching the cricket on the field, but it has not turned into results just yet," King

"Coming into this role, I was not expecting to all of a sudden see West Indies become the number one side in the world. Things take time. It cannot be fixed in a matter of months, but over a period of

"What the period of time is. I do not know, but if they are not improving from match to match, then I'll start asking myself questions about if I am doing the job I am

supposed to be doing "While the players are still in the process of improving, and they are giving me that feedback. I'll continue going down the same path for

the time being. For the West Indies, two

changes are on the cards. Fast bowler Tino Best should come in for his first match of the series and international fixture

since last August to replace Reon

teams - mainly young prospects

who rarely get a chance on the

and Santos midfielder Ricardinho

were the only players returning from

the squad that won the 2002 World

Brazilian Soccer Confederation as a

special 23rd player as part of a

tribute to Brazil's 1994 World Cup

Romario's last game

Wednesday happened nearly 18

vears after his first, when he came in

as a substitute in Brazil's 1-0 loss to

Northern Ireland in a 1987 friendly at

Dublin. His first goal also came in

1987, when he helped Brazil beat

Finland 3-2 in Helsinki, in another

Brazil's squad since 2001, when the

It was Romario's first game with

Romario was included by the

Cup in South Korea and Japan.

winning side.

friendly.

Palmeiras goalkeeper Marcos

King, and Narsingh Deonarine should take the place of fellow lefthander Ryan Hinds after missing out in the last two Tests.

The Antigua Recreation Ground is notorious for its docile nature, but reports indicate that former West Indies fast bowler Andy Roberts and head groundsman Keith Frederick are trying to breathe some life into it for the Test.

South Africa won the only Test the two teams have contested here four years ago by 82 runs, but West Indies have had some strong performances at the ground since

They include the highest fourth innings winning total in a Test against world champions Australia, and Brian Lara's epic quadruple century in a mammoth first innings total against England last year.

TEAMS

Romario's last dance

World Cup qualifier

only behind Pele.

the tribute.

WEST INDIES (from): Shivnarine Chanderpaul (captain), Courtney Browne, Tino Best, Dwayne Bravo, Narsingh Deonarine, Fidel Edwards, Chris Gayle, Wavell Hinds, Brian Lara, Daren Powell, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Dwight Washington. SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme

Smith (captain), Nicky Boje, Mark Boucher, Abraham de Villiers, Boeta Dippenaar, Herschelle Gibbs, Andrew Hall, Jacques Kallis, Charl Langeveldt, Andre Nel, Makhaya Ntini, Shaun Pollock, Ashwell Prince, Jacques Rudolph, Monde Zondeki. Umpires: Billy Bowden and Simon

team lost 1-0 to Uruguay in a 2002

championship team. Romario is

Brazil's second-best all-time scorer,

PSV Findhoven striker was Brazil's

high scorer, and named the tourna-

ment's most valuable player during

the 1994 World Cup in the United

States. Other members of the team.

including Branco. Rai and captain

Dunga also were at Pacaembu for

daughter lvy, who was born recently

Romario has said he is not done

with soccer vet. He recently

extended his contract with Rio de

Janeiro club Vasco da Gama until

the end of the Brazilian champion-

with Down's Syndrome.

ship in December.

Romario dedicated his goal to his

Despite the farewell match.

The hero of the 1994 World Cup

The former FC Barcelona and

lose trophies

REUTERS. Rome

Juventus do not have to hand back titles won in the mid-1990s even though the club's doctor was found quilty of doping offences, the inter national Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in Lausanne has ruled.

The Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) had asked CAS for its advice following the outcome of a trial in Turin last November in which Riccardo Agricola was found guilty of administering excessive pharmaceuticals to players between 1994 and 1998.

That verdict raised fears the club would have to surrender titles it won during that period, including three Italian Serie A championships and the 1996 Champions League.

"The use of pharmaceutica substances that are not expressly banned by sporting law and that are not similar to illegal substances cannot be punished by disciplinary action," CAS was quoted as saying in La Gazzetta dello Sport on Thursday.

CAS's judgement is, however far from the end of the matter. CONI sought advice from CAS only on one part of the Turin court's judgement, that relating to drugs "not expressly banned by the rules"

Agricola was also found guilty of administering the banned bloodbooster EPO. That verdict is under appeal.

