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Stewart's days numbered?

LONDON, May 31 (AP/Reuters): The knives were out for Alec Stewart on Sunday after England's cricket team suffered a new low.

If Stewart is sacked, England will find themselves looking for a new coach and new captain before their home series against New Zealand next month.

The chairman of England's selectors, David Graveney, said it was too early to discuss Stewart's future after defeat to India.

"We will let the dust settle. We will get together and take a look," he said.

But, while accepting that England's elimination was "as disappointing as it can be," he added: "Alec is appointed until the World Cup but that does not mean he stops being captain after that. An England captain carries on until he is replaced."

England do not have many options, with Nasser Hussain the only credible alternative to take over the captaincy.

Seemingly sure to reach the second round of the World Cup, England were instead eliminated in the first round for the first time ever after a poor batting performance against India and Zimbabwe's upset victory over South Africa.

"At one stage we had one foot in the Super Sixes but Zimbabwe beating South Africa put a bit pressure on the boys," said

the England captain. "We lost two crucial wickets but full credit to India who bowled and fielded well in conditions that were more suited to the English than to the Indians. We won the three games



ALEC STEWART

(against Sri Lanka, Kenya and Zimbabwe) very well but against South Africa the batting collapsed and here against India we weren't quite up to it."

The England player combines being captain, wicket-keeper and opening batsman and his form has been so poor this year that he has scored just one half-century in 20 one-day innings.

He followed his 88 against Sri Lanka in the opening match with scores of 23 against Kenya, 12 against Zimbabwe and two against India.

England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive Tim Lamb said: "Alec is the England captain until the selectors decide otherwise and the selectors will be sitting down to look ahead to the New Zealand series."

"There will be a thorough post-mortem over our World Cup performance."

Coach David Lloyd announced before the tournament that he was leaving his job after three years to follow a media career.

Lloyd bowed out with a stinging attack on his team's mental approach.

"We have been found wanting when it really mattered," Lloyd said.

"We weren't tough enough — getting paid of a game by the scruff of the neck and doing the business."

"You can put together a collection of words — ability, application — in trying to explain what has gone on."

England's exit was the country's worst performance at a World Cup and it is made worse by the English batsmen failing to perform in typically English conditions.

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Scotland skipper George Salmond plays a delivery from New Zealand paceman Dion Nash.

— AFP photo

Security talks on high-voltage tie

LONDON, May 31 (Reuters/Internet): British police and cricket World Cup organisers will meet urgently to discuss security at next week's match between India and Pakistan because of tensions over Kashmir, newspapers reported on Monday.

The Daily Telegraph led its front-page with the story, saying: "The teams will meet...with their countries on the verge of war over Kashmir."

Indian fans began singing "Stand up if you hate Pakistan" as they watched their team beat England at Edgbaston in Birmingham on Sunday, the Telegraph said.

The Daily Mail headlined its report: "Cricket security alert after feuding Asians set up World Cup clash."

No British officials were immediately available to comment on the reports.

India and Pakistan are set to meet at Manchester's Old Trafford ground on June 8.

India said on Sunday it had pushed back guerrillas holed up in northern Kashmir heights towards the demarcation line with Pakistan, and vowed to press on with its biggest offensive in the disputed region in nearly 30 years.

Pakistan rejected as ridiculous India's charge that an Indian pilot was murdered in cold blood after ejecting from his jet fighter and landing on the Pakistani side of the disputed Kashmir region.

Some solace for SL Arjuna admits it at last

SOUTHAMPTON, England, May 31: Sri Lanka cruised to a 45-run victory over Kenya on Sunday to end their disappointing defence of the World Cup on a positive note, reports Reuters.

Sri Lanka, who won two of their five games in the tournament, produced their best score, 275 for eight, and restricted the African outsiders to 230 for six.

However, Kenya, beaten in all five games, departed with record 161-run partnership for

the sixth wicket.

With games elsewhere commanding most of the attention, this clash between two sides already eliminated was ultimately ruined by the miserable weather.

The holders were never going to repeat their performance against Kenya in 1996 World Cup when they managed a record 398 for five but they were always in charge.

Opener Sanath Jayasuriya got things moving with 39 from

50 balls and a third wicket stand of 104 between Marvan Atapattu (52) and captain Arjuna Ranatunga kept up the momentum.

A brilliant direct hit at a single stump by Joseph Angara got rid of Ranatunga for 50 and two great catches behind the wicket by Kennedy Otieno put the brakes on at 199-6.

But Mahela Jayawardene (45) and Chaminda Vaas (27 not out) overcame heavy rain to put on a quick 64 for the eighth

LONDON, May 31 (Internet report): Arjuna Ranatunga, captain of World Cup holders Sri Lanka, admitted his team had failed to live up to their pre-tournament expectations.

Sri Lanka, winners of the tournament three years ago, bowed out after winning only two of their group matches against Zimbabwe and Kenya.

After the 45-run win over Kenya at Southampton, Ranatunga said all departments had failed to function.

He added: "Our batting let us down at vital moments and our bowling and fielding was not as good as it should have been consistently."

"A lot of things did not come right when it mattered and we did not fulfil our potential or expectations."

"We gave 100 per cent but other teams performed better than us."

"We came over ten days before the tournament believing we were properly prepared but

when it came to the top games things did not go right for us."

"I firmly believed we would get into the Super Sixes and then the semis, so this is a big disappointment."

"I know I should have done better personally but most of the top batsmen also failed at important times."

Kenya captain Asif Karim paid tribute to sixth wicket pair Maurice Odumbe and Alpesh Vadher whose 161 is a World Cup record.

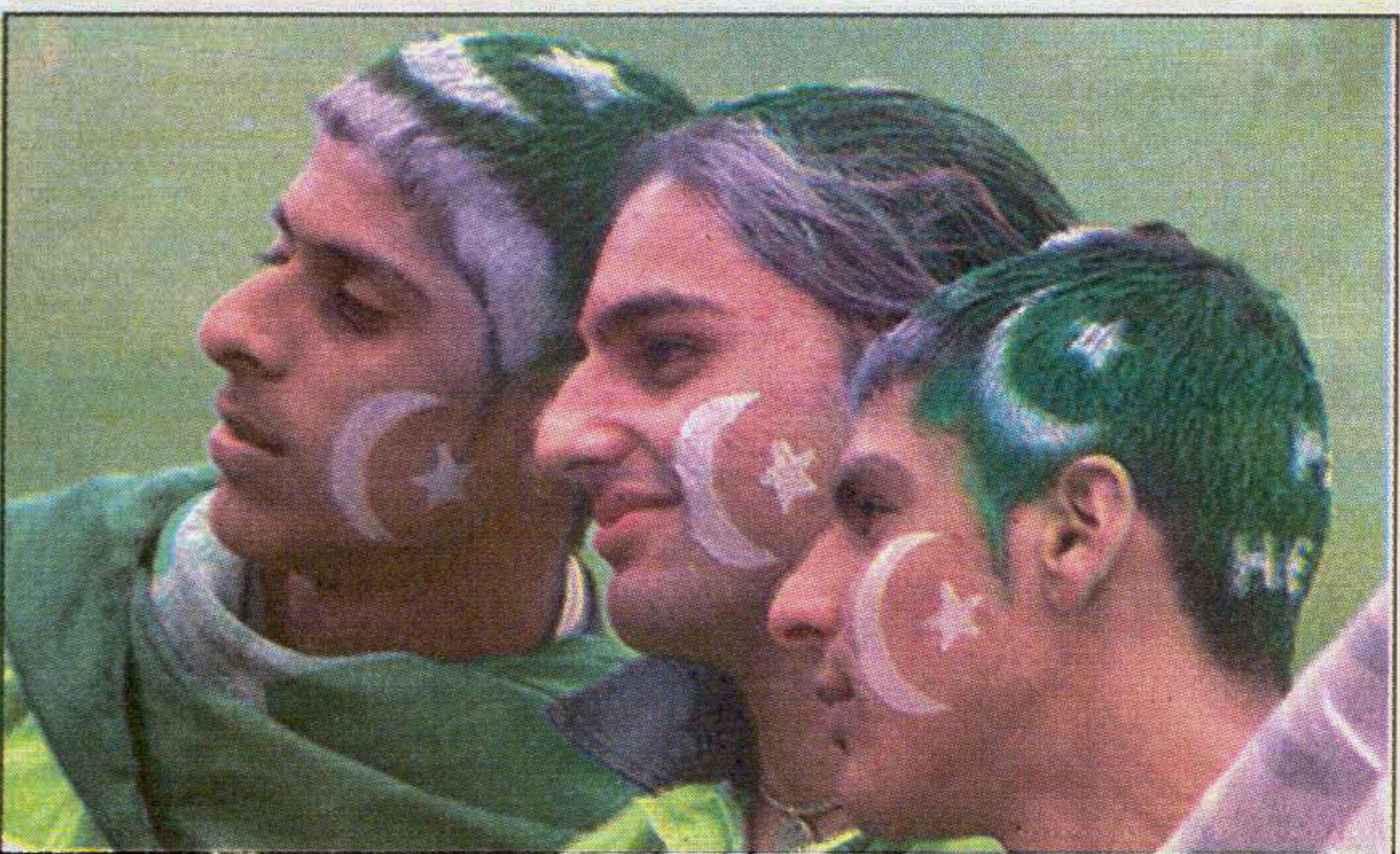
Odumbe made 82 and Vadher was 73 not out at the close.

