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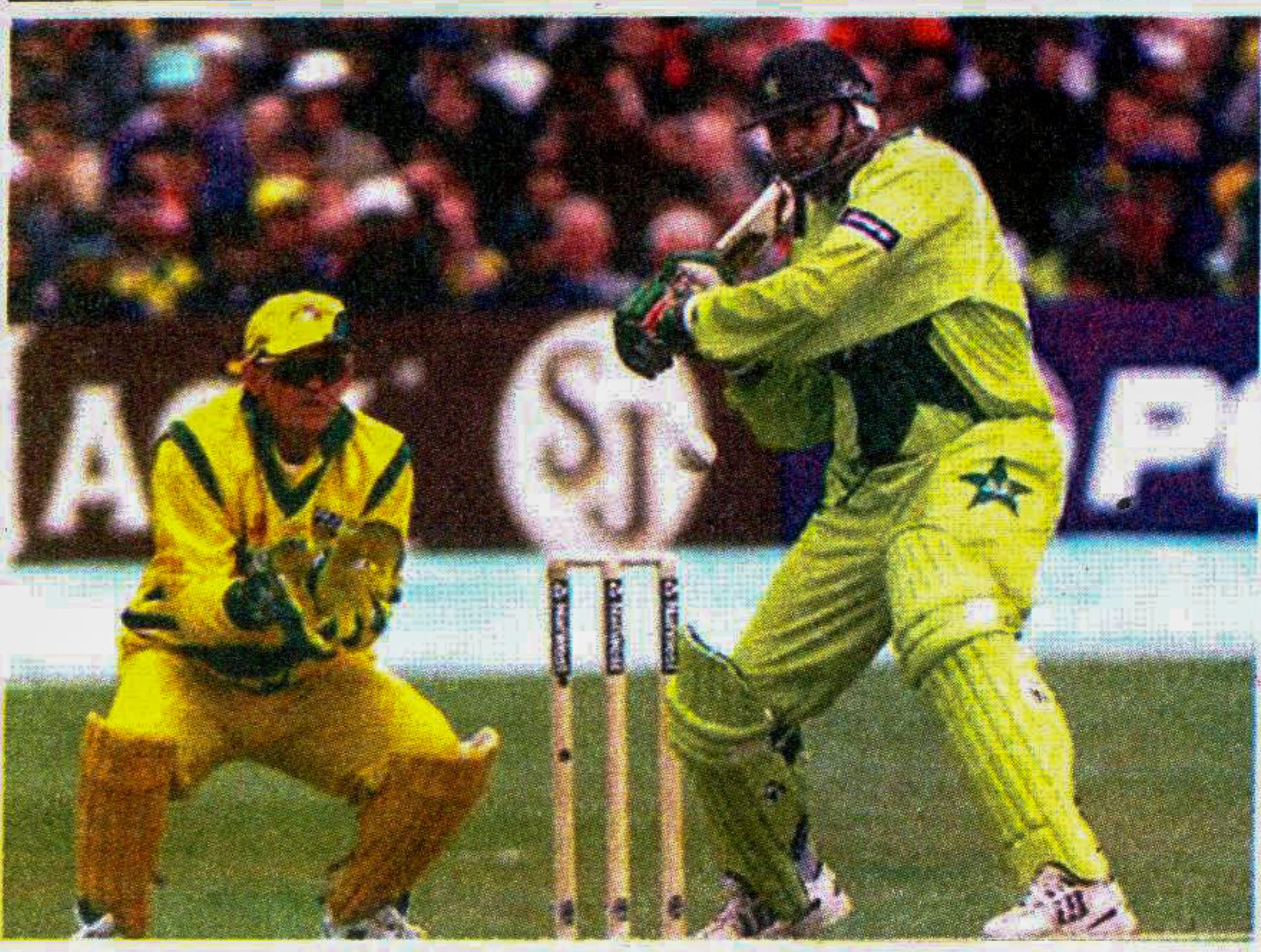


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Inzamain-ul Haq prepares to square cut at Headingley yesterday. — Internet photo

A test of Kiwi mettle

SOUTHAMPTON, May 23: For weeks, New Zealand's cricketers have been revelling in their reputation as boring World Cup underdogs, reports AFP.

