

Topic: The price of defiance

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Introduction

The Board of Control for Cricket in India has only itself to blame for its present predicament. Its **president and secretary have been removed for defying the Supreme Court's order to accept reforms suggested by a court-appointed committee**. And its president, **Anurag Thakur, now faces legal action** for contempt of court as well as prosecution for perjury. None of this would have happened had the BCCI shown some sense of responsibility and a vision for the future, and recognised the fact that the highest court was only seeking to reform the manner in which cricket is administered in the country. In the court's view, the appointment of the Justice R.M. Lodha Committee and adoption of its recommendations were part of a project to bring transparency and accountability to the BCCI. While the court expected cooperation and compliance, the BCCI responded with obstructionist tactics and defiance. It was therefore inevitable that the court would seek to send out a message that it will not brook any willful defiance. Despite the court making the **Lodha panel reforms binding on the BCCI** through its July 18 verdict, the BCCI appeared to defy it. It cited as one reason difficulties in getting its affiliated State units to accept the reforms, but at the same time made at its Annual General Meeting in September some decisions that were not in tune with the panel's recommendations. The price of such defiance is clear: the Supreme Court is now going to appoint a committee of administrators to supervise the board's affairs. Mr. Thakur's position is especially unfortunate. As a young sports administrator, he was presented with a great opportunity to lead cricket administration into a new era in which Indian cricket's on-field achievements would be matched by the Board's transparent and accountable functioning. If only he and other affiliated units had accepted the reforms, influential individuals who had held sway for decades would have been replaced by fresh talent, and the seemingly unending tenure of some would have been cut short. However, by defying the court in the name of protecting the sport's autonomy, Mr. Thakur has courted a double blow: **the loss of power and authority as well as imminent punishment**. His equivocation on whether he invited the International Cricket Council to say there is governmental interference in the BCCI's affairs has led to the court hardening its stance against him. It is not clear what course of action, if any, would now mollify the Supreme Court and help them escape its wrath. A bitter lesson has indeed been taught, but it is uncertain if it has been learnt.

Rise and fall of Anurag Thakur:

Anurag Thakur, son of former Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh **Prem Kumar Dhumal**, is a BJP MP. He won his first Lok Sabha election in May 2008, and won again in 2014. In May 2016, he was elected the **BCCI president** after the death of **Jagmohan Dalmiya**. Thakur's became **secretary of BCCI in 2011**. By then he had already spent many years as the president of the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association. It was during his tenure that the picturesque Dharamshala stadium was built. He was also a junior national selector and has represented his State in Ranji Trophy once that too as captain – in a game against J&K. Anurag Thakur's rise in the BCCI was undisputable as he rose to the ranks of **joint secretary and to secretary in 2011**. When N. Srinivasan was ousted as president of the BCCI, Jagmohan Dalmiya was made the BCCI chief. With Jagmohan Dalmiya's death, Anurag Thakur was elected unopposed as the BCCI president.

Here's a look at his nine-month tenure as BCCI chief:

January 2016: With a **strong recommendation to lawmakers to legalise betting** in cricket for all except cricket players, officials and administrators, the **Supreme Court appointed Justice R.M. Lodha Committee report** says that government servants and ministers should be banned from holding posts in the BCCI. The committee commended the "good work" done by the BCCI, including **pension scheme for national players**. Justice Lodha along with Justices Ashok Bhan and R.V. Raveendran said their objective handed down by the apex court was not to limit the autonomy of the BCCI. After the Lodha panel recommendations made public, the former **MCA chief Sharad Pawar** expresses his happiness but asks for more clarity on reforms.

February 2016: The **BCCI special general body meeting (SGM) authorises Shashank Manohar and Anurag Thakur** to file an affidavit in response to the recommendations by Supreme Court-appointed Justice R.M. Lodha's panel about the administrative overhaul of Indian cricket.

