

28/09/2001

Next few weeks will tell, says cricketing legend Imran

K.P. Waran in Islamabad

CRICKETING legend Imran Khan, who leads the Tehrik-e-Insaf party in Pakistan, said the terrorists attack on New York and Washington is a turning point in history - it could result in a clash of the West and Muslim nations or it could result in a closer relationship.

"This will be decided over the next few weeks and what happens in Afghanistan," said Imran.

"The US response should be very thoroughly thought out although the Americans at the moment feel pain and humiliation after the attack, especially since they have been beating their chests and calling themselves a superpower.

"They should not have embarked on the huge military build-up without first establishing the guilt of Osama bin Laden and providing evidence to convince the world.

"I am happy there is restraint so far and I hope whatever action the US takes would not result in the bloodshed of innocent people.

"There should be justice but the question is at what cost. If the cost is too high the world will condemn the US."

He said Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf was not given much choice. He was given an ultimatum - either Pakistan joins the alliance or risk being condemned as a terrorist state.

As such, Imran said, he understood Musharraf's predicament.

Imran said after the civil war in Afghanistan where the USSR had intervened, the Western nations abandoned Pakistan who hosted two million refugees.

He hoped this would not be the case this time around since the Pakistani people and its economy would not be able to bear it.

Meanwhile, Imran is confident his party will come to power in the next general election "since the people are fed up with the two political parties which had ruled before".

His confidence comes from the credible showing of his party at the 1996 elections although it was only four months old.

He added that during the last five years the party's leadership had broadened its contact with the grassroots and strengthened its membership.

"I believe the country wants a change and in the next election, 15 million new voters will be participating in it and they are going to help swing the support for my party," he said.

He said he considers Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad a role model of a leader who has transformed a developing country to one that is looked up to by other nations.

"Twenty years ago, Pakistan was way ahead of Malaysia but now we are lagging behind. Dr Mahathir has given Malaysians self-esteem and self-respect which are important ingredients in nation building.

"Malaysia is a success story that Muslim countries all over the world should look up to. There are very few Muslim countries which can match its credentials in development.

"Malaysia is a respected member of the international community."

(END)