Sourav says, no comment

PTI, Kolkata

Even as protests continued over his exclusion from the Indian cricket Test team, Sourav Ganguly on Friday declined to comment on the

"I'm not speaking to anyone in the media. I have no comment to offer on this," Ganguly told PTI when contacted over phone.

Asked whether he had any plan to quit, the left-hander said "Please spare me. I don't want to talk to the

Sachin, Anil to be felicitated

Before the commencement of the third Test between India and Sri Lanka here, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) would felicitate Sachin Tendular, for his 35th Test century, and Anil Kumble, who will play his 100th Test match on December 18.

Newly appointed BCCI president Sharad Pawar will be present on the occasion to felicitate the two cricket greats, the official said.

The felicitation is being jointly hosted by the Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA) and its president Narhari Amin would be present also.

V-Day hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Army and Sonali Bank won their respective matches in the Victory Day hockey competition at the Maulana Bhasani Nationa Stadium yesterday.

Army thrashed Bangladesh Police 8-0 after leading the first half 4-0 while Sonali Bank handed a 5-1 defeat to Bangladesh Navy after dominating the first session 3-0.

I don't want Beckham's job, says **Terry**

Chelsea skipper John Terry has insisted he has no desire to take the England captaincy from David Beckham before next summer's World Cup finals in

Terry has become an inspirational leader at Stamford Bridge since being handed the skipper's armband when coach Jose Mourinho first arrived at

He was instrumental in leading the Londoners to their first top-flight title for

50 years when they stormed to take the Premiership crown last season.

His leadership qualities have led to England captain but despite filling in as skipper against Poland in October he has no designs on doing the job per-

"What a feeling," said Terry. "I got a huge cheer from the fans but Becks is our man for the World Cup, he's a great professional. I'm still

just learning the game."

Real Madrid star Beckham has come under fire this season after being sent off three times with many observers calling for him to be stripped of the national team's armband

Cassano eyeing Real move

INTERNET

Roma contract rebel Antonio Cassano has reportedly confirmed that he is interested in a move to Spanish giants Real Madrid.

Cassano had been initially thought to want a move to a rival Italian club in order to increase his chances of securing a World Cup place, but now he has apparently given the first indication of his preferred choice of club.

Cassano is out of contract in the summer and will be able to leave for nothing but may be offloaded by Roma in the January transfer window so that they will be able to at

least command a nominal fee. Spanish daily Marca has quoted Cassano as saying: "Yes, I like Real

"It's the best side in the world." Real Madrid are, according to AS, preparing an offer of 2.4 million pounds for Cassano in the upcoming transfer window but Roma are believed to be holding out for at least 4 million for the player who cost

It's our

them 20 million in 2001.

Madrid.

FROM PAGE 12 point of view, Pakistan's Bahraini coach Salman Ahmed Sharida thinks that Bangladesh would have the edge in the match.

"I have seen both teams and I feel Bangladesh are well balanced to lift the title. They would be the team to beat but to kill the game against a formidable Indian side, they have to utilise early chances,' Sharida suggested yesterday.

PREMIERSHIP

Gunners look to halt Chelsea juggernaut

Football

REUTERS. London

Arsenal host Chelsea on Sunday in the last of the weekend's Premier League games carrying the fading hopes of all the title pretenders that someone, somehow can halt the blue juggernaut.

The champions have shown a chilling consistency in opening up a nine-point lead over Manchester United at the top of the table as they continue their remorseless march towards a second successive title.

But even though Arsenal are 17 points adrift in sixth place, they have long been a thorn in the champions' side. Chelsea's 1-0 victory in August was their first in the league over their London rivals for a decade and Arsenal have won all seven league matches they have played at Highbury this season.

"Everybody hopes they'll drop points," Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson said of Chelsea this week. "Ourselves, Arsenal and Liverpool are all in the same boat where that's concerned."

The potential banana skins however, are becoming fewer and farther between as Chelsea have already played their away matches at United (lost 1-0) and Liverpool

Claude Makelele's knee injury will keep him out of the match but

much as some had hoped with Michael Essien slotting in comfortably in front of the defence.

