

## Murali flies back home

AFP, London

Sri Lanka star Muttiah Muralidaran was set to leave his side's tour of England on Thursday to fly back home to Kandy for a family bereavement.

But Murali, the cornerstone of the Sri Lanka attack, who has claimed 611 Test wickets, is due to return to London on Sunday in time to take his place in the side for the first Test of three against England starting at Lord's on May 11.

Off-spinner Muralitharan was left out of Sri Lanka's side for their final four-day warm-up match against England at Worcester, which began Thursday, after claiming four wickets in his only match of the tour so far against Derbyshire last week.

## Zim keep losing

AFP, St John's

A century from left-hander Ryan Hinds helped the University of the West Indies Vice Chancellor's XI to complete a five-wicket victory over Zimbabwe in their limited-overs tour match on Wednesday.

Hinds, eyeing a recall to the West Indies side, hit an undefeated 117 and shared an unbroken century sixth wicket stand with Chadwick Walton, as the University side successfully chased 325 to win with 23 balls to spare.

The Vice Chancellor's XI, further dented the confidence of the young touring side, when Hinds hit 15 fours and one six in his knock.

Zimbabwe opening batsman Piet Rinke earlier had warmed up for this weekend's third and fourth one-day internationals against West Indies at Georgetown with a purposeful 113 that lifted the visitors to 324 for four from their allocation of 50 overs.

Rinke cracked 14 fours and two sixes to help Zimbabwe post what appeared a challenging total at the Jolly Beach Resort ground.

The tourists now move to the Guyana capital on Thursday for the weekend's matches, trailing 0-2 in the ODI series, after losing the first two games at the Antigua Recreation Ground last weekend by five wickets and 98 runs.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**ZIMBABWE:** 324 for five off 50 overs (Rinke 113, Taylor 80)  
**VICE-CHANCELLOR'S XI:** 325 for five off 46.1 overs (Hinds 117 not out, Walton 67 not out; Ireland 3-52)

## Sajid ready to fire

BBC ONLINE, undated

Fast bowler Sajid Mahmood says he is ready to step up to Test level and play for England against Sri Lanka at Lord's next week.

Mahmood is being widely tipped to make his England debut on May 11. He said: "I'd like to think I'm ready for it. I bowled well in the West Indies on the England A tour."

"It would be a dream come true, especially to play it in England, at Lord's as well. I've wanted that since I was about eight years old."

He is set to get his chance because of injuries to fast bowlers Steve Harmison, Simon Jones and James Anderson.

Mahmood was set to play in the England A game against Sri Lanka, starting on Thursday, but was withdrawn in a move which was interpreted as England not wanting Sri Lanka to catch a glimpse of the 24-year-old in action.

Instead he bowled 21 overs for 55 runs for Lancashire against Kent at Old Trafford and took the wicket of Martin van Jaarsfeld, who was dismissed lbw for 87.

Mahmood, who has played for England in four one-day internationals, admitted he was conscious of the extra attention on him.

## Germans donate for tsunami cause

AFP, Berlin

German international players have donated a total of 250,000 euros (315,000 dollar) to help rebuild Asian regions devastated by the tsunami in December 2004.

The Egidious Braun foundation, connected to the German Football Federation (DFB) revealed Thursday that German stars had donated the money which will help build a football centre in Galle, Sri Lanka.

In January last year a benefit match between the German national team and a select Bundesliga XI in Munich raised 917,000 euros (1.1 million dollars) with the funds helping to rebuild areas torn apart by the tsunami.

Sri Lanka was just one of several Asian countries left devastated by the tsunami that struck unexpectedly on December 26, 2004 and killed more than 220,000 people along the Indian Ocean.

## 'Captaincy no burden'



CRICINFO, undated

Andrew Flintoff has brushed aside, nonchalantly, concerns that the captaincy at home against Sri Lanka next week will be an added burden to his burgeoning list of roles within the England team.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) confirmed that Michael Vaughan will definitely miss next week's first Test.

David Graveney, chairman of selectors, hinted yesterday that Flintoff is likely to take over as captain, continuing from where he left off in India. Flintoff, though, was excited about the prospect of captaining at home.

