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RANGS GROUP

# An African mismatch

AMSTERDAM, May 25 : World Cup favourites South Africa take on minnows Kenya on Dutch soil here on Wednesday hoping to brush up the only weak link in their game - the top-order batting, reports AFP.

rectifying a mistake they made at the last World Cup.

Then, they breezed through five league matches only to be knocked out by Brian Lara's West Indies in the quarter-finals.

"Maybe we slipped up because not all the batters had a chance in the early games," Cronje said.

"Then suddenly there was pressure in the quarter-final and we had batters going to the wicket who had not had a knock."

Although South Africa have won their first three matches this time, the top six batsmen have yet to hit consistent form.

All-rounder Shaun Pollock has not been among the runs and seems certain to play, as will reserve spinners Nicky Boje and Derek Crookes, all-rounder Alan Dawson and Natal batsman Dale Benkenstein.

The match at the VRA ground in Amstelveen, on the outskirts of Amsterdam, will be the first official international played in Holland. It is also the only World Cup match being played outside Britain.

South Africa played at the ground during their tour of England in 1998 when they beat Holland by 83 runs.

On that occasion the South Africans found the turf pitch,

only the second to be laid in Holland, to be true but slow and low.

A win will give the South Africans eight points from four matches, well-placed to top group A.

Kenya, who stunned the West Indies in the last World Cup, are still recovering from the thrashing handed out by India's Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid on Sunday. The pair put a World Cup record partnership of 237.

Kenyan captain Asif Karim said: "We will give it our best shot. It will be quite an experience playing against the best."

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## HEAD-TO-HEAD

First World Cup encounter between the two sides. Kenya have only recently been granted international one-day status and are not yet recognised as a Test-playing country.

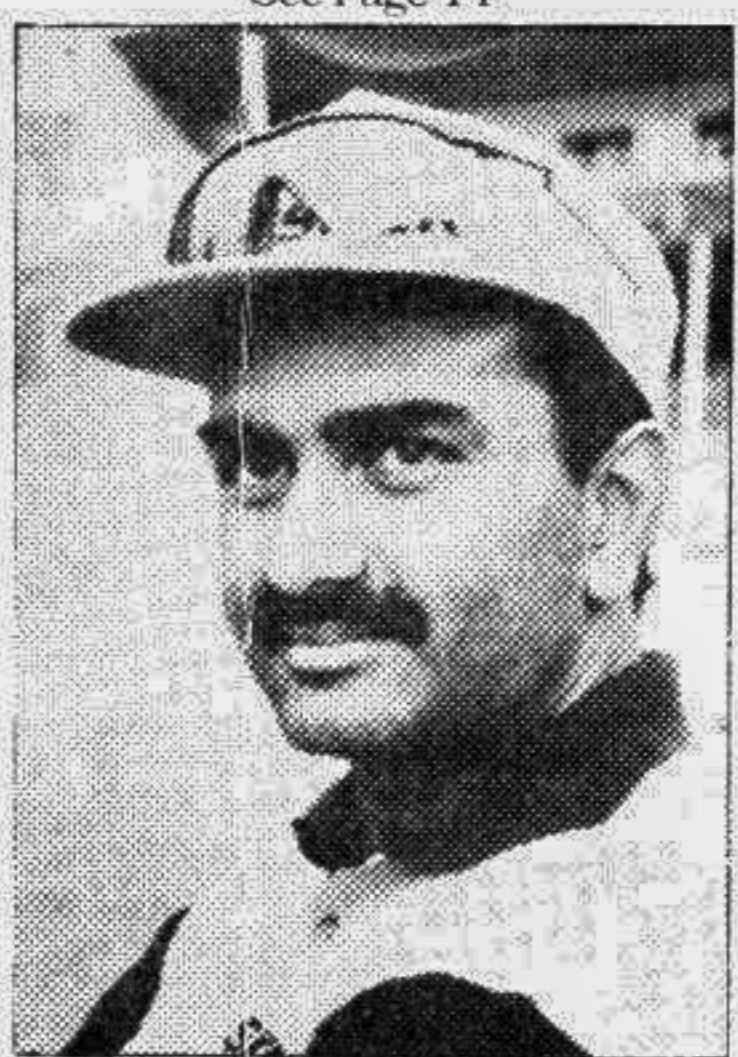
### Players to watch:

**Kenya:** Maurice Odumbe, vice-captain, right-hand bat and right-arm off break bowler. Has played in all of Kenya's official internationals. Best bowling 3-14 in shock win over West Indies in 1996 World Cup.

