

Ties with India should be like Test, not T20: Australia

As they embark on a new innings, Australia wants the bilateral relationship with India to be like a Test match rather than a game of Twenty20 cricket.

Referring to the bilateral ties over the past quarter of a century, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said Australia's relationship with India has been like a Twenty20 cricket game, when it really needs to be like a Test match.

'Occasionally we have gone in fits and starts like a Twenty20 match. Now we need to make sure we apply ourselves to the Indian relationship as if it were a Test match, day in and day out, to take our relationship with India to a new level and to put our relationship with India amongst the first order of our international partnerships,' Smith told reporters here.

No bilateral talks between the two countries can go without mentioning cricket, a passion people in both countries share. When India's External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee spoke with Smith earlier Monday, he too could not help but make a reference to the game.

"My visit here unfortunately was very short, almost like a Twenty20 encounter in cricketing terms. Cricket, in fact, is an essential element underpinning our relations,' Mukherjee told Smith.

In a joint statement issued following the fifth Australia-India Foreign Ministers Framework Dialogue held here Monday, the ministers emphasised the strong bond shared by the two countries in the field of sport, especially cricket.

To take the cricket relationship in a new direction, a recent decision of the Australia India Council (AIC) to fund training programmes for some of India's rising young women cricketers was welcomed by the ministers.

Australian Sports Outreach Programme (ASOP), which provides funding for sports projects for disadvantaged communities, will fund up to three projects in India over the next 12 months.

Speaking at his alma mater, the University of Western Australia in Perth, on June 20, Smith had pointed out the well established connections between his electorate of Perth and India in the field of hockey and cricket.

"It's a tragedy India has not qualified for the Beijing Olympics, a regrettable first in 80 years. I'm sure Ric will help ensure the Indian hockey team is at London in 2012,' Smith said.

Ric Charlesworth, an Australian Olympic hockey team captain, is now technical advisor and expert coach for Indian hockey.

Neena Bhandari (© IANS / India eNews)