

'Holland has 400 turfs for 5 million people, Australia has some 400 for 30 million people. For our billion people, if I can get 50...'

With Delhi hosting the Commonwealth Games, this is a crucial year for M S Gill, Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports. In an interview with *The Indian Express* Editor-in-Chief Shekhar Gupta on NDTV 24x7's Walk the Talk, Gill, a former Chief Election Commissioner, talks about hockey's second innings, getting ready for the Commonwealth Games and the need to spend more on sports

for 5 million people. Australia, I read yesterday, also has 400 for 30 million people. For our billion people, if I can get 50, I will keep pushing.

We have two for 14 million people in Delhi.
Yes, kids have never seen these. How do you expect them to win?

Do you expect to find the money to increase the number?
Well, we have to keep on pushing, but this is a problem. I've said I have to follow your rules now and beat you at your rules. Otherwise why do you make us play on turf which is meant for a wet country?

If ten state governments want to lay down astroturf, will the Sports Ministry find money to help them?

No, I can't find the money for them. They have to spend too and some of them are spending. I give what I can from as much as I can get. I will fight to get more money. Sport needs much more money. We are the youngest country in the world. These 35 to 40 per cent young Indians need sports for leadership, for health, for everything. And therefore the budget must increase.

For your self-esteem.
Yes, for your self-esteem. Even your industry wants gold medals for its self-esteem.

Tell us your own highlights from this tournament. You watched some matches.

Well, I think the India-Pakistan match was great. For one, even the Europeans want to see India and Pakistan play because it lifts the occasion and the atmosphere. Second, despite whatever is happening elsewhere, when Pakistan's national anthem was played, the whole stadium stood up like they were standing before the Indian President. That's a great mature country showing respect. And the match was clean and fun. Pakistan's top players and their ex-captain came to me and said 'aap bahut behtar the to aap jeete hain, fir kya hua?' (You played better and you won, so what?). I said, 'haan bhai, aap bhi jeete the, agli dafaa aap jeet jaoge' (You had won earlier and you can win the next time').

So I think this spirit has to be rewarded now at least with the revival of the India-Pakistan series?

Let's see. I have read that they are thinking of something. When they come to me, I'll certainly look at it in that spirit.

And do you think it'll be a good idea? Because what do you do with the stadium now?

I have to find ways to use this stadium for top tournaments. That is what will lift hockey. Even Negre is very keen to have an event in India every year. By the way, a second thought. I told Negre, if you had held the league matches in Chandigarh, you would have minted money. People would have paid Rs 2,000 for a ticket.

What's your next challenge? Because Commonwealth Games will be over now.

There is always something to do in life. I have all sorts of challenges. I am an MP from Punjab. I get Rs 2 crore a year. I have worked in the Gurdaspur-Amritsar belt, which is so deprived. I said I will spend this money only on education, rural education, above all, girls' education. I built two hostels for 500 girls in Taran-taran and Goindwal so that girls from 10 miles away can stay there and go to college. So, there's always plenty to do.

And what's there to do in sports now? Are you going to focus on hockey or boxing or...?
There's a long agenda and there are many more things to do to encourage Indian sports.

There's a stereotype about all sports, that more officials go on tournaments than sportsmen and they bring back more embarrassment than glory. Can we change that?

I have done a few things to change that but I'm still thinking of how I can improve conditions for sportsmen, make sure the selection process is fair to every Indian.

And you can use the leverage of government money to get associations to fall in line.
Absolutely, because if they are going to use public money, the ministry is answerable to Parliament and to you and so they are answerable as well.

Transcribed by Avantika Sharma
For full text, go to www.indianexpress.com

My guest this week is a real all-rounder in more ways than one, who is also our Youth Affairs and Sports Minister—M S Gill. The problem conversing with you is how to describe you. To call you just the Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports is a bit of an injustice.

Well, yes, I served a long time in the civil services, in Punjab, Delhi...

I read your book on Lahaul when I was a student and you wrote that when you were a fresh IAS officer.

