

Ireland due
March 15

SPORTS REPORTER

A 19-member Ireland cricket team will arrive in Dhaka on March 15 to play three one-day internationals against Bangladesh.

The Irish, who reached the second stage of the last Cricket World Cup in the Caribbean, beat Bangladesh. They are under the guidance of former West Indies opener Phil Simmons.

All three matches will be played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on March 18, 20 and 22.

The squad: Trent Johnston (captain), Kevin Porterfield, Kyle McCallan, Kevin O'Brien, Andre Botha, Alex Cusack, Reinhardt Strydom, Thinus Fourie, Gary Kidd, Greg Thompson, Eoin Morgan, Paul Stirling, David Langford-Smith, Phil Eaglestone.

Officials: Phil Simmons (coach), Peter Johnston (assistant coach), Gavin Craig (manager) and Mark McDonald (physiotherapist).

Obituary

SPORTS REPORTER

Haji Mohammed Sharif Hossain, father of Bangladesh Sports Writers Association (BSWA) president Sarwar Hossain, died of old age at a local hospital yesterday morning. He was 90.

He left behind five sons, four daughters and a host of relatives to mourn the death.

He was buried at their family graveyard at Chundura village in Narayanganj. His kulkhwani will be held tomorrow after the Maghrib prayers at his Rankin Street residence.

BSWA, Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association and Bangladesh Sports Journalists Community condoled the death and prayed for the salvation of the departed soul.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

The Senior Division Football super and relegation leagues begin today with title contenders and leaders Youngmen's Club Fakirpool facing Dhaka Wanderers at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The Super Six opener will kick off at 4pm.

Agrani Bank meet bottom-table Dipali Juba Sangha in the relegation league at the same time at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur.

The seven bottom teams are vying in the relegation league.

CHESS QUALIFIERS

Twenty-five players shared the lead in the qualifiers for the 34th National Chess Championship with maximum two points. The top nine players of the 11-round Swiss League will reach five automatic qualifiers in the finals.

JABBARTENNIS

Local guy Amol Roy and Japanese player Ayami both won double crown in the Jabbar Memorial tennis tournament at the Engineers Recreation Centre.

Top seed Amol Roy who beat Ranjan Ram in the singles final, paired with the same player to win the doubles final against Dipu Lal and Niranjan Ram.

Ayami, who won the women's singles on Wednesday, paired with Taslima to clinch the doubles victory.

Omar Faruk Sunny emerged the boys' singles (U-16) champion Sheikh Hasibul Haque won the boys' singles (U-14) title.

MINI HANDBALL

Six matches of the KFC-Pizza Hut mini handball (girls) tournament were held on the opening day at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex.

Scholastica won two matches, beating Viquarunnissa Noon School 9-1 and Loreto 12-3, Sunnydale beat Siddiki's 14-2, BIS drew 1-1 with Ishpani, Playpen defeated Radiant 3-0 and Ishpani beat Dhanmondi Tutorial 5-0.

Bhajji's parting swipe

AFP, Sydney



Harbhajan Singh has left Australia with the victorious Indian cricketers with a parting barb, saying he was mentally superior to the world champions in the recent tri-

one-day series, reports said Thursday.

Dubbed in the Australian press as world cricket's most controversial figure, Harbhajan said he had clearly won the battle of the minds after helping India to a 2-0 whitewash of Australia in the best-of-three ODI finals.

He said crowd abuse and sledging from the Australian cricketers had backfired in spectacular fashion.

"I was too mentally tough for the Australians," Harbhajan told Sydney's the Daily Telegraph newspaper.

"I was proud of the way our team played and I believe we have the potential to be the number one

side in the world."

Harbhajan, who had a running battle during the Test and one-day series with Australians Matthew Hayden and Andrew Symonds, said the explosive Australian summer had not affected him.

"What made (Hayden) say all that -- he thinks he is becoming bigger than me and bigger than the game," he told The Sydney Morning Herald, referring to Hayden's "little obnoxious weed" comment aimed at him on radio last week.

