

***Interview with Suresh Kalmadi,
President Indian Olympics Association
on preparations for
Commonwealth Games***



The interviewer is Kalyani Shankar(KS), Senior Journalist.

KS : Welcome to the programme Mr. Kamladi. There are conflicting reports about the preparations for the Commonwealth Games, how confident are you to make it a success.

SK(Suresh Kamladi) : Well, the buck stops here. Let me assure you that we will have the best Commonwealth

Games ever. There is still one year for the Games and things are all falling into place.

KS : What has gone wrong between you and the Commonwealth authorities? Mr. Mike Fennel was here some time ago and he had criticized the preparations and while you are saying everything will be on schedule, the ground level situation is something different than officials report and also they indicate that the schedule is far short of the ..

SK: Well, there was General Assembly and Mr. Michael Fennel had a press conference after that. I can tell you that the Commonwealth Games Federation at its last press conference also said that lot of things which were deficient earlier, have moved forward. He said that as far as infrastructure is concerned, there is slight delay but he has no doubt in mind that they will be completed on time. About the Organising Committee also, many things which he felt were behind schedule, have all caught up. Now only there are about five or six areas where we have to reach international standards, but he said do it by December. So,

Mr. Mike Fennel has been very gracious with us. He has come 12/13 times, he has given us lot of information and the Federation has been very helpful.

KS: Then why does he want a Monitoring Committee ?

SK : Well, they have to put pressure on us because this is last one year of the Games. So, he wants things to be perfect and we welcome that. Only what we said was that there is the Coordination Commission coming in December. So this Technical Committee should come along with that. But we don't have too much of duplication, triplication. So now we have to move ahead with our work, that is the only request we have made. But whatever he decides, it is Okay with us.

KS: Mr. Kalmadi, you will be visiting Britain at the end of the month. The Queen Elizabeth will hand over the Commonwealth Games baton to our President Pratibha Patil, who is also scheduled to be a guest next week. This in a way kicks off the Games. Are you sure that by that time this function takes place, all these controversies, you know in

the past over few days there are quite a few controversies about your wanting to remove the CEO and then Mike Fennel saying no he will not, so these things will have died down by that time ?

SK : In every Games, there are some controversies or the other. In Australia also, in Melbourne when we had the Games, one year before the Games, such a controversy took place there also. So, what people say they have to say, but something good comes out of it. Now, media has played it up, much more than what actually happened. So, something good will come out of it. I am meeting Mr. Mike Fennel in London, so most of the issues will be resolved. But it is not affecting the Games one bit. Things are moving and in India there is multiplicity of agencies, you have to go to NDMC, you have to go to MCD, you have to go to DOEC, the environmental people, the courts, people go to courts. Now in spite of court problem, the Games village is on schedule, it will be ready by June next year and also the Siri Fort

complex. So we have lot of obstacles, but we have crossed all the obstacles. Now it is a straight run in for the Games.

KS : Well, are you confident that how much are we lagging far behind now, may be 20 per cent, 30 per cent, 40 per cent ?

SK : We were lagging behind before, but now we are catching up fast, we are on two shifts and three shifts, now all the infrastructure will be ready by March. There were some delays because of international body also. They said that cycling should be of wooden flooring, not concrete, it should be air-conditioned, it should be closed. So we have kept up with international requirements and everybody has praised that this is world class infrastructure. The Hockey International President had come to Delhi. When he saw the hockey stadium, he said it is best in the world, and various other facilities. The Games village is better than the village in the Olympics in Beijing. So we have given great infrastructure and we are having trial games from March onwards. So everything will be ready before that. So, there

is no reason at all for anybody to get worried. The Commonwealth Games Federation also, their task is to keep showing fault so we don't relax and we will keep moving ahead.

KS : What you are saying is very reassuring, but at the same time, why is there public spat between you and the Commonwealth authorities ? And the second thing, the CEO Cooper, you want him to be taken away. What is the reason ?

SK : The CEO is here for advising us, so it is not my view, it was the view of the Olympics Committee Executive Board which I was just as a spokesman issuing it out. And so everybody felt that we need more cooperation from Mr. Mike Cooper. So, this issue, I don't want to speak more on it, it will be sorted out when I meet Mr. Michael Fennel in London and we will go by whatever decision Mr. Fennel takes.