"I got an opportunity in India which I enjoyed to do to it at the home of cricket would be fantastic. I enjoy being involved in the game -- captaining your country can't be a

burden. "It's been great fun to be honest. The lads all know their jobs and get on with their business and help me out



ANDREW FLINTOFF

whenever possible. When fielding at slip when I haven't been captain, I've still been thinking about the game. So there's no great change there and I

enjoy the responsibility and being involved in the game.

"It's something I enjoyed rather than feared. Being England captain can't be a burden, it's a fantastic job and something I've always wanted to do since I was a kid. To get the opportunity to do it in India was great fun. Burden is very much the wrong word."

Steve Harmison's absence has also been confirmed by the ECB for the first Test as selectors meet on Sunday to announce England's squad. Graveney said only players who featured in at least one four-day Championship game would be considered. Neither Vaughan nor Harmison has played since returning from India.

Paul Collingwood stood in for Vaughan in Pakistan and India, scoring a maiden Test century in the first Test in Nagpur and a couple of half-centuries in Lahore the Test before. Alastair Cook hit a debut century in the same Nagpur Test and is also pushing for a place in the final XI.

## Sachin signs \$40m deal



AFP, New Delhi

International advertising major Saatchi and Saatchi has secured the marketing rights for Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar for 40 million dollars, officials and media said on Thursday.

Iconix, the newly-formed marketing branch of Saatchi, signed Tendulkar, one of the sport's leading batsmen, after his 10-year contract with the US-based WorldTel expired last year.

"It's great to have a legend like Sachin as the first client of Iconix," said V Shantakumar, the chief executive officer and managing director of Saatchi's Indian operations.

"Sachin is more than just a cricketer player. He's a role model for young and old India.

"He's still the nation's youth icon and he's still considered by cricket pundits as the world's best batsman. The value he commands comes from the respect and love people feel for him," he said.

Shantakumar declined to confirm media speculation that the three-year deal was worth 1.8 billion rupees (40 million dollars).

Tendulkar, who is recovering from

a shoulder surgery, and has been struggling with his form, missed the recent one-day series at home against England and will also sit out of the five one-dayers in the West Indies later this month.

The 33-year-old, whose fitness will be assessed next week, may be available for the four Test matches against the West Indies starting on June 2.

The Mumbai star was delighted to be associated with his new agents.

"I've entrusted Iconix with managing my affairs and have confidence in its ability to provide requisite continuity to the brands I am associated with," Tendulkar said in a statement.

Tendulkar, who has scored a record 35 Test and 39 one-day centuries during a remarkable 16-year career, enjoys fanatical fan following in India and across the cricket world.

Tendulkar is the world's leading one-day batsman, with 14,146 runs in 362 matches.

The recent dip in form -- he averaged just over 20 in his last 11 Tests -- and the spate of injuries raised fears Tendulkar's career may be coming to an end.

However, many contemporary greats like Lara were not willing to write off Tendulkar. "Form is temporary, class is permanent," the 37-year-old Lara said recently.

## Rookies given central deals

REUTERS, New Delhi

The Indian cricket board awarded central contracts to batsman Suresh Raina and paceman Shantakumar Sreesanth on Thursday following impressive starts to their international careers.

The 19-year-old Raina is regarded as a major talent after the left-hander struck three fifties during India's 5-1 home one-day series victory over England last month.

A brilliant fielder, Raina has already been earmarked to emerge as a key player at next year's World Cup in West Indies.

The 23-year-old Sreesanth has been a consistent wicket-taker on slow sub-continent pitches in his 15 one-dayers so far, including a career-best 6-55 in the final ODI victory against England in Indore.

The pair would be included in the lowest of three categories and offered an annual retainer fee of two million rupees (44,500 dollars), a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) release said.

The Indian board offered central contracts to 15 players in December and announced that if a non-contracted player appeared in five tests or 15 one-dayers, he would be absorbed into the lowest grade.

## 'Ganguly not finished yet'

PTI, Srinagar

Former fast bowler Javagal Srinath said international career of Sourav Ganguly was not finished yet and the ex-skipper of India should take a break to come back fresh in the team.

"The career of Ganguly is far from over. I think he needs to take a break and come back fresh. In today's set up, you cannot shut the door on anyone," Srinath said.

The former pace spearhead, accompanied by MRF Pace foundation chief TA Sekhar, was in Jammu and Kashmir for a two-day camp to hunt for fast bowling talent from the region.

