

Afghans seek Miandad help

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan Great Javed Miandad said Friday that Afghanistan had invited him to help further the country's high-flying cricket team's bid for a World Cup debut.

War-ravaged Afghanistan defied all the odds to chalk up a rapid rise in world cricket, booking their place in April's qualifying tournament in South Africa -- the last qualifying event for the 2011 World Cup.

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh will jointly host the event.

"I have been approached... and since I greatly appreciate their rise in international cricket, I will definitely go there and help them get a place in the World Cup," Miandad told AFP.

Afghanistan won the International Cricket Council (ICC) World League Division Three in Buenos Aires, Argentina last month and alongside Uganda qualified for the last stage of World Cup qualification.

In April's qualifier, Afghanistan and Uganda will join Bermuda, Canada, Denmark, Ireland, Kenya, Namibia, the Netherlands, Oman, Scotland and the United Arab Emirates to battle their way into four slots at the World Cup.

"Pakistan has always supported Afghanistan. Their team practised in Lahore before they went to Argentina and as a Pakistan cricket official I did what I could do to help them," said Miandad.

The former master batsman resigned as director general of the Pakistan Cricket Board late last month.

Cricket-mad Pakistan has spearheaded efforts to help neighbouring Afghanistan develop the sport, providing them with equipment and opportunities to participate in events.

Most of Afghanistan's players learnt the game in Pakistan as refugees.

The ICC made Afghanistan an affiliate member in 2002.

Miandad, who will tour China as cricket ambassador next month, expressed the hope that new countries would continue to widen the sport's reach.

"China, Malaysia, Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Nepal are a few countries who can make big-time cricket, so as a former player I have a duty to help them and I am ready to do that," he said.

India arrive

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year we have to do again. It doesn't really change," Dhoni said.

Dhoni said his team, which plays two Twenty20 matches, a five-ODI series followed by three Tests during the 48-day tour, will have to adapt quickly as it prepares to take on a team that is dangerous as a unit. India has not won a Test series in New Zealand for the past 41 years.

India begin their tour on February 25 with the first of two Twenty20 internationals. They also play five ODIs and three Tests.

Cricket stifling

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Many believe that the latest idea is a political move by a certain quarter rather than a realistic one. If cricket wants to move to the BNS, what alternate venue will they offer to football or athletics? No one can say that.

Also, the cricket officials or the sports ministry have not discussed anything with their football and athletics counterparts prior to announcing their wish.

Salahuddin, however, declined to comment.

"I have heard it but it's too early to talk about it. It has to be a government decision," Salahuddin told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Our focus is now on the Super Cup and we will give more than hundred percent to make this event a success," the BFF chief said of the Tk2-crore competition that begins March 6.

"The Super Cup is a challenge for us to bring back crowds to the game and we are trying to make it as exciting as it can be.

"We also have international commitments this year as two AFC tournaments will be held in Dhaka in May and there will be an international tournament in November. So, we are concentrating on football now, nothing else."

It would be better if the government clears its position as soon as possible on this issue and give the other games a chance to breathe.

