

Back at Eden, Ganguly talks cricket

Kohli's men need to win ICC events, pink ball Test way forward, spinners love SG ball, says BCCI prez-elect



DRIVER'S SEAT

BCCI president-designate Sourav Ganguly arrives at Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Tuesday. *PTI*

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
KOLKATA, OCTOBER 15

RED CARPET was rolled out at Eden Gardens for Sourav Ganguly as he returned from Mumbai after filing his nomination for the BCCI president's post. And as the BCCI president-elect arrived at the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB), things became chaotic. It felt like a throw-back to 1996, when the 'Prince of Calcutta' had returned home after scoring back-to-back hundreds in his debut Test series. Ganguly, however, described his century at Lord's on his Test debut "30 times bigger than this".

He took charge of the Indian team as its captain at the turn of the century, when Indian cricket was going through an upheaval in the wake of the match-fixing scandal. His leadership changed the Indian team. Along the way, Ganguly had put huge emphasis on winning overseas. As the BCCI president, is he satisfied with the way the current team performs away from home? According to him, India not winning an ICC tournament for the last six years is an area that needs to be addressed.

"I think it's (India's performance abroad) satisfactory and we have a very good side. My only thing is that we need to win big tournaments. I'm not saying they will win every time. It's not possible. But they have gone through seven big tournaments without winning one; they are much better side than that. That's the only area where they need to get themselves ready mentally. Talent is enormous, otherwise they couldn't have played so well in the World Cup till the semifinals. So that's an issue which Virat needs to address. And that doesn't happen in the boardroom," Ganguly said.

India won the 2013 Champions Trophy but they have faltered in the knockouts at the ICC events since. Between the lines, there was a message to the team management.

Ganguly also had a message for Wriddhiman Saha, who wowed the pundits and fans alike with his 'keeping in the Pune Test against South Africa. Kohli called his stumper the best in the world and few would argue. But

Ganguly wants the Bengal 'keeper-batsman to be equally good in front of the wicket, if he wants to play 100 Tests.

"I'm extremely happy that he (Saha) does well behind the stumps. But my suggestion to him is that in front of the stumps he should score a lot many runs. His wicket-keeping will never be doubted. (But) if he wants to play 100 Tests, he will have to score a lot more runs. He is our own boy. I wish him the best. Hopefully, in the third Test he will get a hundred."

An emergency-like situation

He is taking charge of the BCCI at a time, when the cricket board's functioning needs to be streamlined after nearly three years of the CoA rule. The former India captain called it an emergency-like situation.

"When I became the India captain, the team was going through a difficult phase. Now also, the administration is going through a major crisis for three years. It's actually an emergency, as I have said before, and I'm happy to get the responsibility to turn it around. That's what matters. When it is tough, people believe that you are good enough to do it. That's my biggest responsibility."

Last year, when West Indies came here, the

BCCI acting secretary Amitabh Choudhary wanted the first Test at Rajkot to be a day-night affair. The Committee of Administrators (CoA) vetoed it, as according to them, players were reluctant. Ganguly, however, has always been a supporter of day-night Tests. After taking charge of the CAB, he brought in pink-ball games in local cricket. With him helming Indian cricket now, is there a chance that India would finally embrace day-night Tests?

"Let's see. Before talking to the team management, this needs the approval of the BCCI members. But I always believe that's the way forward in Test cricket. Games are being played before empty stands," Ganguly said.

Last year, Kohli had criticised the quality of the SG ball, that is used for home Tests. "To have a ball scuffed up in five overs is not something that we have seen before," the India captain had said. The MCC's cricket committee, with Ganguly on board, proposed standardisation of the red ball. The BCCI president-elect, however, dropped a hint that India would continue to have the SG ball for home Tests.

