PHOTO: AFP

India skipper MS Dhoni (R) signs autographs for fans during the first day of the three-day tour match against Australian Chairman's XI at the Manuka Oval in Canberra yesterday.

India's best opportunity

Cricket

RUETERS, *Bangalore*

India have fought some epic battles with Australia but now embark on a Test tour with what many believe is their best chance of humbling the wearers of the baggy green caps in their own back yard for the first time.

The average Indian fan will be viewing the series with a sense of apprehension, wondering if the team are good enough to conquer the final frontier.

They will also hope the four-Test series can represent a coming-of-age for the likes of Virat Kohli, Ravichandran Ashwin and other stars of the next generation.

This is most likely the last stand Down Under for the likes of Sachin Tendulkar, Vangipurappu Laxman, Rahul Dravid and Zaheer Khan, who will want to bow out by guiding India to its first ever Test series win in Australia.

After the drubbing at the hands of England earlier this year, a series victory would be redemption of sorts and go some way to proving India are not just a force to be reckoned with in the shorter formats of the game.

Roughly half of the Indian squad was not part of the England series and it will also be the first tour of Australia for them, so the rookies can expect a stern Test.

And while Australia's slump in form presents a golden opportunity, India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni remains cautious.

"Some people think that the last Australian team was much better than the current Australian side. To judge them is quite a difficult task," Dhoni told reporters in Chennai on the eve of departure for Australia.

"[Because they are] missing big names in the present setup, some people think that this is our best chance. But we did well that time also (in 2007) and quite a few things happened in the series."

A series win, or even a tightly contested one, would also help the Indian young guns ensure there is life beyond one-day internationals and the instant gratification found in Twenty20s.

To many Indian fans, drawing the 2003-04 series in Australia felt as special as beating them back home but the young faces in Indian cricket are not content with, or used to, coming off second best.

Virender Sehwag, fresh from his recording the highest individual score in a one-day match, will look to combine with Gautam Gambhir at the top of the order and provide the launchpad for a formidable batting lineup that follows.

Tendulkar, of course, continues the search for the elusive century of centuries. Could it be karma that the hunt leads him to Aussie shores?

As Dravid looks to continue a good run of form that started against the West Indies earlier this year, Laxman will hope to continue what is now, almost, his birthright, a good run of form against the Aussies.

With the top five picking themselves and Dhoni taking the seventh spot, the toss up will be between youngsters Kohli and Rohit Sharma for the number six spot, which has been up for grabs since Sourav Ganguly's retirement.

No one among Yuvraj Singh, Suresh Raina and a host of other youngsters have managed to cement the spot in the much-vaunted Indian batting line-up.

Dhoni will bank on the experience and guile of pace bowling spearhead Zaheer to take advantage of Australia's new found tendency for batting collapses and hope that Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav, Abhimanyu Mithun and Vinay Kumar give a good account of themselves.

The onus of tying up the Aussie top order will fall mainly on the capable shoulders of Ashwin, whose off-spin will lead the slow bowling attack in the absence of Harbhajan Singh and the retired Anil Kumble.

"Ashwin has just made his debut in the series against West Indies and nobody knew what Ashwin can do. But he ended up winning the man-of-the-series in the Tests," Dhoni said.

"Even when Shane Warne or Glenn McGrath made their debut they started from zero wickets."

Like Australia did recently, India will soon approach a period of transition as they lose world class performers to the inevitability of retirement.

Whether they claim the four-match series or not, India is hoping the tour will sow the seeds of building a team that can eventually win a Test world title just as the one-day side did back in April.

Kohli hits form

Cricket

AFP, *Canberra*

Virat Kohli scored an unbeaten half-century Monday as India's batting stars failed on a rain-interrupted opening day of a three-day tour match against a Chairman's XI at Manuka Oval in Canberra.

The young right-hander finished the day unbeaten on 55 off 93 balls as the tourists reached 162 for four off 50 overs in their final match ahead of the opening Boxing Day Test against Australia in Melbourne.

At stumps Rohit Sharma was 38 not out after being dropped on his first ball.

But while Kohli and Sharma shared an unbroken fifth wicket stand of 78 off 104 balls, India's front-line batsmen Virender Sehwag (12), Gautam Gambhir (24) and VVS Laxman (15) all missed out on a big score ahead of the MCG Test.

Sehwag smashed the highest score in one-day cricket with 219 off 139 balls earlier this month against the West Indies, but he only lasted 12 balls before falling in the day's fourth over.

