

BCB's rebuttal

From Nizamuddin Ahmed

LONDON, June 2: Bangladesh Cricket Board general secretary Syed Ashraf Huj has thrown a wet towel on a BBC report that Bangladesh were looking to offer the coaching job to Pakistan's legendary batsman Javed Miandad.

BCB this morning quoted an unnamed BCB official who considered the Pakistani 'shrewd' cricketer and said that Bangladesh would be happy if Miandad accepted the position. The BBC report said that a decision in this effect would be taken at a meeting next month.

Bangladesh axed their West Indian coach, Gordon Greenidge, from World Cup party on the eve of their match against Pakistan at Northampton last Monday because of his 'indifferent attitude' towards the team and his repeated absence in team practice.

The news made heavy headlines here because Bangladesh was against World Cup favourites Pakistan, their first ODI victory against a Test nation, without a coach. Many consider it a bold decision. As the Bangladesh World Cup team co-ordinator and BCB joint-secretary Dewan Shaiful Arefin said today, "It is always easy to dismiss a coach after a match".

Names are cropping up because the important post has just fallen vacant. Also circulating is the figure of another Pakistan hero, Mudassar Nazar, perhaps because he was talking to high BCB officials at Northampton during the match against Pakistan.

Talking to this correspondent at his London pad this morning, Ashraf Huj denied point-blank that BCB was considering anybody at present as Bangladesh's new coach.

"I have not given it a serious

thought because I have other things on my mind," he said.

When informed about BBC's speculation on Javed Miandad, the BCB general secretary said, "I have not talked to Javed", concurring that if it were a BCB decision, as general secretary, he would have known.

Ashraf Huj explained that his priority current agenda remained seeking Test status for Bangladesh, the ICC meeting about which is on June 23-24 in London, and the ICC annual elections due at the same time. Both BCB president, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, and Ashraf Huj are seeking re-election to posts they have been holding for the past two years.

Saber is an Executive Board member and Ashraf Huj is a Cricket Committee (Management) member.

Referring to the issue of the new coach, Ashraf Huj further said, "We would not like to rush and repeat the same (Gordon Greenidge) experience. Our season starts in October and we have plenty of time. We will make a careful selection to get the right person".

The Bangladesh team meanwhile will arrive Dhaka by Biman at 9.15 am on June 4. They will leave London Gatwick tomorrow after what has been a successful tournament. A rousing citizen's reception awaits the team at the Paltan Maidan on the same day. All the players and officials are travelling with the team.

The team left its Northampton Swallow hotel this morning to attend a reception at Buckingham Palace. They will attend another reception hosted by the Bangladeshi community in England at White Chapel this afternoon. The team will lodge at Meridian Hotel, Gatwick, tonight.

Scary Security

LONDON, June 2, (Reuters/Internet): World Cup event manager Michael Browning said on Tuesday publishing details of any security clamp-down ahead of next week's Super Six clash between Pakistan and India could provoke trouble.

"The moment you start saying we are increasing security you are then throwing out a challenge to somebody to try and break it," Browning said.

There are fears that the current military stand-off between India and Pakistan over the disputed territory of Kashmir could lead to violence when the two sides meet at Old Trafford, Manchester, on June 8.

A World Cup spokesman echoed Browning's comments by saying, "Whatever security measures we take, we would keep those security measures to ourselves otherwise they don't remain secure."

She dismissed a television report that the match could be moved to the Netherlands because of racial tensions in a city boasting large ethnic Indian and Pakistani communities.

Both India's and Pakistan's High Commissions in London

declined to comment on match security issues.

"There might be a pitch invasion by the jubilant fans ... but there has never been violence between the two sides," India High Commission councillor NK Saxena said.

