

Imran Khan't go on

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THE HISTORY MAN

LAST WEEK, ON JUNE 23, THE BRITISH papers went mad on Imran Khan and Jemima Goldsmith. It was the day after the divorce of the celebrity couple was announced. Imran and Jemima have always attracted the media, but this was the day the media had long waited for. Whether or not Imran ever fulfils his dream of leading Pakistan as he did the cricket team, he, too, along with biographers and historians, will look back to the media coverage of last week.

So, how was the coverage in the British press on June 23? All the major papers — from *The Times* right down to *The Sun* — reported on the Imran-Jemima split. The coverage in nine newspapers amounted to about 9,000 words and 35 photographs spread over 16 pages. And that's just one day. There was further extensive coverage in the Sunday papers of June 27, but that is outside the scope of this column.

Four of the papers, including *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, considered the news important enough to advertise prominently on the front page. Coverage in the inside pages ranged from half a page to double-page spreads.

The titles of the articles explain the stance taken: "Cultural rift ends Khan marriage," *The Times*; "East-West divide ended my marriage to Jemima, says Imran," *The Daily Telegraph*; "My political ambitions led to divorce, admits Imran Khan," *The Independent*. *The Guardian* went for a more neutral position by simply announcing, "Imran and Jemima end marriage".

As usual, the tabloids have the most fun. *The Sun* had the heading "We Khan't go on" while *The Mirror* asked "Hugh Dunnyt?" and then answered in the subtitle, "[Jemima's] Night out with [actor Hugh] Grant was 'last straw' in troubled marriage". *The Daily Mail* followed this line as well with the title "Hugh Grant, separate lives and the truth behind the divorce of Imran and Jemima".

Meanwhile, the *Daily Express* carried the large heading of "Doomed from the start" spread over two pages. Another full page in the *Express* is titled "Three little words ... and Jemima is divorced by Imran: talaq, talaq, talaq seals end of marriage". It is depressing to note how some of the papers seem to relish in the pain and suffering of a couple. Rejoice for a while, o ye prophets (more like "profits") of doom.

Let's take a brief look at the contents of the articles. *The Times* refers to Imran's "fairytale" wedding but "questions persisted over how well his beautiful English wife, from the most privileged of backgrounds, would bridge the huge cultural gap in their lifestyles". The paper concludes, "In the end, it seems, she could not."

The Daily Telegraph says many had predicted that a "union of such opposites would never last". The paper notes that "Imran was a Muslim, while Jemima had a Jewish grandfather; he was 42 years old with a past, she was just 21 and barely out of her debutante's shoes; her natural habitat was London high society,



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It was the day after the divorce of the celebrity couple was announced. Imran and Jemima have always attracted the media, but this was the day the media had long waited for

he wanted her to live in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan". However, both had admitted it was never going to be easy and tried their best to adjust and to overcome differences.

The Guardian opens brilliantly: "It was a longer innings than some predicted, but after nine years it came to an end. The announcement brings to an end a union that was Pakistan's very own version of Posh and Becks and, for a while at least, looked as though it might help propel Mr Khan towards the pinnacle of Pakistani politics".

The Independent describes Imran as being "more famous for his cricketing exploits than his political ambitions". However, the paper observes that, "The marriage of Imran and Jemima prompted an immediate transformation of their public personas. Mr Khan shed his playboy image to launch himself into the political arena, and his wife converted to Islam and swapped designer clothes for the shalwar kameez". Alas! It was not to last.

The Daily Express does acknowledge that it is a tribute to both Imran and Jemima that the marriage lasted for almost a decade. Jemima tried to

cope with the "Third World inconveniences of Lahore". The paper recognises that "Imran Khan has always been a driven man with a total belief in and commitment to his causes" but concludes "such a blinkered view of life can lead to greatness but it also blinds people to the needs of those living alongside them who often decide, as Jemima has done, that life would be more satisfactory on their own".

The Daily Mail also takes up the point about the duration of marriage: "Some of their friends believe it was a miracle the marriage lasted as long as it did". In the end, she couldn't continue in the "male-dominated society of Pakistan". Imran, we are informed, has an "unshakeable belief in his destiny one day to be the President of Pakistan".

Imran Khan's statement released last week read, "I can confirm that Jemima and I are divorced. My home and future are in Pakistan... Whilst Jemima has tried her very best to adapt to life in Pakistan over the last nine years, my political life has made it particularly difficult for her".

Imran Khan, 51, heads the Tehreek-e-Insaf Party and founded the charity Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital in Lahore. Jemima, 30, is the daughter of the late billionaire Sir James Goldsmith. Imran and Jemima have two sons — Sulaiman, 7, and Qasim, 4 — who will stay in London.

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