

# THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES–ISSUES OF ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATION

By M.N. Buch

The Commonwealth Games 2010 concluded on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010 amidst much fanfare. India has taken satisfaction from the number of medals it won and from the fact that ultimately the Games were successfully held. These Games gave rise to much controversy, especially because there were serious allegations of corruption, mismanagement and major organisational lapses. The media, both print and electronic, has been severely critical. A whole series of enquiries, criminal, audit, administration, tax related, etc., have been set in motion to look into malpractices and worse. However, what is strange is that even today government has not made available any authoritative figures about how much was actually spent on the games, games related infrastructure and the development of city infrastructure, which was much needed but not related to the Games. That is why figures as high as Rs. 80,000 crores have been cited as the cost of the Games. It is a mystery to me why government, which was the major, perhaps the only, actor in the play is hesitating to make available the figures of expenditure. That would set at rest the speculations on what the Games have cost.

Emerging from the Games there are certain administrative and organizational issues which must be addressed. I would like to look at these in the following way:

1. When the decision was taken to hold the Games and this was approved by the Council of Ministers, then it became the duty of every minister and officer to ensure that the mandate given by the Cabinet was completely fulfilled and in time. Mani Shankar Aiyer was the Sports Minister and, as a Member of the Council of Ministers, was jointly and severally responsible for the decisions of the Cabinet. He had major reservations about the Games and it is alleged that for two years he held back decisions which would have enabled the Games infrastructure to be completed. If he felt so strongly about the Games he should have resigned from the Cabinet. Instead he chose to continue in the Council, internally sabotaged the Games and delayed matters by a good two years and then, as a reward after losing the Lok Sabha election, he managed to get a Rajya Sabha seat as a nominee of the President. We must enforce discipline in the Council of Ministers, at least to the extent that it is demanded by Article 75 (3) of the Constitution and the Business Rules as framed under Article 77 of the Constitution.
2. There does not seem to have been any coordinated planning and estimation of what constituted the core infrastructure of the Games and the peripheral infrastructure to support the Games. Obviously from time to time on a purely ad hoc basis new items have been added by, amongst others, the Delhi Government, which felt that what should have been normally developed by it but was not, could be put under the umbrella of the Commonwealth Games, with the Government of India footing the bill. In other words, whereas on the one hand there was no holistic planning, on the other hand on a purely ad hoc basis there were a number of add-ons, which may be justified as part of improving the city infrastructure, but had no connection with the Games.
3. Once the five years period between sanction and completion of the infrastructure was squeezed into three years, thanks to Mani Shankar, there should have been a review about what was immediately capable of implementation and what could be deferred for a while. If the priorities had been correctly spelt out the essentials such as stadia, the Games Village, the

vital approaches, etc., could have been completed in all details at least six months before the Games were scheduled to begin. Instead we left things to the last minute, we put too much into the agenda so that shortcuts were taken and for the last one week the Chief Minister of Delhi had to supervise even the cleaning of toilets. This is no way to run a government.

4. There are different agencies responsible for building the infrastructure. These include the Delhi Lt. Governor and C.M, the Ministries of Sports, Urban Development, Civil Aviation, Home Affairs, Health and organisations such as DDA, MCD, NDMC and Delhi Police. Other agencies such as Metro Rail, MTNL, Electricity Underaking, Airports Authority of India are also involved. Surely when so many agencies are functioning there should have been an overarching authority or person to coordinate the working of all these agencies. It could be a minister or it could be a very senior officer with complete powers even of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet to monitor, evaluate, direct and remove personnel even at the level of a Secretary to Government and to post an appropriate person if it was found that the agency concerned was flagging in its effort. In other words, there had to be a supreme authority to oversee the functioning of various agencies. Mrs. Sheila Dixit is quite right when she says there was no such a coordinating agency. When all else fails the Business Rules give the Cabinet Secretary the duty and authority to coordinate all the departments of government. Obviously this arrangement did not work till P.M. personally intervened and asked the Cabinet Secretary to take charge. If the Cabinet Secretary had done his duty, if government had appointed a coordinator with plenary powers, the Games infrastructure would have been ready well in time. As it is, it is only mass media hysteria which created a panic situation and which ultimately led to P.M. taking command personally.
5. The question which vexes me is, to whom does Delhi belong? Can the average citizen be displaced, pushed around, subjected to harassment by such decisions as closing entire lanes of busy roads so that the Commonwealth Games vehicles can move fast and without interruption? To build the infrastructure people have been displaced. Have they been rehabilitated appropriately? Are they considered hindrances or are they partners in the modernisation of Delhi? The picture which has printed itself in my mind is that of a child looking forlornly at her demolished house in a settlement which was destroyed near the new shooting range in Gurgaon District because the presence of these people was considered a security hazard. To provide security to some athletes can we do this to our own people? Sheila Dixit made a statement during an interview to NDTV that government did not want to hide the poor, but Delhi has to be developed. For whom is it to be developed? Do the poor have no right to a share of the development? When two lanes of a busy road are closed because some petty bureaucrat from the Commonwealth Games Organisation wants to move fast through Delhi, did the Delhi Police ever consider how much inconvenience it is causing to the common man because of the ensuing traffic jams? Surely the Delhi Police could close the lanes on receiving information that a Games convoy was passing, but for the rest of the time the whole road should have been available to the ordinary citizen.
6. The mindset of those who took these idiotic decisions can be gauged by the fact that Commonwealth Games vehicles has been assigned a red number plate. The rules framed under the Motor Vehicles Act state categorically that the number plate of a private vehicle will be white with black letters and figures and in the case of commercial vehicles the background will be yellow. These rules have not been amended, which means that every

vehicle with a red number plate is plying illegally. Why did the police not take action? Before the abolition of privy purses every ruler of a Princely State was permitted to sport red number plates bearing the name of the State and the digit assigned to that car. Obviously the mandarins of the Games are the new Maharajas and we the people are mere subjects.

7. What struck me on a recent visit to Delhi was that frantic efforts were being made to plant garden plants, shrubs and trees just three days short of the opening ceremony in the hope that by the time the Games begin they will give a new vegetation cover to Delhi. This has not happened because there is not sufficient time for the plants to establish themselves. It does, however, remind me of a French farce in which a maid appears on stage fully clad, but when she turns her back she is naked. Delhi deserves better than to be treated as a French farce.

M.S. Gill is alleged to have said that there is no need to panic because in India the tradition is that the mandap begins to be decorated when the baraat actually arrives on the scene, but we do manage things in the end. No modern nation can be run in this utterly slipshod manner. Will the mess up in the Commonwealth Games at least awaken us to the need for proper organisation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any project, with a proper command structure in place which can be held accountable? Or do we continue to muddle through?

\*\*\*