I was Deputy Commissioner in Jalandhar when I drafted it. And in the old Punjab, when there was no Himachal and no Haryana, I went as Deputy Commissioner in 1961 to Lahaul-Spiti, which had been newly created by Kairon (former Punjab chief minister Pratap Singh Kairon) to take care of the border where trouble had started in 1958. Yes, so I went there, I lived in those valleys. We used to walk over the Rohtang, there were no helicopters, no health cover, nothing.

So, adventure has been a part of your life.

Yes, I am the first IAS officer, and perhaps the last unfortunately, who went to train at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling. I trained with Tenzing Norgay. That's my richest memory of life really.

What did the Prime Minister tell you when he gave you this job?

Well, get the Games done (Commonwealth Games). Because they were assigned in 2003 and I took over April 6, 2008. In the intervening years, there had been four ministers and there were these large stadiums—hockey, shooting, cycling—which had not even been started. So, frankly, my job was to get everything ready in time.

Was the PM worried when he spoke with you?

Yes, he was concerned. And he will remain concerned. It's like an Indian wedding. Till the girl has got into the car and left with her husband, I will remain concerned and I think the same applies to the PM.

Was that a crisis phase for the Games?

There is no crisis. I think the Government of India can handle anything.

Was there any infighting, were there any doubts, was the usual Indian tamasha on?

Those are the things other people should answer, not me. Because where I come from, my head is screwed in such a way that I can look this way but I can't look that way. So I am looking to the job I was asked to do and I am trying to fulfill it and I believe I will do it.

What was the biggest surprise—pleasant and unpleasant—when you took charge?

Well, first, the stadiums. Second, the crisis was that the Games Village, and somehow I can't see why, was put on the other side of the Yamuna, and the athletes are supposed to come to the stadium right across the river and through the town five times a day to practice. And there was no decision on how to bring them there. What were they going to do? Frankly, I bullied my way through and we took a decision which is now being worked on but even now it'll take them till June. You go and see the construction. It's very complex. And we will all worry till it's done.

This is the Commonwealth Games. But let's talk about games as such—the state of sports in India. You know cricket is autonomous, because it produces its own money and it carries on. To some extent, tennis also, lawn tennis pretty much pays for itself. Almost everything else is run by this sort of funny federations, which get money from some place.

From us mostly. It's Government of India money, public money.

And yet, where is the accountability, what do they deliver?

A lot of things have happened since last year and I have certainly acted. You see, the RTI Act is a historic legislation that is having a tremendous impact. I am amazed that now cabinet papers, ministry papers, the highest documents and now even the Supreme Court is being brought under it. It's positive for democracy. Well, a case came up last year before the Delhi HC but the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) was under the impression that they were not supposed to give an answer. But we said loud and clear that everybody has to be answerable. We applied this rule not just on the IOA and the organising committee for the

Commonwealth Games, but on all federations.

So, there are these corrections.

Tell me about some of the surprises you discovered when you looked at the federations, because we know most of them are a mess.

No, I was not surprised because I have a history of being linked with sports and even with federations. But another thing that has come up now is that you can't be president of a federation for 20 years, 25 years, 30 years. It's not a life presidency, this is not North Korea.

So are you going to pass a regulation that there should be no more than two terms for the president of a federation?

That regulation was passed long ago.

But it has not been followed.

It was stopped by a minister. Please don't make me name anyone.

But that 'minister' must have been chairman of a federation for hundreds of years.

No, it was just a minister saying that we don't need to follow these regulations. Well, now in the case of the Rifle Association, a judgment was given which directed the current office bearers to go and they had to step aside. And as usual, we stood by the court and we'll carry the regulation further.

So do we take it that all federations will now have to follow this?

