**IPL spot-fixing: A move by BCCI towards openness is not an alternative,it’s imperative | The Indian Express**

This is not a reflection of the lack of strategic thinking in the military, but of the absence of political will to put vital strategic issues in writing. Speaking at a private event to felicitate the Mumbai Indians on their victory at the IPL John Wright,always dignified,always self-effacing,said that teams play for their supporters and that therefore it should always be a privilege to play before fans. It is something that everyone in Indian cricket must ask of each other every day. Are we being fair to our supporters? Are we doing right by our fans? It is not an alien question. It is the foundation of every well run corporation for it is by being close to their customers that they survive. And so as Indian cricket grapples with issues of legality but,even more so,of morality,the first question those in charge must ask is: What is right for the fans who allow us to be who we are? Over the last eight weeks I have had the great privilege of travelling around India and watching fans fill stadiums day after day after day. I have never in my life seen an event as openly embraced as the IPL From a cricketing point of view it is a magnificent tournament,it is tough and it is thrilling,but now a colossal cloud hangs over it. Three players are in jail so is a top official of the best team over six years. Along with them are some of the most unsavoury elements of our society. Not for the first time,and certainly not for the last,has sport found itself in bed with the devil. It is time not just to do what is right but what is seen to be right for the Indian fan. He (sorry but he/she,sentences become complicated!) wants to be certain that his faith is not misplaced for he gives to his sport everything he has; his hard earned money,his time and his feelings. He braves hardships to go to stadiums,stands in long queues to get a wave from a star and screams his lungs out for his team. All he wants really,and that is at the base of this huge outburst against the BCCI,is a guarantee that his faith is being reciprocated. And so,Indian cricket must not only think of what is right for the BCCI but what is right for the fan. As a first sign of reassurance the BCCI (more specifically the IPL but the governing entities are almost the same) needed to promise a completely independent enquiry into the many issues before the IPL and more specifically with what happened with the Chennai Super Kings,especially in the light of the many calls to resolve the conflict of interest issue. To some extent that has happened and I am assuming that there must be a requirement for both judges to be from Chennai! But to be seen by the fan to be completely independent,the entire committee should have been outside of the BCCI (even though the nominee,Sanjay Jagdale,is one of the hardest working,most sincere people in the BCCI). Conflict of interest is a particularly sensitive issue and,certainly in India,enormously widespread. We see that in politics virtually everyday and it has become an issue to attack others with and accept for yourself. It is like breaking a traffic rule; everyone is doing it and finding a justification that applies only to them. The fact that a very good rule had to be amended in 2008 meant there was uncertainty on whether or not India Cements could have bought a team in the first place. But judges are more learned people than us and it will be interesting to see if their interpretation (and I do hope they look into it) is different from what seems to be the most apparent one. There is however a deeper issue and a great opportunity to reach out to the fans and that is to promise a complete clean-up; not just of the BCCI but,more critically,of the state bodies too. To be honest,in the last couple of years,the BCCI has done a fair job of organising the 2011 World Cup and the IPL which is,in reality,a logistical nightmare. Many new stadiums have come up and having seen them,I can promise you they are world class. And there are some very sharp minds at Cricket Centre in Mumbai. But there is a larger issue of governance and accountability which the BCCI has chosen to address,if at all,in private. That is the opportunity that this episode can utilise if cricket and the fan are put first. I have said it before,and maybe experts in organisational matters would be better qualified to address this,but the Satyam model should work well. An organisation that,by all accounts,was very well run suddenly had to confront a grave financial crime and was in danger of going under. Indias reputation as a provider of quality software was under threat and so the government,in a stunningly rare burst of speed and commitment,appointed a committee of independent,highly respected and experienced people to bring stability,work out a transition and find a buyer. Satyam will become Tech Mahindra and is already back on the rails. The BCCI too is under siege now,not quite as grave as Satyam but serious nonetheless and needs an organisation clean-up so that it better reflects the size of the enterprise it now is. And a board of independent,cricket loving people would,I am sure,be happy to frame corporate governance norms that would be as fair and as transparent and open as the best organisations in the world. People like Deepak Parekh,Narayana Murthy,men of integrity,are the kind of people I am hinting at. This move towards openness cannot be seen as an alternative,it is imperative. With financial success comes