Arsene Wenger is likely to be able to call on the experience of Dennis Bergkamp, who has missed the last two games with a hamstring

The 36-vear-old Dutch striker said Arsenal should not look beyond Sunday's match and let the title look

"It will be a hard game if you think about winning a championship," said Bergkamp. "We need to think about our own game at the moment and focus on getting good results especially over the Christmas United travel to Aston Villa on

Saturday looking for their seventh away league win of the season having cut the gap on Chelsea to nine points with a 4-0 win over Wigan Athletic in their game in hand on Wednesday. Villa will be without injured defender Olof Mellberg and United

strikers Ruud van Nistelrooy and Rooney will fancy their chances of exploiting the absence of the experi-"You never know what can happen in football," Ferguson said.

we want to be the team that's next to Fourth-placed Tottenham Hotspur travel to Middlesbrough in

"Chelsea could slip up and if they do

would move them into third above Liverpool, who are in Japan on World Club Championship duties.

Newcastle are on a high after ending a four-match winless run

1-0 victory over Arsenal last weekend and they will be looking for another win when they play West Ham at the Upton Park on Saturday.

"We go there with confidence but we know there is a very fine line between success and failure in this game," Newcastle skipper Alan Shearer said.

At the bottom end of the table on Saturday, Harry Redknapp takes charge of a Portsmouth side at Fratton Park for the first time since his remarkable return from Southampton. Fellow-strugglers West Bromwich Albion providing the opposition.

FIXTURES

Saturday, December 17 (GMT) Aston Villa v Manchester I Inited Everton v Bolton Wanderers (1500) Fulham v Blackburn Rovers Portsmouth v West Brom (1500) West Ham v Newcastle United (1500) Wigan Athletic v Charlton Athletic (1500) Manchester City v Birmingham City Sunday, December 18 (GMT)

Middlesbrough v Tottenham Hotspur

Arsenal v Chelsea (1600)

PRIMERA LIGA

Stern test for Caro's boys

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Primera Liga joint leaders Osasuna will put Juan Ramon Lopez Caro's Real Madrid to the test in the caretaker coach's first home game in charge at the Bernabeu on Sunday.

Real fans were instrumental in forcing the sacking of Vanderlei Luxemburgo two weeks ago and have not yet had the chance to react to the changes that have been made. Last Sunday's 2-0 win at Malaga

was a positive start in the league for the former youth team coach but highflying Osasuna, who have won six of their last seven outings, are a much tougher proposition.

The Navarrans have defied the odds to keep pace with champions

and league leaders Barcelona after 15 Osasuna are level on 34 points with the Catalans but second on goa difference. Real occupy third with 28 Coach Javier Aguirre maintains

is still to avoid relegation, though their form has bred plenty of confi dence. "The Bernabeu is always a difficult place to get a result. If you don't play well they could put four

Osasuna's objective for the season

past you," said the Mexican "We know they always take the game to you but we have a lot of self belief at the moment. We will show them respect but without

having any complexes" Real have England captain David Beckham available after suspension but France midfielder Zinedine Zidane is struggling with an ankle injury.

Barcelona have the chance to beat a club record of 11 consecutive victories in all competitions, set in the 1955-56 season, when they visit Cadiz on Saturday.

Frank Rijkaard's side equalled the record last week with a 2-1 triumph over Sevilla and are favourites to make it 12 wins against a side with two points from their last seven games. Another interesting game is the

Galician derby between seventhplaced Celta Vigo and fifth-placed Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday. Both teams have 26 points

FIXTURES

Saturday, December 17 (GMT) Athletic Bilbao v Real Betis Celta Vigo v Deportivo Coruna (1900) Sunday, December 18 (GMT) Racing Santander v Malaga v Real Zaragoza (1600) v Real Sociedad (1600) v Getafe (1600) Real Mallorca v Atletico Madrid (1800) Real Madrid v Osasuna

Kumble set to reach 100

Tests as India eye series

Cricket

AFP. Ahmedabad

Veteran leg-spinner Anil Kumble is set to play his 100th Test as a confident India eye a series victory against a struggling Sri Lanka. Kumble, who starred in a 188-run

victory in the last match in New Delhi as the home side went one up the three-Test series, won praise from skipper Rahul Dravid.