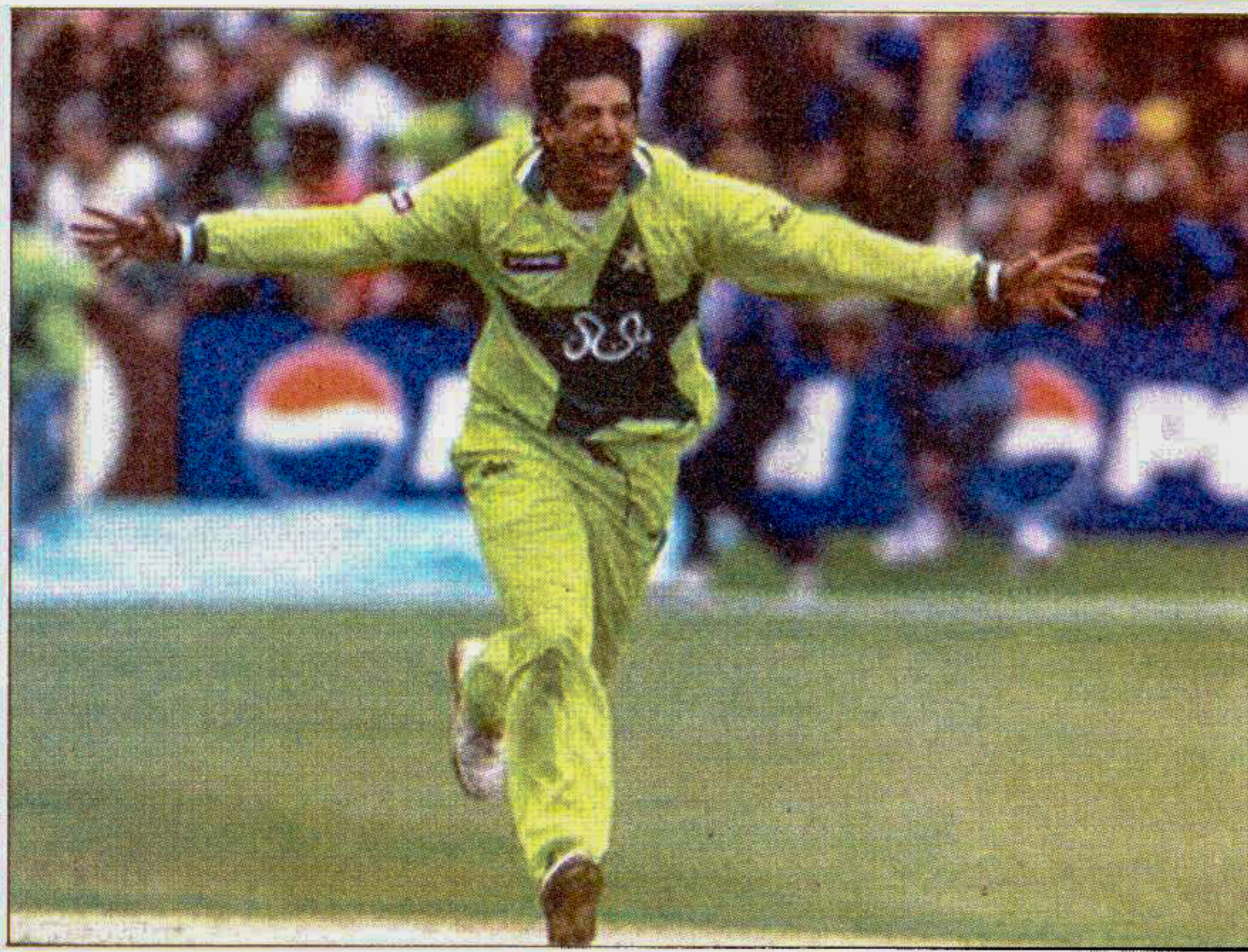
Meanwhile, plans are a foot to segregate fans and mount surveillance cameras. Police officer Mohd Yusuf told PTI his department was planning to install the cameras in the stands though no final decision had been taken.

The Manchester police are taking all possible steps to prevent any untoward incident.

England Cricket Board Spokesman Andrew Walpole said the organising committee was monitoring the situation closely and the security arrangements would differ from match to match.

Volatile behaviour of fans, who run on to the pitch at the end of every match, has turned out to be a major security problem for the tournament organisers.

There have even been suggestions to draft Army personnel to ensure smooth conduct of the match.



Wasim Akram's 'Titanic' hit the most unexpected of icebergs in the form of Bangladesh. — AFP photo

Wasim on Bangladesh

LONDON, June 2 (Internet report): Bangladesh are ready to take on the rest of the world in Test match cricket.

That at least was the opinion of Pakistan captain Wasim Akram after his World Cup heavyweights had been humbled in their final Group B match by the emerging talents of the Bangladeshis at Northampton Monday.

Wasim, whose lacklustre team went down to a 62-run defeat at the hands of the tournament outsiders bent on leaving the Carnival of Cricket in a blaze of glory, was in no doubt that the ICC Trophy champions are ready for the final big step into the major league.

