

N I C K G R E E N S L A D E



THE
THIN WHITE LINE

The Inside Story of
Cricket's Greatest Scandal

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CHAPTER ONE

‘THEY DON’T PLAY FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME, THEY PLAY FOR MONEY, WOMEN AND FOOD’

ON MONDAY, 16 August 2010, Mohsin Khan met Mazhar Majeed at the Hilton Hotel on Park Lane in London. It was late afternoon and was the first time the pair had set eyes on each other. Khan was an Anglo-Indian businessman representing Tata Equity, a private equity firm with links to a consortium in Singapore. The consortium was interested in setting up a Twenty20 cricket league – the shortened form of the game that was proving so popular – in the Emirates. He was 47, well dressed, in a suit but no tie, a good talker and did not drink alcohol.

Majeed was 35, more informally attired in jeans, brown sweat top and a yellow t-shirt, and not lacking in confidence, though he stopped short of arrogance. Like Khan, he was based in England. In fact, he had spent nearly all his life in the country, though his parents were Pakistani immigrants. He was an agent for almost half the Pakistan cricket squad touring England at the time. With so many Asians living and working in the area of the Middle East Khan was targeting, he was an obvious starting point for player recruitment.

Khan had suggested the venue. The Hilton was probably the least grand of the prestigious Park Lane hotels – it was flanked by the Dorchester and the Four Seasons – though it was one of the better known thanks to the brand name. The 28-storey building, looking out on to Hyde Park, had been the first outpost of the

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American chain to open in the UK in 1963 and only the second outside the US. It was here, four years later, that The Beatles had first met and fallen under the spell of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Eight years after that, the hotel had been targeted by the IRA as part of its mainland bombing campaign. The bomb that went off in the lobby area killed two and injured 63.

The Podium restaurant was located very close to the part of the complex where the bomb had gone off and it was here that the pair met for afternoon tea. Of all the eating and drinking establishments – there was also the Michelin star restaurant, Galvin at Windows, on the top floor, and the more racy Trader Vic's bar and Whisky Mist nightclub – this was probably the most low-key. That suited both parties.

Also present was Khan's assistant Ajit. It was the latter, on behalf of his boss, who had set up the meeting. Two days earlier, Ajit had called what he thought was Majeed's mobile. A woman answered. It was his wife, Sheliza. 'This ain't Mazhar's phone, it's mine. Who are you? How did you get my number?' Ajit answered the first question and dodged the second. Sheliza's suspicions were not wholly allayed but she did agree to put him in touch with her husband so they could talk business. Majeed's interest had been instantly pricked by the talk of earning opportunities for his rostrum of talent.

Forty-eight hours on from that opening call, the mood in their corner of the Podium was rather like a first date – and a blind one at that. With Mohsin Khan nursing a coffee and Majeed explaining that he was fasting for Ramadan, there was no alcohol involved, however. The two entrepreneurs spent the first half hour or so checking out each other's history, long-term intentions and the circles they moved in. Understandably, since he was the one who had been asked out, Majeed was eager to know more about his suitor. 'There's a lot of people out there who know my position, see my position and they're jealous of it,' he said cagily. 'So they try and make trouble for me.'

Khan told him about his backers, their interest in the sport. Majeed liked what he heard but wanted to know how they had got

hold of his wife’s number, since it wasn’t something he usually gave out to business contacts. Khan said he could understand his wariness but he too liked to play his cards close to his chest. Since they barely knew each other yet, he was reluctant to disclose his source. If, however, their conversation concluded successfully, then he would be happy to reveal all at their second appointment.

The agent seemed to accept this as he then went into more detail about his work and the plight of those he represented. Contrary to popular myth, his cricketers were not playing ‘for the love of the game’ but for ‘money, women and food ... How much they are getting paid is a joke.’ He said that he managed ‘Ten of the players. I do all their affairs like contracts, sponsorship, marketing, everything.’ He had done his best to secure them lucrative deals but these amounted to chicken feed compared with what their peers in other countries, most notably across the border in India, were receiving.

Now probably wasn’t the most apposite time to be making this point since six days earlier, in Birmingham, a Pakistan side, featuring five of his players, had lost the second Test against England in the most embarrassing fashion. Bowled out for 72 in the first innings, their lowest ever score in Tests against England, Pakistan had been beaten by nine wickets. That put them 2-0 down with two to play in the series.

The financial gulf between the two sides was much starker. While the England players whom they were facing were being paid close to £400,000 a year to represent their country, the Pakistan cricketers averaged around £22,500 each. The England squad’s remuneration did not include individual sponsorship deals and other appearance fees. Their opponents could never hope to make up the difference through their own commercial tie-ups because the domestic market in Pakistan was so underdeveloped and unsophisticated.

In India – the yardstick by which so much Pakistani self-esteem was measured – a cadre of star players, meanwhile, were enjoying annual million-dollar incomes thanks to two trends. The first was

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the focus that Western brands were putting on the burgeoning consumer market in such a vast country. Cricket's popularity meant that the likes of Pepsi, Reebok and Sony wanted to be associated with the game there and its leading practitioners. India captain MS Dhoni would earn \$26.5m by 2011 and most of this came from non-playing earnings.

