

## Aussie stint thrills Ajmal

AFP, Karachi  
Pakistan's wily off-spinner Saeed Ajmal said Wednesday he was thrilled at joining Adelaide Strikers for the Australian Big Bash Twenty20 league next month.

He is one of three Pakistani players who have signed to play in Australia's Twenty20 event, along with flamboyant all-rounder Shahid Afridi and dashing young batsman Umar Akmal. Ajmal is the leading wicket-taker in Twenty20 internationals, with 69 from 48 matches, seven ahead of Afridi, who is joining Sydney Thunder. He is also the world number one ODI bowler.

"I am really excited about playing for the Adelaide Strikers and really happy that I will get the chance to show my talent in the BBL [Big Bash League]," Ajmal said. "I am very keen to meet up with the rest of the boys soon and play my best in the games that I am available, with the hope that Adelaide make the final stages and I can return to help win the competition."

But the Pakistani trio's participation in the Big Bash will be interrupted by their country's hotly-anticipated limited-overs tour to India -- the arch-rivals' first full series in five years.

Pakistan play two Twenty20 and three one-day internationals in India between December 25-January 6.

Ajmal will be available for the Strikers' first match, against the Perth Scorchers on December 9, and is likely to return to play the remaining matches of the league after the India tour.

The 35-year-old's foxy bowling guided Pakistan to the semi-final of the World Twenty20 held in Sri Lanka last month, where he snared nine wickets in six games.

## BOA election schedule announced

SPORTS REPORTER

The schedule for the November 29 election of the executive committee Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) was released yesterday. The nomination papers for the election will be distributed from November 15 to 19 and the date for nomination paper submission has been set on November 21. The nomination papers will be scrutinised on November 22 and the last date for nomination withdrawal has been set on November 25.

The circular was signed by the director general of the association Wali Ullah.

## Practice match

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A series is always more important for the visitors than the local side. The case however was a little different for the home team management this time as they were looking forward to this match to decide on a few batting positions for the first Test.

"It's really unfortunate and frustrating. Some players lost an opportunity to get back their confidence. We have targeted this match to settle a few positions but now we have to rely on previous performances, experience and to some extent the performance in the first two rounds of the National Cricket League," said chief selector Akram Khan.



Serbia's world number one Novak Djokovic makes a forehand return against Britain's Andy Murray during their ATP World Tour Finals match in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Novak breaks Andy

Tennis

AFP, London

Novak Djokovic won the latest instalment of his thrilling rivalry with Andy Murray as the world number one fought back to secure a dramatic 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 victory in the ATP Tour Finals at London's O2 Arena on Wednesday.

Djokovic has a 100 percent record after two Group A matches at the season-ending event and will be guaranteed a place in the semi-finals if France's Jo-Wilfried Tsonga defeats Czech fifth seed Tomas Berdych later on Wednesday.

World number three Murray now needs to win his final group match against Tsonga on Friday to avoid an early exit after the US Open champion failed to take advantage of a promising start.

Djokovic and Murray have been on-court rivals and off-court friends since the day they first faced off at an Under-12s tournament in the south of France.

And, with Roger Federer approaching the end of his career and Rafael Nadal hampered by knee problems, their meetings have emerged as the sport's most significant occasions.

In 2012 alone they have clashed seven times, with Djokovic starting the year with victory in the Australian Open semi-finals and Murray getting his revenge with an Olympic last four win and then, even

more significantly, a five-set triumph over the Serb to win his first Grand Slam title at the US Open.

Djokovic won their most recent meeting in the Shanghai final after saving five match points and his self-preservation instincts helped him survive another epic showdown lasting two hours and 34 minutes.

With their two Grand Slam meetings this year both timed at just short of five hours, Murray expected another gruelling clash against one of the few players who can match his stamina and defensive skills. He wasn't to be disappointed.

The Scot tried to stamp his authority on the tie as quickly as possible and earned a break point in the first game which he took with a forehand winner on the run.

Murray kept Djokovic at bay with some fine serving and, while he couldn't convert his first set point on the Serb's serve, he sealed the set at the second attempt in the next game.

Djokovic was gradually finding his rhythm however and a lunging volley in the sixth game of the second set secured his first break point, which he converted, celebrating with a wild fist-pump when Murray's volley drifted long, before serving out the set.