"Today must be a tremendous boost for Bangladesh. They can claim Test match status now. After a few more months they can be a Test-playing side," said Wasim.

He was reflecting on a historic day's cricket that had seen Bangladesh play to their optimum and Pakistan close to their worst in a match Wasim admitted had been an awkward one mentally for his table-topping and previously unbeaten team.

"It was a very difficult game for us. We had nothing to gain and everything to lose - and that is what happened today," he said.

The flip side of that was an all-round team commitment to positive cricket from Bangladesh, personified by the individual performances of Shahriar Hossain, Akram Khan and man-of-the-match Khaled Mahmud. Shahriar (39) took the initiative against the much-feared Pakistani pace attack at the top

of the order: Akram (42) continued the good work and Mahmud (27 and three for 31) delivered crucially with both bat and ball.

It was a display that earned praise from both Wasim and ecstatic Bangladeshi captain Aminul Islam.

But Wasim had cause for concern too, at the performance of his own team as well as at yet another of the pitch invasions which have marred the World Cup and left the likes of Australia captain Steve Waugh predicting grave repercussions if steps are not taken to improve security.

"The Bangladeshis should not have scored 223 first of all. I think Azhar (Mahmood) and Shoaib (Akhtar) did not per-

form as well as they can with the ball," he said, despite a performance in the field that also included a flattering five-wicket haul for off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq.

"I am not worried but definitely concerned about the top order," he added, after seeing his team reduced to 42 for five and a position from which they could not in the end recover. The premature crowd free-for-all that effectively ended

the match before third umpire David Shepherd had made his final decision that Saqlain was run out was a still more pressing issue for Wasim.

"I think something has to be done before somebody gets really injured," he warned.

"They have to make some rules and regulations about this. The crowd running on its field, but picking up players and stuff is too much at times."

But the last word on a historic day belonged to Aminul, who graciously shared his team's moment of glory with outgoing coach Gordon Greenidge.

The former West Indies Test great has done much to guide Bangladesh to the brink of ultimate international recogni-



tion but has parted company with them amid his own public claims that they are a decade away from truly deserving to compete with the best on the world stage.

"We must share the moment with him (Greenidge) because he has been with us for the last three years. We had a wonderful time with him, and he has been a great personality," said Aminul.

How they fared

LONDON, June 2 (AFP): Team-by-team analysis after the first round of the World Cup:

Pakistan
A team with so much talent that it does not know what to do with it - Waqar Younis and Mushtaq Ahmed have barely got on the field. Born-again Wasim Akram seems to have united a team renowned as much for its internal feuding as its cricketing brilliance. His "100mph" strike bowler Shoaib Akhtar has caused a sensation but several other players, like all-rounders Abdul Razaq and Azhar Mahmood, also deserve credit. Off spinner Saqlain, meanwhile, has 12 wickets. Their 10-run victory over Australia was the game of the tournament to date; their confrontation with South Africa at Trent Bridge should at least match it for drama. Akram was sacked as captain a year-and-a-half ago and is one of several players still facing match-fixing allegations. That worry does not seem to be affecting them, despite their extraordinary failure against Bangladesh in their final group game. Akram's mentor Imran Khan held up the 1992 trophy. Few would bet against the protegee emulating him.

Results: Played five; won four, lost one. Top in group B, carrying forward four points.

South Africa
A perfect blend of top professionals, spiced up by the excitement offered by such stars as Allan Donald, whose pace has earned him 11 wickets, and Jonty Rhodes, the best fielder in the world. The engine room of Hansie Cronje's side, however, is provided by three of the best all-rounders in the game - Jacques Kallis, Shaun Pollock and Lance Klusener. The latter has twice saved his team with rapid-fire innings after the top

order failed. He and Pollock almost did it again in the shock defeat against Zimbabwe, both scoring half-centuries. Pollock, meanwhile, has bowled superbly without much luck. The batting, however, remains a concern. The Sri Lankans had them at 122 for eight and the English took seven wickets for 57. The middle order could be exposed by the top-class attacks of Pakistan and Australia. In Cronje and coach Bob Woolmer, however, they have the men to think their way out of the problem - even if their ear-piece radio link was ruled out of bounds by Cup organisers.

Results: Played five, won four, lost one. Topped group A, carrying forward two points.