He played back to paceman Peter George and was caught out in the gully.

Fellow opener Gambhir batted for 87 minutes before he was bowled out by Jason Behrendorff as he attempted to work the ball only to miss.

Laxman, who averages 55.58 in 25 Tests against Australia and has scored four centuries Down Under, was also out bowled after he tried to work a Jon Holland ball to the leg-side.

The incoming Sharma was dropped next ball in Holland's over as he pushed forward and edged to short leg.

Ajinkya Rahane was the fourth Indian wicket to fall for 15, caught by Australian Test batsman Usman Khawaja at slip off Josh Lalor for 15 off 35 balls.

India went into the final warm up game without key batsmen Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid, while injured paceman Ishant Sharma was also missing.

George (1-42), Behrendorff (1-8), Lalor (1-9) and Holland (1-37) all kept things tight for the Chairman's team.

No play was possible before lunch after overnight and morning rain and there was another lengthy stoppage in the afternoon.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 162 for 4 (Gambhir 24, Kohli 55 not out, Sharma 38 not out)

Citycell b'ball

SPORTS REPORTER

Bakshi Bazar registered a hard-fought 50-47 win over Bangladesh Police in the Citycell Federation Cup Basketball Championship at the Dhanmondi Basketball Gymnasium yesterday.

The first half of the game was locked at 21-21. Tahmid and Niaz caged 13 and 11 points respectively for Bakshi Bazar while Shahin scored 16 and Emilon 15 points for Bangladesh Police.

On Sunday, Boarder Guard Bangladesh thrashed Old DOHS 111-31 after dominating the first half 53-8.

BCF assistant injures player

SPORTS REPORTER

Chess player Joynul Abedin Sagor of the Second Division Chess League sustained an injury to his head after being hit with a stapler by Bangladesh Chess Federation (BCF) office assistant Koushik Ahmed Regan on Sunday.

Sagor, a player of Khulna's Khaleda Memorial Chess Club and Regan got into an altercation during the fifth round of the league because Regan ignored Sagor's repeated requests for his home district of Khulna to be mentioned beside his name on the board.

BCF general secretary Mokaddesh Hossain termed the incident an isolated one and informed that Regan had been terminated from his position.

Meanwhile in the 37th National Chess Championship, GM Ziaur Rahman maintained the solo lead after beating FIDE Master Mehdi Hasan Parag in the seventh round at the Bangladesh Olympic Association media room yesterday.

Zia leads with 6.5 points from seven matches while GM Niaz Murshed is in joint second position with Minhaz Uddin after drawing against Mahtab Uddin. Niaz and Minhaz have five points each.

IM Abu Sufian Shakil defeated Debaraj Chetterjee to reach third position with 4.5 points. Mahfuzur Rahman and Monir Hossain played a draw while Mostafa defeated Javed in the seventh round.

Pakistan test pink ball today

AFP, *Karachi*

Pakistan will experiment with a pink ball in the final of its premier first-class cricket tournament on Tuesday.

"The final of the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy, Pakistan's premier first-class tournament, will be played with a pink ball, under floodlights", the Pakistan Cricket Board announced on Monday.

Pakistan International Airlines take on Zarai Taraqiati Bank Ltd in the final, to be played from December 20-24. Last year's final was also played under lights, but with an orange ball.

Pink is widely regarded as the most suitable colour under floodlights.

The Marylebone Cricket Club, the custodian of the laws of the game, has advocated the use of a pink ball for day-night Test cricket.

Tendulkar has an

FROM PAGE 16

Control for Cricket in India news release, and is an employee at the National Cricket Academy in Bangalore.

A Herald reporter watched Raghavindraa during a Sunday net session with Tendulkar at Canberra's Manuka Oval in which he threw balls at the batting maestro for an hour.

Raghavindraa helped Tendulkar prepare for the barrage of outswingers he is likely to receive from Australia's rising pace star James Pattinson ahead of the opening Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on December 26.

"The session did not always go to plan. After a series of deliveries on his pads, Tendulkar put his bat down for several minutes to show Raghavindraa the wrist position required to enable the ball to shape away from the right-hander," the newspaper said.

"Just two deliveries later, Raghavindraa, unleashing from about three metres in front of the popping crease, sent down an outswinger, which Tendulkar, after shouldering arms, described as 'perfect' and gave his thumbs up."

Tendulkar has been a perennial thorn in the side of Australia's bowlers, averaging more than 60 with 11 centuries in 31 Tests against them and is eyeing his 100th international hundred during the Australian tour.