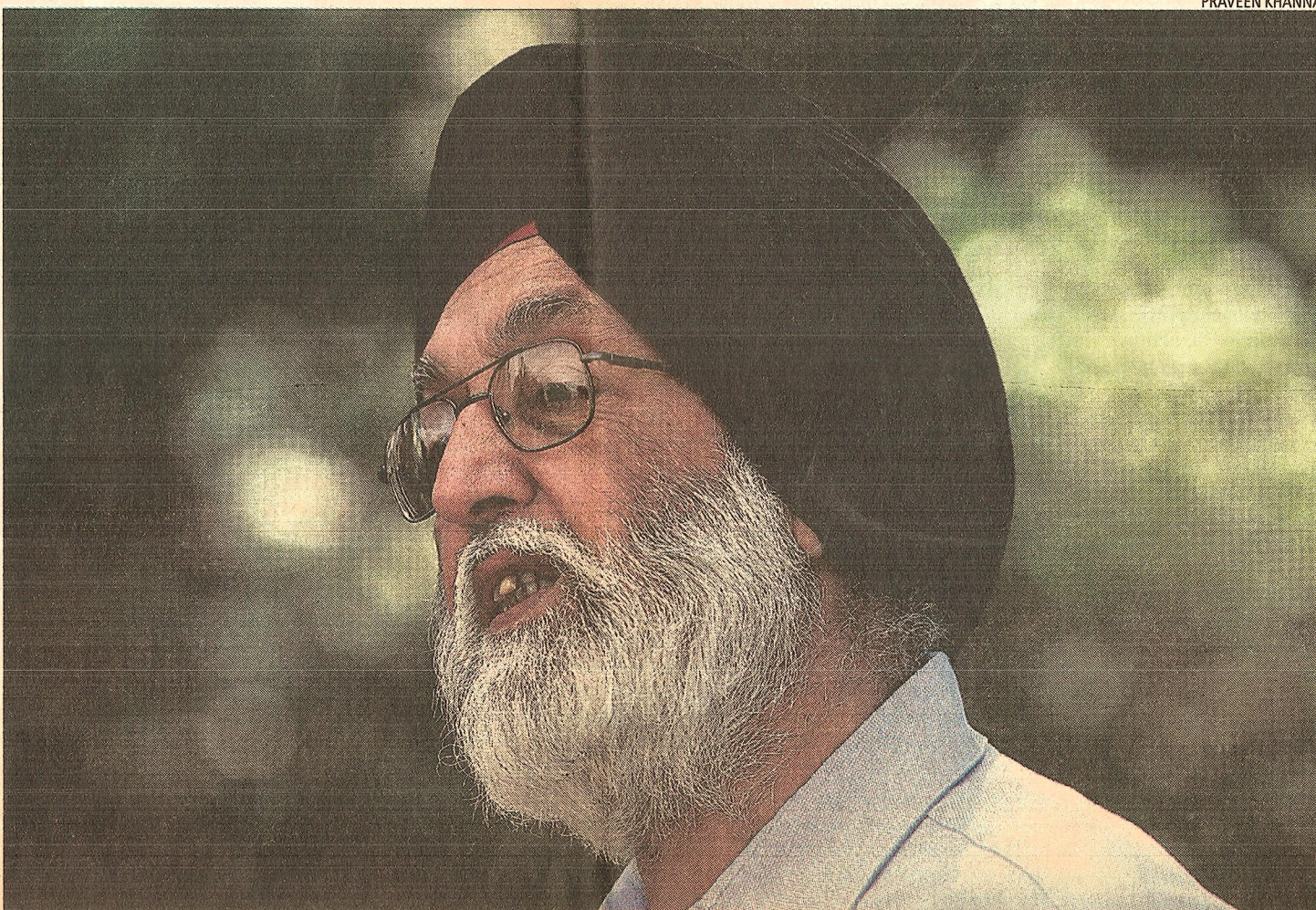
It has to be done and it will be done.

Tell us a little bit more about your conversations with the International Hockey Federation (FIH) chairman because he now controls hockey in the whole world and the FIH is a very powerful body now.

