

The sultans of spin

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Cricket isn't the only place for spin; political activity has come to rely on the sultans of spin, experts in the art of what lexicographer William Safire defines as "deliberate shading of news perception;



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attempted control of political reaction". For many, spin is just a fancy word for lies, but our politicians could learn a couple of things about the concept of political spin. It's no longer about "covering up" or reporting routine governmental matters in a favourable light, nor cloak and dagger silencing tactics such as those the information ministry has traditionally relied on. Instead, it is more proactive and the media has led the way. In most western nation-states, magician-like spin doctors who are now leading political campaigns are popping issues out of the hat where none existed, creating new opinions on old issues and playing for much higher, international level stakes.

These days many eyes are on the probable British elections in May which in some way connects cricket to spin. For Australians aren't just exporting free-lancing cricket coaches all over the world; the British Conservative Party has hired Australian Lynton Crosby as their new campaign strategist. Described as "grubby" and "ruthless", he is attributed to have won the elections for the Australian Liberal leader John Howard, over an apparently invincible Labour prime minister, Paul Keating.

Now, Mr Crosby is attempting to steer another Howard (Michael) to a seemingly impossible Tory win in Britain. The success of John Howard's long reign has been credited to Mr Crosby's willingness to play dirty and employ negative campaigning. Therefore, it's no coincidence that the issues being raised are turning the traditional British approach into an American-like election with abortion and immigration leading the headlines. It's highly unlikely that public opinion or party policies on either issue is going to change significantly, but Crosby is giving the British media fodder to chew and maybe swing things a bit based on perception and fear rather than substance.

Are our opposition party politicians tuned into these international agenda-setting mechanisms? Are they brainstorming on ways to challenge the global institutions that endanger our economic independence, or the future of threatened ethnic minorities in the west as a result of these policies? No, ours are obsessing over the Meera kiss and the religion column as the most pressing issues that threaten our sovereignty.

The trouble with mullahs is that they're never around when you need them. Although the MMA has been focusing its energies on the 'Million March', one doesn't understand why this couldn't

have been timed with Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice's visit, to demonstrate unhappiness regarding USA policies; or against the proposition of a neo-con American as President of the World Bank; or against our justice system that practically sanctions male violence.

Instead, on the eve of the March, mobilisation camps were set up around Karachi city where one heard "issues" that were going to be on the 'Million March' agenda. The Gizri camp spent a good half hour on the moral failure of the government that has allowed "women to strip down to short sleeved clothing and encouraged them to remove dupattas from their heads". Obviously the lack of political focus can always be deflected by an attack on lack of self-defined morality, women and... well, that's about it. Not that one expects the compromised opportunist political amalgamation to focus on anything remotely creative or quick-witted. But more importantly, it's a demonstration of spin in reverse order, or as in cricket, "the wrong 'un'".

One of the criticisms raised at the March was aimed at the General's call for 'enlightened moderation' - a spin terminology that is meant to contrast the supposed obscurantist extremism that he believes is Pakistan's problem. A spin term that, Imran Khan at the March suggested, opposes the very ideology of Pakistan. One assumes he meant we should be neither enlightened nor moderate. But whatever the oppositional views, the point is that all the politicians in the game are spinning away.

It was spin with the active cooperation of the media that convinced us our country was in grave danger six years ago and only a dictator could save us — and the art of spin is so convincing that we become its victim not once, twice but several times over. We accepted it as the "truth", and a dictator was confirmed by a referendum, which is the very same process by which we democratically elected a leader in the first place.

Universally, spin is perfected to its ultimate when it convinces us that no "lying" elected politician can do the job and instead the force of the military will save us. If we can convince ourselves of that, why are we so offended when the American government spins and forces its political will in Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of saving its people via its military "assistance"?

Such is the success of spin that it makes us dizzy to the point that it blurs our independent vision, prevents us from trusting our own judgment, and disables us through reliance on the media's definition of "objective truth".

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