

Srikkanth has two targets

CRICINFO, undated

Kris Srikkanth, the chairman of India's national cricket selectors, has outlined two important targets for the team...

"I believe India are the best-balanced side, in batting and bowling, among the top three teams," Srikkanth told the Hindu.

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Having lost the final two Tests in India, Australia recovered to win both matches of the home series against New Zealand...

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SA's eyes on big prize

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South Africa can eclipse Australia as the leading Test-playing nation with victory in the third and final Test which begins in Sydney on Saturday.

The visitors took a 2-0 series lead with a nine-wicket triumph at the MCG and are looking to inflict Australia's first home whitewash in 122 years.

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Elbow will keep Smith out ODIs

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Graeme Smith, the South Africa captain, will miss this month's one-day series against Australia because of an ongoing elbow injury...

"We're still very positive and very sure that with some of these younger guys coming on that in a few years time we can get back up there and be dominating world cricket once again."

Referring to the series against England when they lost the final Test at The Oval to make their winning margin 2-1, he said: "We don't want to make the same mistakes again, and this third Test is obviously important for the rest of the summer."

"We still have three Tests to play against them at home and to win this Test will obviously keep the momentum with us."

Prince insists, however, that the world number one ranking is not on their minds and said: "We leave the rankings to the people responsible for them and we will just concentrate on what goes on on the field."

Australia have a fine record against the South Africans at the Sydney Cricket Ground, winning seven and losing just one of the 10 matches between the teams played there since 1910.

Prince and Jacques Kallis both scored centuries in the most recent encounter in January 2006, but Australia skipper Ricky Ponting made hundreds in both innings as his side won by eight wickets.

Sarwan's plea

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West Indies batsman Ramnaresh Sarwan has said the youngsters in the squad need to improve their performances if they are to be a permanent feature.

"We're the most experienced and it's important we try to give the young players as much support as we can but it's important for them to learn as well," the former captain said.

"It's a great chance for them to cement a place in the team and that should be the biggest goal for them, striving to be better players. We've already spoken to them, but it's a matter of them seizing the opportunity."

Sarwan mentioned no names but at least nine of the 15-man squad, currently touring New Zealand, are playing for their immediate, some for their long-term, futures.

Sewnarine Chattergoon has yet to put together a significant innings since introduced as the latest in the long line of opening batsman last season in the home series against Sri Lanka and Australia this year.

Xavier Marshall is more likely to be retained for the forthcoming series against England in the Caribbean, either as Gayle's opening partner or separating Sarwan and Shivnarine Chanderpaul in the middle order.

But runs in the ongoing ODI series against New Zealand will boost his confidence.

Shawn Findlay who, given his modest record for Jamaica, was a surprise choice when included in the ODI series against Australia, is an electric

Lee out of SA tour

CRICINFO, undated

Brett Lee will miss the tour to South Africa while Australia hope to have Andrew Symonds back during the one-day international campaign over the next six weeks.

Symonds had knee surgery on Wednesday while Lee is expected to have an operation on his left foot and ankle on Saturday.

Lee will miss up to 10 weeks, ruling him out of the South Africa trip which starts in February, and could come back during the Indian Premier League in April. Now, 32, Lee has set his sights on regaining his spot for the Ashes.

"He doesn't have any intention of going to South Africa," Lee's manager Neil Maxwell told AAP. "He'll be getting everything right, just clearing up that floating bone in the ankle and letting the hot spot in his foot heal."

Lee and Symonds limped out of the second Test defeat to South Africa on Tuesday, which led to Australia's first series loss in 16 years.

Symonds felt pain in his knee during the opening match in Perth and is recovering from arthroscopic surgery.

"Although there were some minor signs of wearing, the main problem was loose fragments of cartilage that were jamming in the joint, which were removed," the team doctor Trefor James said.

Tigers, SL

CRICINFO, undated

When asked about new plans on how to deal with just-arrived spinner Ajantha Mendis, Ashraful said:

"I'm sure it'll be the same with Haydos. There's no point trying to forecast these things. If you, as a batsman, are trying to forecast it, you're not going out there with the clarity of mind you need to succeed."