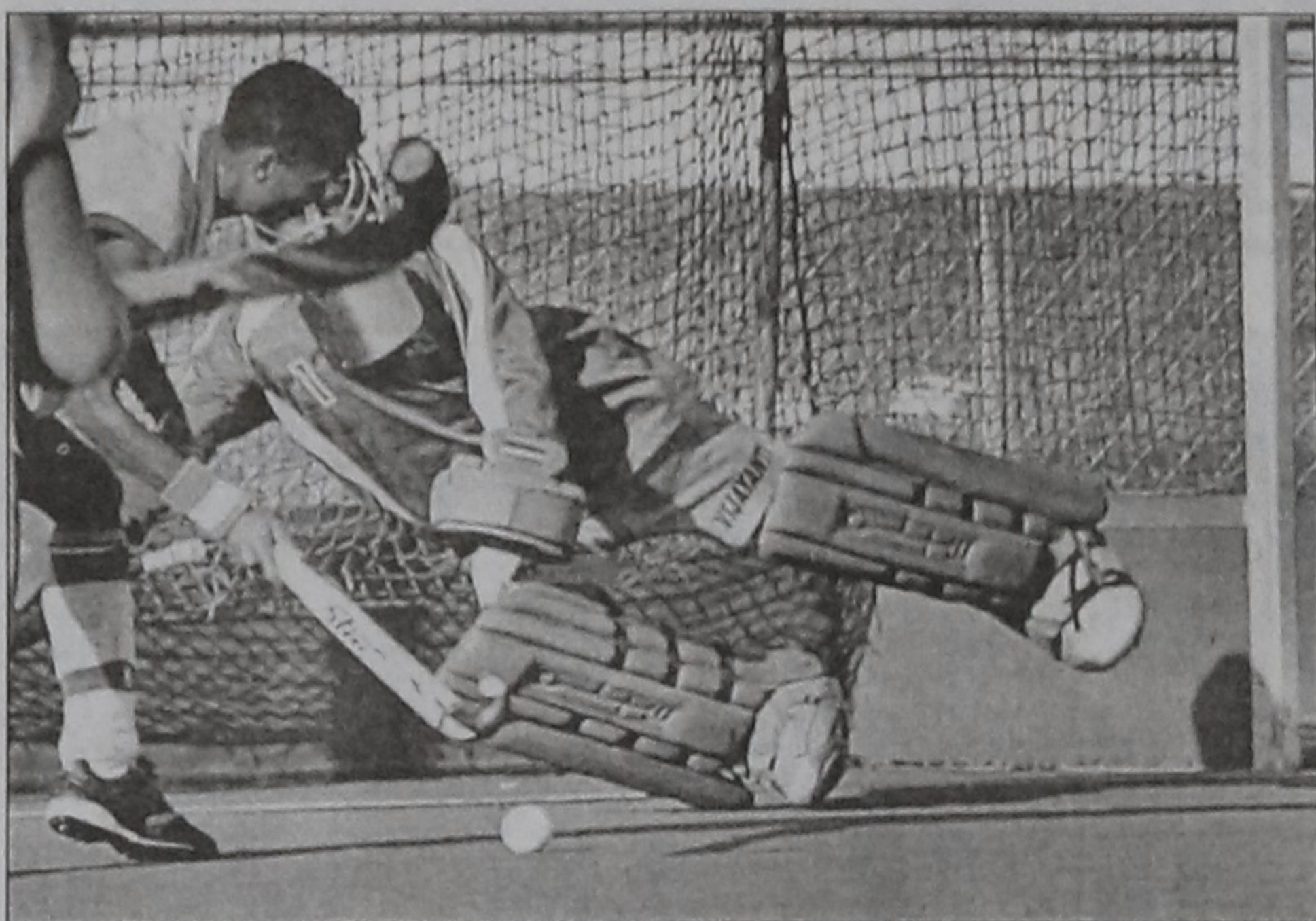


PHOTO: STAR

A goalmouth action during Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Air Force's match in the Shaheed Smriti Hockey Tournament at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Strauss in pain

Cricket

AFP, St John's

England captain Andrew Strauss admitted that having to settle for a draw in the third Test against West Indies on Thursday was hard to take.

England had to settle for the stalemate, after defiant batting from West Indies led by Ramnaresh Sarwan with his 13th Test hundred.

The tourists had set West Indies an unlikely victory target of 503, and were denied victory when the last wicket pair of Daren Powell and Fidel Edwards agonisingly batted 10 overs to make things safe for the home team.

"Clearly when you get so close in a Test and you don't make it over that final hurdle it is very hard to take," Strauss said.

"In some ways, it does feel like a defeat, but once the emotion subsides we'll realise there are a lot of positives to come out of the Test.

"The way we batted after Jamaica was the way to respond, the way Graeme Swann bowled was exceptional and Stuart Broad as well bowled very well.

