

Ex-Pak bowler passes away

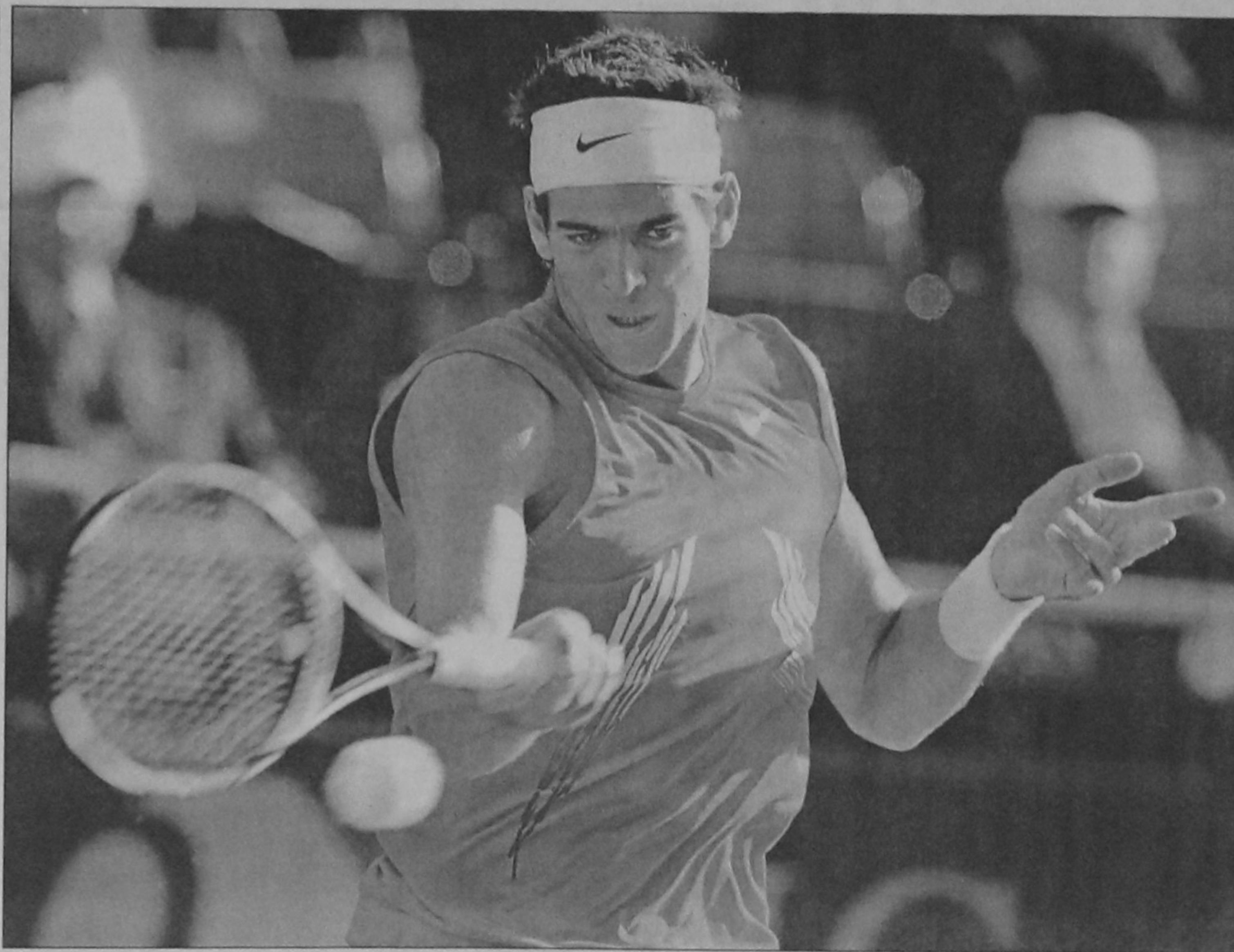
CRICINFO, undated

Former Pakistan off-spinner Zulfiqar Ahmed, 81, has died of cardiac arrest in Lahore.

Ahmed was the brother-in-law of Abdul Hafeez Kardar, Pakistan's first captain, and played nine Tests for his country between 1952 and 1956.

He also went on the tour to England in 1954 and played in the home series against New Zealand in 1955-56 and Australia in 1956-57.

Ahmed is survived by his wife and three daughters.



Juan Martin Del Potro of Argentina plays a forehand against Richard Gasquet of France in the semifinals of the Japan Open in Tokyo yesterday.