A supplementary form of income had arrived in 2008 with the launch of the Twenty20 (T20) Indian Premier League (IPL). Unlike the elongated Test matches or one-day internationals which stretched across seven hours or more each day, T20 cricket (20 overs per side) meant that all the action could be condensed into a three-hour frenzy packed with explosive hitting, fireworks, dancing girls and pop music blasting out of the PA system. This timeframe appealed to broadcasters and organisers who could stage matches in the evening after work, boosting viewing figures and gate receipts.

By securing huge deals with broadcasters, sponsors and other entrepreneurs, the promoters of the IPL were able to attract the best talent from around the world to come to India to play for six weeks. For nearly everyone in cricket, it was a win-win, unless you were a Pakistani. In February 2009 the government had blocked its players from playing after the foreign ministry judged that their safety could not be guaranteed in India in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008. This state of affairs seemed particularly harsh when Pakistan won the World T20 championship in London four months later. However, copycat leagues were beginning to pop up outside India, again offering the leading international players the chance to pick up quite large sums for just a few weeks of competition. These represented the best opportunities for Pakistan players to recoup the shortfall in remuneration.

This was what Khan and his backers in Singapore appeared to be bringing to the table. 'There will be opportunities for them to earn money,' he said of his putative venture. 'Pakistani players, we can bring them for very cheap as long as there are incentives for them to make money, yeah, in terms of match winnings as well. Then it is easy,' replied Majeed.

The conversation quickly progressed from the getting-to-know-you stage of a first date to open flirting. Khan said he envisaged the prospect of substantial earnings beyond just playing contracts and win bonuses. Majeed took the hint and winked. ‘I know what you’re talking about because I know what goes on.’

The afternoon had now escalated into a game of ‘I’ll show you mine, if you show me yours’ and Khan took his cue. ‘If there’s two or three that are on for the other side, the betting side, then good luck, then they’ll be really happy,’ he said of his paymasters. Majeed flashed some thigh of his own. ‘There’s more than two or three. Believe me. It’s already set up. That’s already there.’

The genie was out of the bottle. ‘I’ve got six ready,’ Majeed continued, warming to his theme and his companion. ‘I’ve been dealing with these guys for seven years, OK. Who we deal with and how we deal with it is very, very important. That is the main thing. I’m only dealing with certain people.’

‘Give us some tips if you’ve got any,’ said Khan. ‘If there’s anything we need to know in the forthcoming match let me know. Happy to pay, happy to pay.’

Majeed returned to his earlier point. ‘If you can find out the information how my number was obtained, from what source, I will sit down ’cos I can see you’re a guy I can talk to on a business sense. You get me that information and I’ll talk. ’Cos there’s a lot of people, as I say. You know what Pakistanis are like. They could record a conversation, go out, it’s all over.’

‘I know what Pakistanis are like,’ nodded the Indian Khan. ‘I don’t think they’re smart enough for this kind of behaviour. But I mean they can certainly spread bad publicity and stir up ... Let’s meet Wednesday, Wednesday night. As I say, we are investing a lot of money in this tournament so we don’t need any bad publicity. I mean all it takes is a whiff of this and then all that investment has gone down.’

‘Get me that information,’ said Majeed, ‘and you can even meet me tonight.’

‘We’ll meet Wednesday, inshallah.’

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They said their goodbyes and parted. As Majeed left and made his way to the Aston Martin he had parked nearby, he immediately pulled out his phone and listened to his messages. He did not notice the van parked opposite the hotel, just as he had not noticed it an hour or so earlier when he had arrived.

* * *

The email had reached Mohsin Khan's inbox in early August and came with an attachment. That attachment was a collation of 48 texts/emails from a BlackBerry apparently belonging to Majeed. Most of them had a garbled feel and were slang-heavy. Some were quite obviously written by individuals whose first language was not English. Context was also needed because they covered a three-month period. It was obvious, however, what Majeed was up to.

20 February 2010 Outbox: Salaam sheikh please make dua [sic] Pakistan win in the cricket match today against England. The game starts at 2pm until 5.30pm London time. And is being played in Dubai. This is very important for me. Thank you Sheikh

Pakistan were, that day, playing a T20 match in Dubai against England and won by four wickets. Dua is an Urdu term meaning pray or prayer. It was unclear if 'make pray Pakistan win' was a wish or an order. The fact that Majeed considered the outcome of a warm-up game for the forthcoming World T20 tournament 'very important' suggested there was more than just national pride at stake for him.

18 March Outbox: It is going so wrong

18 March Inbox: Oh Shit! Why? Omg!

18 March Outbox: I promise u will make double what u have lost today. U will see

19 March Inbox: I've already started get phone calls from

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India. You’ve put me in a very big mess. You will have to do something now.

19 March Outbox: I thought u were a big player and u cant cover this loss until next time? We are talking millions in the summer with full transparency.

The above correspondence was sent during and just after an IPL match between Rajasthan Royals and the Kolkata Knight Riders.

*25 March Inbox: Come on then mazhar – let’s do it. Let’s get fucking hold of cricket and squeeze everything we can from it.
Azhar*

Majeed had a brother called Azhar who was also involved in player management.