Should Italy's Court of Appeal uphold the original sentence there could be fresh calls for Juventus to surrender their trophies and possibly another recourse to the CAS.

Romario, who will play in FIFA's

first Beach Soccer World Cup in

May has been on the verge of

retirement since the end of last year.

He twice announced he was quit-

In addition to Romario's farewell

the match also marked the 65th

anniversary of Pacaembu stadium,

and the 40th anniversary of Globo

TV, Brazil's main television network.

It was Brazil's first match at

Pacaembu in nearly 40 years. The

last time was in 1968, when Brazil

beat Uruguay 2-0 in a farewell

match for Brazilian defender Djalma

Brazil elected to play Guatemala

third in CONCACAF's World Cup

qualifying group - only after rejec-

tions from Argentina, Uruguay and

ting, then reversed his decision.

to roll in **Davis Cup**

AFP, Jaipur

Leander Paes. India's most successful Davis Cup player, will return to singles play in the Asia-Oceania second round tie against Uzbekistan starting at the Jai Club grass courts here on Friday

Paes, the team captain with a 72-30 win record in the tournament, had opted out of the singles in the first round tie against China in March to give youngsters Prakash Amritrai and Harsh Mankad an opportunity to gain experience.

The duo won all four singles in India's 5-0 romp, but Paes decided to replace Mankad against Uzbekistan which takes the winner

into the world group play-offs in July. The 31-year-old, who mainly plays doubles on the ATP circuit, will take the court on all three days in stifling hot weather

Paes said he was ready for the challenge

"I have carried the Davis Cup

responsibility on my shoulders for years now," he said "I may not have played singles in

a while but it is more a matter of being mentally prepared. I am ready

Paes meets Farrukh Dustov in Friday's opening singles while Amritrai clashes with Denis Istomin in the second match, according to the draw made Thursday.

Paes will team up with erstwhile partner Mahesh Bhupathi in Saturday's doubles against Istomin and Murad Inovatov. The formidable Indian pair has won four Grand Slam titles and reached the semifinals at the Athens Olympics last

In Sunday's reverse singles, Amritraj faces Dustov while Paes meets Istomin.

"I am happy to start the first singles, hopefully I will give a 1-0 lead to Prakash." said Paes. "I have to concentrate on my

game and as a captain I have to take care of Prakash in the evening."

PCB sends tour

FROM PAGE 16 Peshawar in 2003. The Indian team last year also declined to play a Test in Karachi although it did play onedayers there and in Peshawar. England last toured Pakistan in

2000-1, winning their first ever Test series on Pakistan soil 1-0. A PCB official said: "The reason

for the long nature of the tour is that the ECB had requested us to schedule at least two three-day games before the start of the Test series and also a one-day practice game before the five one-day internationals.'

Stalemate makes 'em happy

CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, London

Battling Liverpool struck a mighty psychological blow by holding Chelsea to a goalless draw in the all-English Champions League semifinal first leg at Stamford Bridge here on Wednesday

The Reds will be happy to go into the second leg on May 3 unscathed but Chelsea will be undaunted by the task of winning 1-0 at Anfield for a second time this season.

England midfielder Frank

Lampard wasted Chelsea's best chance in the 22nd minute, firing over the bar from short range with goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek motionless. Milan Baros forced a superb save out of his Czech Republic teammate

Petr Cech shortly before half-time,

the Blues stopper deflecting the

post to keep matters even. Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho, never short on confidence, insisted his team will be victorious in the

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

"Ninety-nine percent of Liverpool

Argentina coach

Jose Pekerman says

Brazil will get a warm

welcome in June for

a World Cup qualifier

and the game will not

be influenced by the

racism row involving an Argentine

player in Sao Paulo two weeks ago

rivalry took a new twist two weeks

ago when Leandro Desabato.

defender for Buenos Aires club

Quilmes, was arrested on the field

following a Libertadores Cup tie

away to Sao Paulo on charges of

Desabato, who denied making

racist insults, spent 40 hours in

police custody following a first-half

Paes ready

Argentina and Brazil's soccer

fans think they have one foot in the final, but they are not there yet," said Mourinho who guided Porto to the

"In the Champions League 0-0 is a good result. We have scored goals at Anfield and I am very confident. They have to score at home, it is a dangerous situation for them."

