

Spicy WACA awaits India

Cricket

AFP, Perth

India's underperforming top order will need to produce something special when they face Australia in the third Test at the WACA Ground starting Friday if the tourists are to save the series. Down 2-0 in the four-Test series and without a century so far with the bat, India could scarcely have picked a tougher venue to try to rediscover their form and resolve after an ugly streak of six away Test losses on the bounce. Perth's WACA strip is a world away from the low and slow subcontinent pitches India's batsmen thrive on, especially after groundsman Cam Sutherland boldly declared the venue finally back to its venomous best. Sutherland predicted it would be considerably faster and bouncier than when Australia thrashed England by 267 runs there last summer and just two of the 40 wickets fell to spin. Australian batsman Mike Hussey said a spicy deck would clearly favour the home side, who have been dominant so far against a disappointing India. "I hope it's a nice, fast bouncy pitch," he said. "We play those conditions very well. It is very different to what the

Indian players are used to from their home country." With the track ideal for seamers, Australia are considering playing four pacemen, something which has had mixed success in Perth down the years. Indian fast bowler Zaheer Khan, who at the age of 33 finally plays his first Test at the WACA, denied his side -- heavy losers in the first two Tests -- were concerned about the conditions. "There has been a lot of talk about how the wicket is going to play in such-and-such manner," he said. "We are confident as a bowling unit of taking 20 wickets." One positive for India is that a similar pitch prediction in Perth on their last tour, in 2008, saw the home side play four fast bowlers. But it backfired and the tourists won by 72 runs in a match where no batsman scored a century. Of the Indian top order this time, only the formidable Sachin Tendulkar has looked consistently comfortable in the first two Tests, although his much-anticipated 100th international century has continued to elude him. Tendulkar has 226 runs at 56.50 for the series, but he has received little support, with fellow veterans Virender Sehwag (108 at 27), Rahul Dravid (112 at 28) and VVS Laxman (71 at 17.75) all struggling.

Tellingly for his top-order teammates, India's second-best batsman has been tallender Ravi Ashwin, with 143 runs at 35.75. That puts extra pressure on Tendulkar, who is playing just his third Test at the WACA. Criticism is mounting at home of India's ageing stars after their dismal batting performances. India suffered their sixth successive overseas Test defeat, including four in England last year, when they lost to Australia by an innings and 68 runs in Sydney last week to go 2-0 down. That followed a 122-run defeat in Melbourne in the opening Test. India's cause should be helped by the fact that Australia will be without young pace sensation James Pattinson, who took 11 wickets in the first two Tests but has been ruled out for the rest of the summer with a foot injury. He joins fellow pace tyro Patrick Cummins and the experienced Mitchell Johnson, who ripped through England in Perth last summer, on the long-term injured list. Their absence opens the door for veteran Ryan Harris, who also starred in that win over England, also picking up nine wickets as Australia successfully deployed a four-pronged pace attack.

SA make 301

SPORT DESK

A composed century from opening batsman Hashim Amla and half-centuries from captain AB de Villiers and Jacques Kallis overcame a five-wicket burst from Lasith Malinga to take South Africa to a formidable 301 for 8 in the first one-day international against Sri Lanka at Boland Park yesterday. Sri Lanka's bowling stocks were bolstered by the return of fast bowler Malinga (5-53), who got them off to a good start with the wicket of South Africa opener Graeme Smith (6) in the third over with the score on 9. Thereafter, the Sri Lankans had little joy as Amla (112) built big partnerships, first a 144-run second-wicket stand with Jacques Kallis (72), and then a free-stroking 91-run association with de Villiers for the third wicket. De Villiers fell to pacer Nuwan Kulasekara in the 41st over with the score on 244, and Sri Lanka managed to rein in the home team through some disciplined bowling and a late burst by Lasith Malinga. In the slog overs, Malinga took the wickets of Albie Morkel (25) and Amla, and clean-bowled Faf du Plessis (10) and Dale Steyn (1) in the last over, in which he conceded only four runs and completed his five-wicket haul.



