

can take back the land, honours, and presents — and the advertisers are left with damp squibs. As one wag remarked, the only good batting by “our boys” occurred in the advertisements.

In India, the humiliation is “unbearable” — and of course all are shouting for the Captain’s blood. Earlier, Indians disgraced themselves by trying to ban Pakistan playing in Bombay (This was Hindu chauvinism’s contribution to sport) and at the last World Cup, India pioneered the art of stopping a match — if you are losing by running on to the pitch and throwing bottles (as the crowd did in Calcutta).

In Pakistan, there is elation and depression of a manic kind (“we are winning against South Africa”, “now we lost”). Where is the Captain? Instead of showering him with gold coins, perhaps they

will stone him to death or think up some other Islamic punishment. Blood money from the team to the State?

As Mithra predicted, cricket is now a big industry, with politicians, advertisers, businessmen, and thugs muscling in for a share of the pie. Hence the anger. “The chivalry of the Arthurian days of shining white flannels has given way to the raw machismo of the Arnold Schwarzeneggers of one-day cricket” say Dunham and Jayasuriya. If that is so, Cat’s Eye hopes that the defeat will prove to be the proverbial blessing in disguise. An old-style morality lesson which will bring us back to reality. We cannot indulge in the mass escapism of cricket. After all it is only a boys’ game and should be treated as such. Otherwise we’ll be switching off TV when we lose, and taking our sticks to the airport to hit our players for more than a six. And give bangles to the Captain! ■

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THE WORLD CUP-WINNERS AND LOSERS

The first round of the World Cup played in England concluded a few days ago. Sri Lankan team comprised of a few players of international repute, led by one, who up to the time was looked upon as the best in the world, played very well true to their form to lose every match except the two played against Zimbabwe and Kenya. The team’s best performance was with our immediate neighbour, India. It was indeed a bloody massacre at Taunton of the kind that took place a century and half years ago at the black hole of Plassey, Calcutta. The team was disgraced and humiliated. The contribution made by each member of the team will go into the record books. The whole drama is over and it should be a big relief for every Sri Lankan, the Electricity Board, in particular.

The boys, truly, the majority of them are uncles, failed miserably because the climatic conditions didn’t favour them, the pitches were uneven and wet and the ball used to swing making it difficult for the batsmen to negotiate, the ball was not the normal one used in these encounters, the important toss was either won or lost and it did not come off in the way the team wanted, there was not much of a crowd support, had no “buth curry” and cut off from their loved ones for a considerable period of time, practising for long hours and feeling fatigue, tired and weary, the bowlers and fielders found the run-up slippery, they could not bowl to a good line and length because their arms were round stiff and benumbed, didn’t have a proper coach and a manager, disunity and mistrust among the players, their headquar-

ters in Sri Lanka is in a mess, come or go Chicago mentality being Cup holders. In a nutshell nothing favoured them.

Every match the Sri Lankans played caused us enough frustration and agony. Added to that, we were unwittingly forced upon to watch an advertisement match shown simultaneously over the Swarnavahini TV channel. We were tormented, agonised and punished. Swarnavahini, of course, boasted for months that unlike the other TV channels, it would not disturb the viewers with advertisements during the play. Swarnavahini violated all the norms of decency and fairplay making the Agreement it entered into with the viewers a big farce and a comedy. We have been fooled and badly let down both by the Sri Lankan team and the TV.

While we feel defeated and disappointed, the winners are the members of the Sri Lankan team, the Sri Lanka Cricket Board, the TV and the advertisers. All of them may now be in a very happy mood enjoying the stake that was on offer. No one can deny the fact that we have been taken for a ride, duped and deceived by all these parties.

Hopefully, we would have another opportunity to see the same team participating in the next World Cup. Let the poor fellows eye that possibility once again for the third time. Let us have some mercy on our boys and uncles. After all, they are yet the champions! ■

Colvin Karunaratne