"When I was the India captain, the SG ball came in. The spinners wouldn't let the SG ball get off their hands. And Virat Kohli will face the same problem. Ravi Ashwin, Jadeja and

I have heard these political questions before, when I met Mamata Didi, the chief minister, and you have seen the results. I met Amit Shah for the first time ever. The questions were different. Neither was I asked a question on what's going to happen to the BCCI; whether I'm going to get a post or not. Neither was there any discussion of that sort (joining BJP) happened; that you only get this if we agree to that."

SOURAV GANGULY

ON IF HIS MEETING WITH AMIT SHAH HAD ANY POLITICAL UNDERTONE

Kuldeep will not let him change the SG ball."

Ganguly reiterated his stand on the conflict-of-interest and how it is important for Indian cricket to have legends like Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev, Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid contributing to the game. He also mentioned how the BCCI is struggling to fill up the IPL governing council posts, because members are "reluctant" to give up their positions in their respective state associations.

The question with regards to his meeting with the Union Home Minister Amit Shah and if that had any political undertone, with an eye to the 2021 Assembly polls in Bengal, came in due course. "You must have seen Amit Shah's tweet yesterday and he has said very rightly. Not once has he said we will do this for doing that... You have got to give respect to that," Ganguly contended, adding: "I have heard these political questions before, when I met Mamata Didi, the chief minister, and you have seen the results. I met Amit Shah for the first time ever. The questions were different. Neither was I asked a question on what's going to happen to the BCCI; whether I'm going to get a post or not. Neither was there any discussion of that sort (joining BJP) happened; that you only get this if we agree to that."

PAINE BACKS SMITH'S RETURN TO CAPTAINCY

Australian captain Tim Paine has addressed speculation over whether Steve Smith will again lead the team once a ban ends in March, saying he would be fully supportive if it happens "one day".

CoA suggests dilution of 'conflict' clause...

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, OCTOBER 15

THE COMMITTEE of Administrators (CoA) has suggested the much-debated 'conflict of interest' clause in the new BCCI constitution be amended as it feels that it is "proving counter-effective and disproportionately restrictive to players — both current as well as former". Players will, however, have to make full disclosures at the outset, after which relaxations can be granted and they may be allowed to hold multiple posts.

A wide number of former players, including Kapil Dev, Sachin Tendulkar, VVS Laxman, Rahul Dravid and BCCI president-elect Sourav Ganguly were found to be in violation of the conflict of interest clause in the last few months. BCCI's Rule 38 (4) barred individuals from holding more than one post at the same time. This applied to players, selectors, members of cricket committees, team officials, franchise managers or commentators.

The CoA has now urged for a case-by-case discretion from the Ethics Officer. This had become necessary in light of the realisation that this was a crucial time in the revamp of BCCI and it was important that the Indian board "engaged with former players since the cricket reforms process requires cricketing activities to be managed only by cricket committees, exclusively comprising of former players."

The CoA suggested that former international players, who are not in long-term contract with the BCCI or in positions of governance in the BCCI or its member associations, be exempt from 38 (4)'s restrictions. So those contracted by BCCI for less than two years, may now be allowed to occupy more than one post so long as fulfilling this role or conducting that duty isn't compromised or prejudiced by donning of multiple hats.

According to the status report, the CoA felt that though vacancies needed to be filled, there were only few available individuals with the required superior cricketing skillset and expertise in the game. "Therefore restriction of their involvement to merely one post will adversely impact the utilization of the best cricketing expertise available for filling up cricketing positions and the overall improvement of the game," the report stated.

The CoA now wants to involve individuals in multiple capacities where none of the roles are hit by conflict, so it won't limit employment of former players, who can work with the BCCI on part-time basis. Several cricketers and their legal representatives had stressed that the conflict rules were imposing undue restriction on their right to earn a livelihood in the Indian cricketing ecosystem.