*10 May Outbox: This will only work if u score in first 2 overs and no wickets. Also even if we bat second innings it is same...
Bro also confirm other thing in 7th and 8th over. 1 fall on each...
Pleas text me confirm for second thing.*

This last message involved communications with mobile numbers outside the UK. One was for a mobile registered in St Lucia, the other in the United Arab Emirates. Pakistan were, that day, playing South Africa in St Lucia in the World T20 tournament.

There were also a message in his inbox which advised caution over financial dealings because two players were ‘very much into match fixing alegations’ and another which mentioned cricketers and advised: ‘we have to have every thing plan and secret plese make sure’

Mohsin Khan’s real name was Mazher Mahmood. He was not an Indian businessman, that was just an adopted persona. If he had told him his actual job, investigations editor for the *News of the World*, Majeed would have run a mile.

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Insider information was the oxygen of Mahmood's professional existence. The paper even printed a special hotline number in every edition, allowing readers to alert him to any potential wrongdoing. Many of these could be easily dismissed or were handed down to other reporters to follow up. In January 2010, however, a contact, with whom he had dealings previously and whom he later described as a former member of the Pakistan management team, had got in touch about Majeed.

The agent, the source warned, had a shadow life acting as a go-between for Indian gambling syndicates who wanted to fix matches (or certain passages of play) and his players who had it within their powers to do so. This conspiracy ring had already affected the outcome of international fixtures and was planning to do the same during Pakistan's summer tour of England. At this point, the source did not ask for money, nor was any offered. He just wanted Majeed exposed.

Because it came from a reliable contact within the sport whom he knew, Mahmood trusted this one. Yet he found himself constrained. He needed a bit more than unsubstantiated rumour to launch an investigation with all the expense it entailed. He needed a genuine lead or at least a means of gaining easy access to the suspect to check him out. Neither was in evidence in relation to Majeed back in January. Now, with the email, that had all changed. These were the leads Mahmood needed. Just as helpful, he now had contact numbers for Majeed. What he hadn't known was that Majeed had subsequently passed on one of the numbers to his wife, hence the mix-up with Ajit.

A day after the meeting at the Hilton, Mahmood was in Wapping, east London, at the *News of the World* offices, filling his bosses in on the BlackBerry files and his first contact with Majeed. Those bosses were *News of the World* editor Colin Myler and long-serving lawyer Tom Crone. It was rare in the industry for the senior lawyer to enjoy such importance in the editorial decision-making process but, given the nature of the *News of the World's* output, and particularly given the nature of Mahmood's line of work, Crone

was a vital cog in the machine. It was also rare for reporters to enjoy open access to the editor. Yet again, Mahmood’s importance to the paper necessitated it.

His work in delivering exclusives could essentially be split into two parts: uncovering and exposing criminality, and the celebrity hit job – luring the rich and famous to do (or say they would do) things that they really shouldn’t. As a result, he had picked up two monikers, the ‘King of the Sting’ and the ‘Fake Sheikh’. The former spoke for itself, undercover work being an integral part of his work. The latter followed on from that. One of his more popular and effective forms of subterfuge was to pose as a wealthy Arab with huge sums of money to invest in the egos and pet projects of the celebrities whom he targeted. Coming up with the Fake Sheikh’s guise had been the easy bit. His natural skin colour allied to an outfit of Arab robes, headscarf and other accoutrements – he had bought the prototype for this costume in 1984 from an Islamic bookshop in Coventry for £9.99 – were all that was needed for first appearances.

This array would have been worthless without visible signs of opulence to back up his credentials. The first step in any sting was usually the creation of a ‘front’ company in which one of Mahmood’s alter egos would be named as the lead investor. Fake websites would be created and swish offices would have to be hired to maintain a façade. This went a long way to convincing celebrity agents that they were dealing with a real player, which itself led to meetings with the stars. These naturally took place in luxury hotels, top restaurants and chic nightclubs around the world. Limousines and chauffeurs would be hired to ferry him and his celebrity victims to and from these locations. There were also a retinue of retainers to make up the Sheikh’s entourage – another key element in the charade.

None of this came cheap. An insight into the jet-setting lifestyle the Sheikh led had been provided in his 2008 book, *Confessions of a Fake Sheikh*, which effectively acted as Mahmood’s ‘Greatest Hits’ collection: hiring a villa at the five-star Marbella club in Spain where two of the directors of Newcastle United Football Club had

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been plied with champagne before making indiscreet comments about their players and fans; hanging around the Executive Plaza hotel in Chicago while TV host Jerry Springer was covertly filmed romping with a porn star and her stepmother; putting Sven-Goran Eriksson up in Dubai's seven-star Burj Al Arab hotel, picking up the tab for a £1,750 meal with him and then hiring a luxury yacht in the marina to loosen the then England football manager's tongue.

The Park Lane Hilton where he had met Majeed had, in March 2001, been the venue for his first meeting with Murray Harkin, business partner of Sophie Rhys-Jones, Countess of Wessex and wife of Prince Edward. That led to an encounter with Rhys-Jones herself who was recorded making a series of indiscreet claims about the royal family and senior politicians, gifting Mahmood another front-page scoop.

By now he was the best-paid reporter in the industry and also one of the most decorated. In 1999, he was named journalist of the year at the British Press Awards, principally for his Newcastle football scoop. Six years later, the *News of the World* picked up the newspaper of the year honour and its then editor Andy Coulson singled out a Mahmood investigation, about a mother willing to sell her baby, as one of the items of journalism that gave him real pride in his job: 'Not to overstate the case, that story, I believe, resulted in a life being saved.'

Paradoxically, he was also one of the least recognisable, even among work colleagues. This visit to the *News of the World* offices was a rarity and he guarded his identity with great care. There were two reasons for this. The first was that several of his undercover operations had ended in the convictions of serious villains. That left him, he claimed, open to reprisals from within the criminal fraternity. He told *Press Gazette* in 2008 that he had already been beaten up once, had guns pointed at him and that a Russian mafia boss had put a £30,000 price on his head. The second risk of exposure was that if any photos of him ever appeared in print then that would be the end of the Fake Sheikh routine. It didn't matter

how good the garb was if every agent and celebrity in the West had his face etched on their memory.

As he stood before Myler and Crone, Mahmood explained, as he had done countless times to his bosses before, that he didn’t have anything concrete yet but he had a good feeling about Majeed – they would have to trust him on this one. It helped that he was well in credit with the editor. In May alone, he had delivered two exclusives which would have been contenders for scoop of the year. At the start of the month, on the day of the world snooker final, there was an investigation into John Higgins in which the three-time champion was caught on film demanding £300,000 to lose frames in matches to help a betting syndicate. Higgins and his agent had been lured by Mahmood, posing again as a businessman interested in sport, to Kiev where Higgins also revealed how he had tried to bet against himself during one tournament.

Three weeks later, another set-up saw Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, filmed accepting a \$40,000 (£25,000) down payment from a wealthy businessman (Mahmood again) in exchange for offering access to her former husband, Prince Andrew. The Duke of York was a British trade envoy at the time and Ferguson believed that she was in line to make £500,000 from acting as the gatekeeper. She needed the money, she said, because she ‘hadn’t a pot to piss in’.

How Mahmood’s source had come by Majeed’s BlackBerry messages no one quite knew and clearly that created a grey area legally. On the other hand those messages provided serious grounds for suspicion of illegality. On that basis, Myler and Crone decided this was something worth pursuing. If, as Mahmood had told them, a flash of the cash would get them a seat at the table, then it was worth the outlay. Bev Stokes, PA to managing editor Bill Akass, who handled the financial side of the paper, was told to take out £10,000 from the ‘petty cash’ till. Mahmood took away his ‘seed money’ and summoned Conrad Brown to see him.

If there was a second lieutenant in Mahmood’s troop then it was Brown. Like many of the other ‘freelancers’ who dropped in and out of Fake Sheikh investigations, Brown was not a trained hack but

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tabloid journalism was in his blood. His father Gerry had himself been a *News of the World* journalist and a trailblazer for the kind of muck-raking work Mahmood now undertook. In fact, in his later years, Gerry Brown had been enlisted as part of the team too before his death in 2004.

As well as having a good nose for a story, Brown was also one of the first journalists to appreciate the effectiveness of technology in undercover work, deploying miniature recording devices before their use became widespread in industry stings. His interest in surveillance technology was shared by Conrad who, by his own admission, had no way with words. His son began working with Gerry and 'Maz' in 1993 not long after he left university. When his father died, his importance within the unit grew.

It was Conrad Brown who had been sitting in the van outside the Hilton 24 hours earlier waiting for Majeed to arrive and was still there when he exited. The van was a classic surveillance vehicle, with blacked-out windows that allowed him to film or photograph the outside world but did not allow a view the other way. From this vantage point he had, he would write in a later witness statement, 'captured some very brief footage of Mazher and Majeed leaving the hotel separately using a Sony HDR-X550 hard drive camcorder, which produces high definition video files.' He had also provided Ajit with 'a covert video recording device disguised as a mobile phone, known as a PV900, and showed him how to use it to make a video recording of the meeting. In addition, I helped Mazher hide a Sony MP3 audio recorder in his jacket to make a separate audio recording of the meeting.'

Brown would need his camera again now because the £10,000 which the editor had authorised and Stokes had handed over would have to be accounted for if it ended up in Majeed's possession. The quickest method was for Brown to capture all 200 serial numbers – the money was in £50 notes – as video footage. With that done, all that was left was to get the story straight on how they had got hold of Majeed's number and see if the agent swallowed it.

* * *

Neither Mahmood nor his employers had got to the top of their profession without treading on toes and cutting corners. Born in Birmingham in 1963, Mahmood was, like Majeed, the son of Pakistani immigrants. His father Sultan had arrived in Britain three years before his birth. Sultan Mahmood was a journalist and had soon set up an Urdu-language newspaper, *Mashriq* (The East), in his new home city. *Gharana* (Household), the first glossy lifestyle magazine aimed at Asian women, had followed a few years later.

