

## **Not cricket**

Andrew Shearer  
Wall Street Journal  
3 July 2010

John Howard's stymied bid for the leadership of the International Cricket Council is creating bad feelings in Australia because the decision so clearly goes against the spirit of the game, which emphasizes fair play. Indeed it's hard not to conclude that it was Mr. Howard's seriousness as a candidate that was anathema to cricket officials in a handful of countries—seemingly including India—who are all too comfortable with business as usual at the ICC. The rest simply went along for the ride.

If ever there was an organization in need of a shake-up, surely it is the International Cricket Council. And John Howard has exactly the right mix of management and reform credentials, high-level diplomatic experience and familiarity with the game to achieve that.

But let's leave the merits of Mr. Howard's ICC nomination to one side. Many of the claims flung at Howard now are about the distant past in any case. What has been missing from the discussion—and deserves acknowledgment—is the more recent reality of Mr. Howard's significant contribution to Australia-India relations. Attacks in the Indian media on the former prime minister, who is also my former boss, are as misguided as the role played by Indian cricket authorities in blocking his nomination.

For all the Australian Labor government's talk of "taking relations to a new level," it was Prime Minister Howard who was prepared to take on the nonproliferation orthodoxy and overturn decades of Australian foreign policy by lifting the ban on uranium exports to India. He did this not to win votes or to please Australian uranium exporters but because he saw clearly India's burgeoning strategic importance, economic potential and legitimate desire for international recognition. He also recognized New Delhi's strong nonproliferation record.

When former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was swept to office in 2007, however, he reversed the change. Despite enjoying enormous popular support and political authority in the days following his election, Mr. Rudd was not prepared to take on the Australian Labor Party's antinuclear ideologues—in retrospect a harbinger of his weakness within his own party. We will have to wait and see whether his successor, Julia Gillard, is prepared to take on her own Left faction over uranium. Don't count on it though.

Mr. Howard recognized that Australia and India share not only growing economic and strategic interests but also fundamental values and traditions. They are two of the oldest continuous democracies in the Indo-Pacific region as well as growing trade partners and the geostrategic "bookends" of the increasingly important Indian Ocean. The prime minister saw that together these factors made a compelling case for both countries to take each other much more seriously than they had in the past.

Mr. Howard developed a close and warm personal relationship with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh—presumably attracted by his no-nonsense leadership style, political skills and abiding commitment to economic reform. He often publicly highlighted the far-reaching economic reforms Mr. Singh launched as finance minister. He was a consistent advocate of the benefits that would flow to the international community from India's rise and of the durability of its institutions. Ironically, in light of the media barrage directed at his ICC candidacy, these include an outspoken free press.

It was under Mr. Howard's government that work commenced on bilateral free trade negotiations between India and Australia. It was Mr. Howard who entertained the proposal for a Quadrilateral Dialogue that would have brought Australia and India together with the United States and Japan, in the face of Chinese displeasure. The Rudd government subsequently publicly disowned the initiative, in a blatant kowtow to pressure from Beijing.

It was also Mr. Howard who in 2007 lobbied, albeit unsuccessfully, for India's inclusion in APEC, the region's leading regional institution. I know because I was there when he pressed India's case firmly with President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in the face of American resistance.

Mr. Howard's diplomacy may not have been flamboyant or flawless. But it was principled and consistent, and it got results. He understood India's growing importance and was serious about building a strategic relationship with New Delhi. Australia-India relations were better under Mr. Howard's leadership than they had been before, and certainly better than they are now. His efforts to build a stronger friendship between Australia and India deserve better.

Mr. Shearer is director of studies and a senior research fellow at Australia's Lowy Institute for International Policy. He was former Australian Prime Minister John Howard's senior international policy adviser.