

THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES 2010

• By M.N. Buch

In 1982 India was just beginning to be looked upon as a country which, after winning the war against Pakistan 1971 in the matter of Bangladesh and having reverted to democracy after 1977 after the disastrous experiment with the Emergency, had some innate strength and was not a basket case. We still had the problem of militancy in the Punjab converting to an acute stage, but the country was beginning to show signs of confidence. In this environment we staged the Asian Games in 1982. The entire infrastructure of stadia and playgrounds, housing for athletes and hotel accommodation for visitors, security and policing, organisation of the games proper all had to be built from scratch. It is a matter of great pride that all designing were done by Indian architects and structural engineers, all construction were done by Indian contractors working under CPWD, Delhi Administration PWD, the Delhi Development Authority and local bodies such as the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the New Delhi Municipal Committee, with the construction being completed in time and of a quality which has enabled that infrastructure to exist even today. In fact it is this infrastructure which has formed the base of all construction for the Commonwealth Games.

The Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium is today the main venue of the Commonwealth Games. It did not have superimposition of Teflon coated tents to embellish it, but functionally the stadium was top class and won general acclaim. The Indira Gandhi Stadium is the one adopted for indoor games even for the Commonwealth Games and Talkatora Swimming Pool is the one modified for the present games. The Asian Games village for athletes has subsequently been converted into a residential colony which is prized and became a source of revenue for the Delhi Development Authority. The office and hotel complex planned on the banks of Yamuna on the Ring Road, though not completed for the Asian Games, is today the Secretariat of the Government of the National Capital of Delhi. It is one of the finest secretariat buildings in the whole of India and thanks to Sheila Dixit, Chief Minister, it is beautifully maintained and looks more like a corporate office than a government one. The lesson of the Asian Games was that Indians have the capacity to design, plan and construct, that a more modest design which fulfills all that is required of it is what one should attempt and that proper coordination, as happened under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, can always deliver the goods. Whether in design, or in construction, or in management, or in organisation of the games properly, the 1982 Asian Games were not only a resounding success but also a definitive milestone in India's development journey.

Twenty-eight years have passed since 1982, in which period India has become a major player in the information technology field, is militarily powerful and has an economy and a banking system which has overcome the global meltdown and has shown remarkable economic resilience. It is in view of India's strong economy that the 2010 Commonwealth Games were awarded to India. In the final count down for the games we find ourselves in a completely different situation from that which prevailed in 1982. The games are to be inaugurated on 3rd October 2010. The infrastructure for the games should have been ready six months to one year before this date so that it could be tested, put through a full dress rehearsal of the games, the weak points identified and rectified and all the venues totally finished in time so that the athletes could walk into a sports environment which was fully ready. Instead we find that the entire infrastructure is still not ready, the city of Delhi still presents an unfinished look, none of the facilities have been fully tested, many foreign teams are expressing unwillingness to participate, the security cover still has flaws and instances are reported of new structures already showing signs of

stress, I am not referring here to the daily reports of minor mishaps at various sites. I am referring here to such major failures as the games village not being upto the mark, a major footbridge collapsing and water logging, inadequate sanitation, incomplete roads and inconvenience to the citizens of Delhi. I am referring to the complaints of corruption, lack of coordination and the general feeling that our preparations are incomplete. Why this has happened?