"I could have said a lot of things about him but I won't talk about these things in public, we have shown things on the field.

"The best way is to do it out on the ground and we have dominated them, not the other way around.

"We were prepared for any situation or any challenge. We are a very, very proud cricket team. We deserved this. This win takes us to the next level, and we have shown the world what we are capable of.

"We have always given Australia a tough time, a very hard time. We never give them an easy sort of win, we're the only team that does really

well against Australia.

"I don't really feel the pressure. I just take it the way things come and I try to stay very cool. What people were saying about me -- I am not here to make friends, and I can't play soft."

Skipper M.S. Dhoni said his team and Harbhajan, in particular, had been vilified and unfairly targeted in Australia.

"He (Harbhajan) became a Michael Jackson sort of personality," Dhoni said before the team's departure home.

"I don't know what will happen to the Australian media without Bhajji (Harbhajan). He was always there on the front page.

"The more he was taken into these controversies, the more determined he was to perform, as skipper it's difficult to calm him down, he's an aggressive player and quite expressive on the field.

"But he's the kind of player who fights hard -- that's a quality and that's what character is all about. People might see he might have crossed the barrier but nothing was proved against him."

Murray survives

Tennis

AFP, Dubai

Andy Murray, who caused a great upset by beating world number one Roger Federer, followed it on Wednesday by almost stumbling to defeat to a relative unknown.

The 20-year-old Briton had to survive a jittery final set tie-break before getting through 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5) against Fernando Verdasco, the world number 30 from Spain.

Murray finished looking relieved and emotionally drained, as well as appearing to suffer discomfort in his right knee.

His mobility was reduced from early in the second set, and thereafter he relinquished most of his ambition to attack, relying upon containment and a liberal sprinkling of errors from Verdasco.

"You are relieved when you come through a match you have not played well," Murray admitted. "And it's difficult to explain; especially when you have been 6-2 up in the tie-break and it gets to 6-5."

At that dramatic moment the two men played by far the longest rally of the match -- more than 30 shots -- with Murray eventually luring Verdasco into over-hitting.

"I wasn't feeling comfortable. I was swinging at the ball so hard and it was landing halfway up the service box," Murray said with a humourless laugh.

This happened partly because of a strong breeze which made accuracy difficult to achieve and which created conditions totally unlike those in which Murray had

played Federer.

Afterwards Murray claimed that his knee injury was not too serious to be able to play his quarterfinal against Nikolay Davydenko with as good a chance as usual of winning.

"I have been doing a lot of stuff for it," he said. "I don't know if the muscles are a little bit tired but I get it a lot just after a couple of games."

"I get it in 50 per cent of my matches. It's just a bit uncomfortable for a few games. If it was really bad I would have had the trainer on."

He was also asked if this match was the kind of grind which Federer had warned Murray risked by playing too passively behind the baseline and relying on running.

"The problem today was that I was missing it too early in the rallies, shanking a lot of balls, missing returns and not feeling comfortable at all," Murray said.

"The match didn't feel too much of a grind, but it was a difficult match. I didn't play well and I am glad to get through."

Murray now has a chance to capitalise against an opponent, Davydenko, whom he has beaten on the last three occasions.

The fifth-seeded Russian came through with a 6-1, 6-4 victory over Jan Hernych of the Czech Republic.

Two seeds were beaten.

Richard Gasquet, the seventh-seeded Frenchman, lost 6-3, 6-4 to Igor Andreev, the Russian who trains much of the time on Spanish clay courts and who finds the high-bouncing Dubai hard courts to his liking.

Andreev made a great start, taking the first three games after Gasquet double faulted to drop

serve, and consolidating the advantage throughout the first set.

Both men then held serve four times in the second, until Andreev snatched the match-winning break in the penultimate game, again with the help of a Gasquet double fault, this time for 30-all.