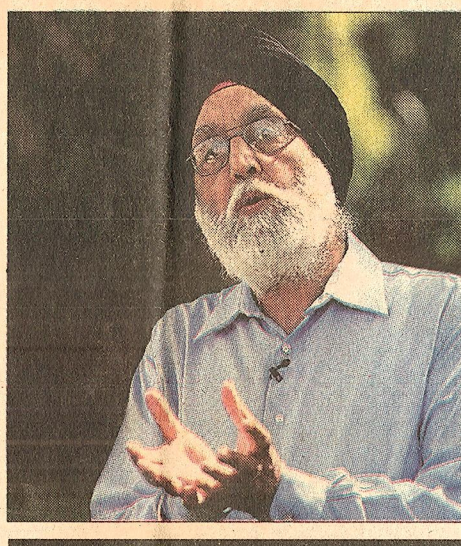
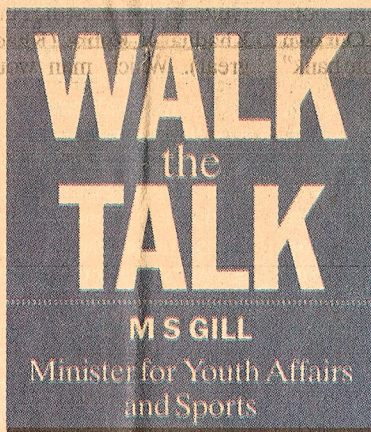
First, elections (to the Federation) have to be held at the earliest. But as I have said in the past and he (FIH chief Leandro Negre) and I both agree, elections will have to be held in the manner that they are acceptable to India. They have to be done and we will push for it. I've also told him some other things. I told him, I watched this tournament and I saw that it has lifted hockey here.

It is a second innings for hockey in India. Genuine, buying public going to watch a hockey match is such a pleasant surprise.

Yes, I am very happy. And the fact that they (the Indian team) have come eighth does not worry me.



PRAVEEN KHANNA



I think the India-Pakistan match was great. For one, even the Europeans want to see India and Pakistan play because it lifts the occasion and the atmosphere. Second, despite whatever is happening elsewhere, when Pakistan's national anthem was played, the whole stadium stood up like they were standing before the Indian President. That's a mature country showing respect. And the match was clean and fun

My attitude is: did you train hard? Did you play united?

Hockey has changed from the time when I played hockey in school. Now nobody plays hockey in schools.

Yes, it's different. But my attitude is different. I want the players to do their best, train hard and play united. I can't ask for more if you have done your best. You lose to somebody better. You'll win too. But I've also told Negre that in this tournament I saw that the entire management and all the referees were non-Asian.

In the FIH?

Yes, and I said this attitude has to change because I read somewhere that more than 50 per cent of their income comes from India.

Even now.

Yes, and Holland is second. They may be better than us but we are, like in cricket, the money pot.

So we have the same power in hockey that we have in cricket.

They must take care of us. It can't be that none of our people are part of the management in Delhi.

In fact, right from Rene Frank's days in the FIH, it has become very European.

But Negre has taken note. I am a blunt man and I have made my point clear.

But you see this hockey performance as an improvement?

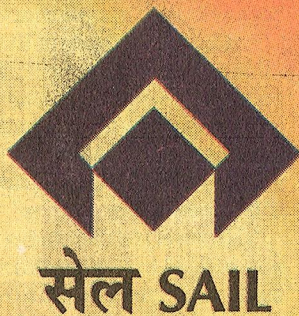
Oh, yes. What I saw, and what you too have written, is that the crowds came and they were happy to cheer any team. And they saw good hockey.

I think this is a big leg up for hockey.

You see, first the stadium is intimate. Anyone even with Rs 100-ticket gets a close view of the magic going on. Then TV is able to show it in slow motion.

Nearly 200 goals in a tournament. But also a tribute to the people who changed the rules because it has become a much faster game—much less whistling. And astroturf, so it's become all weather, although it puts us at a disadvantage.

It does but I've said this to Negre and to others, that you have made the rules, these are rules that I did not know. I have learnt them in this tournament. And as for turfs—Holland has 400 turfs



India's Largest Steel Producer with Annual turnover of over Rs. 48,000 crore (FY 2008- 2009)

www.sail.co.in

There's a little bit of SAIL in everybody's life