"We speak pretty much every day, and I swear that he has not mentioned anything to me about it, or what's got on his mind in terms of playing on. He plays things pretty close to his chest about these kinds of issues, but I would be surprised if he is spending his days planning how he will leave the game. It could be next week, next year or two years. But when the moment comes, he will know."

Not since The Oval in 2005 has Hayden faced such a pivotal Test. In the very match

'I'm backing Hayden'

CRICINFO, undated

Australia surrendered the Ashes, Hayden saved his career with a scratchy, attritional century that triggered two of the best years of his career.

Hayden's struggles this season have been well documented, and another set of failures in Sydney could well force the selectors' hands, particularly with Phil Jacques nearing a comeback. A large score, on the other hand, might convince both the opener and chairman of selectors Andrew Hilditch that Australian cricket would be best served by him playing through the tour of South Africa and the Ashes.

Either way, the importance of the Sydney Test cannot easily be overstated.

Langer, more than most, sympathises with Hayden's plight. The diminutive opener found himself in the crosshairs of spectators and the media on more than one occasion, and weathered numerous calls for his head. But as dire as Hayden's summer has been, Langer believes a turnaround is imminent.

And while many are predicting Sydney will prove Hayden's swansong, Langer feels his old partner might not yet be ready to turn in his badge and service revolver.

"I just keep sensing that he will peel off a magnificent century sometime soon," he said. "I've watched him as closely as anyone else, and I could see in his body language in Perth that he wanted it a bit too much and was probably trying too hard to force it. But in Melbourne he looked much more relaxed, and he looked the goods while he was out there."

"It is the real test of a cricketer how they pull through after a lean trot. I remember watching Steve Waugh do that at the

Ganguly

CRICINFO, undated

year, India has played a lot of cricket at home," Ganguly told NDTV.

Ganguly, who retired from international cricket after the series against Australia in November, said it would be difficult for India to replace great players like Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid when they decide to retire.

"It will take a lot of time to replace the Tendulkars, Dravids, Kumbles and Laxmans. It has taken a period of time for what they have achieved," said Ganguly who ended his career with a Test aggregate of 7212 in 113 matches for an average of 42.17.

A year of decay

CRICINFO, undated

A year that began with a craven victory ended in heavy defeat. All the signs of decay detected during the acrimonious SCG Test match a year ago were confirmed as the season unfolded.

At first, Australia's outdated custom of putting a halo around their captain prevented widespread discussion of his performance but as months passed it became a legitimate topic of debate. Ricky Ponting was at his worst in that match, a fiery figure pushed along by senior players, complaining about opponents, upsetting visiting journalists, disdaining a dignified counterpart and grizzling about former captains critical of his declaration.

Anil Kumble said only one team had been playing in the spirit of the game and a nation reeled. Past players, punters and politicians joined the fray, polls were taken, foreign ministers consulted, and all because of a stray word and years of resentment. On both sides a hundred wounds were opened. It was madness.

The rest was inevitable. Of course the case was lost. As soon as a legally trained person reviewed the evidence, the outcome was certain. During the match I tried to convince Cricket Australia officials a conviction for a parking ticket could not be secured on the available evidence but nobody's ears were working.

ABC, Channel 9 and the umpires heard nothing so it was one man's word against another. Moreover Australia had broken the Mumbai Pact by starting the exchange that led to the rage. Not much of a package to present. Australia persisted anyhow and a visiting country, a nation patronised for 400 years, responded angrily.

India were not going to cop it any more. How did Australia not anticipate that? As was obvious from the outset, the bitterness turned an immature and irritating opponent into a folk hero. Opinions can vary about the rights and wrongs but it was a foolish undertaking. None of the Australians involved emerged unscathed. The Australians were shaken by the outcry. Surrounded by backslappers and propagandists, they had been unaware of

any hostile sentiment. Adam Gilchrist retired soon afterwards and then accused Sachin Tendulkar of changing his story. Others became disillusioned, a mood that proved hard to shake.