Karim said: "Theirs is a brilliant achievement and it is wonderful to think that two Kenyan batsmen now hold a World Cup record."

"It is the single biggest thing we can take home from the tournament and something to reflect on."

"When we came into the World Cup we knew it would be an achievement just to avoid

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Pakistani fans at Northampton yesterday.

— AFP photo

Azzu walking tall

EDGBASTON, England, May 31: Indian captain Mohammed Azharuddin, fresh from leading his side to victory over England here on Sunday, said his team were capable of beating anyone in the second stage of the World Cup, reports AFP.

India will need to win all three of their matches in the Super Six phase to be sure of reaching the semi-finals.

But Azharuddin said: "We have no points going through into the next stage but I believe we can beat anyone in the tournament."

"Zimbabwe showed by beating South Africa on Saturday that anything is possible."

Super Six sides retain the points they won against fellow qualifiers in the first round. India lost to group A leaders



AZHARUDDIN

South Africa and also lost to Zimbabwe, who qualified in third behind them.

The Indian skipper said he was not daunted by the prospect of playing rivals Pakistan, the second favourites behind South Africa.

"We are not unduly worried about our next match against Pakistan as we have beaten them in the last two World Cups," he said.

"I am particularly encouraged with the way the team has improved with each match."

Meanwhile, England captain Alec Stewart defended his decision to put India in to bat following his side's 63-run defeat.

England finished level on points with Zimbabwe and India having won three of their

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West Indies fast bowler Courtney Walsh stands in mid pitch while the two Australian batsmen take a run during their final Group B encounter at Old Trafford on May 30.

— AFP photo

Aussies alarm for aspirants

MANCHESTER, England, May 31(Reuters/Internet): Tournament favourites South Africa and Pakistan will be concerned that Australia have slipped into top gear after a stuttering start to their World Cup campaign.

The slick six-wicket win over West Indies which sealed their qualification for the Super Six stage on Sunday at Old Trafford confirmed the recovery.

"We had a slow start but we have been improving with every game," said captain Steve Waugh.

After an initial victory over Scotland that did not overly impress, the 1987 World Cup winners and 1996 finalists were rocked by defeats by New Zealand and Pakistan.

Against New Zealand they fell victim to a medium pace attack that has outfoxed them before, most notably in the 1992 World Cup.

And they met Pakistan at their most rampant at Headingley, failing to reach a daunting target of 275 by just 10 runs.

The Australian team leader-

ship — one of the most impressive operations of any World Cup squad — immediately went into a huddle and identified the problems before the team coach left Leeds for Chester-Le-Street and the match against Bangladesh.

In came veteran all-rounder Tom Moody to add gravitas to the bowling attack.

Waugh made it clear his bowlers had to tighten up after they proved far too expensive against Pakistan.

Moody responded with three for 25 and a blazing half-century and the out-of-sorts McGrath responded on Sunday by bowling the best spell of the World Cup so far, taking five for 14 including the prize scalp of Brian Lara.

Problems remain, however. Hard-hitting batsman Darren Lehmann is out of touch and struggling with a shoulder injury. He has had one good knock, 76 against New Zealand, but has failed since then.

Opener Adam Gilchrist has also struggled to find his form, scoring only one half-century in the five group matches.

While McGrath and leg spinner Shane Warne are reaching their peak and Damien Fleming is proving economical, Waugh is juggling Brendon Julian and Paul Reiffel as change seamers.

Neither has been particularly successful, although left-armers Julian provides some variety to the attack.

McGrath, unusually wayward in his early games, said he had been "building up" to the telling spell that wrecked West Indies' innings.

Warne is also enjoying English wickets and showing some of his best form after undergoing shoulder surgery.

He has some success with his famed "flipper", a delivery he had not been able to control well since the operation. On Sunday it claimed the wicket of Reon King as Warne posted impressive figures of three for 11 from 10 overs.

Waugh, still under probation as captain following the Mark Taylor era, has quietly gone about his job, using the back-room resources available to him as well as calling in a

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Mike Ailingham of Scotland returns to the dressing room after losing his wicket against New Zealand at Edinburgh yesterday.

— AFP photo



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