Now they have been forced out into the open.

When the Kiwis, whose World Cup odds have been slashed from 20-1 outsiders to 7-1 shots, take on the West Indies here on Monday, they will start as favourites.

Stephen Fleming's men, fresh from defeating the much-vaunted Australians, have the added incentive of knowing that victory will surely propel them from group B into the second round.

But for Brian Lara's team, whose predecessors won the 1975 and 1979 titles, defeat could mean humiliating elimination.

The West Indies are expected to delay naming their team until the last moment, in the hope that Keith Arthurton - a top-order batsman who bowls useful spin and strike bowler Curtly Ambrose pass fitness tests.

Arthurton turned over an ankle in the side's opening defeat to Pakistan and Ambrose withdrew from the victory against Bangladesh with a shoulder injury.

Without them, Monday's line-up will look severely short of bowling.

Lara's claim that his team was "coming together" after a less-than-impressive victory over Bangladesh may have been designed for Caribbean consumption, but few neutrals were won over.



BRIAN LARA

Lara himself, who came to the World Cup after scoring 213, 153 and 100 in consecutive Tests against Australia, is struggling with the bat, with only 26 runs in two innings.

New Zealand, in contrast, are looking increasingly dangerous.

Matthew Engel, editor of the cricketing bible Wisden, dubbed them the least charismatic team in the world before the tournament.

That delighted the Kiwis. Top-order batsman Craig McMillan said: "Not so many

HEAD-TO-HEAD

New Zealand and the West Indies have not played each other at Test or one-day level in the past year.

World Cup:

The two teams have clashed three times. Clive Lloyd's West Indies won by five wickets in the 1975 semi-final on their way to the title and by 32 runs in the preliminary round in 1979, before they won again. In 1992, New Zealand took their revenge at home in Auckland, winning by five wickets as Mark Greatbatch made 63 and Martin Crowe 81 not out.

Players to watch:

New Zealand: Geoff Allott. The hero of his team's five-wicket win over Australia. The left-arm seamer took four for 37 to peg Australia back at 213 for eight. He also took three for 30 in the first match against Bangladesh. Previously regarded as too wayward for one-day success but the English conditions seem to suit his style perfectly.

West Indies: Jimmy Adams. The left-hand batsman has finally established himself in the one-day team after good performances in the recent home series against Australia. Scored an unbeaten 53 against Bangladesh, indicating he may be adjusting to the conditions in what is a bowlers' tournament. Values his wicket highly.

Venue: Southampton. The home of county team Hampshire, it was opened in 1885. The World Cup is the last major events to be staged at the ground before Hampshire move to a new purpose-built stadium in 2001. Capacity: 4,600. (AFP)

people are talking about New Zealand in the Super Six or semi-finals so that suits us fine. We are looking to sneak up and surprise a few people."