Meanwhile other issues arose as players rushed to sign lucrative contracts to play in the IPL. Some complained about the auction but it is possible to buy Picassos and houses on the hammer; it is just a way of determined market value. Cricketers ought not to be so daunt. Later England fretted about Stanford's excesses and so lost the million-dollar math. The IPL took a toll on older players and advanced the careers of numerous youngsters.

Some of the older Australians signed for the rebel T20 league organised by a television mogul. Afterward they were prevented from playing state cricket or even coaching official teams. The BCCI paid the piper and called the tune. Cricket Australia's capitulation was matched only by New Zealand's. Nor did the players' union protect its own. The ICL players are not renegades but professional cricketers and the game has no right to close its doors on them. Packer went to court on the principle of freedom of labour and the ICL ought to follow in his footsteps.

Thanks to abysmal umpiring India lost that match and almost went home. Happily tempers cooled. The Indians had the last laugh, winning in Perth, taking the one-day series and hammering the Australians on subcontinent soil. Along the way they played some scintillating cricket. It is a new country whose players nowadays emerge from the same tough back streets that produced Ponting and company. Alone among the cricketing nations Australia never had a colonial mindset, or played the game by English rules. Quite the opposite. It took a long time but eventually India embraced the same emancipation. They did not add to their charms but it did make them harder to beat.

Australia have not beaten a strong side since. India prevailed in Perth and held their own in Adelaide. Perhaps the Australians were subdued but Virender Sehwag was back and Matthew Hayden was missing. Hayden's lean spells have coincided with Australia's bad trots. Cause or effect? It is quite

something to field an opening batsman capable of intimidating new-ball bowlers. After Sydney, though, the senior players fell back. Andrew Symonds became distracted, Brett Lee lost form, Hayden endured injuries and the team did not recover its rhythm. In hindsight Sydney can be understood only as the last desperate struggle of a falling champion.

Ponting and company easily beat the second division sides like West Indies and New Zealand but the bowling was too weak to trouble powerful batting orders. Gradually the side began fray at the edges. The veterans were torn between lashing out and sitting tight. Some players did progress, notably Simon Katich, Brad Haddin, Peter Siddle and Mitchell Johnson, but momentum was lost and the team lacked belief and penetration. Frustrated by injuries, the selectors became flustered and started neglecting the basics that Australia usually applies better than any rival. Cameron White played as a bowler, specialists were ignored, wounded players retained. Elsewhere dubious appointments were made and contracts were blithely extended. Desperation took hold.

Australia have forgotten how to win. As much was evident in the absurd tactics pursued in Nagpur and in the equally ill-advised response to criticism from retired players. As much could be told from the failure to press in Perth and Melbourne. And yet all is not lost. Ponting's team has been good enough to get into powerful positions. And it still has many fine cricketers in its ranks, not least Michael Clarke and Michael Hussey. Complacent in January the team has become tentative. It's about time the selectors and captain started playing Australian cricket again, forcing the pace, erring on the side of aggression, choosing heavyweights regardless of age. Bad luck and injuries stalk pessimistic sides. Ponting needs to put his annus horribilis behind him and start 2009 with a glint in his eye. He needs to start playing backyard cricket with backyard cricketers, but without the foolishness. It's not needed. Graeme Smith has proved that.

(Peter Roebuck wrote this on the Sydney Morning Herald website).

Football's

FROM PAGE 17

"Football needs big money. We are not going to go for constructions but we need fund and support for running training programmes and increase coaching staff. We have the plans but can't get forward due to lack of fund," said Salahuddin, whose executive committee has yet to show any political affiliation.

But Salahuddin has an advantage, which he can try to use for the sake of football. As a footballer, he spent his glory days at Abahani, whose founder Sheikh Kamal was the brother of Grand Alliance leader and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina.

Salahuddin is like a family member to Sheikh Hasina, who is expected to be the next Prime Minister of the country, and this could turn into a beacon for football.

