

Sourav keen to impress

PTI, Kolkata

Former Indian cricket captain Sourav Ganguly said on Friday he was looking forward to playing in the Challenger Trophy and prove his mettle to the national selectors.

"I don't expect to be in Kolkata during the pujas. I will probably be gone for the Challenger," Ganguly said during a function at his restaurant Sourav's.

"I am now practicing with the Bengal team. I have got runs in the Moin-ud-Dowla Trophy," he said.

"I know I have to score runs consistently, so I am looking forward to playing the Challenger if I get a chance," Ganguly said, adding "I want to use domestic tournaments for making a comeback into the national squad." The squads for the Challenger Series, to be played from October 1 to 4 in Chennai, is to be picked on Sep 26.

Ganguly had skipped the Challenger Series last year citing tennis elbow.

The tournament came close on the heels of his spat with coach Greg Chappell during the tour of Zimbabwe.

Regarding Irfan Pathan, who has hit a bad patch in his career, Ganguly, during whose tenure the pacer was selected to the Indian team, said "ups and downs are part and parcel of every cricketer's life, he is only 21 years old and has a lot of cricket left in him. He will come back again."

Abbas not a witness

CRICINFO, undated

Zaheer Abbas, former Pakistan captain and manager on the recent tour to England, will not be attending the ICC hearing as a witness on charges laid against Inzamamul Haq for ball tampering and bringing the game into disrepute.

Abbas was listed by the PCB as one of their witnesses, as well as Danish Kaneria and Umar Gul, but it was confirmed by the board that neither of the three will be going and written statements will now be sought from the three.

Abbas told APP, "I am not required to appear as a witness in the hearing and according to my information, Gul and Kaneria are not needed to appear either."

Abbas Zaidi, director board operations, told the Karachi-based daily Dawn that Abbas had been advised to stay at home.

"Since we are bound to act on the advice of our lawyers whom we have engaged to plead Inzamam's case, we have now been informed that Zaheer, Danish and Umar are not required to attend the hearing in person," said Zaidi.

He added, "In fact, the lawyers have now sought written statements of these three individuals. Now apart from Inzamam, the PCB chairman and Bob Woolmer will be present when the hearing begins next week."

Abbas was replaced by Talat Ali last week for the upcoming Champions Trophy as manager of the Pakistan side. At the time, the PCB explicitly stated that the move was not "any indictment on the capability or ability of Zaheer Abbas as team manager." Instead, it was explained, that because of Abbas's involvement as a witness in the hearings and any possible appeals thereafter "we wouldn't like to put any extra pressure on him" by retaining him as manager.

Europe ahead as Tiger toils

AFP, Straffan, Republic of Ireland

Europe made a storming start to the defence of the Ryder Cup at the K-Club on Friday as Tiger Woods once again struggled early on.

The cup holders were leading the United States early on in two out of the opening quartet of fourballs. The Americans were up in one and level in the other.

Despite Woods woes he and the steady Jim Furyk reached the turn one up on Colin Montgomerie and Padraig Harrington.

The Americans were also level through six holes in the final anchor match between Phil Mickelson and Chris DiMarco against Darren Clarke and Lee Westwood.

But in-form Paul Casey and Swede Robert Karlsson were two up on Stewart Cink and rookie JJ Henry through eight holes and Spanish duo Sergio Garcia and Jose Maria Olazabal were one up on the hole behind on David Toms and Brett Wetterich.

In the all-important lead-off game the top American pairing took the lead with a birdie from Furyk at the first but Woods in particular looked ragged hitting into a water hazzard with his opening drive and missing a couple of shortish putts.

To compile their woes, the group were warned for slow play -- an unusual occurrence in matchplay golf.

But three birdies from Furyk steadied the ship and they were one up at the turn.



PHOTO: STAR

IN A TANGLE: Action from yesterday's 14th NZ Textile Mills School Kabaddi final between Dolairpar High School and Rifles High School and College at the NSC gymnasium.

WORLD BADMINTON CHAMPIONSHIPS

Shock exit for Hidayat

AFP, Madrid

Defending champion Taufik Hidayat Crashed out of the World Badminton championships on Thursday after an extraordinary defeat to Chen Hong, the sixth seed from China.

The unseeded champion from Indonesia led 5-3 in the second game and 17-16 and 18-17 in the third but may have paid the price for lack of match practice in a 14-21, 21-18, 21-19 loss to Chen.

Hidayat, who has spent much of the year on the sidelines, nevertheless looked to be playing well enough to win the match in the first game, in which he took a long early lead and often tied the rallies up cleverly at the net.

