

Ganguly asked to explain

CRICINFO, undated

Sourav Ganguly has received a letter from Niranjan Shah, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary, seeking an explanation for his absence from a crucial Ranji Trophy match involving Bengal and Gujarat at Surat.

Only a day after Kiran More, the national selection committee chairman, showed his disapproval at Ganguly missing the match, sources from the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) have stated that a "two-line letter" addressed to Ganguly was received by the player himself.

The Indian Express reports that the letter was not addressed to Jagmohan Dalmiya, the CAB president, or Saradindu Pal, its joint secretary. Pal remained non-committal on the matter, stating that he had spoken to Ganguly. "I spoke to Sourav last Friday, the day before the Indian team for Pakistan was selected," he said. "He told me he'd missed Bengal's Delhi match, and would also not play the Gujarat match because of unavoidable personal reasons."

Pal also stated that he had been trying to contact Ganguly since December 24 -- the day the Indian squad was selected -- but had no luck in doing so. Dalmiya, having earlier stated that Ganguly had missed the match against Gujarat for "logistical, and not personal" reasons, refused to comment on the matter today.

Ganguly's absence from the match seems to have agitated the BCCI, given that More emphasized that it was important to members of the Indian team to "engage in domestic matches as much as possible" prior to their departure to Pakistan on January 5. Speculation remains as to whether the message was passed on to Ganguly.

Virender Sehwag, Gautam Gambhir, Zaheer Khan and VVS Laxman turned out for their respective state sides in the ongoing fifth round of the Ranji Trophy.

Bari stays at BHF for 4 more years

SPORTS REPORTER

Shamsul Bari extended his 17-year reign as Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) general secretary by another four years after winning yesterday's BHF polls by a whisker.

Veteran organiser Bari was re-elected general secretary defeating Mohammedan Sporting Club hockey secretary Sajid Adel by three votes. Bari, whose panel won three out of five vice-presidents, a joint secretary and the treasurer, got 37 votes.

Although Adel lost, his panel won two vice-presidents, one joint secretary and 11 members.

Of 73 councillors, 71 cast their votes during the election for 28 posts at the National Sports Council (NSC). The government will appoint the president while the NSC will nominate two executive members.

The candidates to win from the Bari-panel: Shahin Mahmud, Shahrinar Alam, AB Siddique (vice-presidents), Shamsul Bari (general secretary), Khwaza Rahmatullah (joint secretary), Rashid Shikdar (treasurer) and Shimul, Khanchan, Dipu, Jaki Ahmed, Yousof Ali, Shafayet, Abdur Rashid and Ripon (members).

The winners from Adel-panel: Monir Ahmed, Pratap Shankar Hazra (vice-presidents), Ali Imam Tapan (joint secretary), Mosaddek, Piru, Nawshad, Litu, Rois Babu, Maksud, Zahid, Adel Khan, Akil and Panna (members).

Three members of Bari panel -- Abdur Razzak, Nurul Islam and Moniruzzaman -- earned lowest 34 votes each and one of the three will be selected by the BHF president as an EC member.

V-Day b'ball

SPORTS REPORTER

Josephites shocked favourites Europa 71-53 at the Dhanmondi Gymnasium yesterday to emerge as group champions in the Victory Day basketball tournament.

Bangladesh Navy were winners of the other group when they snatched a one-point victory (60-59) over Bangladesh Rifles.

All four teams have reached the semifinals.



Did U Know?

The first goal in the first FIFA World Cup was scored by Laurenti a French player in 1930.



PHOTO: AP
Liverpool striker Peter Crouch (C) holds the ball away from Newcastle's Lee Bowyer (R) during their Premiership match at Anfield on Monday.

PREMIERSHIP

Owen's forgettable Anfield return

Football

AGENCIES, London

Steven Gerard and Peter Crouch helped ruin Michael Owen's Anfield return as Liverpool coasted to an eighth successive Premiership win with a 2-0 win over 10-man Newcastle United here Monday.