"I will go to her (Hasina) and beg the government's assistance for football. I believe she will not turn me down. I also believe that the new government will not only be football-friendly but also will inspire sports."

Sylhet's

FROM PAGE 17

good start to the campaign. BRIEF SCORES

KHULNA: 125 all out in 33 overs (Farid 28\*, Sadat 23, Amit 19; Nazmul 3-31, Taposh 3-15).

SYLHET: 128-1 in 11.4 overs (Saikat 51\*, Mithun 48\*). Result: Sylhet won by nine wickets.

DHAKA: 173 all out in 47.2 overs (Marshall 49, Riyad 30; Rezaul 4-25, Sajjad 2-21).

CHITTAGONG: 174-5 in 45.3 overs (Nafis 57, Rezaul 49; Azim 1-32, Rezaul 1-36). Result: Chittagong won by five wickets.

RAJSHAH: 144 all out in 39.1 overs (Anisur 37, Hamdul 24; Rony 3-26, Arafat 2-15).

BARISAL: 145-8 in 48.3 overs (Nasir 26, Bashar 23; Shuvo 4-23). Result: Barisal won by two wickets.

Dhoni's security upped

CRICINFO, undated

question from waiting reporters. He raised his thumb indicating that everything was okay before driving back to his residence at Mecon Colony, just a kilometre away. Union Minister Subodh Kant Sahay joined midway through the meeting.

Earlier in the day, speaking about the first letter, Pradhan said police suspected it to be a job of "local criminals". The "letter originated locally from a colony which is very much inside Ranchi and not very far from where Dhoni lives".

He said, "The perceived threat from the underworld gangs is for the moment ruled

Johnson

CRICINFO, undated

fans wished him at the airport here.

His brother-in-law, Goutam Gupta, drove down the car to the airport with the security personnel escorting it. Keeping the security concerns in mind, the police did not disclose Dhoni's destination.

"Dhoni's tour programme was previously planned, but we don't know where he is going," said a senior police officer in the backdrop of one Taslim's extortion letters sent to Dhoni's family.

For the first time the administration deployed security personnel at Dhoni's residence as per the requirement under 'Z' category security.

Johnson

CRICINFO, undated

header after meeting a centre by Felix. It was the eighth goal for Idris, who joined Sheikh Russel's Alfaz Ahmed as joint top-scorer.

The celebration of giant-killers Rahmatganj, who have beaten Abahani and Mohammedan so far, did not last long as Johnson restored the Farashganj lead in the 88th minute, putting a cracking shot into the back of the net inside from the area after a solo run from mid-pitch.

The Nigerian was on target again on the stroke of final whistle, tapping the ball in after Ali fumbled on a harmless-looking lob by Dominic.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS 1 Owned 39 Sump-least 41 Elevator alternative 43 Thee 44 Coral structure 46 Dance in 3/4 time 50 Harmonization 51 Vortex for short 53 -Baba 55 Liberate 56 Swim-method 58 As well 59 Got up hangout 57 Fellows 58 Sicilian offspring 59 Actress 59 Actress 60 Tibetan conclusion 61 Bando of baseball 62 Kvelch 63 Tuscany hood 64 Encountered 65 Hawaiian 66 Facial woe 67 Repose 68 The - 69 United nations where-fores 70 Where to find Macy's in NYC 71 Fuss 72 Egos' mates 73 Catcher in the - 74 Group with needles 75 Oodles 76 Albacore, for one 77 Health resort 78 Thither 79 Negative prefix 80 Squid squirt

CRYPTOQUIP

ASX MSBCA-BCPXC GBBJ UXVA PQMSNVL NYAB ASX JNAGSXV. RCQVANGQHFF QMJNVL "USXCX'M ASX RCFXC?" Saturday's Cryptoquip: TO SEE HOW MUCH STARCHY GRAIN A COUNTRY IS USING, WOULD YOU CALCULATE ITS CONSUMER RICE INDEX? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals W