

Minister irked at former Sri Lanka captain's appointment

Sri Lanka's Sports Minister Gamini Lokuge has expressed concern over the appointment of the former captain Hashan Tillakaratne as the new manager of the Sri Lankan national team for the current Indian tour.

Sri Lanka and visiting India are playing three-match Test series, starting July 23 at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) here in Colombo. The Test series would be followed by a five-match ODI series starting from August 18 at the Dambulla international stadium.

'I have asked Hashan to decide between politics and cricket. He should resign his political position if he needs to continue as the manager of the Sri Lanka Cricket team,' Minister Lokuge was quoted as saying in the local media.

However, Tillakaratne said he had not been told anything by the minister and was asked by chairman of the Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) Arjuna Ranatunga to continue his 'day-to-day work as the manager'.

'I was appointed by Arjuna and the present interim committee. I will continue as long as they want me to do so. Even now I am with the team at the practice session,' Tillakaratne told IANS Thursday.

'The minister spoke to me Tuesday and he gave me his blessings. After that I have not heard anything from him,' the former captain added.

Commenting on the controversy, a top SLC official said that the sports minister has told the SLC that 'any appointment by the SLC has to be finally ratified by him as he is the man who is in-charge of sports'.

'He wanted the SLC to send Hashan's appointment letter to him for this ratification. We have sent it to his ministry and have not got any reply so far,' the SLC official said Thursday evening requesting anonymity.

Tillakaratne (41), currently holds the position of an electoral organizer for the main opposition United National Party (UNP) in the district of Colombo. Lokuge coming from the same area himself is a member of the UNP and one of its 17 dissidents who joined the government run by the rival United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA).

Ranatunga, the chairman of Sri Lanka Cricket, is also an MP from the ruling party led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Tillakaratne, a dependable left handed batsman and a wicket-keeper in his early days in international cricket and appeared for Sri Lanka between 1989 and 2004, was appointed to the position Tuesday.

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