Srinath also said leg-spinner Anil Kumble had a lot to contribute to the shorter version of game and he should be a part of the team for next year's World Cup.

"Kumble should be an integral part of the Indian team at the 2007 World Cup in West Indies based on his performance and he still has an important role to play," Srinath told reporters on the sidelines of the camp.

## Agarkar's regret

PTI, Mumbai

Failure to cement a place in India's Test squad despite being in the game for eight years is Ajit Agarkar's biggest regret but the paceman believes that his ability to get wickets with the old ball will now help him to strengthen his claim for a Test slot.

Agarkar said frequent injuries and the team management's preference for an additional spinner in home matches had hampered his Test career which has seen him play just 28 matches since his debut in 1998-99.

The emergence of a host of promising fast bowlers will make his task even more difficult but the Mumbai speedster sees it as a "healthy development" as it will put pressure on him to perform.

"It's a healthy development. It's very good for the team, the advent of two or three young pacers who have done well. They are all between 22 and 24 years in age and the future looks good," Agarkar told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"More competition is always good for the team as well as for individuals as you know you have to keep performing," the 28-year-old bowler said.

Agarkar felt not having had an extended run could be one reason why his record in the longer version of the game was not as impressive as the one-dayers.

"I have not got many Tests in a row. Injuries are part of the reason, while the preference of others, including an extra spinner at home, over me is another," he said.

## Australia name strong A side

AFP, Sydney

Selectors Thursday named a strong Australia A squad for a series of four-day, one-day and Twenty20 cricket matches against A teams from New Zealand, India and Pakistan in Darwin and Cairns in July.

The squad, showcasing Australia's cricket playing depth, contains players with international experience including wicketkeeper-batsman Brad Haddin, the pace trio of Mitchell Johnson, Shaun Tait and Shane Watson, dumped Test batsman Brad Hodge and opener Phil Jaques.

"We see the Top End series as a very important tournament for young, emerging talent in Australia and in particular for those pushing for Australian selection in the upcoming Champions Trophy, the Ashes and the World Cup," new chairman of selectors Andrew Hilditch said in a statement Thursday.

"We have selected players with some real experience at international level in Haddin, Hodge, Watson and (James) Hopes, whilst we also have some very exciting young players who have experience with the Australian team."

"The pace attack of Johnson, Tait and Ben Dorey have all played for the Australian side recently, and along with Jaques, will be pushing their claims for the Ashes and World Cup," Hilditch said.

The selectors have also included young off-spinner Daniel Cullen, who played in the recent one-day series in Bangladesh.

"Australia is obviously very well served at the moment with spinners Shane Warne and Stuart MacGill, but Dan Cullen has shown us what he is capable of on the recent tour of Bangladesh and Cullen Bailey has had a very strong domestic season and also deserves his opportunity," Hilditch said.

**SQUAD**  
 Cullen Bailey, Travis Birt, Mark Cosgrove, Daniel Cullen, Brett Dorey, Brad Haddin (captain), Ben Hilfenhaus, Brad Hodge, James Hopes, Phil Jaques, Mitchell Johnson, Chris Rogers, Shaun Tait, Shane Watson.



Nikolay Davydenko of Russia makes a forehand return against compatriot Marat Safin during their Estoril Open second round encounter on the outskirts of Lisbon on Wednesday.

## Safin stopped on return



AFP, Estoril

Marat Safin's spring comeback on clay ended in a second round knockout at the Estoril Open Wednesday at the hands of fellow Russian Nikolay Davydenko.

More than two months after returning to tennis following a major knee injury, former world number one Safin is still puzzling over his lack of consistent form, evident in his 4-6, 6-1, 6-2 defeat to the second seed.

"How can I be satisfied after a score like that," lamented the 26-year-old who has US and Australian Open titles on his honour list.

"I couldn't find my game. Instead of attacking at the start of the second set, my game completely broke down."

"I had chances and didn't take them and I had so many errors."

Safin said he has no choice but to keep plugging away with coach Peter Lundgren as Roland Garros draws closer.

"What other option is there," said the tortured Russian. "I have to play, practise and put in the work. Something just has to change."

Safin will continue onto Rome for next week's Masters, where he has lost

in the second round in six of his seven appearances.

Davydenko broke his duck in the series after losing twice within days to his compatriot in 2006.