**South Africa:** Shaun Pollock. Conceded just 23 runs in his last 17 World Cup overs against England and Sri Lanka. But the flame-haired all-rounder has yet to take a bagful of wickets or show his qualities with the bat, with just two runs from two innings, including one golden duck.

### Venue:

Amstelveen, in the suburbs of Dutch capital. Staging only one match in the World Cup. Home to VRA, the Dutch cricket champions. Former West Indian batsman Faoud Bacchus used to play for the team. Capacity: 5,000. (AFP)



AASIF KARIM



HANSIE CRONJE



Zimbabwean all-rounder Neil Johnson looks down at the shattered stumps after being bowled by England fast bowler Darren Gough at Trent Bridge yesterday. — AFP photo

## A twist of fate Time to play tough

LONDON, May 25 (AFP/Internet): Minhazul Abedin was being hailed a hero by Bangladesh on Tuesday - less than a month after the selectors ruled he had no part to play in the country's World Cup debut.

The 35-year-old all-rounder was axed from the 15-man squad last month, only to be brought in at the last minute following a public furore which also led to the entire selection committee being sacked.

Minhazul repaid their faith on Sunday by hitting a match-winning 68 not out against Scotland after his side had been teetering on the brink at 26 for five.

Captain Aminul Islam said Minhazul should have been in the team from the beginning.

"We were all surprised when he was dropped," Aminul said. "But what we could not change, the public did. They made sure he was there with us in England."

The soft-spoken Minhazul thanked his team-mates and fans, saying he was inspired by their support.

"Cricket is big in Bangladesh and I knew millions will be following our progress at the World Cup," he said. "I got in the team because of them."

Skipper Aminul said his side had always known they

would lose to the Test-playing nations in Group B but added: "Scotland was our goal. We beat them in the World Cup qualifiers two years ago and did it again. There will be celebrations last a whole week in Dhaka."

Aminul's men will each return home richer by 100,000 taka (2,000 US dollars), a reward promised by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina which the authorities have decided to double after Monday's win.



MINHAZUL ABEDIN

CHESTER-LE-STREET, England, May 25 (Reuters/Internet): Australian captain Steve Waugh said on Tuesday his team would be playing hard and aggressive cricket as they fight tooth and nail to stay in the World Cup.

Waugh, speaking at the northeastern England ground where they play Bangladesh on Thursday, said Australia would be looking to score a lot of runs quickly against the unfancied side playing in their first World Cup.

He said they would also play the same way in the crunch match against West Indies on Sunday.

"We have got to win these matches convincingly and we will be playing aggressively," said Waugh, whose team must win their last two games after defeats by New Zealand and Pakistan.

"Anyone who writes us off is a bad judge. We are going to get through to the next round and take it from there," he said.

"We have got to win this match and then the last one will be a cut-throat game."

Australia are at risk of losing out on a place in the Super Six stage of the tournament and even wins in their last two games may not be enough. Defeat in either would definitely

see them on their way home.

Pakistan top group B after winning their first three matches and New Zealand, West Indies and Australia are chasing the other two qualification places.

Waugh said the Australian team would be studying various permutations before naming the team for Thursday.

"We need to win this game by a big margin," said Waugh, whose team has been criticised for tactical errors during the two defeats.

Australian media and Pakistani captain Wasim Akram have said Australia lacked an effective fifth bowler in their team, but Waugh disputed this and said all the bowlers contributed to allowing Pakistan to score 275 runs on Sunday.

"They scored 145 from the last 15 overs, some of their batting was pretty outrageous," said Waugh.

Waugh said the Australian team would be looking at ways to curb runs in the last 10 overs of matches and he said several options were available.

