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BCCI BECKONS THE BRAGGARTS BACK

Board Suspends Pandya, Rahul Pending Inquiry; CEO To Conduct Initial Probe

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Mumbai: Around 12 am Sydney time, a good few hours after the Indian team went to sleep in time to wake up for the first of the three One-day Internationals against Australia on Saturday, the Supreme Court-appointed Committee of Administrators (CoA) sent fresh notices to Hardik Pandya and KL Rahul telling them they've been suspended pending enquiry.

For lack of an apex council, the legal advice sought now directs BCCI CEO Rahul Johri to conduct a preliminary enquiry and then forward the report to an ombudsman. For lack of an ombudsman, Johri — under the directions of the legal advice sought by CoA member Diana Edulji — will now have to appoint one very soon.

Pandya and Rahul are on their way back home and will be present for the preliminary enquiry.

Reaching this conclusion after a good five-day drama since the episode first aired on Koffee with Karan, the CoA sent two separate notices to Pandya and Rahul that contains the following: "You are aware that enquiry and proceedings against you for misconduct and discipline have been initiated under Rule 41 of BCCI constitution and the same are presently pending. In terms of Rule 41(6) of the constitution, you are hereby suspended with immediate effect from participating in any manner whatsoever in any match or function or event or activity that is authorised, organised, sanctioned, recognised or supported in any way by the BCCI, ICC or any state association, until final adjudication of the matter."

High on legal jargon, the note however does not tell the players if they are required to stay back in Australia or return home. The team management was not informed either on the eve of the game if the two would be returning home. TOI understands that the cricketers have made their own travel arrangements and are on their way back.

Meanwhile, there are BCCI members demanding a six-month ban for both the players despite the fact that both reacted differently on Johar's show.

"Six months? So, they're saying Pandya should not play the IPL or

the World Cup? Has everybody lost it? What has happened to BCCI? Nobody cares about cricket any more. For God's sake, he's (Pandya) only a 24-year-old. Just punish him and move on but don't mess with the Indian team," says a senior BCCI administrator.

After what transpired on Friday, it is clear that BCCI's new constitution is not equipped to handle this matter simply because there is no clear definition for the term 'misconduct' in their own set of clauses. "And neither (the constitution) provides any guidance on what the said term — misconduct — entails in the present context," says the legal note sought by Edulji.

Captain Virat Kohli, meanwhile, has taken a firm stand on the matter indicating that such behaviour won't be tolerated. "We don't support inappropriate comments," Kohli said on the eve of the first ODI in Sydney.

TOI has learnt that the team management had already decided to bench Pandya and Rahul for Saturday's game, considering CoA's notice had not reached them until late on Friday night (Aus time). Five days have gone by since the episode on Koffee with Karan first went viral on social media, inviting a wave of criticism after what the two cricketers, and Pandya in particular, spoke on the show.

"Five days this drama goes on? You want to ban the players? That's fine. Want to suspend them? Do it. Penalise? Make them pay. But don't mess with the team on a tour. Don't mess with the cricket. Just get over with it," say sources close to the team management.

Neither of the CoA members have yet informed the team management in Sydney if replacements will be made available, should the players return home.

The legal note from law firm Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas and BCCI's own legal team says: "Considering that the inquiry process against the players concerned has commenced and is pending, it is open for the CoA to suspend (the two players) pending enquiry and proceeding into the charges of misconduct until final adjudication. The suspension will however cease, if the adjudication is not completed in six months."



Getty Images

THROW DOWN: MS Dhoni (left), Khaleel Ahmed and Shikhar Dhawan watch Hardik Pandya go through the paces at SCG on Thursday

LIVE ON SONY SPORTS, 7.45 AM

INDIA AUSTRALIA

ICC ODI RANKINGS

2 6

HEAD TO HEAD

45 73

GROUND

The last 5 ODIs have seen scores in excess of 300-plus.

WEATHER

The weather is expected to be bright and sunny.

ODDS: INDIA 7/10, AUS TRALIA 6/4

5 ODIs won by India out of 19 contested at Sydney (lost 13 and no-result 1). Their tally includes two wins vs Australia and one each against England, New Zealand and Pakistan.

1 Wickets required by Bhuvneshwar Kumar (99 at 38.22 in 95 matches) to become the 12th Indian pacer to complete 100 wickets or more in ODIs.

1 MS Dhoni (9999 runs at an average of 49.74 in 329 matches — 10,173 at 50.11 in 332 matches) needs just one run to become the fifth batsman to complete 10,000 runs for India in ODIs. He would join Sachin Tendulkar (18426), Sourav Ganguly (11221 — 11363 overall), Rahul Dravid (10768 — overall 10889) and Virat Kohli (10232).

66.37 Average registered by Rohit Sharma while aggregating 1593, including six hundreds and five fifties, in 28 ODIs — the highest in ODIs involving India and Australia (minimum 1,000 runs).

86.66 Success percentage enjoyed by Australia vs India in ODIs at Sydney, winning 13 out of 16 contested, losing two. The other game ended in a no-result.