There were no Urdu language typesetters at the time so the pages were usually handwritten and mostly put together in the family home. Mazher and his brother, Waseem, who both passed the 11 plus, would help their father deliver copies of the publications to Asian-run grocery stores around the city. ‘We were thoroughly involved in the social life of the Asian community, and eventually in the wider political world. I remember meeting Harold Wilson. We were very aware of what journalism was about,’ said Waseem in 2006.

That his brother might have a different interpretation of what journalism was about would become apparent in 1980. At the age of 17, Mazher enjoyed his first big break in the trade. A conversation overheard in his own home led him to tip off the *News of the World* about a Birmingham-based gang producing pirate videos of the latest cinema releases. ‘One of the men I exposed was a family friend, the son of a respected GP,’ he recalled. ‘My father was furious and threatened to throw me out of the house, as my mother struggled to calm him down.

‘I was surprised by my father’s reaction; as a journalist himself, one who’d pioneered the first Urdu-language newspaper in Britain, he had always wanted his two sons to follow him into journalism ... But he claimed that my work at the *News of the World* had “blackened the family name”, “shamed the community” and that I would be seen as a traitor.’

After freelancing in Fleet Street for five years, Mahmood was taken on as a staff reporter for the *Sunday Times*. ‘A three-year stint at *TV-AM*, working as a producer on the David Frost programme,

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followed,' he wrote in 2008 in the only book he ever published about his career. That was only half the story, though. He had left the *Sunday Times* in 1988 not because he had a job with Frost waiting but because he had been forced to resign. The reasons for this would be regurgitated for many years after by the paper's then managing editor, Roy Greenslade.

The key details, grudgingly acknowledged by Mahmood who had originally preferred to use the term 'disagreement' to describe the cause of his leaving, were summarised by Greenslade thus: 'When Mahmood resigned, he was on the verge of being dismissed for an act regarded within the office as gross impropriety. The facts of the matter were not, and are not, in any doubt. The documentary evidence – which I have – is quite clear. And it is very different from a "disagreement".

'Mahmood made a silly error in a story – the kind that any reporter can make. When challenged about the mistake, instead of accepting the fact (for which he would have received no more than a telling-off), he falsely blamed the news agency and then tried to back up his version of events by entering the room containing the main frame computer in order to alter the original copy. He was found out, and while a meeting was being held in the editor's office to discuss what should be done, he wrote a letter of resignation and left the building. He rightly understood that he would have been dismissed (which was the collective decision of the senior editorial staff).'

After his spell with David Frost, Mahmood returned to the *News of the World* in 1991, this time on the staff. His new employers soon promoted him to investigations editor. In *Confessions of a Fake Sheikh*, his professional memoir of 17 years on the paper, Mahmood was defiant in defence of his methods: 'Subterfuge is a legitimate and basic tool of investigative journalism ... Without going undercover my colleagues and I would have no hope of exposing drug dealers, paedophiles and the like.

'Undercover reporting is enshrined in the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) code and is justified where we can show

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that it is in the public interest and that the material cannot be obtained by any other means. The “public interest” defence includes “detecting or exposing crime or serious impropriety” and “preventing the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation”. Sometimes the story comes about because of an insider supplying me with the information, and in those circumstances – when they are going to be paid – that too is covered by the PCC code.’

Mahmood would constantly fall back on the PCC code defence when critics of his methods came calling. Roy Greenslade, who would go on to edit the *Daily Mirror* before becoming a respected media commentator, would prove a perpetual thorn in his side. ‘Mahmood’s methods debase journalism,’ he wrote in April 2006. ‘They often amount to entrapment and, on occasion, appear to involve the use of agents provocateurs. People have been encouraged to commit crimes they would not otherwise have conceived. As if that wasn’t enough, the public interest justification advanced for such activities by the *NoW* is almost always highly debatable.’

Greenslade listed a series of investigations where these charges applied. However, the precipitant cause of his scathing comments was Mahmood’s run-in with George Galloway, the former Labour MP now representing the Respect Party in the House of Commons, a few weeks earlier. The venue had been the Dorchester on Park Lane where the politician spent a Saturday night dining with Mahmood, who was posing as an Indian businessman, Pervaiz Khan, with Islamist sympathies. Galloway was known to be a supporter of Muslim causes and later said that Mahmood had tried to coax him into making anti-Semitic remarks and discussing illegal party financing.

The MP refused to be drawn and later reached the conclusion that he had been a target for entrapment – an operation which had Mazher Mahmood’s fingerprints all over it. What was more, he had a photo of his nemesis and he intended to release it to as many channels as possible. ‘I’m going to publish “wanted” posters next week and I am going to circulate them widely so that no one ever

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falls for this man again,' Galloway told the media. 'He's an agent provocateur and a disgrace to journalism.'

The *News of the World* denied that Mahmood/Khan had uttered anti-Semitic comments. Lawyers for News International, its parent company, were granted a temporary injunction against publication of his photo. In seeking to extend it further, they argued in court that Mahmood's safety would be jeopardised were his identity to be publicly known. Mr Justice Mitting disagreed: 'I am satisfied that the true purpose of the application [for an injunction] is not the protection of his [Mahmood's] life but the protection of his earning capacity.' Though Galloway was allowed to post his photos they were obviously not seen by a wide enough audience because Mahmood and the Fake Sheikh lived to fight another day.