He said they would probably aim to introduce a bowling all-rounder in an attempt to back up the bowling attack of Glenn McGrath, Paul Reiffel, Damien Fleming and Shane Warne. He

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## Indian armoury full Azhar alarmed

TAUNTON, England, May 25 (Reuters): India have key bowlers Anil Kumble and Venkatesh Prasad fit again after injury for tomorrow's make-or-break World Cup Group A match against Sri Lanka.

Leg-spinner Kumble and paceman Prasad missed the last game against Kenya at Bristol on Sunday when their team swept to a 94-run victory, their first of the tournament.

It left India and Sri Lanka level on two points and needing

of extras in the tournament as a whole but we have really got to concentrate on cutting them down," said Azharuddin as his squad practised at Somerset's county ground here today.

"We are working on the problem and hopefully it should be all right tomorrow. The white ball does (swing) a lot and when you play in England in May the wickets are very damp."

Srinath, who had an immensely successful season in county cricket with Gloucester-

LONDON, May 25 : Mohammad Azharuddin made a fresh appeal to World Cup organisers here on Tuesday, warning volatile fans could spark trouble during India's crunch match with rivals Sri Lanka, reports AFP.

Azharuddin, who was jostled by a drunken fan earlier in the tournament, said he feared for his players' safety and said they should be given greater protection from supporters.

His call came after Australia threatened to quit the tournament unless player safety was guaranteed.

The tournament organisers are calling on the Government to introduce emergency measures to punish people running onto the pitch.

Azharuddin added: "It's a big problem... they just come on to the field after the match and push us around. We certainly don't want to be treated like that."

"I don't know who these people are, and don't care. I just want my team to be protected. We complained, the Australians also did, but it continues to happen."

This is something they have to tackle."

India's match against Sri Lanka is likely to be a highly-charged affair. The losers will be out of the tournament and can be certain of an angry reception from their fanatical fans.

Azharuddin, the subject of a campaign calling for his removal just before the World Cup, said he had been bombarded with hate mail from so-called Indian supporters.

"I have never been abused so much in my life, it appears the whole world is against me," he said.

"These things have never worried me, but my father was in the stands in the game against Zimbabwe and he was very embarrassed."

The focus on security has continued at a time the World Cup, following several serious incidents in Asia and the Caribbean.

Around 70,000 fans had to be cleared from Calcutta's renowned Eden Gardens stadium in February to allow an India-Pakistan Test to continue after fans began throwing bottles onto the field following a controversial dismissal.

Australian captain Steve Waugh, meanwhile, said he feared for his life during pitch invasions in the West Indies at the start of the year.

Pitch invasions at British football grounds have been curbed by fencing in recent years. But young cricket fans running onto the pitch in search of autographs have long been tolerated here.

Indian coach Anshuman Gaekwad, however, said on Tuesday: "These are certainly not youngsters asking for autographs. These are grown up men, many of them drunk."

"It's a big game tomorrow. I hope some action is being taken, otherwise we will have the same thing again."

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## Money still on South Africa

LONDON, May 25 (Reuters): South Africa remain clear favourites to win the World Cup with bookmakers William Hill quoting them at 6-5 on Monday.

### LATEST ODDS

6-5 South Africa
5-2 Pakistan
15-2 England
8-1 Australia
11-1 New Zealand, West Indies
20-1 India
25-1 Sri Lanka
66-1 Zimbabwe
1,000-1 Bangladesh

## Mum the coach

CHESTER-LE-STREET, England, May 25 (Reuters): Adam Gilchrist's mum has phoned the Australian opening batsman to offer some tips on sorting out his technique.

Gilchrist, who has failed in all three World Cup innings so far, said he was getting plenty of advice from back home about how to reverse his run of bad luck.

"My Mum even rang me up to tell me to do something about my technique," he said on Tuesday.

"It's come to something when you get long lost friends ringing you up to tell you to keep your chin up. Then you know you're in trouble."

Much of Australia's recent one-day success has been attributed to Gilchrist's cavalier strokeplay at the start of his innings. But his star has faded to shine at the World Cup.