Chelsea, one win short of securing the Premiership title, started the clear favourites against Liverpool. who will be fortunate to finish better than their current fifth place, not high enough to secure a Champions League spot for next season.

The Blues notched up two 1-0 Premiership wins over Liverpool this season then came from behind to win February's League Cup final in Cardiff 3-2 to rub salt in the wounds.

A hamstring injury ruled out Chelsea's Republic of Ireland winger Damien Duff but Arjen Robben, not fit enough to replace him, started on the

striker's powerful header round the Baros recovered from a knee injury in time to feature, much to Liverpool boss Rafa Benitez's relief as substitutes Djibril Cisse and Harry Kewell were not fit enough to last 90

incident with rival forward Grafite

and was at one stage handcuffed

-- hailed by Brazil as an example to

the world in the fight against racism

but denounced as a farce by

Quilmes -- as unpleasant but said

will have the best possible attention,

that they will be well-received and

that it will be a good game on the

field." Argentina coach Jose

Pekerman told Reuters in an inter-

depend on the government, the

security services and each one will

trying to make sure that things are

the way they should be ... and there

Football

Adriano.

make a summer bid.

Nerazzurri instead.

the star striker.

Chelsea were on Wednesday being

associated with a world record

£70m swoop for Inter Milan striker

paper claims that the Brazilian is the

London club's primary transfer

objective and they are ready to

interest when the 23-year-old was

still at Parma but the South

American opted to join the

However, they are now ready to

Adriano is undoubtedly a key

launch a new bid by offering a host

of Roman Abramovich's millions for

figure at the San Siro but if the

alleged £70m offer turns out to be

real, then the Italian club may be

tempted to sell and then re-invest

to finance moves for various play-

ers, including a replacement for

36 Thick

37 Environ-

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41 Pastoral

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That money could then be used

Inter are also set to reinforce

that cash on the market.

CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

1 Lotion

call

12 Petula

14 Zilch

15 Cheeri-

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17 Lubricant

official

20 Pictorial

poser

23 Easy

24 Figure-

skating

25 Dark solar

area

29 "Oops!"

28 - culpa

30 Princess

insomnia

cause

32 Soda-

shop

treats

35 Picks a

target

34 Authentic

18 Prison

16 Over-

additive

8 Nile bird

Clark hit

Chelsea initially expressed an

The Corriere dello Sport news-

Chelsea's mega

offer for Adriano?

"The other (off-field) conditions

"I'm confident that they (Brazil)

there was no climate of revenge.

Pekerman described the incident

before being released on bail

Argentina would

welcome Brazil

European title last season.

fought match. Joe Cole jinked into the Liverpool penalty box 11 minutes in but his shot

was straight at Dudek. The England midfielder was finding space down the right flank against Djimi Traore, and his cross two minutes later almost resulted in

opening exchanges in a keenly-

an opener Didier Drogba iumped for the header and the ball dropped kindly for a cross shot. His effort was heading wide but Eidur Gudiohnsen sliding in at the far post, just failed to connect and score.

Liverpool's Norway winger John Arne Riise cut into the penalty box on 19 minutes but shot straight at Cech who produced an instinctive block.

Lampard wasted a chance to score three minutes later when given a simple chance from close range. William Gallas' cross from the left was nodded down by Cole but

Lampard's shot cleared the crossbar

with the goal at his mercy. Liverpool gave the Blues a scare efore the interval

Baros forced an excellent save out of Cech on 39 minutes when his

"We're an educated country

Pekerman added: "This game

"Some of them are team mates

Argentina, who currently lead the

has got nothing to do with what

happened, there is a great respect

at the same club, there will not be

South American World Cup qualify-

ing group with 28 points from 13

games, four ahead of Brazil who are

second. The two old rivals meet for

the second time in qualifiers on June

8. In the first match in Brazil last

June, the world champions

thrashed Argentina 3-1 with super-

their defensive options over the

summer and that cash injection

would make proposed moves for

Walter Samuel of Real Madrid and

Roma's Cristian Chivu much sim-

Adriano has made the London

giants aware that he isn't keen on a

Inter, particularly if majority share-

holder Massimo Moratti stays in

charge. And if he is to move, he

would only leave Inter for Real

Adriano for his loyalty with a 'super

Moratti is ready to reward

Talks were held over the week

The new deal would run to 2010

Those close to negotiations say

end with the striker's agent, Gilmar

Rinaldi, in which a new, five-year

and also include the option of another

Rinaldi and Adriano are excited by

the proposal and an announcement

could be made by May 10 when the

Inter board meets to discuss new

financial strategies. (Internet

five years taking it through to 2015.

contract was put on the table.

move to England.

