



Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack scores a late winner against Porto in their Champions League match at Stamford Bridge in London on Tuesday.

## Bedi predicts 'white' WC triumph

AFP, New Delhi

Former India captain Bishen Bedi on Wednesday ruled out an Asian team winning the World Cup, saying the sport's biggest prize will go to a "white" country.

Bedi backed Ricky Ponting's Australia to win a third successive World Cup with New Zealand, South Africa and England being the closest challengers at the March 13-April 28 tournament in the Carribbean.

"Just about all experts reckon Australia are not the team to be feared any more. This is as good as living in a fool's paradise," Bedi wrote on the Cricketnext.com website.

"I have a gut feeling that one of the white countries is going to grab the Cup. Apart from Australia, the Kiwis, the Proteas and the Poms have an equal chance of making it a grand reality."

Bedi, one of the game's greatest left-arm spinners with 266 Test wickets from 67 matches, joined former West Indian fast bowler Michael Holding in slamming the International Cricket Council (ICC) for organising a bloated World Cup.

Bedi was critical of the ICC allowing six non-Test playing nations -- Kenya, the Netherlands, Bermuda, Ireland, Scotland and Canada -- to take part in the tournament.

"No other sport caters for absolute no-hoppers to get anywhere near a world-class contest," he wrote.

"By all means encourage cricket globally by financing. The ICC has loads of moolah to burn. But for goodness' sake, let's not throw lambs to slaughter in a world competition."

## Tikolo wants top-class opposition

AFP, Daniel Town

Kenya captain Steve Tikolo is the latest personality to come out swinging for the minnows attending Cricket World Cup 2007.

The places of non-Test playing teams like Kenya, Canada, The Netherlands, Bermuda, Ireland, and Scotland in the World Cup have been subject of a raging debate among some of the game's leading personalities.

West Indies fast bowling legend Michael Holding has been the most prominent critic in the last few weeks about the value of the minnows taking part in the World Cup, and Australia captain Ricky Ponting has also raised an eyebrow.

"The International Cricket Council is looking to spread the game globally," Tikolo said following his side's 21-run defeat to West Indies in an official warm-up match on Monday.

"I don't see how they are going to do it unless they get us involved in cricket activities."

Tikolo also seemed to place the blame for the lack of competitiveness from the minnows at the feet of the Test-playing nations.

"To be playing at this level, you have to be playing against these guys regularly," he said.

"Playing them in World Cup warm-up matches and big tournaments alone is not good enough. We need quality opposition to improve and we are not getting that."

Tikolo is, however, satisfied with his side's performance in the warm-up match against the CWC 2007 hosts.

"It was a fruitful exercise, since the main aim was to try and get some good combinations going in the team, and I think we did this," he said.

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## Down The World Cup Lane

# 1999: Two winners

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Bangladesh travelled to Northamptonshire to play the last match of their already successful World Cup campaign against Pakistan on May 31, also the final day of the group stage matches in the 1999 showpiece.

Led by Aminul Islam, Bangladesh faced a full-strength, in form and over-confident Pakistan team who had at their own chest-beat self.

A day earlier, South Africa were humbled by their neighbours Zimbabwe by 48 runs so the onus was on Bangladesh to slip an upset win.

And so they did.

All-rounder Khaled Mahmud was spearheading the most inexperienced attack in the history of Bangladesh with Shafuddin Ahmed and Niamur Rashid behind him. Mahmud took up the challenge as he took three important wickets while left-arm Mohammad Rafique bowled a brilliant spell to keep Pakistan at check.

When the last wicket fell (Saglani Mushtaq run out by Khaled Mashud), the feeling among expatriates was magnificent. None could forget that day in Northampton. Mahmud was adjudged the man-of-the-match for his heroic effort and a nation hailed this amazing victory.

But the World Cup was not over. The serious business of the Super Six hadn't started but the competition had heightened. Nine matches would decide the semi-final line-up and every team were up for the battle.

Australia, at the bottom of the Super Six table with no carried points, crushed Indian hopes with a 77-run victory. By this time, most of their batsmen were back to form and their bowlers, especially Shane Warne, had hit the straps.

Australia were peaking at the right time.

South African Lance Klusener kept his heroics at a rapid pace with a cool 41-ball 46 against fellow-favourites Pakistan as the Proteas won by two wickets.

India duly beat Pakistan, for the third time running at the World Cup, but then lost to New Zealand who had to give up their place in the last four. Zimbabwe also bowed out but only after giving a good fight. Andy Flower's boys were well-appreciated in England. With a match left, Australia had to beat



PHOTO: INTERNET

Australia captain Steve Waugh (L) celebrates with his teammates after the dramatic win in the World Cup semifinal over South Africa at Edgbaston on June 17, 1999.

## Ballack sends Chelsea thru'

AFP, London

solve.

"I asked the players to enjoy it. We were out with 45 minutes remaining and I said to them do you want to be scared or do you want to enjoy it."

Ballack has been well below his best since his pre-season move from Bayern Munich, but he was signed by Mourinho for important European nights like this and finally showed why he is regarded as one of the world's leading midfielders.

With the Premiership title in Manchester United's grasp, Mourinho could not afford a second successive early exit from Europe's elite club competition and, as a tense encounter headed towards extra-time, Ballack stepped up with a goal worthy of his illustrious reputation.

Andriy Shevchenko had scored Chelsea's goal in the 1-1 first leg draw and he was quick to try his luck with a curling effort that went narrowly over from the edge of the area in the second minute.

Ballack fared no better when Shevchenko cut through the Porto

demonstrated their attacking prowess in Portugal two weeks and they stunned Chelsea with a superbly-crafted goal in the 15th minute.

Chelsea were caught out at the back as Lucho Gonzalez clipped a sublime pass into the space left by Michael Essien and Quaresma took full advantage as he kept his composure to beat Petr Cech with a precise, low shot.

Mourinho's men spent long periods in the first half trying in vain to win the ball as Porto weaved neat passing patterns across midfield.

When the Blues did get possession they often squandered it too easily and one misplaced pass from Frank Lampard brought groans of frustration from the home fans.

Chelsea finally managed to work an opening midway through the first half, but Shevchenko missed his kick as he tried to convert Ashley Cole's cross and Didier Drogba scooped the rebound over from close range.

Lampard fared no better when Shevchenko cut through the Porto

defence and pulled a pass back to the Chelsea captain. Lampard had the goal at his mercy but his first touch let the ball run safely to Porto keeper Helton.

Chelsea's desperation to get back into the match by any means was apparent when Robben surged into the area and past Fucile, who made no contact, before launching into a blatant dive that earned a booking from referee Roberto Rosetti.

The Dutch winger tried a more legitimate attempt to lift his side when he flashed a shot just wide from the right side of the area on the stroke of half-time.

Mourinho, who left his seat before the interval to compose a crucial team-talk, sent on John Obi Mikel in place of Claude Makelele at half-time as he tried to shake up his lethargic side. Chelsea raised the tempo of their game straight from the re-start and were level within three minutes.

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"It was quite strong (the half-time discussion)," admitted Mourinho.

"We had tactical problems to

solve.

"We had tactical problems to