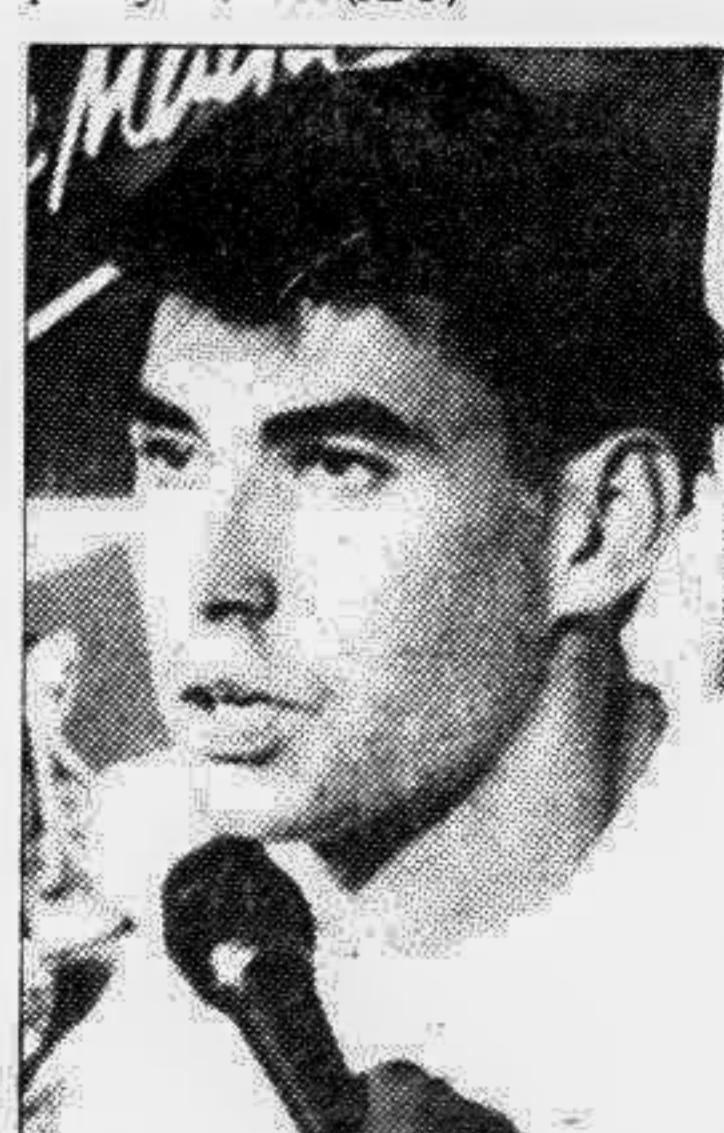
Engel repeated his assessment after New Zealand's win over Australia, calling them "competent and efficient" and adding: "Let's see if they beat Pakistan and the West Indies first. This is just one win."

To some extent, Engel has a point, but very few teams can be compared favourably with the exciting, talent-packed Pakistani and South African sides.

Similarly, very few teams have individual players with the pulling-power of Lara or India's Sachin Tendulkar.

New Zealand, like hosts England, rely more on teamwork, canny bowling and collective spirit than individual brilliance.

It may not be spectacular, but



STEPHEN FLEMING



Allan Donald is ecstatic after Darryl Cullinan (Not in picture) has taken the catch of England batsman Mark Balham at the Oval on May 22. — AFP photo

Struck by 'white lightning'

LONDON, May 23 (AFP): Allan Donald hasn't been much discussed in recent months.

He's still in the frame, of course. Just nearer to the edge of the picture than he used to be.

The South African cricket World Cup side is so full of fresh and exciting talent - Jacques Kallis, Shaun Pollock, Lance Klusener, Herschelle Gibbs, Mark Boucher - that the focus has shifted away from the 32-year-old bowler from Bloemfontein.

So he can't have been too surprised when the match adjudicators at the Oval on Saturday decided that four for 17 off eight overs against England did not merit a man-of-the-match award.

Many of the 18,500 people at the ground disagreed. Sure, Klusener's colourful 48 off 40

balls salvaged the South African innings and helped pave the way to a 122-run win. But four top-order wickets are not to be sniffed at.

Donald, the top South African wicket-taker in both Tests and one-day internationals, effectively shut England out of the game just as the hosts were suggesting the World Cup hosts might smuggle themselves back into it.

