

■ CWG 2010

Anatomy of an unnecessary crisis

Our organisers have shamed us, but our sportsmen have shown how grit and perseverance can overcome any obstacle

Bhaskar Balakrishnan

SHAMED by vigilant media exposures of the abysmal state of preparations for the Commonwealth Games, the government finally woke up and with a Herculean effort averted a disaster. A totally unnecessary crisis and adverse publicity was caused by shoddy management. Finally, the positive elements such as the lavish food arrangements for visitors, the rousing opening ceremony, and above all, the splendid performance by our sportsmen saved the day.

The spectacle of filthy toilets and rooms, flooded basements, and a collapsing bridge shown on global television screens did no credit to India's reputation as a business destination and a country which can deliver complex projects. The unusually heavy rains in Delhi exposed the shabby state of our capital city's drainage and sewerage systems. The Yamuna, long abused by Delhi's untreated sewerage found its revenge as its waters rose and flooded large areas near the capital. The dengue outbreak this year coming at the time of the Games posed a severe challenge, considering that hospitals in Delhi were overcrowded with cases, and the Games village itself was sited in a flood-prone area.

Security preparedness was extraordinary to the point of overkill, but this must be considered necessary and despite the inconveniences, the citizens of Delhi cooperated. Our Union home minister displayed sterling leadership qualities in this effort. Traffic regulation in Delhi during CWG 2010 used the reserved lane system that was used in the Athens Olympics. Its success was assured by a combination of strong publicity and police presence to ensure that violators were swiftly dealt with. Even Delhi's normally unruly traffic was brought under control.

The CWG project was a complex one, and demanded from the start an integrated and determined effort under a single command to enable it to be completed. The Delhi Metro, another complex urban project, is a shining example of how under a single authority outstanding results can be achieved. But CWG 2010 became a pie for many agencies to put their fingers into, a battleground for turf and ego wars, and not the least, a cow to be milked through patently corrupt procurement practices. Despite six years of lead time, the scenario was of frequent reports of slippages and roadblocks in implementation of various components of the

project, for reasons that could only be attributed to lack of unified authority.

The hapless citizens of Delhi were never asked whether they would like to have the CWG in Delhi, and if so what it would cost them in terms of money, and inconvenience. A business-as-usual approach was visible right up to 2009 when it was realised that time was running out, and international criticism of the preparations began to be articulated.

Unfavourable comparisons were made between Delhi's CWG 2010 and the preparations for CWG 2014 in Glasgow. Though last-minute efforts salvaged the CWG, there were several glitches in the various systems that have not been properly tested. For example, ticket sales were a disaster, with empty stands for many events, while people were being turned away with the message that no tickets were available for sale. While sports persons, officials and VIPs were well taken care of, the ordinary spectators were given no priority and were nowhere near the centre of the planning process, and were left to their own devices. Even heads of diplomatic missions were not properly handled during the opening ceremony — a serious lapse of protocol. Gaffes by one of the leading members of the OC became part of the humour com-

ponent of the coverage of the Games. The shining stars were of course our sportsmen. They showed how individual grit and perseverance can win despite numerous obstacles and deficiencies due to the way our sports federations, under the guise of autonomy, perpetrate mediocrity and mismanagement. But to take our performance to the level of Australia or China, we need to do much better. The dedication of individual sportsmen must be matched by the dedication of those who administer sports. Sports bodies must no longer be parking slots for political patronage. Autonomy is a good thing, but there must be minimum guiding principles and standards to be met, and where they are not met, government must play the role of regulator and take corrective action.

On a broader level, we need to realise that in a globalised world, we have to meet global minimum standards.

The shameful example of an official who said that hygiene standards are lower in India should give us pause for thought. Everyday we come across examples of unacceptable situations — traffic violations going unpunished, building contractors cutting corners, garbage lying around, open drains and

sewers, animals, particularly cattle, wandering around the streets and on so-called express highways, and most visibly people using public spaces as toilets. Some of these could be called the revenge of the poor, arising out of poverty and deprivation, but most of these are simply due to lack of education and consciousness. It is time to recognise these as a disease, and not pass them off as an amusing transition phase in our development process.

Our political leadership had shown a lack of vision, courage and determination in the run-up to CWG 2010. Failure cannot be passed on to so-called autonomous sports bodies, or individual ministries or a state government. Now that the Games are over, it is time for accounts to be rendered to the nation for failures and corruption in the system and wastage of public money. The leadership must deliver on its promise to conduct a thorough investigation of all aspects of the management of the Games identify and investigate lapses, so that they are not repeated, and learn lessons for the future. As for our sportsmen, the nation salutes their sterling performance and encourages them to scale new heights.

(The writer is a former ambassador)

● DEFINING THE LIMITS

Karnataka turmoil raises many political questions

While the governor has invited criticism for his actions, the Speaker's decisions too have been questioned, especially the disqualification of Independent MLAs

Sandeeep Shastri

THE developments in Karnataka have attracted national attention. The actions of Governor H R Bhardwaj, the decisions of Speaker K G Bopaiah and the filing of cases in the high court challenging the Speaker's decision have raised a host of constitutional and political questions. Many of these are without precedent.