Earlier eighth-seeded Czech Tomas Berdych was dismissed 6-2, 7-5 by Spanish left-hander Feliciano Lopez.

Berdych came back from 2-5 to 5-5 in the second set as he strove to avoid a one-sided defeat but found Lopez, who delivered ten aces, in good form and keen for a quarterfinal with his compatriot David Ferrer, the world number four.

Another notable name to make an exit, possibly for the last time, was Fabrice Santoro, the 35-year-old who won an amazing final in 2002 but now was beaten 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) by Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic.

However Santoro weaved enough of his old magic with spins and tactical variations to lead 3-1 in the second set, prompting Djokovic to admit: "I was starting to lose my hair in the second set."

It avenged his loss to Santoro in the Masters Series in Paris in November.

"It was an honour to have played against such a very special player," Djokovic said.

The world number three now plays Andreev, while Rafael Nadal, the French Open champion, takes on Andy Roddick, the former US Open champion in the last quarterfinal.

TOUR OF PAKISTAN
Australia close
to decision

CRICINFO, undated

A decision on whether Australia takes the unlikely step of touring Pakistan could be made as early as next week following a meeting with government officials in Canberra on Wednesday.

Representatives from Cricket Australia, the Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade held talks on the security situation in the country, which was hit by bomb blasts in Lahore on Tuesday.

"It was a comprehensive briefing that adds greatly to the knowledge we and the ACA hold," the Cricket Australia spokesman Peter Young told the Age. "It is likely we will be forming a view on this within the next week."

Australia's players are not keen on the trip and the ACA will not send a representative on any pre-tour visit for the series, which has already been shortened following safety fears after the election on February 18. The Age reported the cricket officials were told the situation had not changed dramatically since the polling day.

An independent security report needs to be made before Australia can choose whether to cancel the abbreviated trip, which is scheduled for March 29 to April 27, and the Pakistan Cricket Board is believed to be softening its stance on switching the contest to a neutral venue. The Australian reported the Australian consulates in Karachi and Lahore, which are cities on the series itinerary, have been closed.

Australia's foreign affairs advice for Pakistan says: "We strongly advise you to reconsider your need to travel to Pakistan at this time due to the very high threat of terrorist attack, sectarian violence and the unpredictable security situation. If you do decide to travel to Pakistan, you should exercise extreme caution. If you are in Pakistan and concerned for your safety, you should consider leaving if it is safe to do so."

Dravid fears
his son most

PTI, Bangalore

It's not Glenn McGrath, Shoaib Akhtar, Courtney Walsh or even Shane Warne whose delivery is more fearsome for the Indian cricket's "Wall", Rahul Dravid, but it is that of his two-year-old son Samit.

David himself told this to BBC's Indian Editor, Sanjeev Srivastava at the popular radio programme "BBC Ek Mulaqat with Rahul" on Thursday.

Talking to Srivastava on how he spends time when he is out of the team, the dependable batsman said, "My son asks me new questions. Sometimes I can't answer his questions. It is very interesting to watch him grow. He is very fascinating to me. My son chants particular lines from a Hindi movie, which he likes so much. But I can't sing, because I don't know singing," he said when Srivastava asked him to sing those lines.

His eyes turned flashy when he talked about his tiny tot. Dravid, who had a busy cricketing schedule, said he found solace, at times, spending time with his son as his wife also travelled sometimes along with him.

The man who keeps vigil on a cricket ball and calculates how to send it to the fence or beyond for a six, however, was not lucky enough to get a glimpse of beautiful girls sitting on stands watching the cricket match.

Real Madrid

FROM PAGE 17

to make it 2-0 after visiting goalkeeper Antonis Nikopolidis could only parry Ballack's shot. Ivory Coast forward Kalou completed the scoring from close range shortly after the break.

"We held the ball well, we were patient and quick when we needed to be," Chelsea coach Avram Grant told a news conference. "I was happy because we played some clever football."