This was both a way of avoiding problems with the wind drift and nullified Chen's dangerous jump smash, but Hidayat's concentration appeared to wander in the second game.

This proved a crucial lapse, because although he came back from 11-16 to 16-18 with some more tactical net play, he could not rescue that game, and after that he was always in difficulties against an increasingly motivated opponent.

"In the first game I was too cautious because of the drift," said Chen, a former All-England champion.

"Maybe I was a bit too cautious and I played a bit more cleverly after that."

"I think my confidence was higher than Taufik's."

"In our previous meetings I lost more to him (than I won) but I was not affected by that."

"I had little pressure on me, and Taufik was under more pressure because to win the title he would have had to sweep up four Chinese players, all at their best."

This sounded like Chen being loyal to his colleagues, because the only stage at which another Chinese player seems likely to stand in Chen's path is in the semifinals on Saturday.

Hidayat slid away into the night and escaped interview on a particularly disappointing day for Indonesia. Earlier Nova Widianto and Liyana Natsir lost their world mixed doubles title when they were beaten 21-15, 18-21, 22-20 to Koo Kien Kit and Wong Pei Tty of Malaysia.

Chen's success earned him a quarterfinal with Peter Gade, the former world number one from Denmark, who looked in good form as he won 21-14, 21-13 against Shoji Sato, a surprise survivor from Japan.

The winner may well play Lin Dan the brilliant second-seeded former world number one from China who produced an excellent win and a minor controversy afterwards.

Lin triumphed 21-16, 21-12 against Park Sung Hwan, the 13th seed from Korea, and announced that he was feeling good, better than the day before.

But when it came to answering questions about Friday's match against Muhammad Hafiz Hashim from a Malaysian journalist, he asked which country the questioner came from and, on being told, immediately walked out.

Although the sudden exodus annoyed some of the press, the reasons are probably no more sinister than a wish not to give away secrets to his rivals.

The other leading Malaysian, Lee Chong Wei, often played like a top seed during a well-taken 21-16, 21-12 win over Joachim Persson,

players to create possibly a bit more.

"If we can't score a goal out of five chances then we have to make sure we create six, seven or eight chances."

With Liverpool making a slow start to the campaign, Alonso believes that Benitez's squad are just one of many struggling to over-

come a World Cup hangover.

He said: "It's been a difficult start, not just for Liverpool's international players, but for all the clubs."

"It's been hard following the World Cup because we've been away for a long time and there hasn't been enough time to work together."

"Maybe FIFA have to consider how much travelling we have to do and the number of games we must play. But of course, you have to cope with this and look after yourself."

Danny Murphy is vying for only his third Spurs start against his former club, but injured duo Jermaine Pennant and John-Arne Riise are likely to miss out for Liverpool.

The young and developing Dane.

"I think I'm only playing to 70 percent of my capacity," claimed Lee.

"And I have never lost to my next opponent."

That is the third of four Chinese men in the last eight. The fourth is Chen Jin.

Earlier Petra Overzier feared she might be too ill to compete in the world badminton championships but instead produced the biggest surprise of the tournament so far when she reached quarterfinals.

The 24-year-old from Mulheim had been suffering from a virus which made her white in the face and left her on the floor for half an hour after her first match, but she followed it up by defeating the fourth-seeded Wang Chen.

Overzier's 22-20, 4-21, 22-20 success was also unusually dramatic. She looked out of it after her second game collapse, and was behind almost the whole way in the final game until she sneaked up on the Hong Kong player right at the end.

"I am a little bit ill," said Overzier.

"I also had problems with the wind and decided in the second game to stop attacking."

"I made less mistakes after that and I never thought I would lose. It was difficult but it was OK."

Palermo look

FROM PAGE 20 led to some criticism in the media.

"We knew that at the first false step they would be on to us, but we didn't let that bother us," said Mancini's assistant Sinisa Mihajlovic.

Milan have already wiped out their penalty points with three consecutive wins and they will expect to extend their 100 per cent start away to Livorno.

"Obviously we couldn't have done more than we have," said coach Carlo Ancelotti, "But the road is still long and we have a lot of ground to make up."

Sumon, Kamal

FROM PAGE 17 of the lost prolific scorers in the history of domestic hockey -- fired the old-Dhaka outfit to lead in the very first minute with a field goal.

Kamal showed he has not lost his touch by doubling the lead in the 27th minute from a penalty corner.

The bankers fought back with a 42-minute strike by Rony but their hopes were shattered as soon as Kamal put the result beyond their reach just six minutes later.

In today's Group B matches, Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club face Sadharan Bima at 2pm while heavyweights Mohammedan Sporting Club play Ajax Sporting Club at 3.45pm.