The report further read, "Rules pertaining to conflict of interest are too rigid and prohibit holding of two unrelated or remotely-related posts as listed by 38(4). It prohibits even former players and current players, who do not

The CoA comprising Vinod Rai, Diana Edulji and Vinod Thodge were compelled to reconsider 38 (4) after a host of top retired Indian cricketers had to undergo legal scrutiny with BCCI's Ethics officer DK Jain.

have long term contracts with the BCCI to hold other positions not only in the BCCI but within the entire Indian cricket ecosystem. The current players, not on an annual contract with the BCCI, and participating in limited number of cricket tournaments for limited part of the year are being unduly restricted from being gainfully employed even outside the BCCI during off season."

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Tendulkar had to recuse himself from CAC (Cricket Advisory Committee). Later, Jain ordered Laxman and Ganguly to choose between their IPL teams and their respective positions in state associations and BCCI. Kapil Dev resigned from his post of ad-hoc CAC chief whereas Dravid's hearing is still under process.

"The Committee of Administrators has come across various instances where the rules pertaining to conflict of interest have been applied to positions and scenarios which in its view did not warrant such application. Possibly, this is result of straightjacketed applications of the rules on the basis of certain illustrations given in the conflict rules which seem to cover within its ambit a wide range of scenarios and individual irrespective of their level of proximity or association within the BCCI administration," the status report read.

The CoA had held meetings with a number of past and current cricketers who were adamant that the BCCI needed to relax few clauses. Cricketers had argued how coaching two teams (franchise, state or national) could fall under conflict, or how playing cricket and commentating in IPL could possibly be seen as conflicting when the Indian board wasn't even offering a full contract to each cricketer, falling under their umbrella. The players had felt that it was too harsh on them as all their life they had "only known cricket".

The BCCI will however demand full disclosure within 15 days of potential problem areas. These may be deemed as tractable or intractable, and will then be acted upon by the Ethics Officer. It is suggested that players past or present, who are handed full-time contract shall strictly come under conflict of interest rules. Whereas those who are engaged on annual basis, or two-three years contract should be allowed to hold multiple positions except in Apex Council and Governing Council.

...Recommends independent committee to pick Ombudsman

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, OCTOBER 15

AIMING TO ensure effectiveness and impartiality of the office of ombudsman and ethics officer, the Committee of Administrators has made a recommendation to the Supreme Court that the BCCI should constitute an independent committee that will pick candidates for the two watchdog posts. In its final status report, the CoA suggested that the committee should have a former Chief Justice of India and two international cricketers, one male and one female, nominated by the Indian Cricketers' Association.

This committee will recommend names for the posts of ombudsman and ethics officer at the BCCI's AGM on October 23. The same process should be undertaken for the state units. Under the current structure, as per the CoA, the ombudsman and ethics officer are selected by the BCCI and state associations itself. This has raised apprehensions that com-

plaints that come up for consideration, may not be dealt with in a manner that is fair, expedient and reasonable.

The CoA, during the course of implementing the Lodha Committee's reforms had found how vested interests in some state associations had managed to remove and replace the ombudsman when faced with orders not in their favour. "This was observed particularly in the case of Bihar Cricket Association, which was fraught with factionalism and in-fighting. Representation were received from the Association alleging that two Ombudsmen were removed by the Office-Bearer of the Association when faced with orders against them," the CoA status report reads.

The CoA also wants to amend the part of the rule that requires the Apex Council to be kept in the loop while seeking redressal of grievances. It was suggested that those aggrieved could directly approach the ombudsman. This was deemed necessary after concerns of the Apex Council refusing to forward complaints.

ICA chief Malhotra aware of high expectations: 'Not possible to satisfy everyone'

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
KOLKATA, OCTOBER 15

THE INDIAN Cricketers' Association (ICA) president Ashok Malhotra spoke to *The Indian Express*, touching upon issue like conflict-of-interest and whether the ICA should be part of the Federation of International Cricketers' Association (FICA). Excerpts:

What does it mean to you that for the first time a cricketers' association has the BCCI's recognition?

