ONLY the keen eyes picked up what many failed to see in broad daylight. But then again, Nasser Hussain pointed it out only after repeated replays and screenshots spread across newspapers. The former England captain turned media pundit circled Salman Butt's eyes, from short mid-wicket, fixed on Mohammad Aamer's front foot as it landed six inches in front of the popping crease on that infamous Lord's Test match. He watched as Aamer carried out the dirty work of bowling the no-ball that would spin the sporting world twice over with its notoriety.

Salman would, a little later, pour sawdust on the edge of the Lord's pitch because Mohammad Asif had over-stepped the mark.

Though Hussain was one of probably 500 million people across the world who saw nothing wrong in those no-balls, they were extra deliveries which cost Pakistan a run when the greater plan was to get Jonathan Trott and Alastair Cook, the English batsmen at the crease, out.

Cricket players, coaches and officials have called it the perfect ruse.

A fixer, posed as a players' agent for nearly a decade, called Mazhar Majeed, would direct the trio to bowl no-balls in the last Lord's Test of the English summer. Salman had to direct traffic; Aamer and Asif were the hitmen, so to say.

Majeed, as most of us know by now, was duped by a sting operation by the News of the World (NOTW), the British tabloid and once the story hit the stands, there was chaos, confusion and trouble.

First you bet, then you fix the spot

Sports betting is legal in some countries like the US and England where Ladbrokes and William Hill are the biggest betting companies. It is the act of predicting sport results and placing a wager (bet) on the outcome.

You go down a step and you have the easier, more 'fun' as some might call it, spread-betting. Spread-betting is simpler, especially in sports where you can bet, say in a game of cricket, on the outcome of a particular over or even on what might happen in a single ball.

What if you could fix that particular delivery? What if you gave a cut to that player who would have full control over that delivery?

That's what you call spot-fixing; you can fix, or set up, the particular delivery that you have put a bet on (legally) in one of the many betting houses in England.

Aamir Sohail, sobered up bad boy of the yesteryears and former Pakistan captain, recently termed the whole sting as the battle between legal houses like William Hill and illegal betting rings.

He was convinced that legal bookmakers like Ladbrokes, William Hill and Bet Fair got sick and tired of the fact that illegal bookies were scooping the lions' share from worldwide gambling profits and nobody was doing anything about it.

Ever the patriot, Sohail stressed that Pakistan have been caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Too good to be true

Those coaches and players who I have talked to in the aftermath of the spot-fixing scandal also held the view that the scam was, in many ways, too easy.

Salman Butt, the alleged chief perpetrator, had won the trust of millions of Pakistanis the world over in a matter of weeks after he became the Test captain. His demeanour and sometimes graceful strokeplay made the British media take notice and once he had dedicated the previous Test win to the flood victims, he was a favourite.

Assisting Salman in this ruse were two men who had vastly contrasting images: Mohammad Asif, who sometimes put Shoaib Akhtar's shenanigans to shame, and Mohammad Aamer, the glint-eyed lad whose smile melted steely men's hearts in his first years of international cricket.

Salman, Asif and Aamer must have thought along these lines: what harm could a few no-balls do to a match, when I can earn a good amount of money from it. In fact, no-ball or not, Pakistan were on top of the situation on that second morning at Lord's.

They had the money tucked away (apparently signals are given at the ground when the money is received in the various bank accounts) and given their strong sense of character, the trio got back into action immediately.

Once NOTW broke the story, it became even more apparent how easy the whole issue was, a) to lure the trio into earning a few thousand dollars, b) to set up a seasoned fixer and c) to put a game in such disarray.

Wide eyes across the border

There is not a slight bit of surprise that these cricketers have assisted in spot-fixing or the fact that some of their team-mates are alleged to have been part of previous misdemeanours. I say it, not with derision, but with a general view of the recent string of events that has permanently crippled Pakistan cricket.

The trouble in Pakistan's northwestern border had put cricket tours to the country to a