Javier Aguirre is, will he dare to keep his iconic Spanish international striker Fernando Torres on the bench?

Torres was suspended for last week's trip to the Basque country but, in his absence, the pairing of Kun Aguero and Mista Ferrer worked very well against Athletic.

Another man who is unaccustomed to sitting on the bench is Real Madrid's David Beckham but the former England captain could be among the substitutes again when the Spanish giants play at Real Betis on Saturday.

Beckham scored a spectacular injury time goal against Real Sociedad last weekend but new signing Jose Antonio Reyes looks set to retain his starting place on the right wing, a position which Beckham once called his own.

Tendulkar wicket the key: Lee

PTI, Kuala Lumpur

Brett Lee said Australia's game plan on Friday was centred on getting "King" Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag out cheaply and was happy that he accomplished it for his team.

"We had to win this game. It is always nice to get the king (Sachin) out. They (Sachin and Sehwag) are the keys to get first up," Lee said after Australia's 18-run victory in the cricket tri-series at the Kinrara Oval.

Chasing a modest target of 214, India were bundled out for 195 in 43.1 overs with Lee returning 5-38.

The win put Australia through to the final on Sunday against the West Indies.

"It was quite a hot day so bowling second was better. It is hard work in this heat but the ball swings more," Lee said on his spell.

Indian skipper Rahul Dravid said the team's batting left a lot to be desired after its third successive failure in as many matches.

"It is very disappointing to lose and not to reach the final. 213 was a gettable target. It was a very poor batting performance," he said.

"In batting we have not played to our potential. Our top order did not have a good tournament. We need to improve and get better."

Lawson linked with Maharashtra

AFP, New Delhi

West Indies fast bowler Jermaine Lawson is set to represent western Indian state Maharashtra in domestic cricket this season.

"I am supposed to come there for the season. We have not signed anything, but hopefully very soon we should be finalising things," the Times of India quoted the paceman as saying on Friday.

The 24-year-old Jamaican was in India last week to meet Maharashtra Cricket Association officials.

Lawson, twice reported for a suspect bowling action, has not played a Test since appearing against Australia in Brisbane in November 2005.

He was in India recently to work on his action at a leading pace academy in Chennai with coaches T. A. Sekar and Dennis Lillee, the former Australian fast bowling great.

In his career, Lawson has bagged 51 wickets in 13 Tests. During the home Test series against Australia in 2003, he grabbed a hatrick in Barbados before taking a career-best 7-78 at Antigua.

He has also claimed 17 wickets in 13 one-day internationals.

Maharashtra, only the second Indian state to a hire a foreign coach in Australian Darren Holder, are keen to invite overseas cricketers this season.

Speculation is rife that veteran England paceman Darren Gough will also turn out for Maharashtra this season.

"I have heard the rumours too but until they develop into discussions there is no point in me commenting," Gough, 36, told a cricket website.

"If it came along it will be a wonderful opportunity to help youngsters out there using my experience. India is a wonderful part of the world, so I would definitely think hard about doing it."

Gough, currently out of the squad due to a shin injury, has taken 229 wickets in Tests and 235 in one-day internationals.

Indian cricket board secretary Niranjan Shah has announced that each association can invite three guest players.

Foreigners have made brief appearances in domestic tournaments before.

England batsman Dennis Compton delighted the crowd in the 1940s, scoring more than 1,000 runs in 10 matches with seven centuries for Holkar state while serving as a soldier in the later stages of World War II.

Former West Indies opener Desmond Haynes, Englishmen Simon Jones, Kevin Pietersen and Angus Fraser, along with Bangladeshi cricketers have also figured in Indian domestic competitions.

ICC rejects PCB

FROM PAGE 17 would be considered.

The official, however, said that indications were that the ICC was not on a confrontation path and would adopt the policy of keeping Hair out of Pakistan's matches in the tournament.

"The signals we have got are they will hold back the announcement for the semifinals and final and if we qualify, decide later. They will only announce umpires for the league matches now," he added.

The PCB official insisted that Pakistan would, however, not accept Hair in any of their matches at any cost.

Mushtaq spins Sussex to glory



BBC ONLINE, undated

Pakistani legspinner Mushtaq Ahmed passed 100 wickets for the season to bowl Sussex to their second Championship title.

The 36-year-old took 9-48 as they beat last year's champions Notts by an innings and 245 runs at Trent Bridge.

It gave him match figures of 13-108 and a total of 102 wickets, just one fewer than in 2003 when Sussex won the title for the first time in their history.