Del Potro-Berdych showdown

Tennis

AFP, Tokyo

Argentina's Juan Martin Del Potro continued his stunning run of form Saturday to set up a showdown against Tomas Berdych in the final of the Japan Open.

The Argentinian fifth seed, fresh from upsetting defending champion David Ferrer of Spain in the quarter-finals, beat Richard Gasquet 6-3, 4-6, 7-5 to claim his 29th win in his past 30 matches.

Berdych, the ninth seed from the Czech Republic, staged a great comeback from 0-3 down in the final set to beat second seed Andy Roddick of the United States 6-7, 7-5, 7-6.

The women's final will be played between top seed Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark and fifth seed Kaia Kanepi of Estonia.

Wozniacki beat Jarmila Gajdosova of Slovakia 6-4, 6-3, while Kanepi defeated eighth seed Aleksandra Wozniak of Canada 6-4, 6-4.

"He (Gasquet) served very well in the second and third sets. He has

a good backhand and he made a lot of slices. I don't like it," said the 20-year-old Del Potro.

"But I served well, too, when I needed it. I was a little lucky but I played good."

After losing the first set with three breaks against his serve, Gasquet hit firm in the second set with a single break enough to level the match.

Gasquet, the fourth seed, had the first chance to break in the final set, only to see Del Potro hit a forehand volley winner.

The Frenchman had another chance in the 11th game, when Del Potro hit a couple of double faults to trail 15-40 but the Argentinian held on.

When Del Potro was asked what he was thinking in the 11th game, he said: "I just tried to keep going because if I keep trying, I would have a chance to break him. That's what happened in the final game."

Gasquet said: "In the first set he was better than me. I served too bad. He broke me in the first game so it was not good for my confidence."

"But I was better than him in the second set, for sure, and in the

third, I had one break point at 1-1 and break points at 5-5. I was a little bit (tired) and frustrated after losing at 5-5."

"He served really well in the third set. He is confident after beating Ferrer," added Gasquet, ranked 13th in the world.

In the other semi-final, Berdych stormed back from 0-3 and 2-5 down in the final set before winning the tie-breaker.

"5-2 looks really not good but it was only one break, so I was just trying to stay on my serve. I just tried to make a break, because I made two times in the second set," said Berdych, 23.

As for the final against Del Potro, he said: "He has a great season, his summer was great, he won four tournaments in a row. I think the chances are even. I will bring my best game and hopefully I can bring the title home."

Roddick said: "He (Berdych) plays a big game. I think the surface suits him pretty well because he hits hard and flat. He did everything pretty well, he served pretty well, so nothing really surprised me about the way he played."

Venue switch for England Swann, Shah included

AFP, London/New Delhi

The venue for the fourth one-day international between India and England has been changed, the Indian cricket board said on Wednesday.

The day-night match would now be played in Bangalore instead of Jamshedpur in eastern India, Indian board chief executive Ratnakar Shetty told AFP.

The decision was taken after the cricket association in Jamshedpur said they were unable to host the match as they did not get a response from Tata Steel who own and maintain the Keenan Stadium, he said.

The stadium had come under the scanner after an unruly crowd threatened to disrupt a one-dayer between India and the West Indies in 2002.

It was not awarded a one-dayer till 2005 when Pakistan played a game there. It last hosted a match in 2006 when England beat the hosts by five wickets.

Earlier, Owais Shah and Graeme Swann have been named in England's 15-man squad for the forthcoming two-Test tour of India. Middlesex star Shah picked Young Cricketer of the Year Ravi Bopara to the last batting spot after a prolific campaign.

Uncapped Nottinghamshire spinner Swann has been chosen to back up Monty Panesar and Sussex wicketkeeper Matt Prior has also been recalled.

With former captain Michael Vaughan not considered due to a lack of form, Shah will get the chance to fight for a third Test cap. His debut came in India two years ago when he stepped in for the ill Alastair Cook and struck an imperious 88 in the series-levelling victory in Mumbai.

SQUAD

Kevin Pietersen (captain), Tim Ambrose, James Anderson, Ian Bell, Stuart Broad, Paul Collingwood, Alastair Cook, Andrew Flintoff, Steve Harmison, Monty Panesar, Matt Prior, Owais Shah, Ryan Sidebottom, Andrew Strauss, Graeme Swann.

More power

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The ICC also decided to retain the free-hit rule as well as the mandatory changing of the ball at the start of the 35th over of an innings.

The interval rule, implemented in June, which allowed the umpires to reduce the length of time between innings in an ODI, if the innings of the side batting first is delayed or interrupted, was also retained.