"Hopefully, we have shifted the momentum away from West Indies and if we can get better as the tour goes on there's no reason why we can't win the series."

Strauss felt that England had done enough over the five days of the match to have a far better outcome.

"Test wins don't come easily, especially on a pitch like this, even against numbers 10 and 11, it's hard to force the issue," he said.

"I can't fault the bowlers, they did as well as

they could in those conditions. It's just one of those things, it wasn't meant to be.

"We hoped it would deteriorate on day five, but it didn't really. If anything it died a little and got flatter. The efforts of the bowlers were exceptional. We did everything we could do. Sometimes a ball goes to hand and sometimes it doesn't and it's those small margins between winning and drawing a Test."

Strauss defended England's decision not to enforce the follow-on, when they dismissed West Indies 285 in the first innings and led by 281.

"We had a few problems," he said. "[Steve] Harmison was on his death bed with a towel over his head, and there was Freddie's [Flintoff] injury.

"Graeme Swann also woke up on the fourth day with an elbow he thought might stop him from bowling altogether.

"We had plenty of problems to ponder and it meant the bowlers we did have had as much rest as possible. I certainly have no regrets about not enforcing the follow-on."

Strauss acknowledged that he and the rest of the England team management now had a different kind of challenge trying to get the side ready for action in the fourth Test, starting next Thursday at Kensington Oval in Barbados.

"It's going to be tough, for the next day or two there will be some weary bodies," he said. "Once the emotion clears and you see things rationally, we'll see we played some excellent cricket."

England trail 0-1 in the five-Test series, following an innings and 23-run defeat in the opening Test at Kingston inside four days, when they were dismissed for their third-lowest total in Tests of 51.

Freddie to have hip scan

Cricket

AFP, St John's

England will know the extent of Andrew Flintoff's injured hip, when he undergoes a medical scan in Barbados on Friday.

Flintoff has a suspected muscle tear in his right hip, and had been ruled out of bowling on Thursday's last day of the drawn third Test at the Antigua Recreation Ground if required in England's bid to level the series.

But Flintoff surprised everyone, when he bowled 15 overs through the pain barrier in the West Indies' second innings.

"Clearly, he's not at full fettle at the moment," England captain Andrew Strauss said. "He's got worries with his hip, but we aren't going to know the full extent until the scan is done in Barbados."

Flintoff lumbered to the crease for a six-over spell after tea, when he tried to

bowl at full tilt -- even delivering a ball at 90 miles-an-hour -- against medical advice to help England cross the victory threshold.

"The doctors' feeling was that if he bowled within himself he'd be okay, probably in that spell he wasn't quite within himself.

"In those situations, you have to trust the player. He felt he could put a little bit more into it and all credit to him for trying as hard as he could."

Strauss added: "We've seen it so many times with Fred that he does what the match situation dictates and sometimes they aren't for his best interest.

"It was incredible to see him bowling at that pace with that injury. Hopefully, it's not as serious as first thought, and he'll be fit for Barbados."

England will fly Amjad Khan and Ravi Bopara to Barbados over the next few days, as cover for Flintoff.

Khan and Bopara had been with the England Lions squad in New Zealand, but

will now travel to the Caribbean.

The 28-year-old Khan, who was born in Denmark, is yet to earn his maiden Test cap and was last involved in the England squad in India before Christmas, when he replaced the injured Ryan Sidebottom.

Bopara, aged 23, last played for England in the One-day International series against India. His last Test was against Sri Lanka at Galle in December 2007.

If Flintoff's latest injury turns out to be far more serious, it could be a major setback for him, as well as England's hopes winning the series.

Prior to the first Test at Kingston, he passed a fitness test on a left-side strain, and he is coming to the end of his first full year back in the England squad.

He made a return to national colours following a long-term ankle injury for the second Test of four against South Africa last summer.

Windies' great escape

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holidaying British visitors, Swann then trapped left-hander Brendan Nash lbw for 23 offering no stroke in the fourth over after West Indies continued from their teatime total of 279 for five.