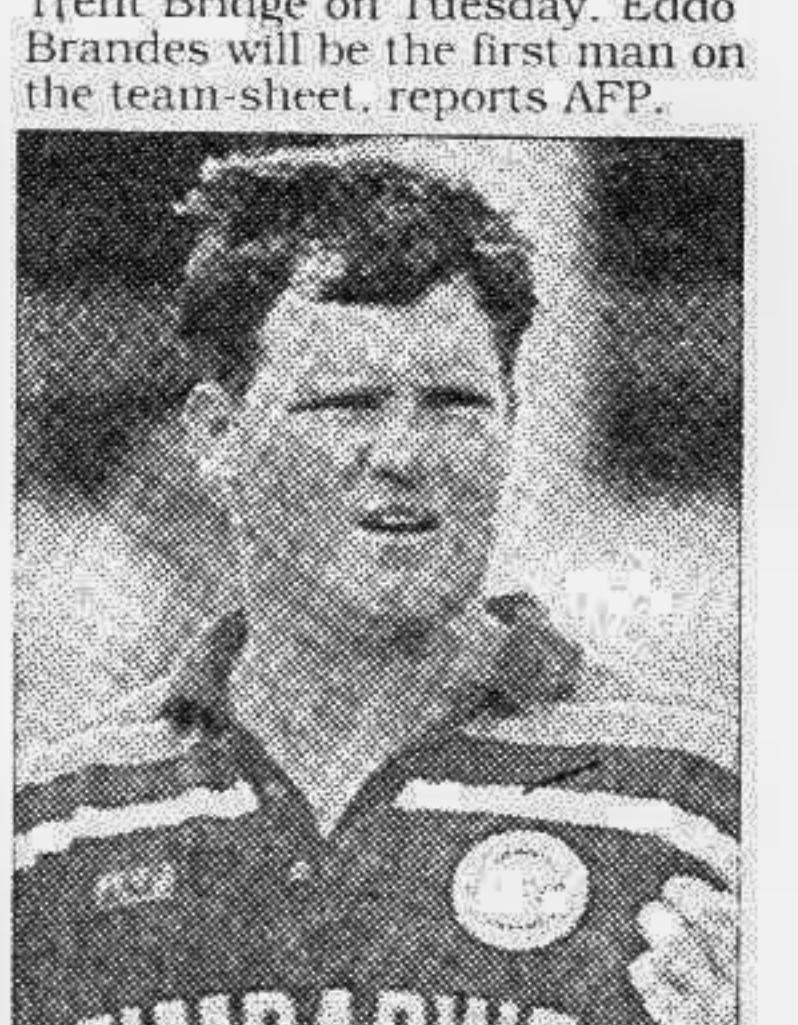
His dismissal of Graham Thorpe was a classic, the ball jagging sharply back into the left-hander and trapping him, plumb leg before. Mark Ealham's wicket came from a ball that darted away and ended in the hands of first slip.

Donald mixed up the pace that earned him the nickname of "White Lightning" with cut.

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Farmer's favourite 'chicken'

LONDON, May 23: When Zimbabwe line up against England in the cricket World Cup at Trent Bridge on Tuesday, Eddy Brandes will be the first man on the team-sheet, reports AFP.



EDDY BRANDES

Never mind that the ageing seamer has done nothing of note in the competition to date - no wicket in 11 overs costing 55 runs.

Never mind that the veteran of the last three tournaments is no longer an automatic choice

for the African side. Brandes, who fits in his cricket as best he can while running a chicken farm, is the team's talisman when it comes to England. He seems certain to take the field in Nottingham for a game which could decide which of the sides gets through to the second round.

Zimbabwe have played their group A rivals six times in one-dayers and lost only once. "Chicken George", as he is known, has played a large part in that record.

As coach David Houghton says: "He has beaten England on his own about four times and he is currently the fittest I have seen him - and that's when he performs well."

The South African-born 36-year-old is being used selectively during the tournament, he says, but "I can see him playing against England because he's always done pretty well against them."

"Pretty well" includes a hat-trick against them on the way to a match-winning five-wicket haul in a 1996/97 one-dayer - Nick Knight, John Crawley and Nasser Hussain were his victims.

See page 14

Indian Premier congratulates Tendulkar

NEW DELHI, May 23: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Sunday set aside his political worries to hail Sachin Tendulkar for his 140 runs not out against Kenya in the World Cup cricket in England, reports AFP.