Zimbabwe
The success story of the tournament. Between 1983 and 1996 they managed three wins and they have doubled that after just five games here, taking four points with them into the second round. Coach David Houghton has a novel way of inspiring his men - he simply insults them and they go out and win. A team of few stars but a lot of grafters, embodied by the Flower brothers. The ever-inventive Andy has been a key man, with 68 not out in the three-run win against India and 41 against Sri Lanka. Neil Johnson, however, returning to Zimbabwe after failing to make the international grade in South Africa, is the missing piece that makes up the jigsaw. His 76 runs as an opener and three for 27 as a strike bowler against South Africa paved the way to an extraordinary 48-run upset. One more win and Zimbabwe are in the semi-finals.

Results: Played five, won three, lost two. Third in group A, carrying forward four points.

New Zealand
Like Zimbabwe, a team of few stars but a lot of hearts. They made it to the last six without playing close to their potential. Opener Nathan Astle and number three Craig McMillan, expected to make a major impact, have barely left a dent. But left-arm paceman Geoff Allott, the leading wicket-taker in the tournament with 15, has been little short of sensational. He was regarded by many as too expensive for the one-day game. Roger Twose, English born and bred, was thought too slow but he is averaging 88 after undefeated scores of 80 against Australia and 54 against Scotland. If everybody fires at once, with all-rounder Chris Cairns a key man, this team could go very, very far. The Kiwis have also become crowd favourites after shrugging off Australia's less-than sporting attempt to eliminate them from the tournament. Stephen Fleming's side kept their cool and sneaked into the second round with a ruthless destruction of the Scots.

Results: Played five, won three, lost two. Third in group B, carrying forward two points.

India
Mohammad Azharuddin's side feel like they are playing at home after the mobilisation of Britain's Asian community behind them. If you like your cricket hot, spicy and exotic, this is the team to follow. Slightly short on bowling and without a top-bracket all-rounder, India got through to the Super Six thanks to their phenomenal batting. Sachin Tendulkar, the best of them all, made 140 against Kenya. Rahul Dravid scored successive tons and Saurav Ganguly smashed 183. Their failure to take any

Results: Played five, won three, lost two. Third in group B, carrying forward two points.

Two teams stand apart

LONDON, June 2: Lavishly-talented Pakistan and ultra-efficient South Africa remain the front-runners to lift the cricket World Cup after a first phase heavy on drama and controversy, reports AFP.

Steve Waugh's Australians, however, face an uphill battle to reach the last four after a lacklustre start to their challenge. Pakistan, the 1992 champions, and South Africa, seeking the first crown, topped their respective groups with four wins out of five.

Their impressive progress was interrupted only by two surprise hiccups, Wasim Akram's men going down to Bangladesh and Hansie Cronje's to Zimbabwe.

Pakistan, however, with "100mph man" Shoaib Akhtar the revelation of the tournament, have the edge.

They take four points through to the Super Sixes after beating the two other qualifiers from group B.

One win from three matches against the top three sides from group A in the upcoming "Super Sixes" will be enough to see them through to the semi-finals.

South Africa, meanwhile, saved on several occasions by the powerful batting of all-rounder Lance Klusener, are just behind with two points which came from their win over group A's second-placed side India.

Strangely, Zimbabwe - branded as cricketing school-boys and chokers by coach David Houghton, apparently in an attempt to motivate them - finished third yet are four points in credit after beating both the teams above them.

Their surprise success was balanced by several tales of disaster.

The 1996 champions, Sri Lanka, returned home after a

desperately disappointing defence, their batting stars Sanath Jayasuriya and Aravinda de Silva failing to make any impression, let alone runs. England - where cricket is losing out to football - and the West Indies - where basketball is increasingly in - fared no better.

The hosts, short on top-class batting despite the fine bowling of Darren Gough and Alan Mullally, missed out on the second stage for the first time in 24 years.

The West Indies, the 1975 and 1979 winners but now declining as fast as the English, failed to survive the first round for the third time in the last four tournaments, losing out to New Zealand on run rate.

Skipper Brian Lara, regarded as the best left-hander in the world, made just 106 in five visits to the crease.

Australia, who triumphed in 1987 and were highly fancied here, fared only slightly better, scraping through on run rate after three wins from five.

With no points to their names in the second round, they will have to beat South Africa, India and Zimbabwe to have any chance of a semi-final slot.