Madrid.

contract'.

Meanwhile, Virgilio daily said

Adriano's first option is to stay at

for the Brazilian players.

any time type of problems."

where we always try to make sure

that everything is organised with

respect."

international teammate powerful header round the post following a curling Steven Gerrard

Cole gave Traore further trouble five minutes after the interval, but after cutting inside the left-back, Sami Hyypia slid in to nudge the ball from his feet as he shaped to shoot.

Liverpool's Igor Biscan and Chelsea's Cole were cautioned as tempers flared before Netherlands winger Robben replaced Tiago with 31 minutes left.

Benitez responded by replacing Baros with Cisse in the lone striker role. The France forward blasted a fierce shot just wide on 68 minutes, leaving Luis Garcia bemoaning the spurned chance to cross.

line in injury time to deny a Cisse

effort, securing a stalemate for the

trip to Merseyside next Tuesday

Liverpool's Xavi Alonso was cautioned in the last few minutes to rule himself out of the return leg. Cech had to charge off the goal-

believe it

AFP, Madrid

England skipper David Beckham said he is "amazed" and finds it "incredible" that his family's former nanny sold a story making claims about his marriage to a Sunday tabloid newspaper. The Real Madrid player and his wife,

Beckham can't

to sue the former nanny Abbie Gibson for breach of confidence after the allegations were made in the News of the World at the weekend. "When someone talks of selling a

Victoria, have already admitted they plan

story to the newspapers, I find it incredible," Beckham told reporters here on Wednesday. "I can't understand that can happen when you invite someone to your place to take care of your children, who are the

trust them and I find it incredible that later they want to sell their story. "But I can't say much about it because there's a legal case. I'm able to focus on football because my wife and I

most important thing for you. You need to

are normal people. "Of course we argue, but I love her a lot and my parents taught me from when I was little how to treat women. If I didn't, my mum would come and have a terrible go at me. Really, we're very happy and we love each other a lot."

Sponsor for U-15s team

SPORTS REPORTER

sponsor Bangladesh U-15 cricket team's tour of Sri Lanka, a Bangladesh Cricket Board media

release said yesterday. Bangladesh will meet hosts Sri Lanka and Malaysia in an U-15 triseries to be held in Colombo from May 2-9.

Puskin's chehlum today

SPORTS REPORTER

The chehlum of Bangladesh Hockey Federation joint-secretary and Abahani hockey player and organiser Zahidur Rahman Pushkin will be held at Abahani Club premises in Dhanmondi today.

A Qurankhwani will be held in the morning and food will be distributed to the poor and distressed after the Jumma prayers on this occasion.

By Eugene Sheffer 4 Imbue 23 Olympic coasters spirit 25 Detectives (SL) 5 Seethe 26 Admitting 6 Grain

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37 Atomizer

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Source)

7 Wind-27 Afternoon flowers 8 Marching 29 Garfield's 47- gin fizz properly 9 Piglet's 31 Stout's papa 33 Got down 10 Groovina

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pat 11 Wit-34 Go to bed nessed 36 Icono 13 Anything clastic art but that move-19 Basilica ment

21 Former 38 Between mates 22 Boyfriend 39 Mount Holyoke founder

20 Aries

Solution time: 24 mins.

Marv 40 Erstwhile 43 Constitution letters 44 Khan title 45 Section of L.A.? 46 Sloppy

RSKVSXV

RGSPV

JVSJPV ISHPA WVPJ PSSL

ISXIVMXVA

ESM GWV KFRRFXC PFXL Saturday's Cryptoquip: TO DETERMINE IF A GOLF PLAYER IS REALLY GOOD, I SUPPOSE THE

PROOF IS IN THE PUTTING. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: R equals S

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.

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for