Around the same time, the paper itself was going through a few difficulties. Founded in 1843, the *News of the World* had for its first 140 years been a Sunday broadsheet, but one which, with its interest in salacious subjects such as crime and sex, embodied much of what would later be regarded as 'tabloid' values. In 1969 it was acquired by Rupert Murdoch, who had also picked up *The Sun* in his first foray into Fleet Street. Murdoch wasted no time in showing where his priorities lay when he bought up the serialisation rights to a memoir by Christine Keeler, the woman at the centre of the Profumo Scandal six years earlier. In 1984 it was transformed into its 'natural' tabloid format and became one of the leading practitioners of 'chequebook journalism' – waving a large cheque in front of anyone who had been involved in a scandal to persuade them to dish the dirt on an exclusive basis.

In 1986 it joined *The Sun* and Murdoch's other two titles in the News International stable, the more sober *Times* and *Sunday Times*, in abandoning the Fleet Street area of London and moving to new headquarters in Wapping where it would shake off the restrictive practices of the print unions. By the late 80s, the *News of the World*, or the *News of the Screws* or *Screws* as it was known for obvious reasons, was selling around 5 million copies each week. By 2006

the internet was starting to make inroads into its circulation and advertising revenue, as it was for all newspapers, but it remained a cash cow within the Murdoch print empire.

It was at this point that controversy intervened. In August of that year, three months after Mahmood’s run-in with Galloway, its royal correspondent Clive Goodman was arrested along with a private detective, Glenn Mulcaire. The pair were subsequently charged under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act with unlawfully intercepting voicemail messages.

The Metropolitan Police investigation had been prompted by a Goodman-bylined story from November 2005. The report – that Prince William had been lent some broadcasting equipment by ITN’s royal correspondent Tom Bradby – was of no great consequence. However, the second-in-line to the throne had discussed with Bradby how such information could have become publicly known and concluded that it was only through someone hacking the voicemail directory on their mobile phones.

The police were alerted and connected Goodman to Mulcaire. Further investigations appeared to show the pair targeting the mobiles of other famous individuals. A month after their arrests, however, company lawyers wrote to the Met saying they had examined how far Mulcaire’s links with Goodman or other *News of the World* journalists went but ‘extensive searches have revealed the existence of only one piece of paper, enclosed herewith. No documents exist recording any work completed by Mr Mulcaire, monitoring of Mr Mulcaire’s return of work, reporting structures or any persons for whom Mr Mulcaire provided information.’

In January 2007 both pleaded guilty to the charges against them. Goodman was sentenced to four months’ imprisonment and Mulcaire, six. At the same time editor Andy Coulson tendered his resignation, though he firmly denied that he had known how Goodman had come by his information about the Prince or that other *News of the World* exclusives had come via a similar channel. With those two out of the picture, the *Screws* picked itself up and carried on as normal. Only *The Guardian*, which as a high-minded,

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liberal, left-wing broadsheet embodied everything the *News of the World* despised, continued to chip away at what it claimed was a cover-up.

Still, when Mahmood mentioned messages downloaded from a BlackBerry an alarm must have gone off in the heads of Myler and Crone. Set against that was the fact that neither at the time of Goodman's arrest nor in any of *The Guardian's* subsequent reporting had their star reporter been linked to phone-hacking. Even if the texts had been illegally downloaded, it was not at the instigation of anyone at the paper. If 'Maz' said he had a sniff of something big, then past form suggested it was wise to let him follow his nose. So that's what they did.

* * *

It scarcely seemed credible, but just two days after their first meeting, and a mere two hours after the end of the first day of the third Test between England and Pakistan at The Oval in south London, Mahmood was sitting next to Majeed as he called up the visiting team's captain Salman Butt. It was the third significant phone call of the day and marked the moment when the agent was ready to allow 'Mohsin Khan' into his secret world.

The first of those phone calls had come in the morning. Wednesday, 18 August had been agreed as the day for their second date and Majeed was keen to fulfil it. He rang Mahmood and they arranged to meet at 8pm at the Bombay Brasserie on Gloucester Road. This was good because Mahmood knew the lie of the land. It was at the same upmarket Indian restaurant in 2003 that he had followed up another big lead on sporting corruption.

Lured to a meeting with the Fake Sheik to discuss a football match in the Middle East, former FA Cup-winner John Fashanu had, over dinner at the brasserie, claimed that he had made £1.5m working for a Far Eastern betting syndicate. He then went on to list his own fee and those for the players if the Sheikh was interested in fixing a match. Fashanu later said that he had merely been playing along and that he had reported the approach to the police. This was

technically true, though he had only gone to the authorities *after* the *News of the World* had contacted him for comment the night before publication.

Majeed would be more circumspect than Fashanu. While much of the night’s success would depend on the credibility of the mobile phone ‘alibi’, it was also important to bolster Mohsin Khan’s credentials. To this end, his entourage would be expanded. Fayaz Sayed, another freelancer, was brought in to serve as Khan’s business partner; Amanda Evans, a *News of the World* reporter, would play the role of his assistant; Alan Smith, as he had done for Maz countless times before, would act as chauffeur.