Alok Kapali of Gazi Tank signs the condolence book for late BCB CEO Manzur Ahmed at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The book will keep open for a week. PHOTO: BCB

'Forget the scandal'

Cricket

AFP, Dubai

Pakistan cricket captain Misbahul Haq on Tuesday stressed the need for forgetting the 2010 spot-fixing scandal when his team take on England in the first of three Tests here next week. The Pakistan captain got the first taste of how the series -- the first between the two countries since the scandal -- will be seen during his press conference after arriving here on Monday. The scandal, related to the bowling of deliberate no-balls during the Lord's Test against England, ended in jail terms for then captain Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer. When asked about the scandal, a visibly upset Misbah said: "That's the past, we don't get into that. I am only focusing on what we can do on the ground. I think everybody knows in both teams that we just have to forget the past." Since the scandal, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has implemented a strict code of conduct for the players and introduced anti-corruption courses for both international and domestic cricketers. Misbah said corruption in Pakistan cricket was no more a concern. "It's not an area of concern for me. Our area of concern is to play good cricket, fair cricket, and that's what we can do," said Misbah,

under whom Pakistan have not lost a Test series since the spot-fixing scandal. And since he replaced Shahid Afridi as one-day captain, Misbah has led Pakistan to wins over Ireland, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Misbah said the credit goes to the players. "I think the credit goes to the team and all the players after that difficult time," he said. "They just wanted to collect their thoughts and prove to the world that we are good players, a good team, and I think they just proved it. "They are really focusing on their cricket and making my job easier. The players are ready to give their hundred percent and we are concerned with the present and future, not about the past." Misbah said the series against England will be played in good spirit. "Our target is just to play cricket in the true spirit ... good relations, and play really good and hard cricket," he said. Misbah also praised his off-spinner, Saeed Ajmal, who took 50 Test wickets last year. "Ajmal is a fine bowler and has a lot of variations but we are not depending on him only," said Misbah of Ajmal, who has promised to use a surprise delivery against England. "England will have to explore themselves. Let's see how England's batsmen tackle it. That's a secret." The first Test starts on January 17. Both teams will also play four one-day and three Twenty20 internationals.

Cook lifts

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Ahmed off Talha before England declared the innings. Cook hit 10 boundaries during his 260-ball knock and looked untroubled throughout. Talha finished with 4-43. It was leg-spinner Yasir Shah who rattled the middle-order with figures of 5-75. Talha, part of Pakistan's 16-man Test squad, dismissed Strauss and Trott in his first spell before Pietersen and Cook repaired the early damage. Shah broke the partnership when he dismissed Pietersen soon after lunch and followed that with wickets of Bell in his next over and then got Morgan to leave England struggling at 5-121. Prior, who hit seven boundaries during his fiery 57-ball knock, helped Cook take England past 200-mark.

SCORES IN BRIEF ENGLAND: First innings 269 for 9 (Cook 133, Pietersen 38, Prior 46, Swann 24; Talha 4-43, Shah 5-75) PCB XI: First innings 22 for no loss (Nasir 12 not out, Raheem 10 not out)

School football

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defeated Mirpur Udayon School & College 2-1, Dhaka Residential Model College edged past Dolairpar High School by a solitary goal, Khilgaon High School blanked Bangladesh Int'l School 4-0, Nahar Int'l School outclassed Rajdhani High School 4-1 and Segun Bagicha High School outplayed Mirpur Udayon School & College 3-1.

MSC to bank

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There are lots of questions asked about the standard of foreign players but Lokman said, "I watched their performance in practice and it was pretty good. However, they could not replicate that performance in the competition." Lokman however said that the club officials would travel overseas to scout for quality foreign players in the mid-season players' transfer. Mohammedan came into the players' transfer scene after Abahani, Mukti Joddha Sangsad, Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club and Sheikh Russel had already scooped up the prized possessions, leaving themselves to be content with mediocre local players and a few unknown foreigners. Realising the situation, Sayeed Hasan Kanon, chairman of the technical committee, said it was not reasonable to expect to qualify for the quarterfinals with such a weak team. "We can't take any emotional decision regarding the coach and the players. Actually we have no option but to rely on them," said Kanon.