They should not expect too much support from neutral - or New Zealand - fans after deliberately delaying their victory against the West Indies in an attempt to get the Kiwis knocked out and, in the process, gain themselves two points.

"I don't know about morals, I'm here to win the World Cup," Steve Waugh said.

Another Australian, Shane Warne, had provided the first controversy of the tournament by telling Sri Lankan captain Arjuna Ranatunga to retire. That earned him a two-match suspended ban and a fine. Ranatunga made few friends

as he responded by rubbishing Australian culture.

If English fans with time on their hands want to find a new team to support, they could do worse than join India's colourful, enthusiastic and friendly army of fans.

Mohammad Azharuddin, a subject of a hate campaign by some of his critics back home, heads the most exciting batting line up in the world.

Only four centuries were scored in the first round, all by Indians. Two came from Rahul Dravid in consecutive innings, one - 183 against Sri Lanka - from Saurav Ganguly.

But, according to Azharuddin, the best was Sachin Tendulkar's undefeated 140 against Kenya. He batted while jet-lagged, after just returning from India after attending the funeral of his father.

Lehmann confused

LONDON, June 2: Australian World Cup batsman Darren Lehmann is not ready to accept he is out of form - he has not spent enough time at the crease to know, reports AFP.

Lehmann, who lines up in the key game against India in the Super Sixes at The Oval on Friday, said: "I couldn't say I was out of form because I haven't been out there long enough."

"It would be a bit different if I was out there for 20 or 30 overs and made 20 or 30 runs. I've got to just keep being positive."

Lehmann did crack 76 in the defeat to New Zealand, giving him Australia's best individual score of the tournament, but his other knocks have earned him a meagre return of nought, five and nine.

Riding on Asian wave

LONDON, June 2 (AFP): The success of Mohammad Azharuddin's India in joining their Asian rivals Pakistan in the cricket World Cup Super Six came as a relief, not only to their fans but to the marketing men as well.

Hosts England did the sponsors and pan-Asian television channels a big favour by losing to India at Edgbaston on Sunday. To them, keeping India aloft in the World Cup means big bucks.

With the game's popularity in England dwindling, this is fast becoming a tournament of Asians, by Asians, for Asians. Jai Narayan of Hero Honda, an Indian sponsor at the World Cup, said there was the danger of advertisers pulling out of the live coverage if India had been

eliminated.

"Our fingers were crossed on Sunday," he said. "People back home would have lost interest in the tournament if India were out. I even heard that some television advertisers were having second thoughts."

At least two of the four major sponsors of the tournament - Emirates and Pepsi - pumped in millions because of Asia.

The Indian market - the country has a population fast approaching one billion - has ensured that this is the most profitable of the seven World Cups held so far, with a projected surplus of 30 million pounds (48 million US dollars).

The International Cricket Council's (ICC) share will be 17 million pounds (27.2 million dollars), an increase of five million pounds (eight million dollars) from the 1996 tournament held in the Indian sub-continent.

The lukewarm response from English fans to the World Cup only proves that the future of one-day cricket lies in Asia.

Not surprisingly, India's Azharuddin has played more one-dayers (320) himself than the entire England side since their first game against Australia in 1971.

The World Cup is a sell-out at most venues in England because of the support from large British Asian population in the country.

They come to the grounds in their thousands to support India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka or Bangladesh. The home supporters are heavily outnumbered - and loudly outshouted - by the flag-waving and drum-beating Asians.

Even the inconsequential last league match between favourites Pakistan and minnows Bangladesh attracted a full house at Northampton. The fans were rewarded with the biggest upset of the tournament, as Bangladesh won by 62 runs.

"It almost feels like playing at home," Azharuddin said, but that has been the case here in England for a long time.

"Asians love their cricket, the English, I think, are a bit more inclined towards football."