—Stats: Rajesh Kumar

After Test high, India's final run for World Cup

Sydney: Hit hard by an unexpected controversy after the high of the Test triumph, India will look to fine tune their World Cup preparations in the three-match ODI series against an under-fire Australia, beginning here on Saturday. On the eve of the opening game, the BCCI suspended Hardik Pandya and KL Rahul pending an inquiry for their unsavoury remarks on women during a TV show, effectively ruling them out of the series.

While Pandya was a certainty in the playing XI, an out-of-form Rahul was not in contention to play on Saturday. Skipper Virat Kohli on Friday condemned the comments made by his two teammates and said the team does not align with the "individual opinions".

Rahul was unlikely to get a go owing to both his poor form and the presence of a well-settled opening pair in Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan. More significant is Pandya's absence as the all-rounder provides crucial balance to the ODI side with his ability to bowl 10 overs as well as bat in the middle order.

Pandya's absence means that India will have to rejig their attack. Jasprit Bumrah has already been rested for this series, as well as the tour of New Zealand, and this allows the think-tank to conduct one final experimentation with their bowling attack.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar is a shoe-in, and thereafter it depends if Kohli wants to go in with a three-man pace attack to compensate for Pandya's loss. In such a scenario, Mohammed Shami and Khaleel Ahmed are expected to get the nod, as India continue zeroing on the



YOURS OR MINE? Finch and Kohli pose with the World Cup trophy at the SCG on Friday

FINCH'S GAMEPLAN

"Over the last 12 months Virat has averaged 133, Shikhar 75, and Rohit 50; so there's a lot of runs and balls faced from their top three. It's important to get them as early as you can because once they get in, they score fast and they don't seem to get out too easily."

"Dinesh Karthik, Kedar Jadhav, Dhoni these guys that can all play their part as well. The top three are very important but you can't just look at that otherwise there's someone else that will catch you off-guard and get the job done as well."

— Aaron Finch, AUSTRALIA'S ODI CAPTAIN

will form the middle order, and there will be keen interest in the latter duo's form here.

Dhoni had an off-colour 2018, managing 275 runs in 20 ODIs at average 25 without a half-century. While this is a meagre return for a batsman of his stature, the worrying aspect is Dhoni's strike-rate of 71.42, which is remarkably lower than his ODI career strike-rate of 87.89. India brought in Rayudu for the all-important number four role, and since the Asia Cup last September, have given him a long run in the middle order. In this interim, Rayudu scored 392 runs in 11 ODIs in the Asia

Cup and against West Indies at average 56 including a hundred and three half-centuries.

While he put in a more consistent showing than any of the other previously tried contenders, this run came in conditions different from those in England. How Rayudu fares on this twin tour of Australia and New Zealand will be a closer representation of whether the team has finally cracked the No 4 quandary.

Similar middle-order issues plagued the visitors when they last toured here for an ODI contest, losing 4-1 in January 2016 when Dhoni was still captain. Sharma and Kohli topped the charts with 441 and 381 runs in the five-match series, respectively, while Dhawan also scored 287 runs. But there were no sizeable contributions from the middle, and only Manish Pandey's fighting hundred in the final ODI had saved India from a 5-0 scoreline.

India's ODI record in Australia is quite poor. Apart from the 1985 World Championship and 2008 CB Series wins, they have lost 35 out of 48 ODIs played against Australia on their home soil.

Teams: India (from): Virat Kohli (C), Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan, Ambati Rayudu, Dinesh Karthik, Kedar Jadhav, MS Dhoni (WK), Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Ravindra Jadeja, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Khaleel Ahmed, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj.

Australia (playing XI): Aaron Finch (C), Alex Carey (WK), Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh, Peter Handscomb, Marcus Stoinis, Glenn Maxwell, Nathan Lyon, Peter Siddell, Jhye Richardson, Jason Behrendorff.

FOLLOWING LALA, BUT LIKE THIS?

Hardik Pandya and KL Rahul being sent back from an overseas tour is only the second such instance in 82 years in Indian cricket.

In 1936, the legendary Lala Amarnath was sent back from the tour of England by the erstwhile captain Maharaja of Vijianagaram or 'Vizzy' for alleged insubordination during a first-class game.

While there has been a history of disciplinary issues on tours, the Pandya-Rahul issue is the first time that the BCCI has acted and called back errant players.

In 1996, Navjot Sidhu left the tour of England on his own after a heated exchange with skipper Azharuddin before a practice game. He left without informing anyone, paving the way for roommate — Sourav Ganguly — to make his Test debut at Lord's and score a century on debut. PTI

WON'T PICK UP BAT ONCE I RETIRE: KOHLI

Sydney: Retired cricketers plying their trade in T20 leagues might be a global trend right now but India captain Virat Kohli says he wouldn't even be "seen around the scene" the day he is "totally spent" to pick up the bat again. When asked whether he would consider playing in the Big Bash league after retiring, Kohli said: "Look I don't know whether that

stance is going to change in the future. As far as I am concerned, playing more cricket when I am done, I don't think I am in that zone to be honest."

Kohli added: "I have played enough cricket in the last five years and I cannot comment on even the first thing I do when I retire because I don't feel like I am going to pick up the bat again. I will be spent, the day I finish I will be totally spent and that's the reason I am going to stop playing cricket."