Notts lasted just 16.3 overs before they were all out for 150 as the C&G Trophy winners completed the double.

Rain in Nottingham delayed the start of the third day's play for 40 minutes with the home side set to resume on 50-4.

Once out in the middle, however, the visitors were quick to make inroads into the Notts middle order as Mushtaq bowled David Hussey and Samit Patel in the same over.

Hussey (10) was beaten all ends up by a googly which spun back between bat and pad as he attempted to drive and Patel (22) paid the price for an undistinguished swipe across the line to a straight ball.

The possibility of Mushtaq claiming all 10 wickets in the innings was ended when James Kirtley had Paul Franks (16) lbw to reduce Notts to 107-7.

But the former Pakistan Test player, who has been appointed as their assistant coach for next month's ICC Champions Trophy, swept up the tail to beat his previous career-best figures of 9-93.

Mark Ealham delayed the end with two sixes and four boundaries in his 39 but Mushtaq had him leg

before sweeping and another straightforward decision against last man AJ Harris, who was struck on the pad on the back foot, ended the match and sparked the Sussex celebrations.

It was their ninth win of the 2006 campaign; one fewer than three years ago, but two defeats was too few than in 2003.

Notts lasted just 16.3 overs on the third day and were left to sweat on the possibility of relegation if Yorkshire and Durham play out a draw in their game, and Durham manage a maximum haul of batting bonus points.

BRIEF SCORES

SUSSEX: 560 for 5 dec (Yardy 119); **NOTTINGHAMSHIRE:** 165 (Patel 35, Mushtaq 4-60) and 150 (Ealham 39, Mushtaq 9 for 48).

Svetlana breaks local hearts



AFP, Beijing

Svetlana Kuznetsova denied the dream of an all domestic semifinal at China Open with her 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 defeat of LI Na Friday.

The Russian second seed emphatically booked her place in the last four at the Beijing tennis centre, setting up a semifinal match with 60th-ranked Peng Shuai.

Kuznetsova, the winner last week in Bali and the Roland Garros finalist against Justine Henin-Hardenne, broke her opponent three times in the two-hour contest.

The 21-year-old stretched her win streak to seven matches and improved her 2006 mark to 54-15.

Earlier, Peng emerged victorious in her third of three quarterfinals this season with a

fighting 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 victory over Japan's Ai Sugiyama.

In the day's highest-profile quarterfinal, top seed Amelie Mauresmo will hope to put 11 straight defeats to Lindsay Davenport aside when the pair meet for the 16th time.

Mauresmo is playing for the first time in China this week while Davenport appears to have put plans for retirement aside yet again as her form lifts towards season's end.

Peng, who began her season 1-6, survived an error-filled contest which lasted two hours, 41 minutes.

Between them, she and Sugiyama offered up a massive 33 break-point opportunities, with the Japanese losing her serve six times while Peng was broken on five occasions.

The Chinese player thrilled home fans at the Beijing tennis centre as she concluded with a break to advance into Saturday's

showdown.

Serbian sixth seed Jelena Jankovic upset Russian third seed Nadia Petrova to move into the final four 6-4, 4-6, 6-2.

"It was a really tough match. I was fighting hard," said Jankovic, 21, a part-time university student who continues her studies on the tour. "It was a little difficult to breathe on court with the pollution."

"But I'm happy to be in the semifinals."

Jankovic has been another turnaround story this season, winning only one for 11 at the start of the year but reaching a final in Los Angeles as well as the US Open semis, where she lost to Henin-Hardenne.

"I'm beating a lot of Top 10 players now, I'm just having fun again," enjoying myself and having fun," said the world No. 17, who began turning her season with a Rome quarterfinal in May.

Russia surge ahead



AFP, Moscow

Mikhail Youzhny defeated James Blake to give hosts Russia a comfortable 2-0 advantage after the opening day of the Davis Cup semi-final clash against the United States here on Friday.

The 24-year-old won 7-5, 1-6, 6-1, 7-5 after two hours 34 minutes in his first ever meeting with Blake to move his team within one point of victory ahead of Saturday's doubles and Sunday's reverse singles.

Earlier Marat Safin produced 14 aces to give the hosts a valuable first point by beating US number one Andy Roddick 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5).

Ninth-ranked Blake had gotten off to a comfortable start breaking Youzhny to take a 3-0 lead.

But US Open semi-finalist Youzhny broke back in the seventh game to level at four games all before taking the set in 48 minutes with another break in the 11th game.

Blake, 26, picked up steam in the second, breaking serve twice to level at one set all after one hour 17 minutes on the clay of Moscow's indoor Olympic stadium.