Abahani start

FROM PAGE 17

Manager and former player Satyajit Das Ruppu informed that the sky-blues have retained almost their full squad for the coming second B. League in addition of rising stars Robin and Sony from fellow professional league clubs Farshganj and Rahmatganj respectively, who will make the trip to Nepal.

Ruppu added that their Ghanaian forward Awdu Ibrahim will be available within a couple of days and he will bring along another foreign recruit.

Abahani have been drawn in a tough group for the April 20-24 meet involving host team Nepal Police, who reached last year's final in Pakistan, Regar-Tadaz of Tajikistan -- winners of the inaugural President's Cup -- and Pakistan Wapda.



PHOTO: AFP
New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor salutes the home crowd upon reaching his maiden century on Day Two of the first Test against England at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday.

Eng rocked by late strikes

FROM PAGE 17

from part-time spinner Kevin Pietersen.

Vettori was in sight of his third Test century when he tried to guide a ball from Paul Collingwood through the gully but was snapped up by Andrew Strauss, the lone slip.

Kyle Mills carried New Zealand past the 450 mark and finished unbeaten on 25 as the New Zealand innings finished with Jeetan Patel and Chris Martin dismissed by Ryan Sidebottom in consecutive balls.

Sidebottom, who will now start the New Zealand second innings sitting on a hat-trick finished with four for 90 while Collingwood took two for 42.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the second day of the first Test between New Zealand and England at Seddon Park in Hamilton on Thursday:
NEW ZEALAND: First innings (overnight 282-6)

Howe c Collingwood b Panesar	92
Bell c Cook b Harmison	19
Fleming c Cook b Sidebottom	41
Sinclair c & b Collingwood	8
Taylor c & b Pietersen	120
Oram c Cook b Hoggard	10
McCullum c Ambrose b Sidebottom	51

Vettori c Strauss b Collingwood	88			
Mills not out	25			
Patel C Strauss b Sidebottom	5			
Martin b Sidebottom	0			
Extras: (b-1, lb-6, w-1, nb-3)	11			
Total: (All out in 138.3 overs)	470			
Fall of wickets: 1-44, 2-108, 3-129, 4-176, 5-191, 6-277, 7-425, 8-451, 9-470				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Sidebottom	34.3	8	90	4
Hoggard	26	2	122	1
Harmison	23	3	97	1
Panesar	37	10	101	1
Collingwood	15	2	42	2
Pietersen	3	1	11	1

ENGLAND: First innings

Cook c sub (Horsley) b Martin	38
Vaughan not out	44
Hoggard c Fleming b Martin	2
Strauss not out	1
Extras: (nb-2)	2
Total: (For 2 wks in 41 overs)	87
Fall of wickets: 1-84, 2-86	

To bat: Pietersen, Bell, Collingwood, Ambrose, Sidebottom, Harmison, Panesar

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Martin	12	4	27	2
Mills	6	2	17	0
Patel	9	2	23	0
Oram	4	0	9	0
Vettori	10	5	11	0

Cairns warns ICC

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

Former New Zealand great Chris Cairns has warned the cricket establishment it faces a mass exodus of leading players if it does not accept the rebel Indian Cricket League (ICL).

Cairns, one of the world's leading all-rounders and one of only six players to achieve the 200 wickets, 3,000 runs double, told bigstarcricket.com that players cannot afford to ignore the lucrative salaries on offer.

"The ICC are going to have to fix this," Cairns said, calling for players to be able to play in the ICL and

not be banned.

Cairns is one of several New Zealanders to sign with the rebel league.

Most signed after retiring from international cricket, although the numbers do include Shane Bond, Lou Vincent and Craig McMillan.

But Cairns said it was not just a New Zealand problem.

"West Indies will have this problem too, any country in fact where players are not that well remunerated."

Cairns said if there was a 10 or 20 percent discrepancy between ICL earnings and remaining on a New Zealand cricketer's salary then players would consider staying home.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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Solution time: 21 mins.	ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE
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