The most important thing is that the ICA is for the cricketers' benefit. For the first time a cricketers' body has the BCCI's recognition. Before this also, cricketers had associations. But those associations were made by the top-level players. They had their own kind of agenda. In this association, there are already 1,250 members. We aren't talking about the elite ones. We are talking about first-class cricketers. We are talking about those former cricketers who aren't probably financially well-off. I will try to definitely talk with the elite cricketers also, but they are already very well-off. We aren't get-

ting the same kind of pension for the last seven-eight years. Plus, people who have played less than 25 Ranji Trophy games don't get pensions. Youth internationals should be paid at par with the Ranji Trophy players. Women (international) cricketers should be paid at par with the Ranji Trophy players. There's a huge difference (in wages) between the international men cricketers and the international women cricketers. That also somewhere we try and work.

Age-fudging is a serious problem in junior cricket. Will the ICA try and look into the matter?

At junior levels, there is a lot of age-fudging. We saw that in Bengal cricket also. We will try and curb that. If a 19-year-old is playing at U-16s, then he will dominate the U-16 guys. And good talent would be left behind. And ultimately the U-19 guy will be found out, when he plays the Ranji Trophy.

Does it help that Sourav Ganguly is going to be the new BCCI president?

It's a great thing for us that we have got a cricketer president. Sourav knows about



Ashok Malhotra. *Express File*

cricket and cricketers. He has had been the CAB president for four years. So he knows what to do and what not to do. So we can request him and the BCCI to help the cricketers. We have a start. We have a meeting on October 16, where the directors of the ICA will sit and there will be a lot of brainstorming. Then, we have our spokespersons in Anshuman Gaekwad and Shantha Rangaswamy, who will be putting our words across to the BCCI.

Are you satisfied with the way the ICA elections happened?

Absolutely. It was e-voting. So, whosoever voted, everybody has his/her own mind. But for us, the eight of us (directors), to satisfy now the demand of these 1,250 cricketers is not going to be easy. And we are going to open the membership for the rest of the people. So it's a huge responsibility and I will only request the fellow cricketers to be a little bit patient. Because, it's not going to be an overnight job.

What does it mean to you that you are the ICA president?

Honestly, I'm surprised to say the least. I'm also surprised that I was elected unopposed.

I have been given the responsibility to look after the welfare of the cricketers. So I will try to do it to the best of my ability. I have played cricket for 24 years. I have been a selector. I have been a coach for a few years. So I have 30-35 years of cricketing experience behind me, and I know the grassroots-level cricket and cricketers. I can tell you that the first three-four months are going to be very, very vital. Because, most of the cricketers are going to expect something from us. Every cricketer has his/her own picking and his/her own agenda. To satisfy everybody, it's not going to be (possible). But we will try to work for the benefit of the majority of the cricketers.

How significant it is that two ICA representative nominees would be at the BCCI apex council?

Up till now, no cricketer was there in the BCCI. Now, we got two cricketers in every state association. Thirty-eight state associations have two cricketers (each) in their respective apex council. So, 76 cricketers in state associations, plus two in the BCCI. And they will be our spokespersons. And what Justice Lodha has done, he has given the vot-

ing rights to former international cricketers in every state association. That means we go to the associations with the right to vote. That's the biggest plus for us.

What's your take on conflict-of-interest?

See, I'm doing an honorary job for the ICA. I have to earn my bread and butter. You can't expect me to do an honorary job and stop working as a commentator. I have to earn my livelihood. I have to run my house. So, conflict-of-interest is a lit bit of a funny kind of thing and I'm sure, as Sourav said, he will look into this and definitely good sense will prevail. I think the current conflict-of-interest clause carries things a little bit too far.

Do you support the ICA's affiliation to the FICA?

Why not? Once there's a cricketers' association, I'm sure we will have interaction with the cricketers' associations of the other countries. The FICA is recognised by the ICC and the BCCI comes under the ICC. I think the BCCI should be OK with that, now that they have decided to have a cricketers' association.