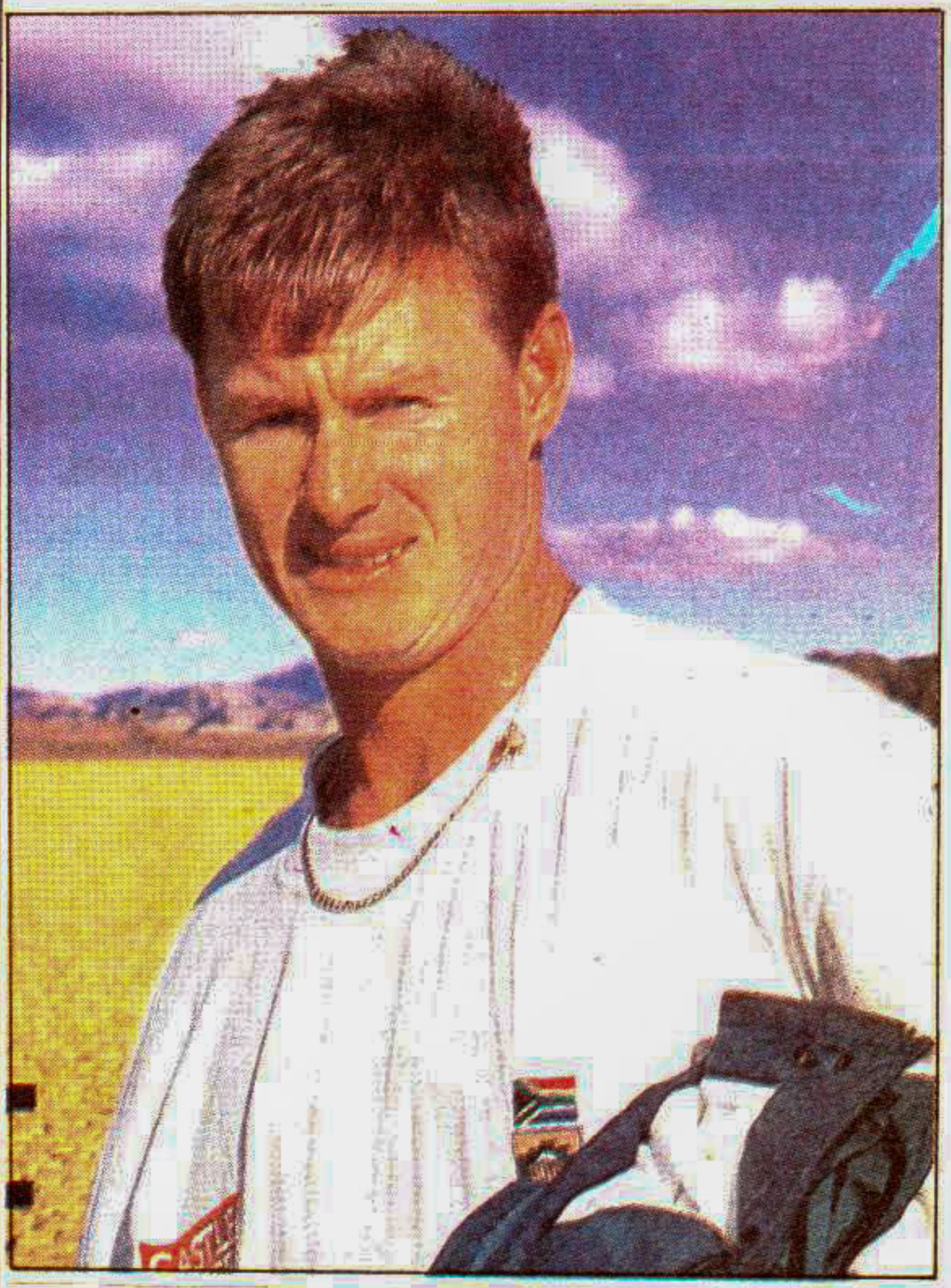
South Africa and Australia may be two of the best cricket teams in the world, but more than half of the projected two billion television viewers will be glued to the progress of India and Pakistan in the second round.

The clash between the two arch-rivals at Old Trafford on June 8 has already sent police, government officials and diplomats into a worried huddle.

They know that this is not just another cricket match. India and Pakistan will now strive to keep the World Cup in Asia for the fourth time in the last five tournaments.



Steve Waugh's hard-nosed professionalism has proved very controversial. — Star file photo



World Cup's hottest all-rounder Lance Klusener has been a revelation. — Star file photo

HE'S GETTING RICHER

LONDON, June 2 (AP): India's star batsman Sachin Tendulkar already claims to be the richest cricketer in the game's history but his agent claims the 26-year-old can double his fortune over two years.

Mark Mascarenhas, who reported the signing of Tendulkar after promising he could generate earnings of 5 million pounds (8 million dollars) over five years, said commercial opportunities were boundless for the young