Jerome Taylor joined Denesh Ramdin, and they importantly occupied the crease for the next 45 minutes before James Anderson made a belated entry in the match into the wickets column.

Unsuccessful in his previous 39 overs in the Test, Anderson had Taylor caught at mid-wicket for 11, and five overs later, had Ramdin bowled for 21 chopping a delivery into his stumps to leave West Indies teetering at 322 for eight.

But England's bowlers, weary from a long, hard toil on an unresponsive pitch, lacked the energy to cross over the threshold.

Earlier, England had endured a fruitless toil before lunch in their bid for the series-levelling victory, as Sarwan and Chanderpaul batted defiantly, when West

Indies continued from their overnight total of 143 for three.

England's bowlers found the ARG pitch less than accommodating, and they would have been disappointed that it did not misbehave as they had expected during the morning period which was cut short by 45 minutes because of rain.

The remaining Tests in the series take place at Kensington Oval in Barbados from February 26 to March 2, and Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad from March 6 to 10.

The second Test at the nearby Sir Vivian Richards Ground was abandoned after just 10 balls last week because of a dangerous outfield.

SCOREBOARD

Final scorecard on the fifth and last day of the third Test between West Indies and England at the Antigua Recreation Ground on Wednesday:

ENGLAND: First innings 566 for nine declared (Strauss 169, Collingwood 113)

WEST INDIES: First innings 285 (Sarwan 94; Swann 5-57)

ENGLAND: Second innings 221 for eight declared (Cook 58, Collingwood 34, Pietersen 32)

WEST INDIES
Gayle b Swann 46
Smith lbw b Harmison 21
Sarwan b Broad 106
Hinds c Shah b Broad 6
Chanderpaul c Prior b Broad 55
Nash lbw b Swann 23
Ramdin b Anderson 21
Taylor c sub (Bell) b Anderson 11
Benn lbw b Swann 21
Powell not out 22
Edwards not out 5

Extras: (b-21, lb-7, w-1, nb-4) 33
Total: (For 9 wickets in 128 overs) 370
Fall of wickets: 1-59, 2-81, 3-96, 4-244, 5-261, 6-287, 7-313, 8-322, 9-353

Bowler O M R W
Anderson 25 6 68 2
Broad 21 3 69 3
Swann 39 12 92 3
Harmison 22 3 54 1
Flintoff 15 5 32 0
Pietersen 3 0 15 0
Shah 3 0 12 0

Result: Match drawn.
Man-of-the-match: Ramnaresh Sarwan.

Toss: West Indies.
Umpires: Daryl Harper and Rudi Koertzen.

ECB terminates Allen contracts

AFP, London

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Friday terminated all contracts with Allen Stanford, the ruling body of the game here said.

The ECB will not be taking part in any further Stanford Twenty20 matches in Antigua or the proposed Stanford-sponsored international Quadrangular Twenty20 events in England.

Sports day at Shaheed Lt Selim Shikshalaya

SPORTS REPORTER

Maghbazar Modhubagh Shaheed Lt Selim Shikshalaya celebrated their Annual Sports Day and Prize Distribution Ceremony at the T & T High School ground yesterday.

Bangladesh Kalyan Party chairman Major General (ret'd) Syed Muhammad Ibrahim Bir Protik, was present as chief guest while the event was attended by eminent Daily Ittefaq columnist Habibur Rahman as special guest.

Aside from taking part in numerous competitions throughout the day, students also wowed the guests present with drill routines and march-past.

The event was also attended by the school's founder chairman, vice-principal Aftab Hossain Sikder and principal Khaleda Khanam.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

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League at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur. Tushar Ahmed Ronny scored the all-important goal for the winners in the 20th minute.

In the day's other match, PWD split points with Government Printing Press in a goalless draw.

INT'L TENNIS

Thailand's Kumkhum beat compatriot Upapong 6-4, 6-1 in the final to lift the girls' singles title at the Ramna Tennis Complex.

