**Bad behaviour**

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Cricket tournaments raise a lot of emotions, both good and bad. There is joy at victory. There is dismay at defeat. And there is indifference over the performance of other teams.

Yet, rudeness and loutish behavior are not really meant to happen since – please don’t forget – it’s supposed to be a gentleman’s game. A few days back, PTV Sports channel’s Dr Noman Niaz insulted Pakistan’s true great fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar and didn’t agree to apologise for it. This was while foreign players like Viv Richards and David Gower were with him on the programme. What would they have thought?

Shoaib Akhtar set the perfect example by behaving like a gentleman and simply announcing his retirement from the channel and quietly walking away, which the anchor had asked him to do. That added fuel to the fire.

There was an outcry at Dr Niaz’s atrocious behaviour and PTV had to wake up from its slumber and indifference and temporarily ban Noman Niaz from the screen. For good measure, it also banned Shoaib Akhtar, the fastest bowler in history, forgetting that Shoaib Akhtar had already resigned from PTV.

PTV is as much responsible for this sad incident as the anchor himself. It took them so many years to realise the unacceptable behaviour of Dr Niaz is. As an anchor he was arrogant, talking to former great cricketers of other countries too like a headmaster and pretending that he was a former great cricketer himself. The good thing that has come out of it so far is that he is at least temporarily absent from the screen. It would be best for PTV to find a good anchor who really is a former cricketer.

While Pakistan continues to do well in the T20 World Cup and has made it to the semi-finals, politically the country is buffeted by a maelstrom of confusion. The TLP took to the streets again and blocked the main highway between Lahore and Islamabad, threatening to shut down Islamabad when they got there.

Their strength is their religious blackmail and the government’s fright in taking action against them. They are reminded of the public reaction after the liberation of the Red Mosque in Islamabad and turn a correct action into an incorrect action. At the time, television had played its part in fomenting the emotions against the operation to liberate the mosque. So, the TLP was pretty certain of gaining public sympathy if the government had taken action against them. Thus, the government entered into what it called an ‘understanding’ with them and they apparently agreed to not go any further.

It was a surrender really, not an understanding. The TLP protesters have not quite given up the march and are still infesting large swathes of GT Road. They knew that they could depend on support from other religious parties, a media ready to latch onto any excuse to raise its ratings and certain elements happy to exploit anything to cause the collapse of the government.

It is also a consequence of the success of the Taliban in Afghanistan. I said then that it could have dire consequences and right now that is what is happening. It has taken years for Pakistan to come to this sorry pass; it will take years to come to a better understanding of statecraft and governance. That takes education and experience, which is a great teacher. A lot also pivots on how the army reacts to such things.

Since Prime Minister Imran Khan is a born-again Muslim, he depends a lot on what he is being told are spiritual practices and the words and actions of its real or imagined Sufis. A real spiritual person becomes a Sufi when the public around him starts considering him or her as such. He doesn’t become one by misinterpreting the actions of Sufis, and the life of the Holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh). Just mimicking without understanding intent, purpose and context can be very damaging. So, one needs to sit back and think and then arrive at conclusions. It is our stupid actions and decisions, particularly our reluctance to take tough decisions, that do the real damage.

So, God help Pakistan and its ruler, Imran Khan who is fundamentally a good man of high principles. But he has to help himself as well.

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