

Chess' popularity on the rise: Anand

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

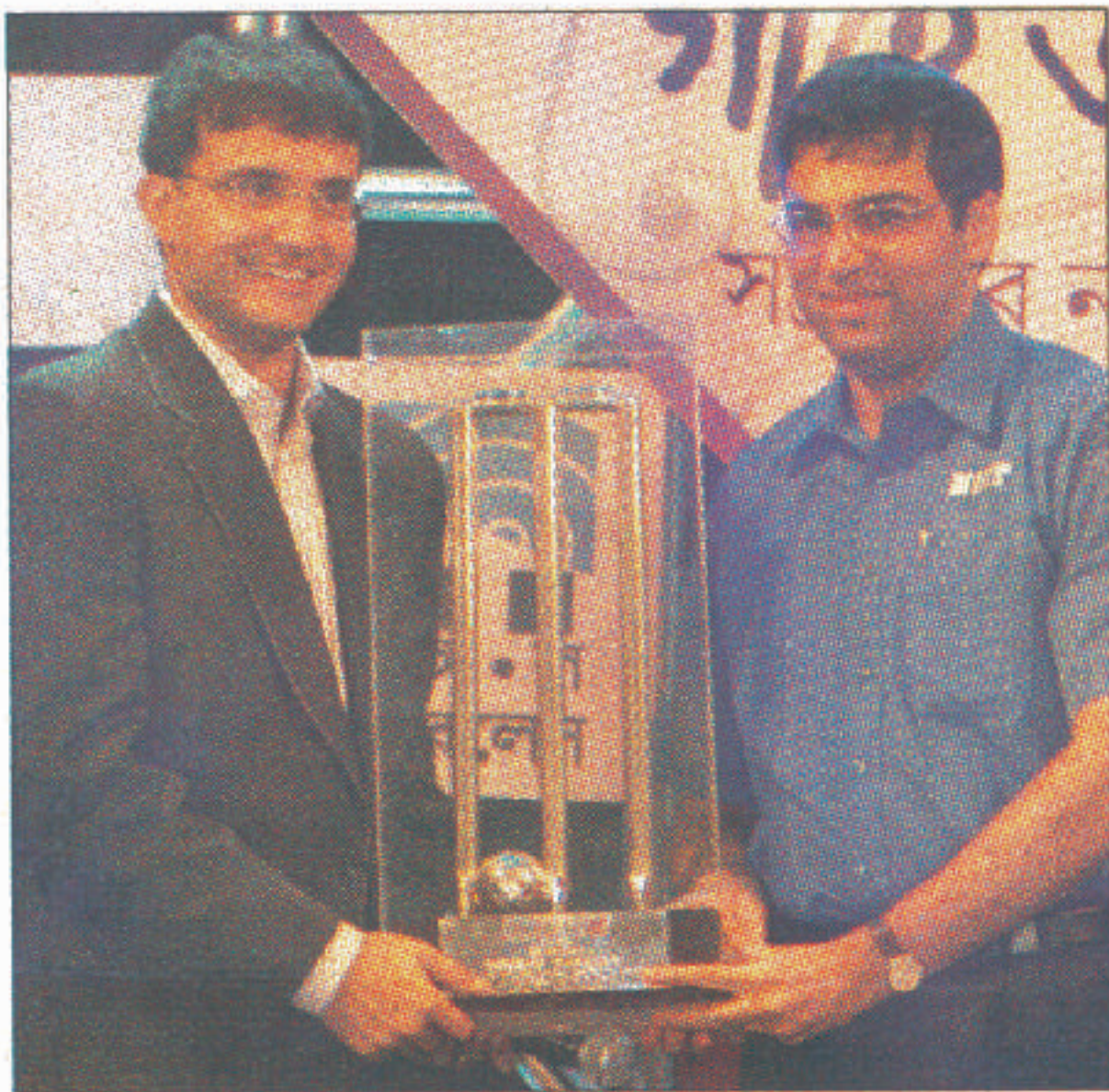
KOLKATA

Jan. 15: Winning the world championship title thrice is a feat that very few sporting icons of India have achieved so far. Viswanathan Anand certainly belongs to that rare group whose mastery in the game of chess has held the tri-colour high in the sports fraternity.

The world champion is optimistic of the future of Indian chess even after he calls it a day, though he shies away those who blame cricket for hogging all the limelight, thereby pushing other games further backwards.

"The situation in chess is much better today compared to what it was 20 years ago. Sponsorship today is quite encouraging. The only thing is carrying out your work step by step. Another significant aspect is grooming the interested kids from various academies. Once these are done in a process, I'm sure the popularity will go up further," Anand said on the sidelines of a felicitation ceremony organised by NIIT.

"Back in 1987, we had only one grandmaster. Now, there are 18. Even last year, we had five gold-medallists from our country. Besides, we have players like Surya Shekhar (Ganguly), Sasikiran, Parimarjan Negi who



Sourav Ganguly (left) and Viswanathan Anand during a felicitation ceremony in Kolkata on Thursday.

— *Debajyoti Sarkar*

are consistently rising above their game. Surya Shekhar particularly is highly impressive. I've been working with him since 2002-03. I was keen on having him with me in Bonn."

Anand didn't forget to focus on the role that should be played by parent body All India Chess Federation, who he thinks should concentrate on organising more international tournaments. "There are certain things which they are handling well. But there's always scope for doing a little more since the number of tourna-

ments have gone up by far nowadays.

"What they should focus on now is spreading the game throughout the country and organising more international tournaments," Anand emphasised.

Dedication, passion and enjoyment are the three components that lead to the path of success, Anand feels. "It's all about doing something you enjoy and love the most. The rest, off course, depends on practice. And yes, on the eve of a match, practice hours may last from three to 10 hours."