"He has proved his worth over the years and is always an asset to the side," said Dravid, who is looking for victory in his first Test series as captain after the rain-hit opening match at Chennai ended in a draw.

Kumble, who bagged 10-157 in New Delhi to take his Test wicket tally to 478, will become only the fifth Indian to figure in 100 Tests after Kapil Dev (131), Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar (125 each) and

Dilip Vengsarkar (116). "Having been there for 15 years I

have learnt to take things positively and focus on improving my game and bettering my performance, Dravid, while praising Kumble,

termed his team's performance in the previous match a very good team effort. "It was not that a single performance lifted us. It was a hard fight and we played good cricket. But we can't slip up as there is still a lot left in

the series." said Dravid. India, who dropped former skipper Sourav Ganguly for the match starting Sunday even though the stylish lefthander scored 40 and 39 in the second Test, have an additional opener in

recalled batsman Wasim Jaffer. Jaffer, who played seven Tests without much success from 2000 to 2002, provides an alternative to lefthanded opener Gautam Gambhir who has scored just five runs in

Cruciani's dream is to win

2.5.2000

29.7.2000

18.1.2003

Bang 0: India 1

Bang 2: India 1

Bang 1: India 1

(after extra time)

three innings in the series. Opener Virender Sehwag, who

missed out because of a throat infection, is also available. Dravid and Irfan Pathan opened once each with Gambhir in the last match. With Yuvraj Singh striking form with

an impressive 77 not out in the second innings and Mohammad Kaif pushing hard for a place, the competition for slots in the middle order is tough. "It is good when we have two or

three players in contention for one place." said Dravid, who led his team to Test wins against Australia and Pakistan as stand-in captain when Ganguly was indisposed.

"It might be tough for players who miss out in such a situation but it is always good for the team."

Sri Lankan skipper Marvan Atanattu felt India had got contributions from players when they needed them but the same could not be said for his side

HEAD TO HEAD

midfielder Mehtab, who scored both goals in the 2-1 win over Nepal in the group opener. "We will go out and give our best to win, win and win only. India are playing

so I am not concerned about missing one player," said Nayeemuddin, who guided Brothers Union to win their maiden Dhaka Premier League title Defensive midfielder Mehraj, who

the replacement of striker-turned-

was sent off against Bangladesh, returns after being suspended in their 1-0 semifinal victory over Maldives but Nayeemuddin thinks not only him, the Indian team would also be coming

"We don't underestimate any opponent. Bangladesh are good," added the former Indian captain, who pinned hopes on skipper Baichung.

"He will rise to the occasion. Baichung will prove tomorrow what he is. He has always risen to the situation and especially, in finals.

ATE	SCORELINE	EVENT	VENUE
1.12.1978	Bang 0: India 3	Asian Games	Bangkok
.11.1982	Bang 0: India 2	Asian Games	India
).3.1985	Bang 1: India 2	WC qualifier	Dhaka
2.4.1985	Bang 1: India 2	WC qualifier	Kolkata
5.12.1985	Bang 1: India 1	SAF Games final	Dhaka
	(Bd lost 4-1 on penalties))	
2.1988	Bang 1: India 1		UAE
3.10.1989	Bang 1: India 1	SAF Games	Islamabad
5.12.1991	Bang 2: India 1	SAF Games	Colombo
2.9.1994	Bang 2: India 4	Independence Cup	Qatar
.3.1995	Bang 0: India 0	Saarc Gold Cup	Colombo
	(Bd lost 4-2 on penalties))	
7.12.1995	Bang 0: India 1	SAF Games final	Madras
9.1997	Bang 0: India 3	SAFF Championship	Kathmandu
2.4.1999	Bang 0: India 0	SAFF Championship	Goa
5.1999	Bang 0: India 2	SAFF Championship f	inal Goa
10.1999	Bang 1: India 0	SAF Games	Kathmandu
.11.1999	Bang 2: India 2		UAE
5.2000	Bang 1: India 1	Jubilee Cup	Male

SAFF Championship

SAFF Championship

Friendly

Ronaldo denies Real departure

REUTERS, Madrid

Ronaldo has dismissed suggestions that he wants to return to Inter Milan and says the only way he will leave Real Madrid is if the club decide to get rid of him.

