

## Chandra had told Pawar about Zee cricket league

Contrary to the Indian board's stated ignorance about the Rs.1 billion (\$24.5 million) Indian Cricket League (ICL), Zee television boss Subhash Chandra had told Sharad Pawar 17 days before announcing the tournament of 'inevitable necessity'.

On March 18, Chandra first told Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) president Pawar on telephone about his revolutionary tournament, describing it as an 'inevitable necessity'. He then faxed a letter to Pawar just a few hours before announcing the ICL at a press conference April 3 here.

A copy of the letter, in which he gives a 'helicopter view' of the ICL, is with IANS.

Addressing 'Pawar Saheb,' Chandra said in the letter that he was advancing the Essel Group-promoted ICL 'to stem the consequences of the adverse turn of events' after India's first-round exit from the World Cup in the West Indies in March.

'When I spoke to you over phone on March 18, 2007, I had briefly told you about an initiative that Essel Group is planning on cricket,' he says in his three-page letter.

'This I see as an inevitable necessity in the present context of the game in India and of the changes and the modifications needed in its contents and models from the search for new talent to innovative playing methods,' he explained in the letter faxed at 12.45 p.m.

Chandra also told Pawar that he was going to announce his 'proposed initiative' at a press conference that very day, April 3.

Experts immediately termed ICL as an establishment-threatening, parallel tournament designed on the lines of Australian media mogul Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket (WSC) of the late 1970s that shook the cricket world, especially the Australian cricket board.

Shaken out of its complacency, BCCI dashed off letters to its affiliated units warning the players and umpires not to associate themselves with the ICL. The board also told its units not to release any pitches or other infrastructure for its 'rivals'.

ICL has since signed former India captain Kapil Dev, Kiran More, Sandeep Patil, former England skipper Tony Greig and ex-Australia batsman Dean Jones to either conduct the tournament or coach some of the six teams that are to play 20 overs per side matches, probably in October-November.

The winner in the first tournament will receive \$1 million. The matches will be telecast on Zee's in-house Zee Sports channel. Each team will have two players from the Indian team and four foreign players, to add to the glamour.

Chandra said he would have launched the ICL a bit later, but the World Cup result forced his hands.

'... in view of the present predicament of the game, which has saddened millions of cricket lovers in the country, I decided to advance these plans on cricket promotion,' he wrote.

'Thus, I am conceiving the ICL as a transparent and innovative laboratory, off the establishment-managed cricket field, for the game and its promotion and remodelling.'

Chandra, in fact, told Pawar that BCCI would gain from ICL. 'An initiative of this nature will, in my view, greatly assist the cricketing establishment here and the world over. This will undoubtedly make the task of BCCI in promoting and managing the game of cricket more comfortable and efficient.'

There is another similarity between ICL and WSC. Packer started the WSC after the Australian board denied his Channel Nine the domestic rights while Chandra's ICL comes after he lost the bid to telecast India matches twice in recent times.

Last year, however, Zee won the BCCI's five-year overseas rights by bidding \$219 million. But Chandra's company scrapped the deal, almost two months after the launch of ICL, citing government stipulations for compulsorily sharing feed with Doordarshan.

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