Owen, who scored 158 goals in 297 senior appearances during eight years at the Merseyside club, was given a mixed reception by Liverpool supporters before the game as he made his first appearance at the Reds' home since leaving for Real Madrid in August 2004.

But the England striker endured a miserable afternoon after first-half goals from international teammates Steven Gerrard and Crouch ensured Liverpool put their disappointment at losing to Sao Paulo in the final of the FIFA World Club Championship behind them.

Newcastle finished a man down after Lee Bowyer was sent-off for a dreadful 65th minute lunge on Xabi Alonso, the fourth time the former England midfielder has been red-carded in a year and the second time in as many seasons at Anfield.

Liverpool, who remained third in the Premiership table, have now taken a maximum 24 points from eight league games since losing to Fulham on October 22.

Manchester United crushed West Bromwich Albion 3-0 at home to remain in second place. Paul Scholes, Rio Ferdinand, who headed his second goal for United, and Ruud van Nistelrooy scored at Old Trafford where manager Alex Ferguson was as impressed by his defence.

"Our defending has been good in the last few games. We've hopefully come out of that bad spell," he told United's official website after a third successive league clean sheet.

Aston Villa beat Everton 4-0 at home with two strikes from Czech

Milan Baros, who admitted to handball in the build-up to the opening goal of the match.

Striker Shekif Kuqi scored both for Blackburn Rovers in their 2-0 win at Middlesbrough and Jason Roberts also hit two in the thriller at Wigan Athletic which the home side edged 4-3 against Manchester City after leading 4-1.

Portsmouth manager Harry Redknapp remained unbeaten in two home matches since his return to the club after a 1-1 draw with West Ham United, while Sunderland picked up only their sixth point in 18 matches and first in 10 against fifth-placed Bolton.

Earlier, league leaders Chelsea won 3-2 against Fulham at Stamford Bridge to maintain their 100 per cent home record in the Premiership.

The victory meant that the champions remained nine points clear of second-placed Manchester United and 15 points clear of Liverpool.

Gerrard slams boo boys

INTERNET, undated

Steven Gerrard has slammed fans for booing former Liverpool favourite Michael Owen.

The Newcastle United striker came in for some harsh treatment from a section of fans during his first ever return to his former club, prompting the Reds skipper to round on the Anfield faithful.

"I am disappointed with that," he told Sky Sports News.

"He should be a legend here for all the goals he has scored for Liverpool in the past."

Owen got very little change from a resilient Reds defence although he might have enjoyed a vintage afternoon at Anfield had he been able to swap sides, as a litany of Liverpool chances went begging.

"He got a mixed reception, which is disappointing," Gerrard added.

"I do not think they were booing him much but he deserves a standing ovation for the goals he has scored."

Di Stefano set for bypass

REUTERS, Madrid

Doctors plan to perform a heart bypass operation on former Real Madrid great Alfredo Di Stefano on Wednesday if his condition remains stable, the hospital said on Tuesday.

The 79-year-old Argentine was admitted to hospital after a heart attack on Saturday. Doctors postponed planned surgery on Monday because he had suffered a fever.

"In the last 24 hours, and though the prognosis remains serious, there has been an improvement in his circulation," the statement from Valencia's La Fe hospital said.

"If the current clinical stability continues, the planned bypass operation will take place tomorrow," it added.

Doctors at the Valencia hospital had been holding a daily press conference on Di Stefano's condition but on Tuesday the hospital simply issued a two-paragraph statement.

Massive win

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At the City Club ground, Mintu hammered 121 as Young Pegasus B chased down a mammoth Kathalagan total to snatch a six-wicket victory.

Pegasus made 255-4 in reply to Kathalagan's 252-9.

Cricketer Coaching School (162-5) defeated Azad Sporting Club by five wickets at Dhaka University ground in the day's other match.

DOHS atop alone

FROM PAGE 12

ticking and eventually finished on 218-8.

Razzak flighted the ball effectively to finish with 5-21 while Tikolo's off-spin fetched him two wickets for 41.

MOHAMMEDAN-INDIRA Indian Sandeep Sharma and Monjurul Islam ensured an easy sail for Mohammedan as they combined to dismiss Indira Road for only 92.

Sandeep was most successful with 4-16 and left-arm seamer Monjurul captured three wickets for 14 runs.

The Delhi right-hander then struck a 47-ball 58 and Hannan Sarker added 25 as Mohammedan raced to 95 in 14.5 overs with all ten wickets intact.

VICTORIA-KALABAGAN Pakistani Jaffer Quraishi excelled both with the bat and ball including a hat-trick as Victoria put behind their disappointing first defeat in the previous match with a massive victory against Kalabagan.

Jaffer led the Victoria charge to post 277-6, the biggest total scored at the Comilla Stadium in the league so far, with a blazing 64 off 51 balls followed by half-centuries Nasiruddin Faruque (58 off 76 balls) and Sakib Al Hasan (56 off 58 balls).

Kalabagan, in their chase, were bundled out for 119 in 27.1 overs with left-arm spinner Kamrul Hasan ripping through the top order claiming four wickets for 28.

Jaffer then mopped up the tail in style, dismissing the last three batsmen with the last two deliveries of the 26th over and the first ball of the 28th over. He finished with four for 19.

Jaffer was the second bowler to score a hat-trick in the league after Kalabagan's occasional spinner Nahidul Haque achieved the feat against Abahani.

SONARGAON-CITY

Star-studded City went into the match after ending Victor's winning streak in the previous round but choked while chasing a not-so-impressive Sonargaon total of 191-9 despite defiant 40 by former Zimbabwe captain Tendata Taibu.

The star-studded City batting collapsed at 178 with eleven balls to spare with left-arm spinner Elias Sunny claiming three vital wickets after pacer Tapash Baisya started the slide dismissing both City openers.

Earlier, opener Nayeem Islam made 40 and Mohammad Salim made an unbeaten 32 in Sonargaon's winning total.

BROTHERS-ABAHANI

Regional tune-up for WC

2nd women's Asia Cup begins in Pakistan today

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

The second Asia Cup for women cricketers is the best platform to prepare regional teams for international tournaments, the players said Tuesday on the eve of the three-day event hosted by Pakistan.

"The Asia Cup is the best platform for regional teams to do well and get tuned up for bigger events like the World Cup," Indian women's team captain Mithali Raj told a media briefing to launch the nine-day event that begins on Wednesday.

India, defending the title they won by beating Sri Lanka in a two-team event in 2003 and runners-up to Australia in the World Cup earlier this year, will be playing in a different atmosphere in a conservative Pakistan.

Only families will be allowed to watch the matches, while players of all teams will follow a strict Islamic dress code of baggy trousers and long shirts -- unlike the skirts employed by some teams at inter-

national level.

But a dearth of female umpires has forced local organisers to employ male umpires, a decision which could spark a reaction from fundamentalists who have opposed mixed sports in the recent past.

"We have women umpires in India, but if there are male umpires employed we don't have any problems if we are getting fair decisions," said Mithali.

"India is ranked higher but we will not show any complacency, because any team can upset any other team on its day," said Mithali, whose team beat England's women early this year.

Pakistan will take on Sri Lanka on Wednesday, while Sri Lanka will face off against India on Thursday in the double league event. After two rounds of matches the top teams will play the final on January 4.

South Asia's other Test-playing nation Bangladesh did not send a team.

Pakistan captain Sana Javed said women need exposure to excel at higher level.

"The Asia Cup is the launching pad for women in the continent. With

more and more events like this we can improve our level of playing," said Sana, who took over as captain last month.

Sri Lankan captain Shikala Siriwardene said her country had progressed well at the Asian level.

"Women's cricket in Sri Lanka is just eight-nine years old but we have progressed along nicely and it we win here it would be a great boost. We will do our best to win," said spin bowler Shikala.

Cricket has been attracting a growing female fan base in India. The women's game got a shot in the arm in Pakistan earlier this year when it was placed under the supervision of the Pakistan Cricket Board.

Pakistan hosted its inaugural national cricket championship for women in March. It then invited the Indian Under-21 team for a first-ever women's cricket series between the rivals, which India won in October.

SA resist Aussie attack

FROM PAGE 12

century 10th wicket partnership. McGrath featured in the previous one with Jason Gillespie, a 114-run stand against New Zealand in Brisbane last season.

It was a much improved day for the Australians, who clawed their way back into the game after a spectacular 7-85 collapse late on day one.

Hussey, starting the day on 23, proved a major irritant to the Proteas. His innings evoked memories of his unbeaten 133 against the West Indies in the third Adelaide Test last month, when he was on 35 with two wickets left in the Australian first innings.

He seized the momentum from the South Africans, who had finished the opening day on top and had salvaged a draw against the odds in last week's opening Perth Test.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close of play on the second day in the second Test between Australia and South Africa at the MCG on Tuesday:

AUSTRALIA: First innings (over-

Jaques c Rudolph b Pollock	2
Hayden c Smith b Pollock	65
Pointing c Gibbs b Nel	117
Hodge c Smith b Pollock	7
Hussey b Ntini	122
Symonds c Boucher b Nel	2
Gilchrist c Gibbs b Nel	0
Warne c Boje b Nel	9
Lee b w b Ntini	4
MacGill b Ntini	11
McGrath not out	4
Extras: (b-2, lb-4, nb-4, w-2)	12
Total: (All out in 119.3 overs)	355
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-154, 3-176, 4-207, 5-207, 6-213, 7-227, 8-239, 9-248	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Pollock	26	5	67	3
Ntini	22.3	3	70	3
Kallis	21.5	4	69	0
Nel	31	6	84	4
Boje	18.1	3	59	0
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings				
De Villiers l b w b McGrath	61			
Smith l b w b Lee	22			
Gibbs not out	57			
Kallis not out	14			
Extras: (lb-4, nb-11)	15			
Total: (For 2 wks in 58 overs)	169			
Fall of wickets: 1-36, 2-122				
To bat: Rudolph, Prince, Boucher,				

Bowler	O	M	R	W
McGrath	14	8	17	1
Lee	14	1	65	1
Symonds	13	4	34	0
Warne	12	3	40	0
MacGill	5	1	9	0

V-Day tennis title Dipu's

SPORTS REPORTER

Dipu Lal upset top seed Amol Roy 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 in the final to lift the men's singles title of the Victory-Day Tennis Tournament at the Ramna National Tennis Complex yesterday.

Amol got the consolation doubles trophy when he paired with Laxman Lal to beat Ranjan Ram and Dipu Ram 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 in the final.

Israt Sultana Rumi clinched the women's singles title beating Ma Hai Ching 6-2, 4-6, 6-3.

Ma Hai Ching won the girls' under-16 singles title while boys' U-18 and U-13 titles went to Ranjan Ram and Arif Hossain respectively.

Larsson home-bound

Football

AFP, Stockholm

Henrik Larsson is leaving FC Barcelona in the summer of 2006 to return to his native Sweden, he said in an interview published Tuesday.

"I am going home in the summer," Larsson told the Swedish daily Expressen.

Larsson will move into his newly-completed house in Helsingborg, southern Sweden, and play for the local club, as well as the Swedish national team, while he waits for new offers.

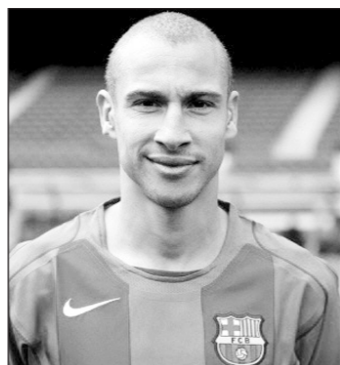
"Interested clubs can contact my agent. Then I will evaluate the offers and decide," he told the paper.

