

**BEFORE JUSTICE ARUN KUMAR MISHRA
FORMER JUDGE, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA**

**OMBUDSMAN,
THE BOARD OF CONTROL FOR CRICKET IN INDIA**

Reference No.1/2025

**(Arising out of Inquiry Report dated 06/01/2021 filed by Ravindra K. Doiphode,
Sr. Investigation Officer, forwarded to Ombudsman, BCCI, by Head Anti-
Corruption Unit, BCCI)**

In the matter of :

Gurmeet Singh Bhamrah

Owner of Team SoBo Supersonics

Email: gurmeetgt20@gmail.com

.... Respondent

ORDER

This case under the BCCI's Anti-Corruption Code relates to the second season of Mumbai T20 League (hereinafter, the league), organized by the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA). This league was launched in 2018 and the second season/edition was played in 2019. The BCCI's Anti-Corruption Code is applicable to all BCCI officials. It applies to all players and to MCA officials as well.

2. Investigation in this case began when the Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) got in touch with Mr. Bhavin Thakkar. At the relevant time, Mr. Thakkar was playing for the team called "Akash Tigers". However, in the first edition of the league, he had played for the team owned by respondent, namely, "SoBo Supersonics". As such, the two had known each other. Mr. Sonu Vasani, a close associate of the respondent, was also known to Mr. Thakkar.

3. The ACU team got into action following media reports that a Mumbai T20 player was approached by the owner of the opponent team to under perform as a player. Preliminary inquiries revealed that the player who was so approached was Mr. Bhavin Thakkar. ACU team first telephonically connected with Mr. Thakkar who acknowledged that the approach was indeed made to him. Following this ACU team met and interviewed Mr. Thakkar on the same day.

4. Mr. Thakkar gave a written statement to the ACU. Along with his written statement, Mr. Thakkar also submitted three video recordings to the ACU. These recordings were made from the telephone of another player namely, Mr. Dhawal Kulkarni, who was present along with Mr. Thakkar when the approach to under perform was telephonically made to Mr. Thakkar by Mr. Sonu Vasan on behalf of the respondent.

5. During the course of their investigation, the ACU issued notices and investigated the following persons apart from Mr. Thakkar:

1. Mr. Dhawal Kulkarni
2. Mr. C.S. Naik, CEO of Mumbai Cricket Association
3. Mr. Sonu Vasan
4. Mr. Gurmeet Singh Bhamrah

The following tabulation mentions the relevant documents filed by the parties :

Sl. No.	Name of the person investigated	Nature of the evidence
1.	Bhavin Thakkar	a. Written Statement submitted to ACU b. Full transcript of three video recordings submitted to ACU c. WhatsApp chat history from Bhavin Thakkar's Phone showing conversation between him and Sonu Vasan from 04/04/2018 to 05/06/2019
2.	C.S. Naik	Two Letters of the same date signed by C.S. Naik and submitted to ACU
3.	Dhawal Kulkarni	a. Statement given to and recorded by the ACU b. Transcript of the complete recording of conversation between Sonu Vasan and Bhavin Thakkar
4.	Sonu Vasan	Photograph taken by ACU of Sonu Vasan's Phone screen showing WhatsApp chat between Sonu Vasan and Bhavin Thakkar
5.	Gurmeet Singh Bhamrah	a. Copy of itemized Mobile bills of Gurmeet Singh Bhamrah for the period 11.12.2018 to 10.09.2019 b. Statement by Gurmeet Singh Bhamrah in his own handwriting submitted to ACU during his interview with ACU

6. Upon completion of investigation, ACU submitted its report and wherein it recommended that respondent be charged with Article 2.1.3, Article 2.1.4, Article 2.4.1 read with Article 2.5.1 and Article 2.5.2 of BCCI's Anti-Corruption Code (hereinafter the 'Code') for participants. ACU further recommended that appropriate orders may be passed against the respondent under the provisions of Article 4 and Article 5 of the Code.

7. Upon consideration of the Inquiry Report, notice of charge for committing offences under the Code was sent. Respondent was asked to show cause and submit a comprehensive reply providing any evidence or arguments that he may wish to present in his defence.

8. Respondent has submitted his reply wherein he inter alia contents that he has been targeted with an oblique motive as part of a witch-hunt and that the entire proceeding against him in this case is an abuse of the process of law.

9. I have considered the Inquiry Report, the respondent's reply and have perused the relevant Rules and the material on record.

10. In the reply to the show cause notice, respondent has claimed that the word "Paaji" is a word of general use in Northern India to refer to a brother or a friend and, therefore, the Inquiry Report erred in assuming that the word "Paaji" in this case was in reference to respondent and no one else. There is no dispute that the word "Paaji" is in fact a word of general use in some parts of the country. However, respondent's contention that this word does not exclusively refer to him in the record of this case, is not supported by the material on record. Quite to the contrary. The Inquiry Report is very detailed. There is extensive corroboration in the material on record to lead one to the inescapable conclusion that the word "Paaji" used by different people at different times in this case refers to the respondent and respondent alone.

11. In the first instance, in his statement to the ACU written in his own handwriting, respondent himself admitted that like everyone else Sonu Vasani refers to respondent as "Paaji".

12. That apart, Bhavin Thakkar confirmed to the ACU twice that Bhavin, like everyone who knew the respondent, referred to the respondent as "Paaji". Bhavin's written statement to the ACU specifically mentions this. Bhavin later reiterated this to the ACU at the time he shared with the ACU the three video recordings of his conversation with Sonu Vasani.

13. Bhavin has throughout maintained that he referred to the respondent as "Paaji". Dhawal Kulkarni has also maintained that the respondent was referred to as "Paaji" when Bhavin mentioned respondent's name to Dhawal.

14. In his interview with the ACU, Sonu Vasani acknowledged that he refers to Gurmeet Singh Bhamrah as "Paaji". Sonu Vasani has never retracted this aspect of the matter. In fact there is no dispute as to this.

15. Respondent has also contended that there is no evidence to even remotely suggest that Sonu Vasani was acting under instructions from the respondent. Respondent has himself produced no evidence whatsoever to substantiate this contention. In his written reply submitted to the Ombudsman, there is no supporting material for this. On the other hand, the Inquiry Report mentions a number of circumstances, which taken together leave no manner of doubt that Sonu Vasani was throughout acting under respondent's instructions and on his behest.

16. In his entire conversation with Bhavin Thakkar, Sonu Vasan mentioned multiple times that he had called Mr. Thakkar since "Paaji" i.e. the respondent had specifically asked him to do so. Transcript of the conversation shows that Sonu Vasan offered money and other benefits to Bhavin Thakkar at the behest of the respondent. Upon narrating the entire offer that he made on behalf of the respondent, Sonu Vasan told Bhavin Thakkar that whatever call Thakkar wished to take in the matter, Vasan would relay it back to the respondent. Even prior to Thakkar's denial to be a part of wrong-doing, Vasan also mentioned that he was asked by "Paaji" that in case Thakkar's reply was in the affirmative to the offer of underperforming/wrong-doing, "Paaji" had asked that he i.e. the respondent could in fact be joined in on the same telephone call. Further, Vasan also mentioned that since "Paaji" has also owns similar cricket leagues in Canada and elsewhere, "Paaji" had also told him that Thakkar could also be offered other benefits in those leagues and tournaments as well. Inquiry report reveals that Gurmeet Singh Bhamrah did own cricket league teams in Canada and other mentioned places at the relevant point of time. This corroboration is crucial since it not only establishes that the word "Paaji" was used to refer to no one else but the respondent, but it also belies respondent's assertion that Sonu Vasan was not acting on his behalf.

17. Sonu Vasan's long acquaintance with the respondent is not in dispute. The two had known each other for a considerable period. In fact, record clearly shows that Vasan was a close associate/aide of the respondent. Both lived in the same locality and had been a part of various cricket tournaments. Inquiry report mentions that there is evidence to show that Vasan was an employee of the bank where the respondent had an account.

19. Further, in the transcript of the Whatsapp call made by Vasan to Thakkar, it is clearly mentioned that it was Vasan who told Thakkar that "Paaji" had telephonically called Vasan to come to his house the night previous to the phone call. This fact is corroborated with the phone bill of the respondent .

20. When confronted with the recording of the phone call, Sonu Vasan did not contest the call. His voice in the call and the corrupt approach made by him on behalf of respondent both went unchallenged by him. Nor was any context or explanation offered by him. The circumstances clearly indicate that Sonu Vasan approached Bhavin Thakkar on instructions of the respondent.

21. Respondent has contended that the proceedings against him are a result of mala fide intentions, to tarnish his reputation and goodwill. No evidence has been to support this. Equally, no explanation, much less any convincing explanation, has been offered by the respondent as to why Sonu Vasan or anyone else would wrongly implicate him. The record of the case supports no such assertion of bias or ulterior motives. In fact, inquiry findings are clear and consistent. They unequivocally make out a case of corrupt practice against the respondent.

22. Respondent has also contended that no offence under the relevant Articles of the Code is made out against him since the Inquiry Report casts no aspersion on the performance of Akash Tigers as a Team or on the performance of Mr. Thakkar or Mr. Kulkarni. This contention is thoroughly misconceived. The Code does not require that the corrupt practice attempted by a participant/wrong-doer can be taken cognizance of

or punished only if the transaction, as envisaged by the wrong-doer, actually matures and comes to fruition. Even failed attempt is punishable. There is no place for such practice in order to ensure purity of cricket.

23. Charge was framed against the respondent under Article 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.4.1, 2.5.1, and 2.5.2. The same was communicated to him vide the Show Cause Notice. Further, the Show Cause Notice had called for a comprehensive reply for the respondent, directing him to ensure that each point be addressed clearly, providing any evidence and arguments. No further evidence has been submitted by the respondent. Other than assertions on fact or misconceived arguments on the law, in spite of opportunity, no evidence has been adduced. Circumstances and the material on record, justify the conclusions reached in the inquiry report, a copy of which was provided to the respondent.

24. The Charge framed against the respondent deserves to be and is hereby upheld.

25. In view of the same, respondent is suspended under Article 4. Now it is proposed to impose appropriate sanctions under Article 5. Respondent is called upon to Show Cause as to why appropriate sanctions provided for under Article 5, including the maximum sanction provided for the Charge be not imposed against the respondent. It is directed that respondent is to ensure that any mitigating circumstance upon which he wishes to rely must be stated clearly.

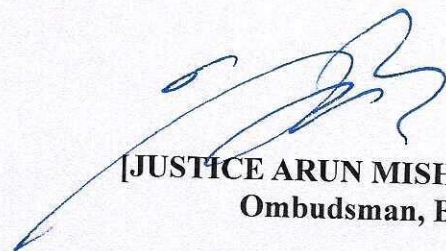
26. In reply to show cause, it is submitted that report is of 2021 and action is proposed in 2025. It is made clear that delay cannot condone such act. The office of present

Ombudsman / Ethics Officer received the inquiry report by post only on 14/01/2025, then action has been taken. This submission is of no avail to the respondent.

27. Respondent is directed to submit his reply as to punishment within seven days from the date of receipt of this order.

28. Let a copy of this order be communicated to the respondent, the BCCI and all concerned.

Date: 19.03.2025



[JUSTICE ARUN MISHRA]
Ombudsman, BCCI