KS : Well, you talked of sorting out the issues with Michael Fennel. What are the issues which you want to sort out with him?

SK : The issue is mainly Mike Cooper, that is the issue, and then the international consultants. You see, we have got enough international consultants, we have actually got about 40 international consultants at a cost of 900 crores. And we can get international consultants for Net ball or rugby or long ball, because these are new games for us. But if you try to get international consultants for shooting and archery and badminton. We have held the World Badminton Championships, we have got great people in India. So that is our difference with the international body. So, we are sorting these matters out and hopefully things will be in place by the time I can come back from London.

KS : Mr. Kalmadi you are supposed to meet Fennel later, but what you expect from him?

SK : Well, we will have a dialogue and we will see how to sort out most of the problems.

KS : See, you can change Cooper, but you cannot change Mike Fennel, he is there.

SK : No, no we have no problems with Mike Fennel. He has been a great asset and great support to us and he has been advising us properly. So, there is no question, we have don't have any differences with the Commonwealth Games Federation, it is the problem with only this one person, but we will sort that out because the important point is to host the Games. So, no personal issue should be more important than the Games. And we shall stand by whatever Mike Fennel tells.

KS : But Mr. Kalmadi why is it that there is no coherence among the various agencies working for the Games. You have just said that you know there is multiplicity of agencies which are looking into the Commonwealth Games, you have MCD, you have Delhi Chief Minister, you have DDA, you have other agencies. Is it because that there is no chain of command?

SK : All the Games allotted to the Indian Olympics, so it becomes our responsibility to see that everything is organized in a proper manner. And luckily, we have a good Sports Minister who is supporting us to the hilt because Shiela Dixitji was looking after all the Delhi infrastructure, the Prime Minister is looking personally into it, he has formed a Group of Minister which Mr. Jaipal Reddy is heading. So things are mostly in place. Though there is multiplicity of authority, but there is Group of Ministers also, there is Cabinet Secretary, Prime Minister's Secretary, I am in touch with them all the time. I wanted some more people to man the organization committee, we are short of people and the Cabinet Secretary has been good enough to give me three/four good officers. So, now it is the process, now I have got some 450 people in the organizing committee in the building, it will go up to 1600. So, all our problems because of shortage of accommodation, a committee has been established. We already have the main committee, but now all the committees are established and they will have to

work here round-the-year and full day and night etc. So, now the real focus on the Games start from the organization committee side and the sub-committees which are there.

S K : What about the sports persons themselves, how prepared are they? There are criticisms that there was politics even in the selection.

KS : No, politics is not there much in our bodies and Olympics Committee is functioning as one team. We have got all the Federations together. You are aware that in the last Olympics elections, I was elected unanimously, these are things that never happen. In the last few elections, it shows the oneness in the Olympics Committee (..) towards good Games. Hence, we have, Prime Minister has given us first time to send them across for training. It has never happened before, there is more budget for sports, so we are having coaches, foreign coaches, providing good food for athletes, good accommodation for athletes, good (..) training for the first time, so lot of things are happening. Basically, you want to promote Commonwealth sports,

Olympic sports. I think in this country youngsters are moving towards cricket. Through the Commonwealth Games, we will attract them more towards the Olympic sports. And we have made a good start in the Olympic. We have got medals for shooting, we have got medals for wrestling and boxing, we are doing well in badminton, we are doing well in tennis, we are doing well in archery, doing well in many disciplines. So, now Olympic sports are coming of age and this Commonwealth Games would be of great interest and lot of youngsters are going to return to Olympics. In the Commonwealth Youth Games in Pune, we topped the medal, trally. So, it is a great thing, youngsters coming up and coming to Olympic sports.

KS : How many medals do you expect? We being the host country, I am sure you would expect us to do better.

SK : Yes, we should come in the top three. Medals, you see because each time it is a different setting, so we will get enough medals to come third in the Commonwealth Games.

KS : There is one problem which is dogging the sports persons. Every time there is big games like Olympics or even Commonwealth or Asiad, there is one problem about the drugs. So, are you taking care that there will be no problem about this.