Vajpayee's message, faxed to all western news organisations with an hour of India totalling a monstrous 329 for two in their make-or-break World Cup match, described Tendulkar's smash a "wonderful century."

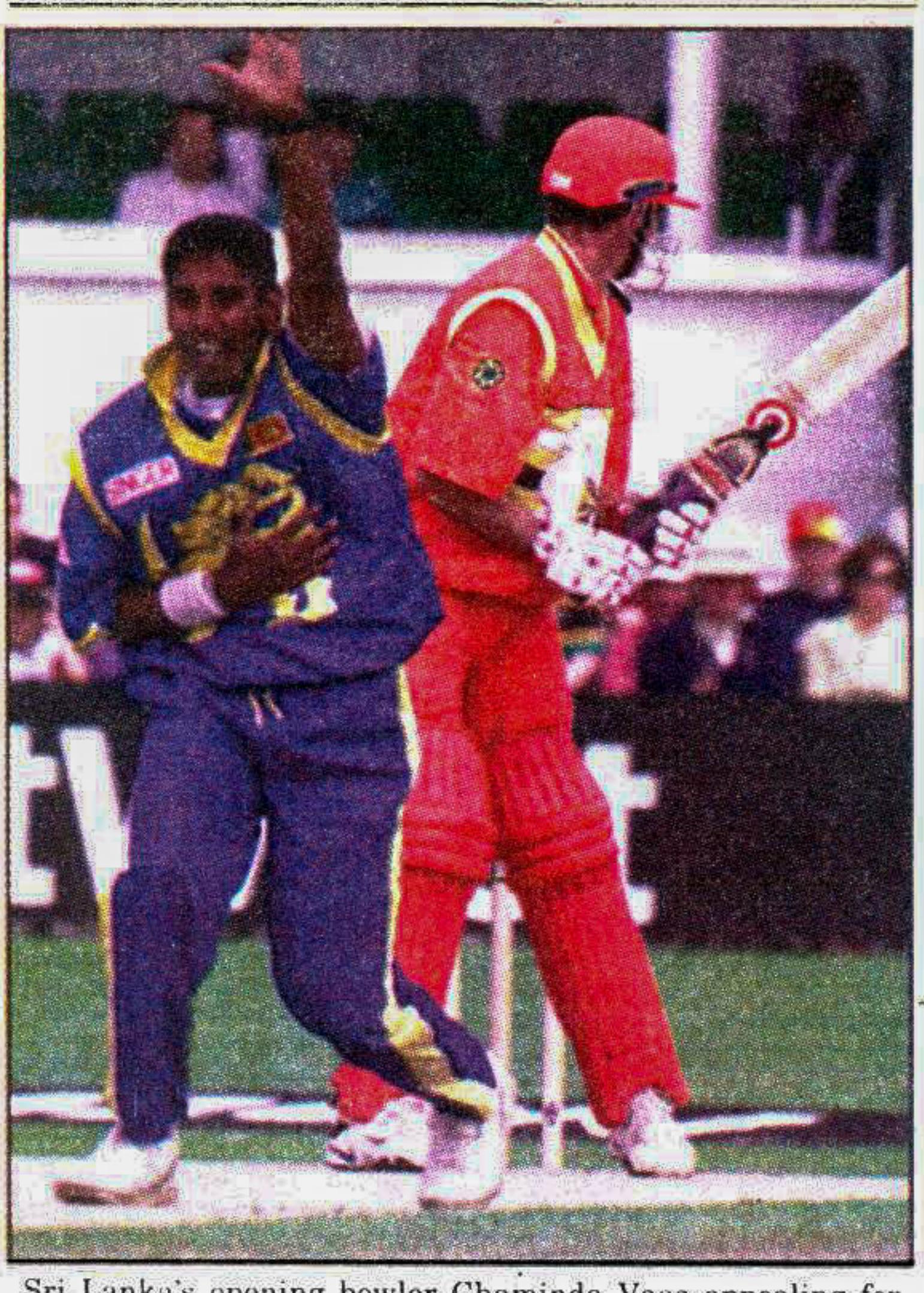
"Heartiest Congratulations to you," Vajpayee, a diehard fan of the game in cricket-crazy India, said in a message to Tendulkar, who flew back to England on Saturday after attending his father's funeral in Bombay.

