**Not cricket**

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Cricket used to be known as a game played by Englishmen and fools in the midday sun, or something like that. It actually came to be played by very serious people who were not fools. It was also known as the gentleman’s game. Sadly not so anymore. Cricket’s biggest disaster has been that it is used as a tool in the hands of politicians who know only how to destroy and disrupt. It is now a game played by knaves.

New Zealand set out to prove just that. And gentlemanliness was evicted from the game when at the last minute, just before the game was to begin with spectators galore, they decided to cancel their entire tour to Pakistan citing “security reasons”. Funnily enough, the security threats seem to have been perceived only by New Zealand and not by Pakistan, which is arguably the world’s greatest anti-terrorist force. Not only did New Zealand’s last minute withdrawal leave many people disappointed with a terrible taste in their mouths, it brought politics and cricket out front and the conversation was now less about security and more about politics and the game with India, the greatest culprit. Sad, because India too has a fairly good cricket team.

But the excitement was not yet over. A few days later, the English also cancelled their forthcoming tour to Pakistan. They were at pains not to cite security reasons but the mental health of their players. We all know that the English have a habit of whinging at the drop of a hat, like when they cited pollution in Calcutta as the reason they were getting a thrashing. Considering that England were the ones who invented the game, it is a tragedy.

But it is far more complicated than nationalistic rivalry. It takes me back to what I said in my last article: that the West is trying to beat what it calls ‘political Islam’. America’s defeat in Afghanistan and the victory of the Taliban was a huge setback which was a great fillip for political Islam. They had to immediately train their guns elsewhere. Pakistan with its geostrategic location, fantastic armed forces and nuclear capability is actually the most powerful entity to be with political Islam.

Pakistan was always in the West’s crosshairs but now it is bullseye, with the prime objective being to de-nuclearlise it. What greater immediate damage could they do to Pakistan than to put it back in the list of dangerous countries to be avoided? It will be a great threat to our tourism industry, to foreign direct investment and Pakistan’s overall standing in the world.

The government of Pakistan has responded very sensibly without hurling meaningless threats and avoided falling into their trap. I am sure that this government will continue to remain cautious. An added advantage is that Pakistan’s prime minister is a former world superstar of cricket who led the team to World Cup victory.

Just New Zealand and England – of course egged on by India – have turned cricket into a game of knaves and rascals. Now in a few days, Australia is to decide whether it will tour Pakistan or not. The betting is that they too will pull out. In fact, this is a great opportunity for Australia to do the right thing and join the ranks of gentlemen rather than be charlatans.

Going back to the American and Western strategy concocted by the American Enterprise Institute to finish off what they call political Islam, which the British started when they ended the Ottoman Caliphate. Now as I said, after their shameful defeat in Afghanistan, they have trained their guns on Pakistan. Their guns are already on Iran and Turkey. They’re going to go from belittling every country creating all kinds of false impressions about them to, if necessary, all out war.

It will be a grave mistake for the US to do this for they too are likely to go to the Stone Age. America nearly went to the Stone Age on the sixth of January of this year when a right-wing insurrection led to the storming of Capitol Hill. That is an event that still lingers and the US is still trying to come to terms with it.

A new book by Bob Woodward says that America is in “peril”. Frankly, the world is in peril and no other country more so than Pakistan. Pakistan has to deal with this peril with great maturity as it has been doing so far. We have to guard our nuclear arsenal jealously and be very careful of the traitors in our midst because it is always they who enable the enemy to overcome you. Imran Khan is now under greater test than he has ever been and he has the capacity, the will and the conviction to deal with this peril very well.

America is in greater peril from its own, like Donald Trump and his fellow travellers. They are likely to stage another insurrection like January 6. Pakistan too is in peril – mostly from its own, namely the highly misled and misguided oh-so-liberal fools who don’t understand liberalism and those who are sell-outs. You have been warned.

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