March 2016: **BCCI has blames the Supreme Court-appointed committee led by former CJI R.M. Lodha**, in an affidavit filed, for keeping it in the dark. The affidavit was filed by the then secretary Anurag Thakur.

April 2016: The apex court says cricket bosses has transformed the Board into a "mutual benefit society" which disburses huge amounts to choice members without even bothering to ask how they spend it.

July 18, 2016: Supreme Court accepts the major recommendations of the Lodha Committee on reforms to the BCCI, including a **bar on ministers and civil servants and those above 70 from becoming its members**. It, however, left it to Parliament to decide whether it should come under the RTI and betting on the game should be legalized.

September 2016: During the long legal battle, a Supreme Court Bench led by Chief Justice of India T.S. Thakur, prima facie concludes that BCCI's top administrators, including its president Mr. Thakur, were an impediment to the Lodha Committee's efforts to reform Indian cricket.

October 2016: The **BCCI expresses concern at the "dent" to its reputation** following the freezing of its accounts. "The BCCI has achieved the top positions in all three formats in the game. We have the world's fastest growing league in IPL. We also host the world's largest domestic tournament (Ranji Trophy). We have created our own infrastructure, without government help, throughout the country and contribute hundreds of crore to the State exchequer. Despite this, why is the BCCI's functioning being objected to?," asked Anurag Thakur. Warning there will be no domestic cricket matches if the BCCI and its members do not fall in line with the Lodha committee reforms, the **Supreme Court threatens to pass an order** within 24 hours to stop all BCCI payments to State cricket associations for hosting domestic matches, including the Ranji Trophy.

December 2016: Thakur says to Supreme Court that the Lodha panel recommendations seem to be aimed at weakening the organisation. In an affidavit before the Supreme Court, Mr. Thakur said "the removal of democratically-elected office bearers of the BCCI or State cricket associations will not result in any benefit to the game and shall instead paralyse the administration." Their removal would directly impact the BCCI among organisations like the International Cricket Council. Lodha panel's recommendations seemed to aim at making BCCI a "weak organisation," he alleged.

December 15, 2016: The **Supreme Court says it found BCCI president Anurag Thakur** prima facie guilty of contempt of court and liable to face criminal prosecution for perjury. A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India T.S. Thakur threatened that once the Supreme Court passes an order to initiate prosecution, no other court would dare to come in between, and the BCCI president would have “no way out, but go to jail.”

January 2, 2017: The **Supreme Court orders BCCI president Anurag Thakur, Secretary Ajay Shirke to forthwith cease and demit office.** The apex court also issued a contempt notice to Mr. Thakur. The court had found him prima facie guilty of contempt and perjury for approaching ICC chairman Shashank Manohar for a letter undermining the judgment of July 18, 2016 upholding the Justice R.M. Lodha Committee recommendation to have a CAG nominee on the Board's apex council. The order, authored by Justice Chandrachud, fully supported the Justice Lodha panel recommendation to oust BCCI office-bearers and administrators of affiliated State associations who are above 70 years old.

Who's Next?

While the Supreme Court has said that a **senior vice-president would discharge** the duties of the BCCI president, there is no such position in the Board. The five vice-presidents are Gautam Roy (East Zone), T.C. Mathew (West), M.L. Nehru (North), C.K. Khanna (Central) and Dr. G. Gangaraju (South). Sources said **Khanna had also served as vice-president** many years ago and could be regarded as the senior-most vice-president. The most important question is whether there can be a meeting of the BCCI now as a majority of the State administrators have been wiped out because of the tenure and age rule. There is no issue, though, with Amitabh Choudhary discharging the duties of Secretary Ajay Shirke, who, too, has been asked to demit office. Meanwhile, the **National selection committee is scheduled to meet on January 5** to pick two sides for the warm-up matches against England, and also the Indian squad for the ODI series.

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<http://indianexpress.com/article/sports/cricket/supreme-court-removes-anurag-thakur-from-the-post-of-bcci-president-4455251/>

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/Pitching-reform-at-the-BCCI/article16681070.ece>