Army win

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distributed prizes after the match. The prizes for the tournaments held earlier: Federation Cup, 3on3 Basketball and Victory Day Tournament were also distributed.

Dravid denies rift

Cricket

AFP, Perth

Senior batsman Rahul Dravid has dismissed claims of a rift in the Indian camp ahead of the third Test against Australia starting Friday in Perth. Reports in the Australian media, fuelled by India's limp performances in the first two Tests of the series, have suggested there are growing tensions between captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni and opener Virender Sehwag. Sehwag, one of the most dangerous players in world cricket, has scored just 108 runs in all as the Indians slid to a 2-0 deficit. The 39-year-old Dravid said the opener's poor form had nothing to do with his relationship with the skipper. "When you are 0-2 down, this is what happens," Dravid said. "Nothing seems right but there is no truth to those comments. "There's a sense of disappointment with the results so far -- we would certainly like to do better -- but the spirit of the team is very good." Dravid said the tourists were determined to ensure the series was not a repeat of their

previous overseas tour, a 0-4 whitewash at the hands of England last year. Meanwhile, former Australian captain Ricky Ponting has urged India to embrace the ICC's DRS system. DRS is designed to remove obvious umpiring errors, but it is not being used in this series after India controversially vetoed its use. Ponting said he was disappointed that DRS -- decision review system -- wasn't being used for all Test series. "As international players, one thing you strive for is uniformity around the world and right at the moment we haven't got that," he said. "We played one series against South Africa where you're using a certain system and then a couple of weeks later you're not using that system. "When it first came in, my understanding was it was going to be used in every series and it hasn't turned out that way. "The system is not always perfect, but the bottom line is we are actually getting more correct decisions as a result of using the system than we are with not using the system, and that has got to be great for the game."

Kvitova-Li semi clash

AFP, Sydney

Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova set up a semifinal clash with defending champion Li Na after an emphatic straight sets victory over Daniela Hantuchova at the Sydney International on Wednesday. The Czech world number two reeled off the opening eight games before dishing out a 6-0, 6-4 victory over the stunned Slovak number 21. Earlier French Open champion and world number five Li beat Czech Lucie Safarova 6-2, 7-6 (7/3).

Ricky ready to turn tide

Cricket

REUTERS, Perth

Australia batsman Ricky Ponting said he was confident this century against India in Sydney last week would signal the start of a revival in his batting career. Ponting, the third highest run-scorer in tests behind India's Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid, scored 134 in Sydney, his first hundred since he made 209 against Pakistan two years ago in Hobart. "I've had to work really hard with my game the last few months and I felt that I made a bit of progress the last few weeks," Ponting, 37, told reporters in Perth on Wednesday, two days before the start of the third Test. "I think the biggest challenge for me was the technical flaws that I've been working on and getting enough quality time in the middle and starting to feel that bit more free again and I feel my rhythm is starting to come

back in my batting. The former captain said he felt as comfortable as he had done for a long time during the Sydney Test, which Australia won to go 2-0 up in the four-Test series. "...I think the start of day two, was probably as free as I've felt in a long time," he said. "The way that I moved, hit most of the balls in the middle... so when you're making a few mistakes as I did for the last half of that innings, then you can start to take some confidence from that. "It has been a work in progress for a while... It was nice to spend a bit more time in the middle in Sydney and make that hundred that I have been pushing so hard for." Ponting said he had been struggling with a few technical issues which caused him to get out lbw on a number of occasions. "It was all about my initial movement and my balance. They're the only things I've been working on really for the last few months," Ponting said. "I've done a few different drills that I've incorporated into my game now that I've never had to do before. "I was in probably a rut technically that I hadn't been in right through my career. I had to have a really close look at things and break things down and try and find the best and simplest way to address it and fix it. "I'm not sitting here saying that I'm completely on top of my game but I know very well that I'm not far off." Ponting has scored 40 Test hundreds and 30 in one-day internationals. "Confidence is everything in our game as we all know and understand," he said. "But I'm not going to rest on one hundred. "I've said it for a while now that if I got to those three figures then hopefully its the start of something big for me again, so that's the way I'm looking at it."

