

Promoting inexpensive games

On Record

by **M.S. Unnikrishnan**

DR MANOHAR SINGH GILL has been a proactive Sports Minister. His hands-on approach has helped solve many knotty issues, particularly concerning the 2010 Commonwealth Games. A retired IAS officer, who had a long stint as the Chief Election Commissioner, he knows the pulse of the bureaucracy well and deftly manages to get his job done.

Interestingly, he would not take no for an answer. He speaks about his plans for Indian sports in an interview to The Sunday Tribune.

Excerpts:

Q: Is there any change in your work after elevation to the Cabinet rank?

A: Elevation does not change anything. I had greater control of the Ministry when I had independent charge, except of course I had to go to the Cabinet for greater funds or to the Prime Minister for something. The Cabinet rank gives me the privilege to sit in the highest policy-making body of the country on a regular basis and try and contribute something to

issues beyond sports.

My policy will be to promote inexpensive sports and games, which could be played on any surface, in all-weather conditions, in six lakh villages across the country. The Government has earmarked Rs 1500 crore to promote rural sports in the 11th five-year Plan. Last year, we distributed Rs 300 crore on this head, and Punjab got Rs 12.5 crore. Football is No 1 on my list. I am doing everything to revive it. Punjab has a great tradition in football, which has produced Jairnail Singh, Inder Singh etc. The greatest football stars come out of the poverty of Brazil. Last year, I managed to assemble nine of the players who played in the Melbourne Olympics, and gave them financial incentives.

Hockey touches the heart of the country, and we have plans to revive it too. We had a great record in athletics during the times of Milkha Singh, P.T.Usha...but we have not gone beyond that. We have to revive athletics too.

Q: What are the main issues confronting Indian sports?

A: Lack of infrastructure and misplaced priority. Earlier, major games like football, hockey and athletics were put in category B while lesser games were in category A. I changed all that.

Q: How do you plan to improve the

sports infrastructure?

A: I have sanctioned a new astro-turf to the Guru Nanak Dev University (Amritsar). Another turf will be laid at Jalandhar's Punjab Armed Police Centre. Punjab Police has a great name in sports, hockey in particular. A synthetic athletic track will be laid at the Government Stadium at Taran Tarn. We will lay 20 training turfs, which will be half the size of a full hockey turf, across the country.

Q: What about Commonwealth Games infrastructure?

A: We have made tremendous progress in the construction of seven stadiums under the control of the Sports Authority of India, including the building of a bridge connecting the Games Village across the Yamuna to the Nehru Stadium. We have also sorted out the technical problems regarding the construction of the shooting range, the velodrome and the swimming pool.

Q: What are your plans on training our sportspersons?

A: The Centre sanctioned Rs 678 crore last year. This will work out to nearly Rs 300 crore a year up to the Commonwealth Games. About 1400 sportspersons have been selected by various federations for best training facilities, including foreign exposure. The swimmers are being trained



Dr Manohar Singh Gill

in Europe for 75 days.

Q: Are you keen on improving hockey?

A: We have got a new foreign coach, Jose Brasa of Spain. We will give him the facilities needed to improve hockey. We will also set up a democratic hockey body as India will host the 2010 World Cup Hockey Championship in Delhi. We will resolve the hockey issue sensibly and democratically. ■