"It was a wonderful century, made unforgettable especially by the tragic circumstance in which you scored it," the Prime Minister said.

"Not only did you not let the deep personal loss caused by your father's sudden demise deter you, but you actually used it as an inspiration to scale another summit in cricketing excellence."

"The whole of India is proud of you today," Vajpayee told Tendulkar.

"You have shown the entire nation... how to serve the nation by overcoming each and every adversity," said Vajpayee, whose outgoing coalition government faces national elections in September-October.



Sri Lanka's opening bowler Chaminda Vaas appealing for lbw against Neil Johnson of Zimbabwe at Worcester on May 22. — AFP photo

Counting on cold

LONDON, May 23 (Internet report): Scotland bid for their place in cricketing history when they take on Bangladesh in Edinburgh on Monday.

Since the draw was made for their first appearance in the World Cup, coach Jim Love has earmarked this single game as the one Scotland must win in order to achieve their ultimate goal.

Love knows that a win, after the dress rehearsals against Australia and Pakistan, would make Scotland's case for international one-day status watertight.

And with the cold and blustery conditions which hit the Scottish capital today set to drift into the first World Cup game to be held north of the border, the home side have a marked advantage.

However, Scotland did lose a World Cup qualifier against Monday's opponents last year and in opener Mehrab Hossain the visitors will have the only man on the field with an international century to his credit.

"Nobody else knows too much about Bangladesh - but we do," said Love. "They have a decent batting line-up and have some capable spinners but I'm not sure they will be ready for a day in Edinburgh."

Scotland must start well if they are to achieve their ultimate objective.

"It's only in a competition like this that we can get our full strength side together and show what we are capable of," said Love.

Bangladesh have been given one-day status and if we beat them tomorrow there will be no excuses for us not getting it either."

The undoubted batting success has been Yorkshire all-rounder Gavin Hamilton, who has twice pulled Scotland to respectability after calamitous starts.

"The batsmen need to concentrate more... the middle order has been failing to build on a good start," said Cronje after title favourites South Africa defeated England by 122 runs at The Oval Saturday.

"We are doing the right things," Cronje said. "But a lot of hard work still needs to be done."

But Cronje is not satisfied.

"We need to play much better than this," he said. "We can't relax and must win the remaining two group matches as well."

Points logged in the group matches against teams which qualified for the Super Six phase will be carried forward.

The pressure is on us to See Page 14

"We now have two important games," Campbell said. "We are playing two teams who are playing very well. We did not get enough runs (against Sri Lanka). Our batting was the thing that let us down."

England have met Zimbabwe just once before in the World Cup at the 1992 tournament when the African side won by nine runs in Albury, Australia.

That victory in the last round of round-robin matches marked Zimbabwe's only triumph in the group stage while England went on to make the final where they lost to Pakistan.

Bothersome batting

NOTTINGHAM, England, May 23: After suffering their first defeat of the tournament England and Zimbabwe are worried about batting form ahead of their World Cup Group A game at Trent Bridge on Tuesday.

"We need to put in a performance that warrants a win," England captain Stewart said. "We did not do it as a batting team against South Africa."

"If we win against Zimbabwe and beat India (in our last first-round match) then we will be second... They are all big games and we hope to get back to winning ways."

The Trent Bridge result is even more important for Zimbabwe since they have the harder of the two teams running, facing the impressive South Africans in their last first-round match.

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Australia's Damien Martyn (R) tries to gather the ball while Younus Youhana sprints to the crease at Headingley yesterday. — Internet photo