Brand Hardik takes a hit, loses sponsor

Players' Market Value May Further Suffer In Coming Days, Say Experts

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New Delhi: Brands and companies are reviewing their association with cricketers Hardik Pandya and KL Rahul after their suspension on Friday following the duo's sexist comments on women during their appearance on a TV show.

Pandya's deal with men's shaving razor Gillette Mach3 Start was the first victim of the controversy as the company suspended it's association with the cricketer. "Hardik Pandya's recent comments do not reflect the values of Gillette. We have suspended our association with Hardik until we decide on further course of action," a company spokesperson told TOI on Friday.

Rahul endorses brands such as, German sportswear maker Puma and Bengaluru-based fitness startup Curefit. Pandya has inked deals with around seven brands, including Gillette and D:FY, a sportswear brand launched by Puma India's former boss Rajiv Mehta.

"As we have seen with celebrities such as Aamir Khan, who lost his endorsements after he made comments that did not go down well with a certain section of the au-



TROUBLING TIMES: Pandya and Rahul

dience or even golfer Tiger Woods who got embroiled in a controversy, Pandya and Rahul's brand valuation may be impacted in the short run," said Aviral Jain, MD at Duff & Phelps, which on Thursday released a report on celebrity brand rankings.

"However, if the BCCI decides to restrict a cricketer's appearance at social events or on talk shows, there may be a bigger impact on the community," he said.

While Puma India has clauses in its endorsement deals, which the company may exercise in the case of Rahul, a founding member of D:FY refused to comment on the brand's association with Pandya. "We are a very small brand compared to the other ones endorsed by Pan-

dya. You should speak to them," he said.

"Both cricketers represent an aggressive, young and candid India," said brand expert Harish Bijoor. "They speak the language of IPL cricket which may work well on Instagram but on traditional media, more votes will be against the youngsters. Not everybody shares the same set of values they endorse."

Bijoor, however, said brands will play the wait-and-watch game before coming to a conclusion. "Fortunately, unlike an Aamir Khan, who was let go as brand ambassador by e-commerce company Snapdeal for his remarks in 2016, Pandya and Rahul are not big celebrity endorsers and are likely to have minimal impact on the brands they represent. However, there will be pressure on them to perform."

Cricketers have contributed to the growing number of celebrity endorsements in India. For instance, captain Virat Kohli emerged as the country's No. 1 celebrity endorser in 2018 twice in a row. Duff & Phelps pegged his brand value at \$171 million, up 18% from the previous year.

While Bollywood stars hogged the top 20 celebrity brand rankings valued at \$877 million, sportspersons provided tough competition as well. Kohli, Sachin Tendulkar, MS Dhoni and PV Sindhu collectively contributed around \$241 million, which is over 27% of the cumulative brand value of the top 20 celebrities.

Not too stressed about Pandya situation, we have Jadeja: Virat

Sydney: India captain Virat Kohli said he is not too stressed about the possibility of a ban on all-rounder Hardik Pandya for his "inappropriate" comments on women as the side has a ready replacement in Ravindra Jadeja.

"We played in India against the West Indies with a finger spinner and a wrist spinner. So it's good that we have someone like Jadeja who can do the all-rounder's role if a scenario like that occurs," Kohli said on the eve of the first ODI against Australia.

"So we are not too stressed as a team (about the Pandya situation) because you'll always have things that you can do in terms of creating that balance for the side. And hence, we keep players who can provide balance with bat and ball as a backup anyway," he added.

"I don't think we will have too much of trouble if we have to change our combinations. We are pretty comfortable as a side and any combination that we go in with," he said.

Kohli said he is pleased with the current team's combination and there isn't too much room for tinkering with this squad in the build-up to the ODI World Cup in England starting May 30.

"The fact we have not many games left before the World Cup and hence we want to play the side that more or less will feature in the World Cup. The exceptional case of Jasprit Bumrah being rested is purely because of the workload in the Test series."

"But apart from that I don't think combination-wise we are going to look to tinker too much," he said.

However, Kohli did admit that form and fitness could be decisive for a couple of spots. PTI

Oz not playing like defending champs

Dean Jones

I think the success of Pu-jara, the media attention towards him, and the way he played, might inspire a lot more kids to now to play Test cricket. Virat Kohli's love of this form of the game and this magnificent win will ensure that it survives and is loved for generations to come. The final frontier has been conquered after 71 years and I hope that every fan and past Indian Test player have raised a beverage in honour of this splendid victory. Australian fans really enjoyed the way India played.

We are five months out from the World Cup, and our

selectors are silly and stupid enough to change the game-plan. They're resting three of our best bowlers — Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins. This, at a time when coaches and selectors are dotting I's and crossing T's, figuring out strategy and tactics for the World Cup.

In their last 23 ODI matches, Australia have only won three! And we've selected 32 different players in those 23 games! So, how can we be settled or organized with regard to the World Cup campaign? I blame the selectors. I think they have forgotten the fact that we are the defending champions and we're certainly not playing like it. GAMEPLAN

THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

EXIDE INVERTER BATTERY