Kumkhum also bagged the girls' doubles title pairing with Netherlands' Demi Schuurs. They beat Taipei's Hua-Chen Lee and Thailand's Upapong 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 in the final.

The boys' singles trophy went to Wang of China, who got walkover from Great Britain's Mathew Thomson.

Thomson and his brother David also gave walkover to Bai Dong Du of China and Yen-Hsiang Lo of Taipei in the boys' doubles final.

Finance Minister Abul Mal Muhit distributed trophies on the concluding day as chief guest.

Pakistan ready

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Jayawardene believed it provided enough practice for his players.

"It was good for all of us, we were trying to do different things," said Jayawardene, who steps down as captain after the series.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed the captaincy and look forward to the last two Tests as captain. You can still be a leader when you are not the captain."

TEAMS

PAKISTAN (from): Younis Khan (captain), Misbahul Haq, Salman Butt, Khuram Manzoor, Shoaib Malik, Faisal Iqbal, Kamran Akmal, Sohail Khan, Umar Gul, Mohammad Talha, Yasir Arafat, Danish Kaneria.

SRI LANKA (from): Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Kumar Sangakkara, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedera, Tharanga Paranavitana, Thilan Samaraweera, Malinda Warnapura, Muttiah Muralidaran, Chaminda Vaas, Ajantha Mendis, Dilhara Fernando, Farveez Maharoof, Thilan Thushara, Suranga Lakmal, Prasanna Jayawardene.

Rapid Chess

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standing.

Khairul Islam, Mohammad Yousuf and Waliullah Patwari won rating category prizes, Syed Sazzad got the best unrated player prize and Abdullah Al Saif won the best Sub-junior prize.

Jahanara Haque Runu and Amena Khatun received the top two women players' awards.

A total of 98 players participated in the 9 round Swiss-League.

Razzano reaches final

Tennis

AFP, Dubai

Virginie Razzano reached the biggest final of her career when she produced her fourth successive upset win to earn a showdown with one of the Williams sisters in the WTA Dubai Open on Saturday.

The world number 58 from France will also make a substantial leap, somewhere close to the top 40, after beating Kaia Kinepi, the 16th-seeded Estonian, for the loss of only three games.

"I try to make a lot of pressure all the time and play aggressive," said the flat-hitting, high-intensity French woman after her stunning 6-1, 6-2 triumph.

Razzano agreed that, following previous wins over Dinara Safina and Vera Zvonareva, both top ten players, and Daniela Hantuchova, a former top ten player, this was the best sequence of success she has had.

"I have had a good preparation in November and December at home," she said when asked to explain how this surge in form had come about.

"I thought after the Australian Open (where she beat the 14th seeded Patty Schnyder) that I am feeling good. I am able to try my best every time because I have worked hard."

By contrast, Kanepi looked tired. She had had four hard matches and never rediscovered the tenacity which enabled her to upset Jelena Jankovic, the 2008 year-end number one, in the third round.

After going a break of serve down in the fourth game, Kanepi could not prevent the first set from sliding quickly away from her, often looking slow by comparison with Razzano's twinkling footwork, upbeat gestures, and dashing attacks, especially down both sidelines.

Kanepi even lost eight of the first nine games before rallying briefly to break back for 2-2. It was her last significant resistance though, for a double fault and a netted forehand cost her another break of serve, and two more double faults in the seventh game contributed to the collapse of that service game too.

"I am very happy with this week," Razzano said, who then caused a laugh when asked if she would watch the other semifinal, the 19th meeting between Venus Williams, the Wimbledon champion, and Serena Williams, the Australian and US Open champion.

"Oh no," she said. "I'm going to the spa. I'm going to relax."

She added: "I was feeling good before I came here. I knew I had practised a lot and I know my tennis and what I can do when I have worked a lot."

"It is a surprise because I have beaten players in the top ten or the top 20 but I have played my best every time."

"Sometimes I don't have a result and it's difficult because I don't understand why when I have a lot of motivation for my career."

