

PCB: PAKISTAN CRICKET BOARD OR POLITICAL CRICKET BOARD?

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With the division of the Indian sub-continent, the British Raj came to end but the colonial governance framework, colonial laws and structure of power remained intact in both India and Pakistan. Cricket was also inherited from the British who introduced it in the sub-continent, a game that today ranks as the most played and famous in both India and Pakistan. After the independence of Pakistan on 1st May 1949, the Board of Control for Cricket Pakistan (BCCP) was established to promote cricket and on January 1994 this body was replaced by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

According to the 1962 Ordinance of Sports (Development and Control), the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is the governing cricket body in Pakistan. The PCB is not only responsible for regulation and administrative management but also for the promotion of cricket in Pakistan and generating a positive image of Pakistan worldwide.

Like other cricket boards in the world, PCB has its own constitution and does not receive any financial assistance from either the federal or provincial governments, instead generating its own revenues. Before the 2014 amendment to the constitution of PCB, the Head of State (President) of Pakistan was Patron in Chief of the PCB and had the right to directly appoint its Chairman. This was changed in 2014, when an amendment declared the Prime Minister as the Patron in Chief and Chairman appointed via a vote among the Board of Governors (BoGs). The tenure of the Chairman was set to three years as well around then. The BoGs of PCB consists of ten members; four from the region, four from services organisation and two to appointed by the Patron in Chief.

Despite having a proper framework, the Chairman of PCB is always appointed based on political nepotism and affliction. Recent events in the sacking of Ramiz Raja as Chairman and Najam Sethi's tweet on 20th June 2023 declaring his vacating of the Chairman's post clearly illustrates the political interference in Pakistan Cricket Board.

First of all, as PCB is an autonomous body in terms of its income and expenditure political interference is unjustifiable. The government should only ensure transparency and accountability in PCB matters and nothing else,

because without this PCB will become an office of a political party. Like uncertainties in the political cycle of Pakistan, the seat of PCB Chairman always remains under clouds of uncertainty – which has had devastating impacts on cricket in Pakistan.

Following the formation of the Big Three in the International Cricket Council, the influence of the Board of Cricket Council of India (BCCI) has increased. In global cricket, India and Pakistan never support each other: something that has negatively affected the PCB. Rivalries with BCCI and political pressures on PCB have made hosting ICC mega events in Pakistan almost impossible. Let's consider the current scenario of hosting Asia Cup: after the refusal of BCCI to travel to Pakistan, PCB under Najam Sethi proposed a hybrid model for the Asia Cup – in which the first half will be played in Pakistan and the second half in Sri Lanka. The Asian Cricket Board accepted this model, but Zaka Ashraf (like the next PCB Chairman) said in his TV interview that he already rejected the hybrid model of the Asia Cup. Under such unpredictable conditions, other cricket boards and the International Cricket Council are unlikely to lend support to the PCB in the future. Coaching staffs and players can deliver better results when they receive support from PCB – not just monetarily but also in terms of mental support for coaching staffs and players. In the past, changes in the Chairman post have led to disturbances in coaching staff, captains and vice-captains. When new coaching staffs are appointed it takes some time to adjust and familiarise themselves with players – but in our case they have removed before they have even had the opportunity to do so. Similarly, coaching staff have been removed and appointments of new captains have also been observed with the change of Chairman. When such conditions prevail, it produces disastrous impacts as players will play for themselves, not for the team. The selection committee is another important element and along with changing of coaching staffs and captains, the whole selection committee also tends to be revamped with the change of Chairman. In the past, certain players have automatically been selected captains appointed even though they had been out of action for extensive periods just prior.

In the past during the domestic season, various departmental teams took part alongside regional teams. The departmental cricket was a source of income for many players, but when Imran Khan became Patron in Chief he abolished the structure of domestic cricket and introduced an entirely new structure comprising six teams only. The new structure has failed to deliver quality infrastructures and players, snatching away the hopes and dreams of many players who are now unemployed. According to TV reports after the abolishing of departmental cricket, many cricketers have been compelled to drive online ride services for their earnings.

For a better future for Pakistan cricket, political pressure and power over PCB needs to be eliminated and the body turned into an autonomous one. Eligibility for Chairmanship should be contingent upon factors such as experience in sport management, formal qualifications in sport science, and other merit based criteria. Most importantly, a complete ban on appointments based on political afflictions ought to be pursued immediately. The direct nomination of name by the Patron in Chief for PCB Chairmanship should not be allowed and appointments should be based on formal, transparent mechanisms. Proper advertising of the post, form submissions and free and fair election-like steps should all be part and parcel of the process for appointing the PCB Chairman. Regional and departmental cricket representatives in the PCB's Board of Governors are also important stakeholders on this crucial decision, and their preferences must be taken into account. For the selection of a competent Chairman, regional cricket election should be conducted freely so that only one member of regional cricket always becomes president of that region and also member of the PCB Board of Governors. With the help of such steps, the politicisation in the Pakistan cricket board can be minimized.

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