"In the event of time being lost [playing time lost less any extra time provided] up to and including 60 minutes in aggregate, the length of the interval shall be reduced from 45 to 30 minutes. In the event of more than 60 minutes being lost in aggregate, the duration of the interval shall be agreed mutually by the umpires and both captains subject to no interval being of more than 30 minutes' duration or less than 10 minutes' duration. In the event of disagreement, the length of the interval shall be determined by the match referee."

Umpires can now consult the third umpire on whether or not a catch was taken cleanly. "Following such consultation, the final decision will be made and given by the bowler's-end umpire. Should the bowler's-end umpire still not be able to decide, a not-out decision shall be given."

The greatest rivalry

Cricket

AFP, Hyderabad

It's billed as the mother of all cricket battles, greater than the Ashes for many Australians and bigger than any Pakistan rivalry in the eyes of many Indians.

The four-Test series between India and world champions Australia for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy starting in Bangalore on October 9 has caught the imagination of the cricket world like never before.

Batting superstar Sachin Tendulkar justifies the media hype before the series as an indication of how important matches against Australia have become for the cricket-mad public in both countries.

"We have played some of our best cricket against Australia," says Tendulkar, who is just 77 runs away from surpassing Brian Lara as Test cricket's leading scorer.

"It is because of the competitive nature of cricket that an India-Australia series is bigger than the one against Pakistan."

The series prize, named after two distinguished former captains and batting greats, Allan Border of Australia and Sunil Gavaskar of India, has provided fascinating

cricket since its inception in 1996.

Of the 22 Tests played for the Trophy, Australia have won 10 and India eight, with four draws. The last 15 Tests have seen Australia hold a narrow 6-5 advantage.

The upcoming contests follow an ill-tempered, but enthralling, four-match series in Australia earlier this year that the hosts won 2-1 amid deteriorating relations between the two sides.

Anil Kumble's Indians, already seething at umpiring errors in the acrimonious second Test in Sydney, almost abandoned the tour when all-rounder Andrew Symonds levelled racial abuse charges against spinner Harbhajan Singh.

When officials brokered a compromise, the Indians hit back with a brilliant win in the next Test in Perth, often regarded as a no-hope venue for touring teams due to its fast wicket.

India are the only team to win a Test match on Australian soil since January 2003, and they have done it twice following the Adelaide win by Sourav Ganguly's men in 2004.

Australia regarded India as the final frontier after Mark Taylor's tourists lost 1-0 here in 1996 and 2-1 in 1998 and Steve Waugh's team went down 2-1 in a thrilling series in 2001.

All seemed lost for India when Waugh's men wrapped up the first Test in Mumbai in three days and

made the hosts follow on 274 runs behind in the second match in Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

India, however, conjured a remarkable fightback on the back of Venkatesh Laxman's extraordinary 281 to win the Kolkata Test by 171 runs and then clinched the series with a two-wicket hum-dinger in Chennai.

Australia finally conquered the Indian frontier under Adam Gilchrist in 2004 as injured captain Ricky Ponting watched from the sidelines, but not before the Indians took the final Test in Mumbai on a treacherous wicket.

"Given India and Australia are the powerbrokers of contemporary cricket it is appropriate they provide the game's most competitive and compelling Test match cricket," veteran Australian journalist Mike Coward told AFP.

"The rivalry between these two superpowers now generates an intensity and excitement once reserved for Ashes and Indo-Pakistan matches."

Australia, who played just one Test series in India between 1980 and 1995 -- in 1986 which featured only the second Test in history in Madras (Chennai) -- now can't wait to get to India.

The upcoming series will be their fifth on Indian soil in the last 12 years.

Pace, not spin

Cricket

AFP, Hyderabad

Banish the thought that Australia's untested spin attack would hand India a major advantage ahead of the highly-anticipated Test series starting next week.

Contrary to popular belief, it's the pace, rather than spin, that has clinched wins for touring teams in India in recent years on dry, dusty wickets that are supposed to favour slow bowlers.

The retirements of the legendary Shane Warne and fellow wrist spinner Stuart McGill in quick succession have left the world's number one side short of quality spin options.

Ricky Ponting's tourists will have to pick between two debu-

tants, 36-year-old leg-spinner Bryce McGain and off-spinner Jason Krejza, 25, for the series opener in Bangalore from October 9.

Part-time left-arter Michael Clarke is the third spinning option, having grabbed an astonishing six wickets for nine runs on a vicious Wankhede stadium turner in Mumbai on Australia's last tour of India in 2004.

"Whether they can win is problematic, given the inexperience of this team in Indian conditions and the paucity of slow bowlers, post Warne," veteran Australian cricket writer Mike Coward told AFP.