"I don't want to leave Real Madrid," the Brazil striker told sports daily AS on Friday. "How many times do I have to sav it? I want to stay at this club for many years to come and I want to win a lot of trophies here.'



Italian daily Tuttosport reported this week that Real and Inter were planning to do a swap deal involving Ronaldo and fellow Braziliar

"I will only leave Madrid when they decide to get rid of me and I hope that doesn't happen," Ronaldo

Ronaldo has had a difficult start to the season with Real, missing all six of the team's Champions League group matches because of suspension and injury and struggling for fitness after suffering ligament damage to his left ankle.

But the 29-year-old, who has still managed to notch up eight goals in 10 league appearances, said he expected to be in top form after the brief winter break and was keen to have a successful season with his club ahead of the World Cup.

"I'm practically fully recovered and I know that I will be 100 percent in January," he said. "I'm very motivated because of the World Cup and I want to be in really good form and in high spirits after having won something with Real Madrid this

Mourning Rafa stays in Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez has decided to remain in Japan despite the death of his father and a tribute will be held before Sunday's World Club Championship final, FIFA president Sepp Blatter said.

Benitez was reported to be agonising over whether to leave Japan and fly home to Madrid to join his family, but has decided to stay. British newspaper reports said it

was his family's wish that he remain with the club to win yet another title

Blatter said here that a "special tribute" will be held before The Reds play South American champions Sao Paulo in Yokohama on Sunday. A FIFA spokesman told AFP if

His father Francisco, 74, died on Wednesday in the Spanish capital after a long heart illness.

would likely be a minute's silence.

Ntini tears

FROM PAGE 12

Gilchrist was also dropped at first slip by Justin Kemp off Ntini, though he went four balls later without adding to his tally.

South Africa took the field without star all-rounder Jacques Kallis, who has an injured left elbow and failed a last-minute fitness test

He was replaced by top-order batsman Rudoİph

SCOREBOARD

Langer c Smith b Ntini

Bowler

Bowler

London

Dhaka

Karachi

McGrath

Bracken

Hayden c Rudolph b Ntini

Scoreboard at stumps on the opening day of the first Test between Australia and South Africa at the Western Australian Cricket Association ground on Friday: AUSTRALIA: First innings

Ponting Ibw b Pollock Hodge c Boucher b Ntini Hussey c Langeveldt b Ntini Symonds b Nel Gilchrist c Gibbs b Ntini Warne Ibw b Langeveldt Bracken c Boucher b Nel McGrath c Boucher b Nel Extras: (b-4, lb-2, w-2, nb-6) Total: (All out in 75.2 overs) Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-111, 180, 5-185, 6-199, 7-210, 8-243, 9-

R 46 Pollock 64 100 Langeveldt 0 13 SOUTH AFRICA: First innings De Villiers not out Smith not out Total: (For no loss in 7 overs) 38 To bat: Gibbs, Rudolph, Prince, Kemp, Boucher, Pollock Langeveldt, Nel, Ntini

18

15

0

Toss: Australia. Umpires: Steve Bucknor and Billy

Mouth-watering last 16

CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP. Nvon

For the second straight year, the Spanish and English league leaders will meet in the opening round of the Champions League tournament after being drawn on Friday.

In a repeat of last year's controversial match-up, English Champions Chelsea take on Spanish champions Barcelona. The London side edged the

Spaniards at the same stage last

year winning 4-2 at Stamford Bridge

after losing 1-2 in Barcelona. Both games were clouded with controversy and resulted in Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho being sanctioned by UEFA for comments he made about referee Anders Frisk

after the Barcelona game.

Arsene Wenger's Arsenal meanwhile were drawn against record winner Real Madrid as they continue their quest for a first-ever European crown. Reigning champions Liverpool

were handed Benfica who ousted Manchester United from the group stages, while Scottish champions Rangers were given a good draw against the third remaining Spanish outfit Villarreal.

Former winners Bayern Munich and AC Milan were drawn together as were Ajax and Inter Milan.

Italian champions Juventus will fancy their chances against Germans Werder Bremen while unbeaten French side Lyon go up again against PSV Eindhoven of the Netherlands who defeated them on penalties in the quarterfinals last

Barcelona, the 1992 European champions, and Juventus, European Cup winners in 1985 and 1996, were made 5-1 joint favourites to win the competition by British bookmakers William Hill.

The draw for the last 16

Chelsea (ENG) v Barcelona (ESP) Real Madrid (ESP) v Arsenal (ENG) Werder Bremen (GER) v Juventus

Bayern Munich (GER) v AC Milan

PSV Eindhoven (NED) v Lyon

Ajax (NED) v Inter Milan (ITA) Benfica (POR) v Liverpool (ENG) Rangers (SCO) v Villarreal (ESP) The first legs will be played on February 21/22 with the return legs

Netherlands reach

Taeke Taekema scored a last-

minute penalty corner as the

Netherlands squeezed past valiant

India 2-1 on Friday to join Australia

The Dutch, who needed a win to

in the Champions Trophy hockey

prevent Spain from making the final,

were stunned by a dazzling display

by the hosts before some 8,500

screaming fans at the Mayor

Champs Trophy

hockey final

AFP,Chennai

on March 7/8.

Blatter hails Mourinho



REUTERS, Tokyo

FIFA boss Sepp Blatter has credited the outstanding talents of manager Jose Mourinho, and not Roman Abramovich's millions, for Chelsea's success.

Russian tycoon Abramovich has

spent over 500 million dollars on players since buying Chelsea in 2003 and they won the Premier League title last season in Mourinho's first year in charge. Chelsea are comfortable leaders

this term too but Blatter said money was no guarantee for winning "With respect to Roman Abramovich and his involvement in football, I think if Chelsea is such a good team it is because they have

an outstanding manager," Blatter

past poured scorn over the "pornographic amounts of money" in the But Blatter also pointed out that other big European clubs have struggled for success despite

The FIFA president has in the

"Real Madrid have more star players than Chelsea, or Liverpool, or Manchester United," he said. "You can add star players and

massive investment in new players.

star players but if the combination is

not good, you have seen what happens at Real in the last few Brazilian Vanderlei Luxem-burgo

was sacked by Real Madrid earlier this month. He was the club's fifth



coach in the space of two and a half

managers because it is difficult to bring the team together," said Blatter. "With money you do not solve the problem of supremacy.

Sandeep Singh converted a penalty corner, but Taekema converted one in the dying seconds to give the

JOSE MOURINHO

already assured of a place in the "They have used three or four

"Football is unpredictable. The team is more important than a lot of stars together. This is the human

Indian goalkeeper Bharat Chetri warded off the Dutch strikers until the 51st minute when he was beaten by a Roderick Weusthof penalty corner to concede the lead. India drew level four minutes before the final whistle when

Radhakrishnan Stadium.

Dutch a hard-fought win.

The Netherlands ended the sixnation league on 10 points, one point more than Spain, who themselves secured a tough 3-2 win over Germany earlier in the day. Olympic champions Australia,

final with four consecutive wins. take on Pakistan in the last league match later on Friday. The title clash on Sunday will be

a repeat of the Olympic final in Athens last year in which Australia rode on Jamie Dwyer's suddendeath goal to down the Netherlands

SERIE A

Lazio next for Juve

face of our game."

Football

REUTERS, Rome With runaway leaders Juventus preparing to travel south to take on Lazio on Saturday, there is talk the Serie A title race is already as good

After his team's defeat in the Milan derby last weekend, AC Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi said he believed Juventus would be impossible to catch. Champions Juve's start of 14

wins from 15 games has given them 42 points, 10 ahead of their nearest rivals. Inter Milan and Fiorentina. AC Milan lie fourth on 31 points. Juve's last Serie A opponents Cagliari, looked hopelessly out of

their depth as they went down 4-0

last weekend but Saturday's game

at least offers the possibility of an

minute Pavel Nedved goal to bring home the points from the same fixture last season Lazio's form at the Olympic

Stadium this season, played

seven, won five, lost none, should give hope to those praying for the eaders to slip up. Teams to struggle against Lazio in Rome this season include

who stuttered to a goalless draw. Lazio's influential Brazilian winger Cesar is expected to miss out with a thigh strain but the side still contain dangerous players.

Fiorentina, who lost 1-0, and Inter.

Striker Tommaso Rocchi, who grew up in Juve's youth system. scored a hat-trick against his alma mater in January 2004 when he was playing for Empoli. Juventus are at full-strength

except in goal where reserve keeper

Christian Abbiati continues to stand

in for Gianluigi Buffon, whose return

to the first team has been delayed

If Juventus drop points, their pursuers are almost certain to make up ground Inter look a safe bet to rack up

their fifth consecutive Serie Awin, at Reggina on Sunday. Fiorentina appear too strong for Tuscan rivals Empoli while AC Milan play relegation candidates Messina

FIXTURES

at the San Siro.

Saturday, December 17 (GMT) Treviso v Lecce (1930) Lazio v Juventus Sunday, December 18 (GMT) AC Milan v Messina (1400) Cagliari v Ascoli (1400) Chievo Verona v Udinese (1400) v Fiorentina (1400) v Livorno (1400) Palermo

v Inter Milan (1400)

v Parma (1400)

Sampdoria v AS Roma (1930)

'We must bounce back'

sure we can bounce back." said the

doubt about it -- but we've been in

similar positions before and

bounced back. I'm pretty sure we

"It will take some hard work -- no

Cricket

SPORTINGLIFE, undated

push Pakistan all the way in the remaining two matches of their fivematch series, according to Marcus Trescothick. Trescothick is coming to terms with England's humbling experience

England are capable of bouncing

back from their joint-heaviest one-

day international defeat in time to

of being battered for 353 for six and replying with 188 all out in 42 overs. Defeat by 165 runs in Karachi meant falling 2-1 down in a series

they led after last week's first match.

"There are two games to go, and we are 2-1 down. If we win the next two everyone will be cock-a-hoop, and all this will pretty much be forgotten," claimed Trescothick, who concedes it will not be easy for England to launch an unlikely fightback.

from only 22 balls.

He is confident nonetheless his team have it in them to do so -having been powerless on Thursday to resist the strokeplay of to start off really well in series and Kamran Akmal (109), the ever then fall off at the end. Maybe it is reliable Mohammad Yousuf (68) the mental side of the game, and and most damagingly of all Abdul Razzaq whose unbeaten 51 came

it right.

"I think the guys will be a little bit down from this, because we haven't performed as well as we can. But I'm

"We've got to make sure we get on top of it quickly, because we are not that far away from major compe-

can do the same again here if we get three key players. "We have to make sure we use the time before the next game to prepare, sit down, talk about what has happened, work out reasons

rib injury.

Irrespective of how England finish what has been a tough tour over the past two months, Trescothick accepts the Ashes heroes' limited-overs profile is nowhere near as convincing as their Test match form -- and that needs to

why and get it right for the next

begins to loom. "We've not improved in the oneday game as much as we have done in Test cricket, and it is something we are trying to address," he said.

change soon as the 2007 World Cup

"I don't know why we often seem how we approach individual matches or read the different situa-

Reggina

Siena

Whatever the reason, Trescothick is not in the business of making excuses -- despite the

mitigation of tour-ending injuries to

First-choice captain Michael Vaughan had to leave for a knee operation after the 2-0 Test series defeat; left-arm spinner Ashley Giles was gone even before then for surgery on his creaking hip, and perhaps most debilitating of all Kevin Pietersen also flew back to

England at the weekend to rest his

Trescothick is of the opinion

however, that England should be able to make up for those absences. "There's generally always someone has a little bit of an injury. But

you can't always rely on having your same team fully fit all the way through," he said. "You have to have the right

replacements to come in and win you games. It's not something you can use as an excuse.'