Mani Shankar Aiyer was sports minister in the cabinet which approved the holding of the Commonwealth Games. He is at liberty to oppose the games but he had no right whatsoever to internally sabotage the games by sitting on files for two years. Alec Buchanan Smith, a classmate of mine in Cambridge University, was a conservative M.P. from Scotland for over a quarter of a century. He had been Minister for Agriculture, Trade and thereafter Minister for Environment in Margaret Thatcher's cabinet for several years. When the question of devolution for Scotland and Wales came up he disagreed with the Prime Minister about the extent of devolution and the new system of regional assemblies proposed. He told the Prime Minister that he was not in a position to obey the whip issued by the Conservative Party but would oppose the proposed Bill and, therefore, he submitted his resignation from Parliament, the cabinet and the party. Mrs. Thatcher accepted his resignation as minister but told him that he was free to oppose the whip, that he need not resign as M.P and that the party would give him the ticket for the next election also. The point is that the minister resigned. Mani Shankar Aiyer did not, his intransigence resulted in two years delay in commencing of work and this has caused great damage to the preparation for the games. Obviously Mani Shankar Aiyer has neither read Article 74(3) of the Constitution which makes him party to the collective responsibility of the Council of Ministers to the House of the People, nor Article 77 (3) under which the Rules of Business of the Executive Government are framed, ministries and departments are created and the minister and the secretary made responsible for implementing the policies of the government vis a vis that ministry or department. It was the duty of the Sports Minister and his officers to ensure that the decision of the cabinet to hold the games was implemented faithfully. Instead he chose to sabotage the games. His reward has been that after losing the next election he was given membership of the Council of States by nomination under Article 80 (1) (a) read with sub-clause 3.

Mani Shankar Aiyer's cussedness and the Prime Minister's tolerance of and even condonation of this act of sabotage has ensured that the preparation time was reduced from five years to three years. Those people charged with building of the infrastructure should have taken this factor into account and should have assigned priority to works immediately connected with the games, deferring other development works till after the games. Because there was no one to coordinate these preparations, no overview was taken of priorities and different agencies started their own works without proper planning. Was it necessary to dig up the whole of Connaught Place just a few months before the games, with no chance whatsoever of being able to complete the work in the period remaining before 3rd October 2010? It is this mindless construction without planning that gives Delhi an unfinished look, there is debris and muck strewn all over the place and there are manic efforts to somehow complete the work. Is this how one plan games in which half the world is to participate? Gautam Bhatia, a distinguished architect who is also a thinker and who was connected with the planning of the Asian Games, has commented that this is a case in which not a single Indian architect was called upon to design the various venues, no Indian engineer was associated with the planning stage, all consultancies were awarded to foreign companies and even the construction is being done largely with foreign companies. There is hardly anything Indian about the games. So much so that even the housekeeping and catering contracts of the games village have been awarded to some foreign companies. No wonder the village is in a mess because these companies have not deployed the trained manpower to provide housekeeping service, etc. In the process we have given a certificate that all Indian architects and engineers are incompetent or ignorant and that

organisations such as ITDC, the Maurya Group, The Taj and Oberoi Group are unfit to look after the village or to feed the athletes. In 2010 we pride ourselves on being a great power. In 2010 we have simultaneously told the world that we cannot even design a stadium and we need foreigners to do this for us.

One of the striking things about the games is that there is no coordinating authority and it is only now that the Prime Minister has asked the Cabinet Secretary to intervene. The Cabinet Secretary is India's senior most civil servant who has the right to coordinate the working of different departments of government and for this purpose he can send for the files of any ministry and give suitable directives thereon. K.M. Chandrashekhara, the present Cabinet Secretary, has been given two extensions by government. The agencies responsible for construction of the games infrastructure are a part of government. During all this period why did the Cabinet Secretary not call upon the Secretaries Urban Development, Sports Home, etc., as also Chief Secretary, Delhi, Vice Chairman DDA, Chairman NDMC and the Commissioner of Police and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi respectively to inform him about the progress made. He performed no coordination functions and the implementing agencies and their overseeing ministries never bothered to ensure that work was done according to schedule. Should not government use Article 311 (2) (b) to remove all these officers from service so that the message goes down that officers entrusted with a particular job, as also the officers responsible for supervision and coordination, will lose their jobs if they do not perform? But unfortunately in India we have lost all fear of consequences, with the result that the wrong doers are confident that nothing will happen to them. Meanwhile I am looking for a good plastic surgeon who can reconstruct the collective nose of all Indians which has been cut off, thanks to the incompetence of those who are responsible for the Commonwealth Games.