The good news, however, for the tourists is their formidable pace attack in the accomplished Brett Lee, Stuart Clark and left-arter Mitchell Johnson, besides two promising rookies in Doug Bollinger and Peter Siddle.

In 2004, it was the Australian fast bowlers who secured a 2-1 win for the tourists, their first series win on Indian soil in 35 years.

Jason Gillespie led the pace battery with 20 wickets in four Tests, followed by Glenn McGrath (14) and Michael Kasproutz (nine), although Warne's 14 wickets proved invaluable.

South Africa, who played the most recent Test series in India in March, forced a 1-1 draw on the back of a potent new ball performance by Dale Steyn (15 wickets), Makhaya Ntini (10) and Morne Morkel (eight).

When England drew 1-1 in India in 2006, five of the six leading wicket-takers in the series were seamers with Matthew Hoggard (13 wickets) and Andrew Flintoff (11) bolstering the tourists' attack.

Even the home team's seamers prospered in that series as Munaf Patel, Shanthakumaran Sreesanth and Irfan Pathan finished among the top six behind spin king and current captain Anil Kumble's tally of 16 wickets.

Former India great and pace spearhead Kapil Dev, whose career tally of 434 wickets included 219 on home soil, said the quicks had a major role to play in Indian conditions.

"Good fast bowlers and seamers have always done well in India," Dev told AFP. "It moves around in the morning and reverse swing with the old ball can be very deadly."

Recent results at the venues chosen for the four-Test series will bring smiles on Australian faces.

India have not won a Test at Bangalore's Chinnaswamy stadium since beating New Zealand in 1995. The hosts lost to Australia twice there in 1998 and 2004, were beaten by South Africa in 2000 and by Pakistan in 2005.

The wicket at Mohali, venue of the second Test, was traditionally provided bounce where India has managed just two wins of the seven matches played there.

Anil Kumble's men will fancy their chances in the third Test at the renovated Ferozeshah Kotla in New Delhi where the hosts have won all their last seven matches.

The fourth and final Test will be played at the newly-built stadium on the outskirts of Nagpur, with the curator promising "a feast for the Indian spinners."

ICC to keep series fair

Cricket

AFP, Hyderabad

Cricket's governing body on Wednesday took pre-emptive steps to ensure the upcoming Test series between India and Australia is free from acrimony and bitterness.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) kept umpires Steve Bucknor and Mark Benson off the roster for the eagerly awaited four-match series starting in Bangalore on October 9.

The duo officiated in the ill-tempered Sydney Test between the two nations earlier this year that almost saw India pulling out of the series after a string of controversial decisions.

An angry India agreed to continue the tour only after the ICC pacified them by standing down West Indian Bucknor from the subsequent Perth Test, which he was due to officiate.

England's Benson had not been named for the rest of the series.

Rudi Koertzen of South Africa and Asad Rauf of Pakistan will umpire the first two Tests in Bangalore and Mohali, while New Zealand's Billy Bowden will join Pakistani Aleem Dar for the other two in New Delhi and Nagpur.

Former England batsman Chris Broad will be the match referee for the entire series, which ends on November 10.

The Sydney Test ended a pre-series agreement that the fielder's word will be taken for disputed catches and Australian captain Ricky Ponting was unsure it will be in place for the current tour.

"I will have a think about it over the next couple of days and see if I think it is the right idea to bring it up again," Ponting, in Hyderabad for the four-day tour opener from Thursday, said.

He stressed that Indian captain Anil Kumble had ended the agreement after Sydney and could

oppose it again.

"Anil was the one who did not want that after the Sydney Test for one reason or the other," the Australian skipper said.

"To me it's like flogging a dead horse, to tell the truth. I go to every referee meeting before a series wanting to play the game like that, but almost every other captain in the world is not interested."

Ponting hoped a chat with Kumble at the referee's traditional pre-series meeting in Bangalore would ensure the Tests were played in the right spirit.

"We will have a chat and it's important to us Australians to play the game in the right spirit and embrace the culture," he said.

"Anyway, we did meet during the middle of the last series before the Perth Test and spoke a lot about the way we should play in the remaining Test matches there."

"We know lots will be made in the media about the apparent tension between the two sides. But even last summer, the tension was not as high as it was made out to be."

Australia, the world's number one side, are hoping to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy they won by identical 2-1 margins in the last two series in 2004 and earlier this year.

Ponting happy

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FROM PAGE 17 full faith in the security provided to the team.

"We have a security expert with us and he is doing his job. The team has full faith in our cricket board and the Australian Cricketers Association. We know they are taking the right decisions," said Clarke.