"But now my schedule is better this year and I can give one hundred per cent game after game, match after match. I don't want to make the same error as last year when I played too many tournaments and was not feeling good."

Asked why the win was so easy, Razzano replied: "I put a lot of pressure on Kaia, and I played very good tennis. I don't want to give her any luck -- it's me the boss today. I want to win too!"

Asked if she could beat which Williams she played, Razzano brought more laughter with her reply. "I have to have my spa first, and talk with you, and enjoy my boy-friend!"

"I want to enjoy a good restaurant and a good sleep. When I go to the warm-up in the morning tomorrow, that's when I will think about the tennis."

Stanford found

Cricket

AFP, Washington

Texas financier Allen Stanford, accused of a 9.2-billion-dollar fraud that prompted governments to shut his banks and seize assets, was tracked down in Virginia, as investigators

Politics reported that SFG gave 2.4 million dollars to political parties, committees and more than 100 political candidates -- past and present -- since 2000, including 31,750 dollars to President Barack Obama when he was a senator, the third ranking recipient among lawmakers.

Obama's White House rival, Republican Senator John McCain, received 28,150 dollars from SFG, the center said.

Both politicians as well as others vowed to donate the Stanford contributions to charity, according to the Chicago Tribune.

A US judge has frozen the assets of Stanford, his banks and two top executives and investigators are working to track down and seize assets overseas.

That could be complicated by the actions of other governments which have shut down -- and in the case of Venezuela seized -- his banks, said SEC spokesman John Nester.

"In any investigation involving multiple jurisdictions, there are complications that arise," Nester told AFP.

The Stanford Financial Group claims to serve 50,000 clients in 140 countries with more than 50 billion dollars of assets under management or advisement.

It was particularly successful in Latin America and the Caribbean, where authorities sought to quell fears among depositors who formed long queues outside local branches.

Five Latin American countries have already taken action against companies owned by Stanford, 58.

Faced with a run on a local subsidiary by panicked Venezuelans, Caracas "made a decision to intervene and to immediately sell" financial companies owned by Stanford, Finance Minister Ali Rodriguez said Thursday.

Peru's securities regulator on Thursday suspended oper-

ations for 30 days at the local office of SFG, promising it was working to secure investors' funds.

In Panama, banking authorities took over "administrative control" of a local Stanford branch after clients made massive withdrawals of deposits Wednesday.

And Ecuador suspended a Stanford affiliate from operating in the Quito stock exchange for 30 days or until the company resolves the claims, while the Stanford affiliate in Colombia agreed to suspend its activities on the Bogota stock exchange.

On the tax haven island of Antigua, hundreds of people queued up at the Stanford-owned Bank of Antigua to withdraw funds despite authorities' assurances their accounts were not in danger.

ON THE TAX HAVEN ISLAND OF Antigua, hundreds of people queued up at the Stanford-owned Bank of Antigua to withdraw funds despite authorities' assurances their accounts were not in danger.

NZ tour

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"The worrying aspect for the side is that there is no warm-up game. It's tough, especially when you are playing in Australia, England and New Zealand," Ganguly said.

Ganguly, who was here for a promotional event of Indian Premier League franchise Kolkata Knight Riders of which he is the captain, said the Black Caps were difficult to beat at home but the Indian side had the necessary quality to perform the job.

"New Zealand is a tough side to beat at home but ours is also a good side," he said pointing out that India had done well in similar conditions in Ireland and England under Rahul Dravid in 2007.

Heroes hail

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this game took a lot out of us," he said.

"The good thing is that we have a couple days to rest and to regroup, and get ourselves ready for Barbados."

"It is important that we do not find ourselves in this situation again or else it might be difficult to get out of it again, so it is important that we go into that Test and try to hold the upper hand from early."

Before the series, Powell predicted that West Indies would win 3-0, and he feels this is still possible.



PHOTO: STAR

Winners of the Dhaka Bank 23rd International Junior Tennis Championships display their trophies while posing for photographs with the officials and guests at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna yesterday.