Safin stepped back into the game in February at the expense of Davydenko, beating him in the first round of Dubai and following up just days later with a third-round victory at Indian Wells.

"In the second I played much better," said Davydenko, currently the world number six.

"My confidence is improving after losing my first three matches on clay. But I'm not thinking any farther than the next round."

Two other seeds made early exits, with unfancied American Justin Gimelstob producing the biggest shock.

The 29-year-old who before this week had last won an ATP-level match on clay in 1999, stunned Chile's seventh seeded Olympic champion Nicolas Pietrangola 2-6, 7-6, 6-4.

Gimelstob, who travelled to European clay for only the second time in his career outside of three Roland Garros appearances, confessed that he was as surprised as anyone else.

"I came over with no expectations," said the American, who was eliminated at the first round in Barcelona

last week by Argentine Agustin Calleri.

"I don't know how much longer I have in my career. I wanted to try some new experiences and I'd heard good things about the spring circuit."

"I was killed last week in Barcelona. I was so bad last week. If I can win on clay, then anyone can."

"No one will believe when they read in the newspaper that I beat Massu."

"They'll think he broke his foot or something."

Gimelstob will on Friday face his doubles partner, Spanish specialist Albert Portas, whose career claim to fame so far is a surprise 2001 Hamburg masters crown.

"He's the heavy favourite, I'm like a bit of gum on his shoe," said Gimelstob.

Gimelstob claimed his last clay success in Florida seven years ago in the first round when Delray beach, now hardcourt, was played on the surface.

Portas booked his place against his doubles partner with a knockout of French fourth seed Gael Monfils 3-6, 7-6, 6-4.

## Venus' first win of 2006



AFP, Warsaw

Wimbledon champion Venus Williams claimed only her second victory in eight months on Wednesday when she beat Polish wild card Urszula Radwanska 6-3, 6-3 to reach the second round of the Warsaw Open.

Top seed Kim Clijsters was another winner, taking just 51 minutes to dismiss Ukrainian qualifier Julia Vakulenko 6-3, 6-2.

Third seeded Russian Elena Dementieva was even more efficient in overwhelming another Ukrainian qualifier, Tatiana Perebylitska 6-2, 6-0, and fifth seed Francesca Schiavone and Italy defeated Russian Elena Likhovtseva 6-4, 6-1.

Since losing to eventual champion Clijsters in the quarterfinals of the US Open last September, Williams had played just two tournaments and two matches.

She defeated Nuria Llagostera Vives before defaulting against Marta Domachowska in Beijing last year, and then was beaten by Tsvetana Pironkova

in the first round of the Australian Open.

Although she rarely played at her highest level, there were few signs of rust against a modest 15-year old opponent competing in her first match on the WTA tour.

"All in all I'm happy," said Williams, who won for the first time in 2006. "You can't ask for too much more. I played a really good player."

"She was eager and really knew how to hit the ball, and that's good news for Polish tennis."

"Just pretty solid and I'll improve on that. At this stage every match is important to me, to get a rhythm and start dominating hopefully."

The seventh seeded American forced a netted forehand to break for 3-1, and although she made a backhand volley error to drop her serve in the next game, she went on to break a second time to lead 4-2.

Although hitting a return wide on a set point at 5-2, Williams then served out the set.

She also always held the upper hand in the second set, often overpowering her opponent with her huge forehand.

The former World No. 1 broke to lead

1-0, and after Radwanska levelled at 2-2 with the aid of a net cord, she regained the lead by breaking for 3-2 and claimed the match with a further break at 5-3 when Radwanska hit her sixth double-fault.

Williams had suffered a strained ligament in her right elbow and finally began practising in earnest about four weeks ago.

She wanted to be sure she was ready to return after her unsuccessful attempt at competing in Australia.

"It was a really hard place to heal and it just took time," said Williams. "I just did rehab and tried to get better the best I could."

"I had to honest with myself, because I really didn't want any more Australian Opens where I wasn't playing at 100 percent. I just didn't want to come back until I knew I could do it right."

Her next opponent is Martina Hingis, and it is a challenge she is eagerly anticipating.

"I definitely look forward to that. She's had a great year so far just living her dreams. I think everyone's happy for her, and I'm happy for her. It should be a very good match tomorrow."

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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