The Australians will meet an Indian Board President's team in a four-day practice match starting here on Thursday.

The Bangalore Test will be followed by back-to-back matches in Mohali, New Delhi and Nagpur. Australia cancelled a scheduled Test tour of Pakistan in March due to security concerns and were also one of the teams that forced the Champions Trophy there to be delayed by a year.

problem with it. But I see it's a decision of a cricketer for their financial future," he continued.

He however was excited with the experience of IPL and believed that more Bangladeshi players have the ability to play in that competition.

"I think IPL for me was a fantastic experience, though I was only there for a couple of weeks. To try and be in the same changing room with some of the greats of the game, like (Muttiah) Muralidaran, (Makhaya) Ntini, (Matthew) Hayden and (Micheal) Hussey.

Oram's final comment on the Bangladesh's batting was absolutely on the spot: "Tamim (Iqbal) is a very good player. I think Bangladesh has some very exciting players. They showed in New Zealand that they could play all the shots. They had us under pressure a number of times. Tamim, (Zunaid) Siddiqui, (Mohammad) Ashraf at the top of the order and Afab... he's gone now, hasn't he? They are all exciting players, the guys play all the shots, more shots than us, but may be too many shots."

They play too many

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"We have lot of New Zealanders going there as well. Guys who have retired like (Chris) Cairns and the other guys like (Shane) Bond and (Lou) Vincent. I think if you have an offer and financially it is very secured in the future, I have no problem with that," he responded.

Oram was also not sure about how much damage it has done for Bangladesh cricket following the sudden departures.

"I have no idea. I saw very less of the players who have left for ICL, but I am not sure if they were around the Bangladesh first eleven or how close they were."

"All I know is that we have lost a number of players, who were very good for us and were part of our large squad, but as I said these things happen. I understand them and I think it is just a part of the current landscape of international cricket," he said.

"It's their decision and they know the consequences. The media or ICC whoever want to label them as rebel I don't have any

Hussey, Chawla

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resistance with a googly delivered from round the stumps. He completed his five-for with another googly, which won him an lbw verdict even though the ball struck Peter Siddle outside the line of off stump. The Australians were struggling at 218 for 9 but Hussey and Clark slowly took them out of trouble.

The Indians too got off to a shaky start. Aakash Chopra couldn't escape a shooter from Clark and S Badrinath edged an attempted upper cut. The pitch had begun to change character in the last session. Clark welcomed Badrinath with a nasty lifter from short of a length after Chopra was done in by the lack of bounce from the same spot. Badrinath, who was guilty of going into a shell in his recent failures, started promisingly. He was tested with bouncers and full deliveries but he coped well and even hit a pleasing square drive and a straight drive for fours. However, he fell trying to guide a Lee lifter over slips.

Jaffer and Yuvraj too were beaten a few times but they managed to get over that phase by playing as close to the body as possible. Both resisted their natural urge to drive and accumulated a majority of their runs behind square. Though both helped themselves to couple of boundaries against Michael Clarke they were patient against Krejza. It was, after all, the mantra that allowed the Australians to get out of jail in the morning.

New Tigers

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conditions and definitely spinners will get advantage in this condition. But everything will depend on how good we bat," he observed.

Like his other teammates, Razzak, who got the chance in IPL, was not ready to focus too much on the players who already left them to join Indian Cricket League (ICL).

"It's their own decisions. I think it's better to think of those who are with us now," he said.

Ganguly back

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kept out of the Rest of India team for the Irani Trophy match.

The two Test rookies in the team for the first two Tests are Tamil Nadu middle-order batsman Subramaniam Badrinath and Haryana leg-spinner Amit Mishra who got a recall into the Test team after five years.

Badrinath, 28, a prolific run-getter in domestic competitions, made his one-day international debut in Sri Lanka recently as a replacement for an injured Tendulkar and Mishra has so far played just three ODIs and that too in 2003.

Badrinath and Mishra replace batsman Rohit Sharma and off-spinner Pragnan Ojha.

Wicketkeeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni returned to the side after choosing to opt out of the Sri Lanka tour due to fatigue.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Includes a solution time of 24 mins and a solution grid at the bottom.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a 10x10 grid of letters and numbers for solving.

CRYPTOQUIP
GEJ XYCEJYTPK CVTPQN
EUEJIC TP KTC JZGJTLZJXVEJ.
T QPZS X DNDMTCV SKE
SEWMU WCZ YTQTPLE CEUX.
Saturday's Cryptoquip: WHEN LEATHERWORKERS SING, I THINK THEY'RE PROBABLY SUPER AT BELTING OUT TUNES.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals I