he was forced into action by Salman Butt and Mohammad Asif and that he was merely following orders.

Nasser Hussain would tell Sky Sports a few days after the NOTW story that he wished it wasn't that 'youngster' while another former England captain Michael Atherton pleaded to the ICC not to be too harsh on Aamer.

But would Aamer be the trap door for the likes of Salman and Asif to escape?

The burden of history

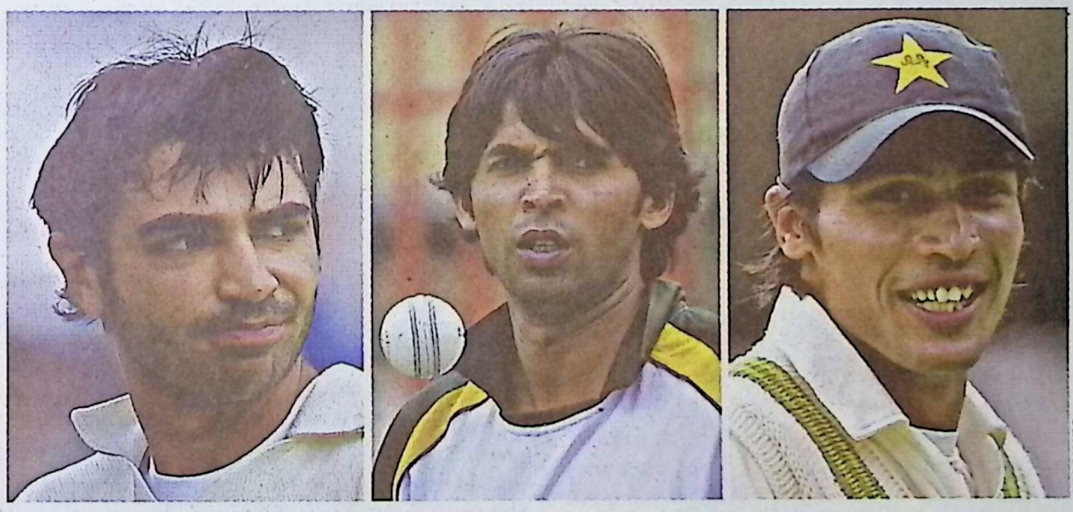
When Hansie Cronje said in 2000 that he took money from bookies in India to fix a game, he shook cricket to its core. Before the devout Christian made his admissions, there was always that 'maybe not' tone in everyone's voice when allegations were made against Wasim Akram, Salim Malik, Mohammad Azharuddin, all national captains and some of the legends of the game.

nineteenth century when the first backers (financers) of the game would bet men who bowled under-arm and wielded crooked bats.

There has always been that innocent story of the legendary Australians Dennis Lillee and Rod Marsh putting a bet on an Australia loss in the epic 1981 Test at Headingley, on the day when Ian Botham staged a heroic comeback. On the next day, the final day of the game, the England all-rounder and Bob Willis beat the Australians with inspiring displays with both bat and ball. The match is part of Botham folklore and cricket history as England came back from a massive deficit to win the game. But you add the dots and something sinister comes up.

The state of the game

While corruption may be an everyday reality in the sub-continent, cricket has always stood for



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Malik and Azharuddin would be banned while Akram would walk away with a slap in the wrist and while these major players were always in the news when it came to match-fixing, there were several other high-profile names that came to the fore.

Steve Waugh wrote in his enormous autobiography *Out of My Comfort Zone* that his brother Mark and Shane Warne were approached by then Pakistan captain Malik to throw a Test match in 1994. The Australian cricket board would secretly fine the duo, only for the story to leak after a few years for the entire world to see.

Steve, the most successful Australian captain, also wrote of how empty he felt when two Pakistani batsmen tamely played his bowling when they chased a meager 180 runs on a Colombo featherbead.

But fixing in cricket goes back to the early

its qualities. (They didn't make 'not cricket' a phrase for nothing).

Azharuddin was banned from cricket for life but the former Indian captain was still voted into parliament. When India's ruling party gave him the election ticket, they knew that his past record is nothing compared to those of many other MPs. But he now has no place in the sport (though he is slowly trying to make a comeback).

Very few Pakistanis would think that Aamer could touch the country's president on the corruption scale. But Aamer and co now stand in the dock somewhere in Qatar where not just their future, but the future of cricket's ethics will be on the line.

Guilty or not, they have been found wanting, in the cricketing parlance, fishing at the wrong ball.

Mohammad Isam is a cricket reporter.