Gilchrist, whose score of 154 against Sri Lanka in Melbourne in February was the highest in limited overs internationals by an Australian, admitted he was worried about his loss of form, especially as Australia base much of their tactics around the opening pair's ability to get the team off to a fast start.

"I'm very frustrated that I have not had a good bat but I really feel that all I need to do is to spend some time in the middle," he said.

"Three failures in a row - you just have to try to forget about it and not get too worried about it."

The left-handed Gilchrist said the "English conditions" and white ball being used in the tournament made life very difficult for openers. Other players have struggled to cope with the ball swinging and seaming prodigiously early on.

## Wasim keeping the 'Express' on the rails

LONDON, May 25 (Internet report): Wasim Akram believes he can control hot-tempered Shoaib Akhtar and extract the best out of the pace ace they call the "Rawalpindi Express".

The experienced Pakistan skipper had to throw a fatherly arm around the 23-year-old speedster as the clash with Australia at Headingley on Sunday reached boiling point.

Shoaib, currently the fastest bowler in the world and emerging as one of the most exciting players of the tournament, got into a running feud with Steve Waugh.

So much so that match official Raman Subba Row was

forced to issue a "private rolling" to the Pakistan star afterwards.

Wasim handled the whole thing with kid gloves, saying, "we had to calm him down, but I can look after him."

He'll need all his diplomacy to keep the youngster in check and still get the best out of him.

Wasim admitted: "He's a fast bowler, and a very fast bowler at that."

"Yes, we have to calm him down at times but he's learning, and he's shown he is the fastest bowler in the world right now. He's improving day by day."

"He hasn't been bowling 100

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## Lara lauds fast four

SOUTHAMPTON, May 25 (AP): West Indies skipper Brian Lara says the World Cup tournament is shaping up to be a seamer's paradise, and his team may have that extra edge with their five fast bowlers.

But Lara cautioned that there still is room for improvement in the West Indies' side despite their seven-wicket victory Monday over New Zealand, which handed the Kiwis their first defeat after two wins.

West Indies hopes of qualifying for the second round. An unbeaten 80 from opener Ridley Jacobs helped the Windies overhaul a modest target of 157 with 34 balls to spare.

Earlier, pacemen Curtly Ambrose, Courtney Walsh, Mervyn Dillon and Reon King had exploited a seaming and bouncy wicket to restrict the Kiwis to 156, their lowest World Cup score since their 158 against the Windies in 1975.

The West Indies and New Zealand, with two wins apiece, are now equal in second place in the Group 8 standings behind Pakistan.

"We are learning from our mistakes," Lara said after Monday's match. "We are looking better. The extras are coming down."

"It is nice to know that you have a platform to work from," he added.

Asked what lessons he has learned from the games so far, Lara said: "First of all it seems

to be a seamer's tournament, a bowler's tournament, and we got the best in Ambrose and Walsh; Dillon and King."

"Simmons is improving and I think if conditions stay as the present we (can) maintain our advantage."

"I was pleased with the way we used the conditions" on the Southampton pitch, he said.

After winning the toss, Lara put New Zealand in to bat, an expected decision given the bounce in the pitch and the movement in the cold and heavy morning air that opening bowlers Walsh and Ambrose used to deadly use.

Even after Ambrose had finished his uninterrupted spell of 10 overs that conceded only 19 runs, King and Dillon continued to exploit the pitch to mop up the middle order and the tail.