SK : We are very particular that this should be drug-free games and we have been asking government for many years for a drug laboratory here. Finally, the drugs laboratory is in place and the International Olympics Committee has recognized it. So, we got the infrastructure in place. Now if anybody commits an offence, he will be straightaway behind the bars. So, now they know about it, we are trying to educate people as much as possible and hopefully it will be drugs-free games.

KS : What about selection of candidates ? Have you completed all that, are they undergoing the coaching?

SK : We have completed most of our selection processes and training of athletes is going on in various training camps. So I am confident of good results.

KS : And how many sports persons are coming from outside ?

SK : Total, we will have about 8,000 athletes and officials for the Games, which is a big number. All the stadiums will be packed, no doubt about that.

KS : And how they will be accommodated, there were some schemes like they will become the house guests of people here and things like bed-and-breakfast scheme all that. But are you getting enough response and do you think this city is in a position to host 100,000 visitors ?

SK : All the athletes and officials will be staying in the Games villages which are getting ready. Then we have the hotel rooms, then we have got the bed-and-breakfast scheme by the Delhi Government, then we have got the ITDC which has converted now nearly 4000 flats into hotel rooms. So, most of the things are ready. Then, for the opening and closing ceremonies all the artists, we are putting them in good tents. So, that will three more hotel rooms for the guests. But, I expect a big inflow of guests for

the Games because behind the baton wherever it goes, all the sentiment continue till the Commonwealth. And then it will go, not only foreign guests, Indian guests, because the baton relay will go to all parts of India. So, I am sure it is going to create lot of interest for the Commonwealth Games and we will have a big turn out, but we are making adequate provisions for everybody.

KS : Well in UK, when you go tomorrow, function will be there with the President and the Queen. What is going to be the function there.

SK : Well, there we will have a pre-inaugural cultural programme and then the Queen will come on stage and the President of the Commonwealth Games Federation will give the baton to the Queen. The Queen will pass on the baton to the President of India, Mrs. Pratibha Patil, who will give the baton to the Sports Minister, Dr. Gill and the Sports Minister, in turn will give the baton to me as the Chairman of the Organising Committee and I will give it to Abhinav Bindra, who is leading the baton relay. But we have taken a lot of

baton bearers for the Games, Milkha Singh is there, then we have taken some cricketers also like Kapil Dev, who won the Test match in Lords, so he is a very popular figure there, then Jitender Singh, Sushil Kumar who won the bronze medal, all sportsmen are there, all sportsmen are carrying the baton.

KS : They will all strictly go to London now with you? There is again another controversy saying you want to take a team of 100 people. In the austerity drive, where does that stand ?

SK : There is no 100 people, there are just 12 people, all the baton bearers. Then we have got just 9 or 10 people from the Olympic Committee and we have got a staff which will be doing all the work for us, there will be about 15 people for that. And that is about it. It is all needed because we are having a big show out there, it is the baton, then the controlling of crowds, lot of invitees are there for the function in Buckingham Palace and then the baton will move to various places where we have to have reception, we will

be handing over the baton to the English Olympic Committee at the Parliament House in London. So, there are various things and the President is opening up Business Club Lounge also. So there are three-four functions and we need some people to look after all these function areas and people accepted big responsibilities. And then it goes 1,75,000 kilometers all over the Commonwealth Games, so that will be a different team which will be there.

KS : Ultimately, when will it reach India ?

SK : It will come to India 100 days to go for the Games, it will come to India from the Wagah border, to India and then it will go to all the capitals of India and it will come to Delhi three days before the games, and will be in Delhi for three days and then it will come to the opening ceremony, to come in where the Queen will receive the baton and read out a message.

KS : Well, Mr. Kalmadi, are we in a position to provide security for this huge contingent of people who are coming, sports persons as well as tourists.

SK ; This is a big issue in many countries, but that is the perception which is there about India and the neighbours. But when we accepted security commanders conference about 15 days back and all of them had lot of doubts. When they came here and saw the arrangements, the Home Ministry is responsible for all security affairs in the country and Lieut. Governor and the Police Commissioner look after the security in Delhi. So, everything is in place and people have gone to Beijing and seen their security apparatus. So people in Commonwealth Games Federation are quite happy. The Commonwealth Games Federation also has got their own security adviser who keep giving his reports every three months. So, we are acting on that, on all the buses we keep security, on the route we are keeping security.

SK : Thank you very much.

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