There was real power and purpose to Djokovic's game now and he pounced on a rare loose service game from Murray to break for a 2-1 lead in the decider.

## Bell hopes for best

ANI, London

England batsman Ian Bell is confident of putting up a good show in the Test series against India, starting on November 15, despite a poor form and an impending paternity leave.

Bell, who has struggled to make runs against spin abroad this year, would be returning home for the birth of his first child and therefore, would be missing the second Test, which begins on November 23.

However, as someone who has played in all of England's last 34 Tests, generally with distinction, Bell feels he has built enough credit to automatically regain his place when he returns for the third Test in Kolkata.

## England not

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United Arab Emirates earlier this year, before they could manage a draw in the two-match Test rubber against Sri Lanka in April.

Swann, however, said that the wicket in Dubai was different from the typical sub-continent track. "I think last winter was a bit different," Swann was quoted as saying by cricinfo.com.

"First of all, when we played in Dubai that was not really the subcontinent, that wicket was very unique in the sense that it was very skiddy and span as well."

Swann later flew home ahead of the final tour match against Haryana to spend time with his daughter who is unwell. He is however expected to return before the first Test.

## No. 1 ranking at stake

### Aus-SA begin Test series Friday

Cricket

AFP, Brisbane

Pace-packed South Africa's number one world ranking is on the line in a mouth-watering Test series against an in-form Australia team that starts at Brisbane's Gabba on Friday.

The Proteas, who became the world's top side after an impressive 2-1 series victory in England earlier this year, are looking to repeat their historic series win in Australia four years ago against Michael Clarke's ageing side.

But the glittering incentive for the home team is that they can usurp South Africa and return to the top of the rankings with victory in the three-Test series, which also includes matches in Adelaide and Perth.

Skipper Graeme Smith said South Africa were taking strength from their first ever series win on Australian soil on their last tour, in 2008-09.

"Obviously, winning here four years ago certainly helps in the self-belief factor, knowing that you've overcome a hurdle before," Smith said.

"Winning in someone else's backyard, it's a tough thing to do and that challenge is something that excites us."

The Proteas will unleash their formidable pace battery, led by Test cricket's leading pair Dale Steyn and Vernon Philander and backed up by Morne Morkel.

The Gabba pitch traditionally offers early life and bounce, with the South Africans yet to win in three Brisbane visits, the last in 1963.

South Africa bowling coach Allan Donald spiced up the showdown series by declaring his country's current pace attack the best he had ever seen.

Donald in his prime was one of the most fearsome quicks in international cricket, ripping through opposition batsmen with partner Shaun Pollock but even he admitted the current crop was a league above.

The Proteas also boast a formidable

batting line-up featuring the likes of Smith, Hashim Amla, Jacques Kallis, JP Duminy and AB de Villiers.

Duminy said South Africa's batting depth was a key factor in their series win over England in August, which was de Villiers's first as a wicketkeeper-batsman following an eye injury to Mark Boucher.

"It definitely feels good," Duminy said. "I think it's helped a lot in the previous series. Hopefully it will pay dividends to us this time again."

Former Australian skipper and senior batsman Ricky Ponting has urged his side to embrace the daunting challenge of taking on South Africa, saying the home team, currently ranked third, are within touching distance of the world's best side.

Ponting believes his teammates should not forget it was largely the same Proteas' line-up they defeated by two wickets in Johannesburg just 12 months ago to secure a share of the spoils in their two-Test series.

"It's really important for us as a group to realise just how close we are to them as a team," Ponting said.

"They're the number one ranked team in the world, and deservedly so, but we're breathing down their necks."

Australia go into the opening Test without influential all-rounder Shane Watson, who succumbed to a calf injury and was replaced by left-hander Rob Quiney, who will be making his Test debut.

Australia coach Mickey Arthur, who guided South Africa between 2005 and 2010, said his side remained highly confident of toppling the Proteas despite losing Watson.

Australia have won eight of their past 10 Tests, including a 4-0 whitewash of India at home during the last Australian summer.

"We are comfortable we have the players and we have the cover," Arthur said.

"We're relaxed, we're calm. I think the team is in a really good space."

"We're excited and really hungry for some success. We see this as a massive opportunity for us."

