

Will CAG draft save Mascarenhas?: <span ...

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Will CAG draft save Mascarenhas?

Nirmal Mishra

Outside, the rain had stopped, but inside, in a flat on the 20th floor of Jupiter building in Cuffe Parade, the storm still raged. The man who is in the eye of the storm is none other than Michael Prem Mascarenhas, the suspended managing director of Air India (A-I).

"I do not want to say anything. The matter is subjudice. The High Court has admitted my petition. I have full faith in the judiciary. It is upto the court to decide who is guilty and who is not," said Mascarenhas.

The May 2 suspension order has brought about a change in Mascarenhas's body language — his voice full of emotion, eyes wet, and dress unkempt.

Mascarenhas's 90-year old mother, who can barely walk, passes the drawing-room, helped by a maid servant. "She is most disturbed. Imagine at her age having to read the newspaper reports,"

said a family member.

The Bombay High Court division bench, headed by Justice A P Shah, has directed the Union Civil Aviation Ministry, on Tuesday, to file an affidavit before June 28, following a petition

filed by Mascarenhas challenging the ministry's order. Legal circles believe that the case may blow up in the face of the government, which, it appears, jumped the gun without taking the time to do the ground-work.

"The very fact that the government, though unwittingly, admitted, through a Press Information Bureau press note, that they suspended Mascarenhas after taking

Technical Fault



Michael Mascarenhas

was suspended on charges of showing undue favours to London-based Welcome Travels to the tune of Rs 57.82 crore.

"The audit passes through various phases. First, internal audit by A-I; second, statutory external audit by the government-appointed auditors; third, via the audit division of the Indian High Commission in London; fourth, through the principal audit directors, Mumbai circle,

cognisance of the observations of the 'draft' Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report, makes its position weak. The draft report is not a final report," said airline sources. They further pointed out that Mascarenhas

and finally by the CAG, New Delhi. How come the alleged malpractice was not detected at any level?" wondered the sources. And they added: "The case dates back to 1986, while Mascarenhas became the MD in 1998. During this period seven MDs have come and gone. There is something really fishy if the issue has been raked up after 14 years."

Airline circles are also amazed at the fact that the government issued a press note through the Press Information Bureau, which normally does not deal with such matters. "The aim is clearly to tarnish the image of Mascarenhas, they felt.

Mascarenhas who joined the airline as an Assistant Manager was appointed MD when the company's was losing around Rs 600 crore. Today the airline has an operating profit of Rs 76 crore, despite an increase in fuel prices.

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