The burly Smith chaperoned them into the bar area to meet Majeed before retreating to a silver S-class Mercedes. They sat down for drinks and small talk before adjourning to their table for dinner. This would be the best time to get the tricky business done. It was time for the second big call of the day.

Mohsin Khan began by apologising to his would-be partner that he had not been upfront from the start about how they had come by his wife’s phone number. ‘We wanted to get in touch with you,’ he said, ‘but we couldn’t get a number through the internet or anyone in cricket.’ With a sheepish grin, he told Majeed that they hadn’t exactly used normal channels. Khan had a driver whose girlfriend worked in a mobile phone shop. She had accessed one of its phone directories to see if there was anything registered to his name. And there the number was. Strictly speaking, this wasn’t legal, but what was a little contravention of data protection laws among like-minded businessmen? Khan was willing to go further to put Majeed at ease. He was now going to call up the driver so he could hear the story first-hand.

The ‘driver’ was in fact another of Mahmood’s stringers, Majeed Singh, who had been primed to expect the call. Majeed Singh fitted the bill perfectly. He was a Sikh who spoke Urdu. The plan was not for him to meet Majeed but, if it ever came to it, he looked and sounded exactly like the kind of discreet and dependable fixer a dodgy Far Eastern syndicate would want on its payroll. Majeed

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listened and spoke – they both conversed in Urdu – and was satisfied. Time to eat.

The final significant call of the day would occur during the meal. As they ate, the pair discussed arrangements for the planned T20 competition. Majeed said it would be a good idea if he called up Salman Butt. He did this because he wanted to show how close he was to the Pakistan dressing room but also for practical reasons. They would need an idea of the team's itinerary over the nine months to work out when they would be available for the fledgling tournament. As captain, Butt was best placed to provide that. Within earshot of Mahmood, he told his agent that after a series of limited-overs matches against England in September, they would be playing South Africa in Dubai in October and November and touring New Zealand the following month.

The meal and discussions continued. For the second time in 48 hours, there was a flirtatious air. Majeed and Mahmood were like two lovers making eyes at each other, sharing suggestive comments without either actually mentioning the deed they were going to perform. Finally, Mahmood decided it was time to get down to the dirty. He asked Majeed if they could talk more in his car. Majeed agreed and followed him into the Mercedes. Any reservations he might have had were now banished because when Mahmood offered to let him search for recording devices, Majeed said there was no need.

Even if he had taken him up on the offer, it is unlikely that he would have found the Sony MP3 audio recorder which Conrad Brown had expertly hidden within the vehicle. Nor would he have thought to examine the lining of Mahmood's 'bespoke' extra-large Y-fronts which contained a Sony MP3 audio recorder connected to a small microphone in his belt buckle; or indeed what had been inside Mohsin Khan's assistant's handbag – a video camera and another MP3 audio recorder. These had all been installed by Brown just a few hours earlier when the *News of the World* team had met at Mahmood's London home. At this particular moment, Brown was sitting in a 4x4 car, his Sony camcorder having captured the two plotters leaving the restaurant for the Mercedes.

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The search offer declined, Majeed got down to business. ‘I don’t usually speak about these things,’ he began in conspiratorial fashion. ‘I am very, man of instinct. And I do feel that I can speak to you about this so I am going to speak to you about it. OK. Now, there is very big money it. They’ve toned down match fixing a lot. They’ve made it very, very difficult in many, many ways. But obviously, you know, these guys would not deal with anybody ... the only reason they deal with me is professional, they know my background, they’ve known me for so many years. I’ve been doing it with them, the Pakistani team now for about two and a half years. And we’ve made masses and masses amounts of money. I’m not doing no betting, I deal with an Indian party, yeah. They pay me for the information.’

Now he was ready to specify what that information might be. ‘Say for example a bracket would open in India, and it would open for 30 runs after ten overs, or 33 runs after ten overs. So what the players would do is for the first three overs, they would score a maximum, they would score 13 or more runs in the first three overs. Right. So then the market goes, expecting it to go high because they are scoring at a higher rate. Then the next seven overs they would score 14 or less. So then the people who know the information would go low and make a hell of a lot of a killing on it.

‘Then there’s a bowling bracket.’ Majeed was now getting excited because he began referring to ‘the last Australia match, the second Australia match’ and showed a message on his BlackBerry. ‘Oh I’m sorry that’s another one,’ he added before reading out a second text:

Eighth, ninth, 10th bowling, one confirmed with 17 plus one run of no ball in the last over ...

‘So say for example Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Amir are bowling, yeah. The market opens at ten overs and, let’s say, 32 runs. Asif is going to indicate by bowling a dead ball at the start of the sixth over. That means it’s on. In other words he runs up but doesn’t bowl the delivery, pretends that he didn’t get his stride right and

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then goes back. That means he's going to do it. Then we know, then we start betting ...

'So at the sixth over when he does the dead ball, my people know that the eighth, ninth and tenth over they are going to concede more than 18 runs. They're going to concede more than six runs an over and the last ball of the tenth over is going to be a no-ball. OK. So they know, then everyone's thinking, no they're not because they're conceding only two or three runs an over. So the last three overs they let it all go and they make a killing ... So that's brackets. There's brackets and results.'