Brothers bite

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Molla in place of Akbar Hossain Ridon and the substitution paid off immediately as the slightly-built striker brilliantly controlled a high cross from Siyo Zunapio inside the box before side-volleying it past goalkeeper Rasel Hossain in the 53rd minute. Wari, a Championship club playing without any foreign players, mounted a few attacks but failed to breach Farahganj's solid defence. They were then reduced to 10 men in the 59th minute when defender Mokhesur Rahman unnecessarily fouled Zunapio. Thereafter Farahganj took a stranglehold of the match and substitute Saiful Arefin found the back of the net from a 30-yard dipping shot nine minutes before the end. Wari coach Mahidur Rahman Miraj was also sent off in the 88th minute for protesting the decisions of referee Bharat Chandra Goura.

Sylhet franchise targets

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another former national captain, Khaled Mahmud, as their advisor. Mahmud was also with the Chittagong Tigers, owned by SQ Sports, when they participated in the Port City Cricket League. Meanwhile, the BPL Governing Council and Game On Sport Management held a meeting with the franchise owners and their representatives yesterday. The commercial rights and benefits, code of conduct, playing conditions as well as other important details were discussed. The foreign players' payment, in case of missing matches, will be according to the contracted amount divided by total number of matches multiplied by the matches played by the player. The franchisees have been requested to recruit a head coach, an assistant coach, a physiotherapist, a physical trainer, a computer analyst and a media manager. BPL Governing Council will provide a list of foreign coaches who are interested at this moment along with local available coaches, physio and trainers. The teams have also been requested to include anti-corruption and security personnel. As for the players' auction, the franchises will be given a comprehensive training session on January 16.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Hardly hirsute 5 Teeny bit 9 Frat-party item 12 Reed instrument 13 Unembellished 14 A Gabor sister 15 Prop in a Gidget movie 17 Shrink bark 18 Takes the helm 19 Saunter 21 Opposite of 30-Down 22 Crooner Iglesias 24 Not barefoot 27 Anderson's "High —" 28 Frilly 31 Debtor's letters 32 Towel designation 33 Fish eggs 34 Legend 36 "Characters Welcome" network 37 Probability 38 Pop 40 Hairstyle 41 Boston newspaper 43 Plant of the mint family 47 Grazing area 48 Pub target 51 Listener 52 Notion 53 Pleased 54 Conclusion 55 Under the influence 56 Longings DOWN 23 — 24 Alastair who played Scrooge 25 Today, in Tijuana 26 Motorboat feature 27 So 29 Massachusetts cape 30 Opposite of 21-Across 35 Center 37 Study of eggs 39 Made over 40 Slight touch 41 Jane Lynch's show 42 Tilt 43 Remain 44 Crooner Jerry 45 Persia, now 46 Tosses in 49 Big brother 50 Agt.

Solution time: 25 mins.

FLAK SUM PHEW LAVA MARI RARE OVER HANI ANNA PERMIT SNIDER ANT TYRO ASH TEA CIVILS PEAR RUG EELS PANEL KOD ROIT GEES DEW PROFIT LEAGUE LOVE OVERHANG USER WAS OLIIO MARS ENS OATIS

Grid for Cryptquip puzzle with numbers 1-56 indicating starting positions for words.

CRYPTOQUIP

KRUPU LQJSRIJKP KRNK X TQYU KQ SQFTU TNKU XI KRU UYUIXIS EQJTL FU EQIPXLUCUL IXSRK ECJTTUCP.

Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF YOU SET OUT TO DESTROY STOREFRONTS WITH A HATCHET, I GUESS YOU'RE GOING WINDOW CHOPPING. Today's Cryptquip Clue: F equals B