Barcelona had offered to extend Larsson's contract for another year, for a reported 18 million kronor (1.9 million euros, 2.2 million dollars), and the striker announced in October that he would accept, but then changed his mind.

"After two years in Barcelona it feels right to come home," said Larsson, whose stint at the Spanish

superclub was marked by lengthy injury periods and competition with Barcelona's other world-class strikers, meaning he spent much time on the substitute bench.

But former Celtic striker Larsson, who is a favourite of Barcelona's



HENRIK LARSSON

home crowd and scored five times in 20 matches, said he was not bitter about being mostly a substitute.

"I am not bitter," he said. "But everyone on the bench wants more match time. I am no exception."

Kerry Packer

FROM PAGE 12

Benaud, now Channel Nine's voice of cricket.

"He was absolutely brilliant...he'll be much missed."

Packer once called himself "academically stupid" but there was no doubting his skill in the boardroom, where his jaw-dropping deals were greeted with envy and amazement.

He had recently steered PBL into another of his passions -- gambling -- by taking control of Australia's largest casino and developing new gaming complexes in Macau with businessman Stanley Ho.

His greatest coup came when he sold Channel Nine to Perth businessman Alan Bond for just over a billion dollars (750 million US) in 1987, then bought it back at a fifth of the price three years later.

"You only get one Alan Bond in your lifetime," Packer said. "And I've had mine."

The low point of his public life came in the early 1980s, when an official inquiry was investigating the Australian drugs trade.

Packer was named as a drugs kingpin known as "the Goanna" but vehemently denied the allega-

tions and was formally cleared of any wrongdoing in 1987, although the episode reinforced his determination to avoid the spotlight.

He officially handed over the reins of PBL to his son James in 1998 but was still involved in the day-to-day running of the operation.

Packer's health had deteriorated in recent years.

He underwent a kidney transplant in November 2000, receiving an organ donated by his helicopter pilot and friend Nick "Biggles" Ross, and in 2003 needed emergency surgery to clear blocked arteries.

In 1990 he nearly died while playing polo, but managed to survive even though his heart stopped beating for around seven minutes.

Afterwards he reportedly boasted: "I've been to the other side. And let me tell you son, there's ... nothing there." Within a week he was back on the polo field.

Packer is survived by James, wife Ros and daughter Gretel.

JFA CUP Five in final round

SPORTS REPORTER

Sathkira, Bagerhat, Dhaka, Gaibandha and Rangamati moved into the final round of the Second JFA Cup U-16 football tournament yesterday as zonal champions.

Dhaka were the lone team to break the monopoly of hosts when they edged Manikganj 1-0 with Rimon scoring the match-winner at the Manikganj Stadium.

Shahabuddin slotted a hat-trick to help Sathkira drub Jenidah 6-2 while Kabir notched all three goals in Gaibandha's 3-0 win over Thakurgaon.

The remaining matches were decided in tiebreakers.

Bagerhat defeated Khulna 4-1 after a 1-1 draw at regulation time and Rangamati beat Chittagong 5-3 after a goalless draw.

Booters back

FROM PAGE 12

expected to return to Dhaka on January 23 and prepare the team for the qualifiers, which begin from February 23.

The footballers will be free to represent their clubs in the ongoing National Football League.

Skipper Arif Khan Joy said that defeating Pakistan twice on Pakistan soil in less than two weeks was "an achievement".

Feroz Mahmud Titu's 83rd minute strike off a pass from substitute Kanchan separated the two sides in the Asian Cup pre-qualifier at the People's Sports Complex Stadium while centre-back Sujam slammed the all-important goal from a penalty in the SAFF Championship semifinal at the same venue on December 14.

"It was a fighting match. They played rough in the first half but I am happy that we could play the passing game we were intended to play," the midfielder said.

"The most important thing is that we would be able to continue the national camp. The games we are going to play in near future will give us more exposure," added Joy.

The draw of the Asian Cup qualifiers will be held on January 4.

Bangladesh Football Federation general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal, SAFF Championship team leader and BFF official Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chinnu and former national football coach George Kottan welcomed the team.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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