So what, Mahmood asked, could Mohsin Khan and his people expect from entering into partnership with Majeed? 'Do we get information, like there will be three no-balls in the third over?'

'You will get everything like that. And you get the indication to show if it's on or not. They'll change gloves at a certain point. It all comes through me. I do it all but as I said I only deal with Indian people. We do results now and again. The last one we did was against Sri Lanka in the Asia Cup which was about two months ago.'

Pakistan had played Sri Lanka on 15 June. Sri Lanka had scored 242/9, with Mohammad Amir and Mohammad Asif easily the most expensive of the bowlers. In reply, Pakistan had been bowled out for 226. Their total would have been much lower but for a century by then captain Shahid Afridi, who was not one of Majeed's players. Of those who were Majeed's clients, Butt had been out for 0, the Akmal brothers had scored a combined total of 44 runs with each run out, while Amir had made 5 and Asif was last man out for a second-ball duck.

'And you get a script as well,' he continued. 'In other words, this bowler is going to concede this many runs or more, this batsman's going to do this ... If there's a Twenty20, rather than being out for zero it's better that he wastes an over or two and then gets out. But you will never have the whole team ...'

'How many have you got?'

'I've got six first-team players. And they are all guaranteed positions.'

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‘OK, it’s against England now, what’s happening?’ asked Mahmood, scarcely able to believe how well things were proceeding.

‘For Friday, you get the information, we deal with everything on the night before or the morning – Thursday night or Friday morning early. We charge anything between £50,000 and £80,000 per bracket. And for results, Twenty20 is about £400,000. A Test match, depending on the situation, can go up to a million pounds.’

‘Come on. How do you recover that – a million?’ To Majeed this sounded like Mohsin Khan expressing some scepticism, which it was in a sense. Yet this was also investigative journalist Mazher Mahmood probing and prodding for more information. He wasn’t to be disappointed

‘Let me tell you the last Test we did. It was the second Test against Australia in Sydney. On the last day Australia had two more wickets left. They had a lead of ten runs. The odds for Pakistan to lose that match were I think 40-1. We let them get up to 150 in the morning, and then everyone lost their wickets. That one we made £1.3m. Tests is [sic] where the biggest money is but we are not going to do any results for the next two games because we want Salman Butt to be captain for the long term.’

Majeed’s recollection of the Sydney Test was more or less correct. That final day had started with Australia eight down in their second innings and with a lead of 80 – the two batsmen at the crease, Mike Hussey and Peter Siddle, had already enjoyed a partnership of 29. On the final day they added another 94 before Australia were all out for 381, leaving Pakistan to chase 175. They were then bowled out for 139.

Pakistan were said to have ‘choked’ during their fourth innings chase, though their cause had not been helped by wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal dropping three catches and missing a fairly simple run-out opportunity in Australia’s second innings. Akmal would later say that the game had been like a ‘scary dream’. The report on the website *Cricinfo* would also put some of the blame on captain

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Mohammad Yousuf, 'whose timid tactics in the morning session played into the hands of the Australian batsmen.'

It was clear that something had gone badly wrong on that tour because, though none had fixing charges or even circumstantial evidence brought against them, former captains Younus Khan and Mohammad Yousuf, Shoaib Malik, Rana Naved-ul Hasan and the Akmal brothers were all the subject of disciplinary proceedings for indiscipline or in-fighting soon after it ended.

Mahmood asked about arranging no-balls but Majeed made clear that was small beer. 'No-balls is easy. No-balls, there's not that much money anyway. If you wanted no-balls you could probably get up to 10,000 each. But in terms of results, one-day matches, results are about 450, depending on who we are playing. You can speak to any bookie in India and they will tell you about this information and how much they'll pay. You can make millions, you can make absolutely millions, millions.'

They had come so far in such a short time but Mahmood needed to go further. Braggarts with big mouths were an occupational hazard for him. In Asia, the UK or elsewhere, there were untold young men on the make, eager to say whatever would impress a wealthy contact. Majeed himself liked to give the impression that he knew everyone and everything. He said he had helped set up a £12m book deal for footballer Rio Ferdinand before making an even wilder claim about the Pakistan president, Asif Ali Zardari: 'Everyone knows he killed his wife.'

Yet the detail he had gone into about cricket matches, combined with the BlackBerry messages, looked like corruption. What the story still lacked was evidence to link to his players. Butt could, for example, state he had no idea of his agent's shadow life, while the rest could legitimately claim they had simply underperformed in the matches cited. It was time for Mahmood to put the bait on the hook and cast his line into the water. 'So let's put this to the test, if this is going to work. Would you be able to tell me on Thursday there will be a no-ball in whatever over it is?' Majeed said he would.

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‘We’ll give the boy ten grand, no problem, whatever the rate is,’ Mahmood/Khan went on. ‘Just give me a no-ball so that our boys have got an indication this is on. Then they’ll invest big.’

‘Fine. I will let you know on Thursday evening and I will tell you on Friday morning what the no-ball is going to be. I’ll give you two if you want. And once you paid then I know that it’s real, yeah. The main thing if we do this is to be discreet. The only thing that can ever mess this up is if people talk.’

Majeed had no idea how indiscreet he had been.