Governors in India have often been at the centre of controversy. Do they represent the central government (sometimes derisively called 'agent' of the Centre), or are they head of the constitutional machinery at the state level? The two roles could come in conflict, especially if different parties are in power at the Centre and in the state. Much of the controversy surrounding the office of governor has been in the exercise of their discretionary powers in political situations which can neither be always anticipated or a line of action specifically defined. The governor of a state is supposed to be an impartial umpire. In many states, they have become the goalkeeper defending the opposition goalpost!

Governor Ram Lal dismissing NTR as chief minister (August 15, 1984) and appointing N Bhaskara Rao in his place on the ground that he was convinced the chief minister had lost his majority (without a trial of strength in the House) is a classic case of a governor stretching his discretion beyond imaginable limits. Former Haryana governor G D Tapase, too, made history in 1982 by inviting Bhajan Lal to form a government soon after elections even though the coalition led by Devi Lal had a clear majority!

Karnataka has had its share of controversy. Governor Venkatsubbiah dismissing the S R Bommai government without giving it a chance to prove its majority led to the now-famous Supreme Court judgment where it clearly held that the test of majority should be on the House floor, not Raj Bhavan. Governor Bhanu Pratap Singh had to be recalled from office when in March 1994 he dismissed the Goa chief minister and recommended a short spell of president's rule when the majority Congress faced an internal crisis. More recently, Governor Rameshwar Thakur was at the centre of controversy when he delayed inviting Yeddyurappa to form a BJP-led government in Karnataka. What are the lessons to be learnt from this crisis about a governor's role, the Speaker's powers and the relationship between the ruling and opposition parties?

The governor's role in writing to the Speaker a day before the confidence vote, asking him to maintain the status quo of party positions as on a particular date, was truly unprecedented. While the governor can send messages to the legislature under the Constitution, such a specific direction amounted to direct intervention in the internal rumblings of the BJP and the actions of independent legislators. After the vote of confidence, the governor sent a report to the Centre recom-



ommending president's rule, calling the vote of confidence a farce.

Many would argue that he did have the power to make this recommendation, after which the ball was in the Centre's court. But his decision the next day to give the BJP a second chance to prove its majority came as a surprise. If the governor intended to offer this opportunity it should have preceded the recommendation of president's rule. In his defence, the governor said he wished to dispel the image that he was being unfair to the ruling party. It is more likely that the central leadership was uncomfortable with the recommendation, mindful of its political implications and may have suggested a second vote.

But the haste with which the report was sent to Delhi, and the second chance offered within 24 hours, could have been avoided. It would be useful to revisit the recommendations of different commissions on Centre-State relations which have consistently emphasised that it may not be a good idea to appoint as governor someone actively involved in politics immediately before his appointment. We have had governors who went on to become chief ministers or Union ministers after completing their terms. This allows the office to be dragged into controversy and casts aspersions on their role as constitutional authorities.

Bopaiah has also been in the spotlight. His decision to disqualify the 11 rebel BJP MLAs and the five Independents hours before the trust vote has evoked strong reactions. There is no shadow of doubt that the Speaker is the final authority under the Constitution to take action on questions of disqualification. The aggrieved party has, of course, the right to approach the court, as happened in the present case.

The disqualification of the rebel

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BJP MLAs and the Independent legislators must be treated separately. The Speaker's decision to disqualify the Independents merits detailed analysis. It is important to assert that an Independent's victory means that the electorate has chosen someone with no party affiliation as their representative. As per the anti-defection law, the Independent must remain independent for the period elected. Or she is free to support any political party. Thus, when the BJP required the support of Independents to form the government, they decided to support the BJP. They joined the council of ministers as independents.

When they withdrew support to the government, they were within their rights to do so. Thus, it would be difficult to argue that they violated the anti-defection law. In the case of the BJP rebels the arguments would be different. As they were elected on the

BJP ticket, they submitted a letter to the governor withdrawing support. On the strength of that letter and the complaint filed by the BJP, the Speaker issued a notice to the said members, who replied to it. An important question that arises is whether a party legislator invites disqualification for action done outside the House or only for violating the party whip on the floor of the House.

There have been cases of MPs (when V P Singh formed his Jan Morcha) who were critical of the Congress launching a blistering attack on the party leadership — all outside the House. While in the House, they followed the party whip. As a result no action was contemplated against them under the anti-defection provisions. A question likely to come up in the high court is whether action can be taken against a party legislator by the Speaker for actions outside the House, or do anti-defection provisions apply only when a legislator violates the party whip on the floor?

The decision of the high court to stay the disqualification of five Independent MLAs and stating that the October 14 confidence vote would be subject to the final outcome of the court on the matter should come as a relief to these legislators. It indicates that their case will be treated differently from that of the BJP rebels.

The final decision of the high court has the potential to re-open the debate on the majority of the government. Each passing day would provide a new twist to the political battle in the state. Clearly, the clouds of political uncertainty will continue to cast their shadow over the state with no hope of a clear political picture emerging in the immediate future.

(The writer is a political analyst and observer of Karnataka politics, and pro vice chancellor of Jain University)

● THE PROBLEM OF HUNGER

Malnourishment is a killer lurking in our midst

Puja Marwaha

SIX-YEAR-OLD Priya 'lives' with her family outside the spanking new electronics store in Chennai's popular shopping district, Panagal Park. As they live in a shopping area with many small roadside eateries and shoppers, Priya says she gets a lot to eat — 1,410 calories per day, about 300 calories short of her recommended daily intake.

Take the case of two-year-old Surja Basfore and his five-year-old sister, who live on Platform No 4 of the Kalyani Railway Station in Kolkata. They earn between ₹20-25 a day by begging, which is duly handed over to their father, a leprosy patient who also begs for a living. The total calorie intake for both children put together is about 1,000 calories. They are facing chronic starvation.

In Mumbai's Khar area, a small street-family survives on a strip of footpath near a busy intersection. Six-year-old Vishal starts his day with half a cup of tea and two biscuits bought by his mother from a pavement stall. Breakfast is one *samosa-pav*. Lunch is *khichdi* from a local charity, half of which Vishal saves to eat in the late afternoon. By night he is hungry again, which is when a small packet of Kurkure is bought with five rupees his mother is able to spare. In all, Vishal consumes 856 calories. Khar is missing a crucial institution that is single-handedly responsible for children like Vishal — an Anganwadi.

Envisioned as a single-window space that provides nourishment and education, these nurseries in India are part of the ambitious Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, charged with the responsibility of mainstreaming children into formal schooling and ending child malnourishment. The programme extends to adolescent girls, pregnant women and nursing mothers.

The scheme is designed as a safety net for people at their most vulnerable stage of life; which is why in remote areas, the ICDS is the only hope for mothers and children. Take an area like the Godda district in Jharkhand. The Pahariya tribal community who live here have seen the slow degradation of the surrounding forest. Malaria and Kala-Azar are still dreaded threats, as they were 200 years ago. Food is scarce, which is why six-year-old Dharma Pahariya and Sani Paharin from the Maligod village in Boryarize have been eating only rice and salt, twice a day. Their total calorie intake is a meagre 440 calories, or about one fourth of the 1,715 calories they should be eating.

Both doctors and people who work with children state that nourishment gaps at this age will result in lifelong poor health. Such severely malnourished children will not have age-appropriate levels of development in terms of height, weight and cognitive development.

Tribal populations in the entire central/western region seem to find themselves in a similar predicament. At a local Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) in Majhgaon,

near Satna in Madhya Pradesh, 14-month-old Roshni whimpers constantly, too tired to even put in the effort for a full-throated wail. Sometimes she just dozes off from exhaustion. Her mother's milk has dried up, since the family's 'diet' of dried *rotis* and watery potato curry is not nutritious enough.

The NRC, a government of India programme, runs a 15-day 'course' to bring severe cases of malnourishment, like Roshni's, back from the brink of death, with a two-week injection of essential food. But the centre caters only to severely malnourished infants, and not to older children or parents, making the entire effort rather minuscule, given that the whole community is dying of hunger; 10 children have succumbed to hunger over the last year.

Roshni's father was a small farmer in the forests where this tribal family comes from. Owing to a land encroachment dispute, the forest department evicted all the farmers from the area, without any compensation. Left with no choice, Roshni's father took up a labour job under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). This earns him up to ₹1,000 per month, which is insufficient to feed the family of five since the local PDS store does not open and they have to buy their food.

The condition is so bad that food distributed by the neighbourhood Anganwadi is brought back home by the children and shared with the entire family. And since the infants are small, they are the last priority and are only breastfed by the mother.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) points to a 'window of opportunity' for improving child nutrition, from the period between 9 to +24 months (that is, the 1,000 days between conception and a child's second birthday). These 1,000 days are when nutritious food in adequate quantities, preventive and curative healthcare, and age-appropriate care practices for healthy development will yield the best results. After two years, the effects of undernutrition are largely irreversible.

While large-scale schemes such as the ICDS and the Public Distribution System can very easily be re-harnessed to reduce malnourishment among children and mothers, a working food security Act is the umbrella that is required — one that focuses on ensuring food all year round, improving maternal nutrition during pregnancy and lactation, promoting good breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices, providing essential micro-nutrients, while also ensuring appropriate immunisation.

It goes without saying that to reverse this trend that has grown to alarming proportions, policies over the longer term, that are pro-poor and economic development strategies that will take the majority of the country along with it (leaving no one behind) are non-negotiables, if the goal is to improve children's basic survival and their right to a healthy childhood.

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