

Major changes likely in Indian motor sports

The decision of the World Council of the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) to recognise Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) as the official Indian body after de-affiliating Motor Sports Association of India (MAI) could herald far reaching changes, although it is early days yet.

The Council voted 13-7 with five absentees against MAI, who thus lost its right to conduct events in the country under its aegis Wednesday night.

The MAI, launched in June 2000 by Nazir Hoosein of the Himalayan Rally fame, had hitherto controlled four-events in India following a compromise with its rival faction, FMSCI, who managed two-wheeler racing activities.

When Hoosein applied for the ASN status (National Federation affiliated to the FIA), the World governing body for the sport had not taken cognizance of Indian government's recognition of FMSCI as the sole motor sport authority in the country.

Thus, with MAI securing FIA blessings, Indian motor sport split into two before a compromise of sorts was arrived at that allowed FMSCI to conduct two-wheeler racing.

The FIA, in a bid to resolve the impasse, had decreed in 2006 that the two factions merge into a single entity by September 1, 2007. However, neither MAI nor FMSCI seemed prepared for a merger although both units had Vijay Mallya as the chairman.

The FIA subsequently fixed a new deadline of April 1, 2008, and when the merger did not happen, the matter came up for decision yesterday at the World Council meeting in Paris with MAI being divested of the 'Sporting Power' that was then handed over to the FMSCI.

FIA's decision was seen as a surprise in some quarters considering that Hoosein is one of its vice-presidents besides Chief Steward of the World Rally Championship, and was said to enjoy a close rapport with FIA president Max Mosley.

It is now a subject of speculation as to what caused Hoosein to fall out of Mosley's favour who himself survived a vote of confidence in the wake of a sex scandal.

Speaking to IANS here Thursday, FMSCI committee member and former president Vicky Chandhok welcomed the decision but said it was still too early to comment as they were awaiting an official communication from the FIA.

'Obviously, the FMSCI will now be in charge of motor sports in India. We will be meeting shortly to plan our way forward,' he said.

When asked about the Indian National Rally Championship (INRC) that commenced with the first round in Mysore earlier this month, Chandhok said: 'The INRC is MAI's calendar. Ideally, we would want the championship to continue as scheduled and in fact, would like to add more rounds.'

The latest development coincides with the entry of a new title sponsor for the INRC in the form of

Sidvin CoreTech, a Bangalore-based software company that also is supporting V.R. Naren Kumar's World Rally Championship (production class) programme.

However, there being some uncertainty with the possibility of Hoosein appealing the FIA decision that in turn could muddy the waters, it remains to be seen whether Sidvin would honour its commitment to support the INRC or wait until the dust settles down on this vexatious issue that had deterred many a prospective sponsor the past eight years.

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