Greg Chappell, who coached India for a three-year spell ending in 2007, said in a new book released last week that Tendulkar was a prisoner of his incredible fame in India and carried expectations greater than Australia's iconic batsman Donald Bradman.

MSC set

FROM PAGE 16

today afternoon and play their first match against team Rangpur on Wednesday.

"To make the matches competitive, we will lend our players to the district teams after forming our squad," said Dana at the MSC conference room.

They will play against Panchagargh (Dec 23), Thakurgaon (Dec 24), Dinajpur (Dec 26), Nilfamari (Dec 27), Lalmonirhat (Dec 28), Kurigram (Dec 29) and Gaibandha (Dec 30) and then leave for Dhaka on Dec 31.

MSC director Sarwar Hossain informed that MSC has planned to form a women's handball team for the upcoming season and a U-16 boys' football team.

He further notified that MSC would launch coaching programmes for chess, table tennis, cricket and football next year.

'Drop cost dearly'

FROM PAGE 16

to a chance that could have been held standing up had he run quicker. Next over, Shahriar Nafees must have been surprised to see one coming his way at short-leg after a long time. The man under the helmet was slow to move and couldn't reach the ball.

Nazmul Hossain however believed that it was the one dropped after lunch that could have made the difference. "One catch was dropped just after lunch. If we could have used that chance, this Test could have gone in another way," said the man who took his second wicket in the innings during a fine fourth spell that saw good control and lots of heart.

But the other two pacemen, Robiul Islam and Shahadat Hossain, bowled too many no-balls (six each) and it is an area for the specialist coach to work on among the bowlers.

Robiul said that Nazmul was unfortunate, though the Satkhira pacer was the one who suffered Nazimuddin's drop.

"Nazmul put in a solid bowling effort on the day. He had some wicket-taking deliveries but unfortunate he took only one wicket today.

"Our plan was not to give too many runs and we were successful in that. You can't say we had negative bowling, rather we bowled a tight line and length and tried to bowl in the right areas," he said.

The one saving grace was Pakistan's approach on the day, the visitors batting at 2.9 runs per over. If they lose momentum on the fourth day due to the extra caution on the third, the Tigers can be thankful.

The trouble though is that the Tigers will have forgotten these nuances as soon as they hit the long break between this and the next Test match.

Missed

FROM PAGE 16

who made a double century in the first Test in Chittagong, to return to the dressing room along with his captain Misbah-ul-Haq (26) unbeaten on 48.

So in the end the Tigers were left to lick their self-inflicted wounds.

Tons sink

FROM PAGE 16

(Mithun 109, Tushar 62, Dollar 40; Kapali 2-45, Tapash 2-48)

SYLHET: First innings 243-8 in 77.3 overs (Rajin 59, Mabud 56 not out; Dollar 3-52).

Coach sings Thorpe song

Swimming

AFP, *Sydney*

Australia's head swimming coach insists Ian Thorpe's hopes of competing at next year's London Olympics are still alive despite his struggles since returning to competitive action.

The five-time Olympic gold medallist competed at his first long course event since early 2006 in Italy at the weekend, and slow times in both the 100m and 200m freestyle raised doubts over whether he would even make the Olympic team.

"For any public figure like Ian everyone has an opinion," coach Leigh Nugent said, according to the Sydney Morning Herald.

"Often most of them are ill-informed, so we'll just keep doing what we are doing. That's all we can do. What people write or say is so much of an irrelevancy really."

Fed Cup

FROM PAGE 16

Beanibazar SC and Wari Club and the one winning between BKSP and Bangladesh Army will have to take part in the play-off match to move into the 16-team final round while another four teams will book seats for their finals, playing only one match.

"We expect to start the final round from 2nd or 3rd January and complete the 24th Federation Cup by January 13," said Salam.

Participating teams of the season's curtain-raising tournament will receive Tk 25,000 as participation money while champions and runners-up will get Tk five and three lakh respectively.

Form makes

FROM PAGE 16

their plan.

"The plan was just to play a normal game and wait for the bad ball. Now we are in a good position and we will accelerate tomorrow and see how things are going. I think we were on the backfoot and we would be in deeper trouble had we lost two to three early wickets. We wanted to get closer to the runs and then see how it stands. We wanted to stay at the wicket and wait for the bad deliveries. I think we were quite successful," explained Taufeeq.

The left-handed opener has been passing a memorable year as he is now the highest run-getter for his country for this year and understandably Tafeeq was happy with his feat.