In the third Youzhny, ranked 24, tightened his game and produced three more breaks to take the set in

27 minutes for a 2-1 lead, as Blake's unforced errors mounted.

The opponents traded breaks early in the fourth before Youzhny got a crucial break in the 11th game to wrap up the tie under the watchful gaze of former Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

"It's well known that Blake is a good starter. I was ready for it but still managed to win the opening set," said Youzhny.

"After losing the second I found my normal game again and experienced few problems up to the end," he added.

Safin met with little resistance from Roddick.

Both players held their serves until the seventh game before 26-year-old Safin broke to take the opening set in 34 minutes.

In the second, Safin, ranked 72nd, looked even more confident breaking his sixth-ranked rival's serve twice to gain a comfortable 2-0 advantage after one hour 12 minutes.

Safin grabbed the lead in the third set with a break in the eighth game.

But the 24-year-old American broke back immediately to level 5-5 and force a tiebreak, which Roddick was leading 5-2, before Safin managed to reel off five consecutive points to take the match on the first matchpoint.

"It was very important point and I'm still shaking," said Safin.

"I lost my nerve suddenly when I

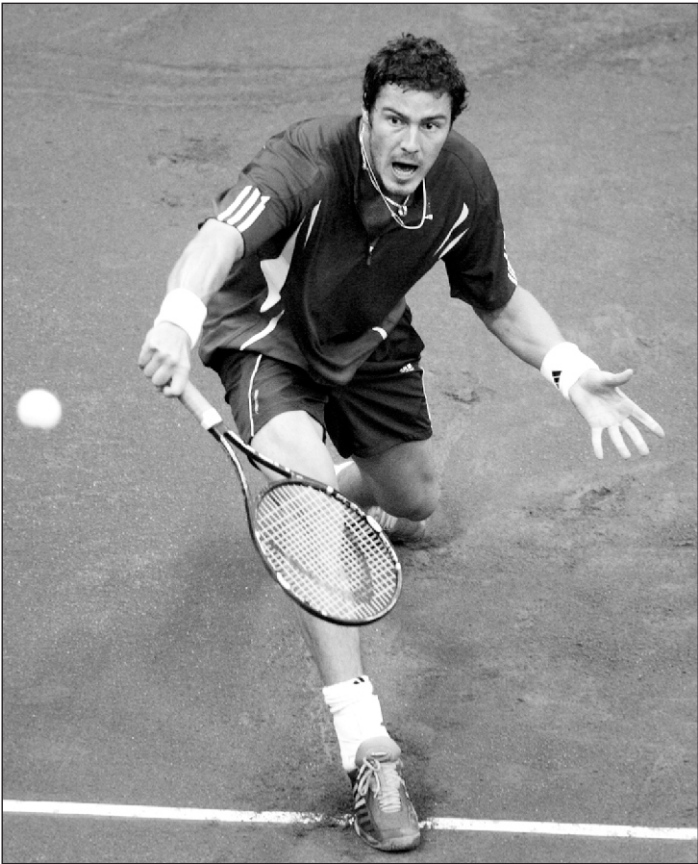


PHOTO: AFP

Russia's Marat Safin slices the ball to Andy Roddick of USA during their Davis Cup semifinal tie in Moscow on Friday.

Barca wary of 'black beast'

FROM PAGE 20 Xavi is likely to be marked by his sometime Spanish international teammate Valencia's Vicente Rodriguez.

"In one respect it's just one more game but, on the other hand, we are even more determined to beat them since they have become the champions of Europe," said Vicente this week.

Vicente spent large parts of last season on the sidelines with an ankle injury, and unlike Xavi, didn't win his race against time to be fully fit for the World Cup but he has started the season in fine form.

"I'm starting to feel very comfortable back on the pitch again. I'm calmer now but for a long time I was very nervous about how the ankle would stand up. All I want is for people to stop asking me about the ankle, it's always the same question," added a vexed Vicente.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard

is expected to continue his policy of rotating his squad which could herald a recall for Belletti and Giovanni Van Bronckhorst at right and left back respectively.

Sevilla, the only other team with three wins from three games and who lead the league having scored more goals than their two immediate rivals, have an away trip to Atletico Madrid on Sunday.

"Atletico still haven't started to play as well as they can at home and we hope to exploit that," explained Sevilla winger Antonio Puerta

Puerta was alluding to the fact that Atletico have already proved their ability to delight and frustrate in equal quantities, a factor in their failure to qualify for Europe in recent season.

However, they showed their positive attributes in an outstanding 4-1 win at struggling Athletic Bilbao last weekend.

The question for Atletico coach