## Ricky's eyes on Gabba

Cricket

AFP, Brisbane

Senior batsman Ricky Ponting plans to step up sprint work to prove his fitness from a hamstring injury ahead of Friday's opening Brisbane Test against South Africa.

Ponting withdrew during last week's Sheffield Shield game for Tasmania with hamstring tightness, but said he was feeling better two days out from the Gabba opener with the top-ranked Proteas.

"I came down early and did 20 or 30 minutes of running before the boys got here today which is part of the process the physios have mapped out for me for the next few days," Ponting told reporters on Wednesday.

"I'll probably ramp things up a little on Thursday with a bit more intense running with some sprint work and another full-on hit in the nets."

"I didn't feel anything with it today so I expect to be right."

As skipper Michael Clarke muses over the final make-up of his bowling attack, the heat was on in the practice nets on Wednesday as the battery of fast bowlers went about their work to impress selectors.

Clarke took a blow on the wrist and had his hand in a bucket of ice following his

net session.

"The boys [bowlers] have been going exceptionally well trying to impress and that's good," former skipper Ponting said.

"That's the sort of intensity we have come to demand around our net sessions now."

"When we train, all the bowlers are going flat out and they've got new balls and all the batters are making sure they get through their first 20 balls in the nets."

Meanwhile, opener Ed Cowan goes into the first Test under pressure to hold on to his Test spot with top-order batsman Rob Quiney to make his Test debut for injured all-rounder Shane Watson.

Cowan is averaging 29.83 and is feeling the heat at the top of the Australian batting line-up with Watson expected to return at number three once he recovers from a calf muscle injury.

"There's always something to prove in the Australian cricket team," Cowan told reporters.

"Seven Tests now is a point in time where you know what Test match cricket is all about and what you need to get to that point in peak performance."

"At no stage have I felt out of my depth. I probably haven't performed as well as I'd have like to in terms of getting myself in and not going on and getting a match-winning score."

## PFLC places its demands

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formed on Sunday last.

Having welcomed the initiatives of the club association, Salahuddin hoped the relationship between the federation and clubs would be smoother and any problems, if arise, would be solved through discussion.

With the previous activities of the club association, a general perception has been borne that players might be deprived during the players' transfer due to 'gentleman's agreement among the clubs.'

Asked whether he urged the club officials to come forward to stop playing fixed matches, the BFF president said, "It

sounds bitter if you beat the drum repeatedly. When I retired from football, I knew that matches were being fixed on the table of federation. But things are much different now as match-fixing has been all but eradicated. I assure you that there will be no fixed matches and if it happens, then punishment will be taken accordingly.

Kazi Salahuddin also said that they are dreaming of qualifying for the 2022 World Cup and keeping this in mind they would work with district football associations from tomorrow (Thursday).

"I am not dreaming with the current players, rather I am dreaming of those budding booters who are now aged 10."

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS: 1 Ended a chess game, 6 Rule, for short, 9 Lawyers' org., 12 Accustom, 13 Acapulco gold, 14 Varnish ingredient, 15 Hammerstein's contribution, 16 Fond of reading, 18 Jacks, 20 Being, to Brutus, 21 "Ball —", 23 Ever-green type, 24 Sasquatch's kin, 25 Siberian city, 27 Album item, 29 Colleague, 31 Have-not, 35 William's mum, 37 Actress Giffpin, 38 Jeans material, 41 Indiana Jones' pursuit, 43 Upper limit, 44 Vicinity, 45 Siege, 47 Sickly sentimentality, 49 Mrs. Gorbachev, 52 Coopers-town Giant, 53 Soccer star, 54 Plus-column entry, 55 Ph. bk. info, 56 Skillet, 57 Giggly sound, 17 Maintain, 19 Panorama of 52-Across committee, 22 I love, to Livy, 24 Singer Sumac, 26 Alaskan bear, 28 In two places, 30 Edge option, 32 Hungry Raymond, 33 Mound brother, 34 Wardrobe malfunction, 36 "Guys and Dolls" lead, 38 Pythias' pal, 39 Love poet's Muse, 40 Salamanders, 42 Gold measure, 45 One side of the Urals, 46 Docket entry, 48 Little demon, 50 Witness, 51 Dined

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## CRYPTOQUIP

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Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals I