

CBI points finger at Azhar, Jadeja, Ajay, Prabhakar

- **No evidence found against Kapil**
- **Links between star players and bookies alleged**
- **Sharma was in touch with Indian bookies, Prabhakar with others**

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INDIAN cricket's worst kept secret is finally out and official. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has named Mohammed Azharuddin, Ajay Jadeja, Ajay Sharma and Manoj Prabhakar as the cricketers involved in match-fixing.

Nearly a dozen-odd bookies in Delhi and Mumbai, who were closely questioned by the CBI, were found to be in regular touch with these four Indian cricketers. Ironically, it was Prabhakar who first blew the whistle on the scandal.

The CBI, however, did not find any evidence against former Indian captain and coach Kapil Dev. Similarly, allegations of match-fixing against Bikhil Chopra and Nayan Mongia also found no evidence.

The 210-page report along with annexures prepared by the anti-corruption wing of the CBI under Special Director Gopal Achari is now ready to be handed over to the Youth and Sports Minister Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa.

The report says that Ajay Sharma and Prabhakar were the key players in the most shameful saga in India's cricketing history. They began their life together at Ghaziabad. While Sharma was in touch with Indian bookies and players, Prabhakar took care of foreign bookies and players, the report says. So close were Sharma and Azharuddin that the former was authorized to operate Azhar's locker at the Taj Palace Hotel. The CBI also traced Azhar Dubai bank account which he had concealed from the tax authorities.

However, it was the mobile phones which provide clinching evidence against the match-fixers. If Azhar made 60-odd phone calls in a single day to bookie from his cellphone, Ajay Jadeja was found to have made 50 phone calls from his mobile phone to another bookie on another day.

Both players had refused to acknowledge to the, CBI that they knew the persons they talked to on their mobile phones. Jadeja, when confronted by the CBI was strange. He said he was superstitious, and he had been told that if he talked on that particular number he would never be out. Jadeja made 94 in the match in question in the series against South Africa, which the CBI found was fixed. Jadeja has performed disastrously in the earlier two matches.

The bookie Mukesh Gupta confessed to the CBI that he had been active in the game till 1997 and later on settled down as a jeweler. He had nothing to do with match-fixing after 1997 and his 'business' was taken over by another bookie.

It was established during the course of investigations and detailed interrogation of bookies that Azhar, Jadeja, Sharma and Prabhakar not only tanked their own performances in crucial matches but also ensured that the other side also played ball with them.

Ajay Sharma, the report says, even fixed the Ferozeshah Kotla pitch for a Ranji Trophy match by paying of Rs 5,000 to a person. His performance in the match ensured him a berth in the Indian squad once again.

The CBI did not find any evidence against Navjot Singh Sidhu, who shared the room with Prabhakar. While Azhar, Jadeja, Sharma and Prabhakar. While Azhar, Jadeja, Sharma and Prabhakar were found to have assets disproportionate to their known sources of income, the CBI did not find anything against Nikhil Chopra and Nayan Mongia.

Former captain and coach Kapil Dev confessed to having some unaccounted money and gifts. Though he was in touch with the controversial South African businessman Banjo Qasim and had accepted a BMW car as a gift, the CBI did not find any evidence against Kapil Dev too.

The agency also found that the one-day international match between India and South African in Mumbai was fixed and the betting and fixing amount involved was estimated to be over Rs 300 crore.

The sensational 1996 World Cup match in Pune in which minnows Kenya upset giant Windies was also suspected to be fixed. But the CBI could not find any clinching evidence against an industrialist allegedly involved in fixing that match.