greater responsibility and I really hoped that the BCCI would want to be the best run cricket body in the world; setting standards in on field play and off field governance. There are two teams that play for India and that which plays off the field is often just as important. An open organisation is also a sign of confidence and while it is true that many people seek to attract attention by attacking the BCCI,it would yield such rabble-rousers far lesser sympathy than it does now. Within the IPL itself,I hope the franchises lead the clamour for greater openness and participation and,as a result,for greater responsibility on themselves too. That is important for some of the problems lead to their door! Having often given the impression that revenues produce greater excitement than wins,maybe a potential attack on revenues will spur these reforms. That is why the franchise holders and sponsors need to exert pressure. It will benefit everyone,including the BCCI. Rahul Dravid recently talked about how the truth liberates and that is what fans will be seeking. It is also in BCCIs self-interest to do this because there are too many people in political India,whose performance is far more sordid,who will seek to wrest control of Indian cricket. If the government insists on running it,Indian cricket it will hurtle towards ruin. Olympic associations and sports federations have been extraordinarily efficient in killing many sports in India. We cannot let cricket go there and maybe,making it a model of corporate governance will prevent that. A set of corporate governance norms would also have ensured that the decision on whether or not Mr Srinivasan steps down would not have descended to a battle of factions,for that is what it seems to be. In an ideal world Mr Srinivasan would step down temporarily,for the duration of the enquiry,with the assurance that if he emerges clean he becomes President again with his term extended for the duration of the temporary suspension. But he cannot do that now because it will be seen as a victory for his opponents,Eventually it will come down,as it already has,to who controls the greater number of votes. That is Indian crickets biggest enemy,the vote,and it empowers the state associations from coming clean with their activities. It is also this little sense of insecurity that causes the BCCI to contract commentators for example. The request to stay with the on-field action is not wrong in principle for commentators are appointed for their skills in communicating the on-field drama and the thinking behind it. The platform has,in the past,been usurped for commenting on many unconnected issues. The last thing you want,for example,is for the telecast to sound like one of the dreadful prime time news nights where sensation and scandal throttle reason and decency. The flip side is that the fan wants independent opinions,he forms a bond with some people he trusts and letting them speak their mind only strengthens that bond. The coverage of Indian cricket from a technical point of view has been nothing short of outstanding,no expense has been spared for example,but that has got completely shrouded by other issues; the ones I just mentioned,or the discussion on commercial intrusion (increasingly happening everywhere). An open debate on selection is not bad and I am certain an informed debate on the DRS would have shown the BCCI that there are many reputed commentators around the world,not just in India,who agree with certain aspects of their stance. But a debate would have taken place,ideally on a wrap-around show not over live action,the fan would have seen both sides of the argument,he would have been better informed and happier. The alternative of course,is to have such a debate on another forum,but news channels,so vehement in their criticism,have long surrendered to an often undignified chase for ratings. (In Australia in early 2012 I asked a tv news reporter why he was insisting on asking questions that were clearly aimed at a saucy headline. His reply,without a sign of regret,was: My boss has made it very clear; forget the cricket,get me a headline!) It is because of the attitude of the news channels (there are two exceptions but my association with them prevents me from naming them) that I am actually in favour of not letting players speak to the media on tour on matters other than their performance on the day. These are young people not very well versed in avoiding manipulative questioning and therefore liable to be caught in the search for a headline! It is true that the fan would like to hear from them but everyone needs to play it straight for that to happen. It brings us to the aspect of grooming and mentoring,an area where lot needs to be done but maybe that is for another day. This article has already become too long so all Ill say on that front is that the BCCI needs to invest heavily in media management and on on-tour officials. At times I am optimistic that matters will come to such a head that a governance overhaul will become the only way ahead,that the BCCI will be forced into being open and rigorous. At others I fear that there will be a superficial truce once a compromise is reached. That is the way governments are run and Indian cricket cannot waste this opportunity by heading in that direction. The BCCI has done a few things right and a few things wrong. But at this moment in time,if they do not do what is right for Indian cricket and the Indian fan,they will let him down. The time for reform,for overhaul and for openness is now.