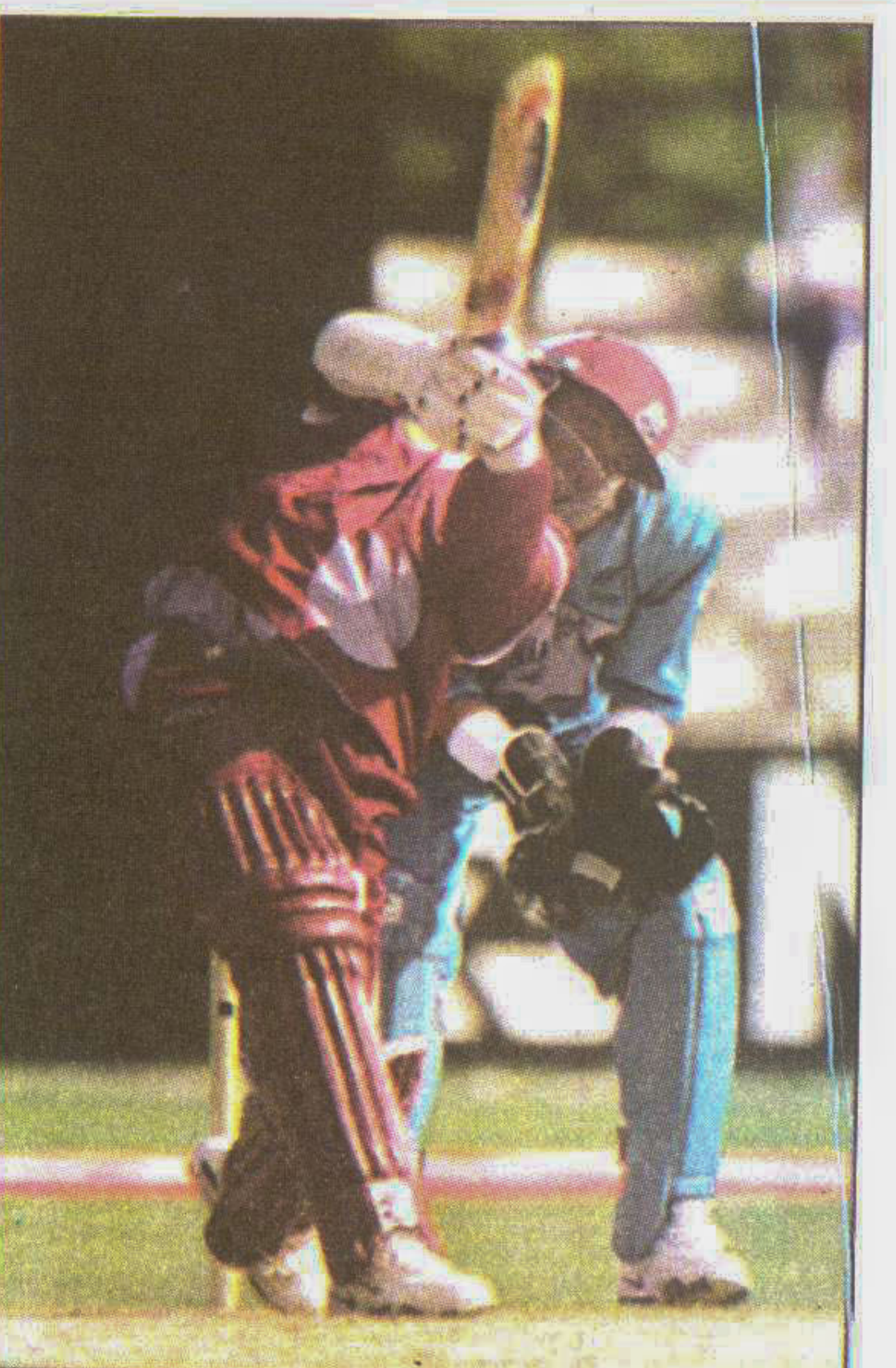
Kiwi captain Stephen Fleming criticised the wicket, saying it gave the West Indies bowlers "too much assistance early on."

"If you are going to have assistance you want it all the way through the game and not just through one innings," he said.

"We know they have good bowlers. I don't mind the bowlers dominating this tournament. It's refreshing, as long as it's even for both sides throughout the game."

Still, he gave the West Indies bowlers full marks for their performance.

"While they got assistance, they bowled beautifully on it," he said. "We were always struggling to win the game."



SWEET CAMEO : Brian Lara whacks a straight six during his brief innings against New Zealand at Southampton on May 24. — AFP photo



Zimbabwe's champion batsman Andy Flower marginally fails to make his ground at Trent Bridge yesterday. — AFP photo