"I think the whole year was a good one for me. After the comeback I scored a century against Sri Lanka and runs against New Zealand. I think my time is going good as I am the highest run getter for Pakistan this season. Every hundred is important. But I scored a double hundred against Sri Lanka and that was very special because I did not score a double hundred before. This hundred is also special because every hundred in a Test match is important," said Taufeeq.

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman (L) makes a move against FIDE Master Mehdi Hasan Parag in their seventh round match of the 37th National Chess Championship at the BOA media room yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

CROSSWORD *By Eugene Sheffer*

ACROSS

1 Creche trio
5 Antiquated
8 Pulsate
12 Right angles
13 Kids' pie filling?
14 Eastern potentate
15 Go sightseeing
16 Pose
18 Embassy employee
20 Actress Spacek
21 Historic period
22 Conclusion
23 Without pizzazz
26 Try
30 Born
31 Playwright Levin
32 — constrictor
33 Lure
36 Choir rendition
38 "Hail!"
39 Total
40 Ecru
43 "Way to go!"
47 Lawyer
49 Anger
50 Humdinger
51 Web address
52 Up to
53 Scottish garment
54 Sock part
55 "That's one small — ..."

DOWN

1 Transcending (Pref.)
2 Oodles
3 Excessive supply
4 Where Tel Aviv is
5 Nebraska city
6 Minstrel's instrument
7 Banned pesticide
8 Happen as if by fate
9 Flightless flock
10 Lends a hand
11 Deuce defeater
17 "— It Romantic?"
19 Weep
22 Greek H
23 "CSI" evidence
24 Pensioned (Abbr.)
25 Nevertheless
26 Illustrations
27 Degree for a CEO
28 D.C. figure
29 53-Across wearer's hat
31 Lemieux milieu
34 Spicy stew
35 Maintain
36 Deposit
37 Intellect
39 Fashion
40 Abruptly refuse
41 Needle case
42 "— be OK"
43 Re planes and such
44 Fisherman's enticement
45 Look lasciviously
46 Shrill bark
48 Eccentric

Solution time: 21 mins.

T	A	L	C	■	C	U	T	■	H	A	S	H
U	V	E	A	■	O	N	A	■	E	N	T	O
B	E	E	R	■	S	U	P	E	R	I	O	R
A	R	R	E	S	T	■	S	T	O	M	P	S
■	■	■	E	L	U	L	■	S	E	A	■	■
S	U	P	R	E	M	E	S	■	S	T	A	Y
O	R	R	■	D	E	M	O	S	■	O	N	E
S	E	E	M	■	S	U	P	P	O	R	T	S
■	■	E	O	S	■	R	H	E	A	■	■	■
A	R	M	P	I	T	■	I	C	K	I	E	R
S	U	P	P	L	I	E	S	■	L	O	T	I
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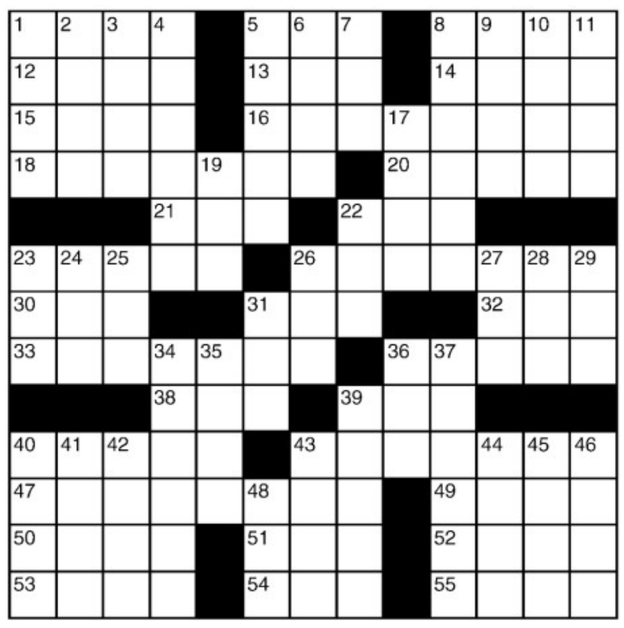

CRYPTOQUIP

JDR OTCJK EOXT RD QTBCQT MACBA GASRRTU GXERG RD CJFTGR CJ, C GEJK "RDUJ OTRMTTJ RMD XDSFTUG."

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A BUNCH OF BYGONE RUSSIAN RULERS WERE CROWDED TIGHTLY TOGETHER, WOULD THEY BE TSAR-DINES?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: R equals T