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From the President's Desk

Happy days are here again! May be, it is too early to celebrate! But as things have gone in the recent past there is at least hope that things will improve in the Indian hockey scene.

Although the Government decision to downgrade the 'National Game' from the 'priority' to 'general' category had both the players and administrators worried. Some on-and -off the field developments in the last couple of months have surely come as a big relief, even as the national team prepares itself for the challenges ahead. The most important of them being to qualify for the next year's Beijing Olympics.

On the home front, the successful completion of the country's 'heritage' tournament - Beighton Cup - showed that old is gold as the game was still popular among the masses, even though it is played on natural grass. The world's oldest hockey tournament, which was started in Calcutta in 1895, is in its 112th year. There was a large turnout on all the days to watch the 23 teams in action. Indian Airlines beat BSF (Jalandhar) 1-0 in the final to earn Rs. 1 lakh.

A new-look youthful Indian team under new coach Joaquim Carvalho passed a litmus test by retaining its third position in the Continent's prestigious Sultan Azlan Shah cup tournament at Ipoh (Malaysia). This was another opportunity for the much-maligned Indian hockey to come out unscathed. The Indians had a few points to prove which they did effectively. By beating China in the league phase, India avenged its Doha Asian Games defeat. They went on to beat South Korea also to finish third. India's performance would surely have given the players much-needed confidence to take on stronger opponents in the forthcoming Olympic qualifiers.

With the election of a number of Indian officials in each of the 12 Committees in the Asian Hockey Federation, the country gets a fair representation in the AHF Governing Council. Headed once again by the Malaysian Ruler Sultan Azlan Shah as its President, the AHF is planning to make the game more popular and spectator-friendly.

The Steel Authority of India beat SAI (Combined) 4-2 in the final of the third Junior (Under-18) National Championships held at the Acharya Nagarjuna University campus in Guntur (Andhra Pradesh). As many as 34 teams participated in the tournament.

India has a busy schedule ahead this year with the BDO Champions Challenges Cup in Belgium (June23-July1), 8-Nation Under-21 Invitational tournament in Germany (August 6-12), 7th Men's Asia Cup in Chennai (Sept 1-9) and the Singapore International Challenge Trophy during October 17-21.

India will have the honour of hosting both the World Cup (New Delhi - February) and the Commonwealth Games (New Delhi - October) during 2010, which are eagerly awaited by the lovers of the game.



Ram Niwas Mirdha

BEIGHTON CUP HOCKEY : INDIA'S 'HERITAGE' TOURNAMENT

Even as Indian hockey is struggling to come to terms and the country's 'National game' was pushed out of the 'Priority list' by the Union Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, the Beighton Cup, which was instituted 112 years ago, is promoting the game in all its glorious splendour.

Beighton Cup, which began in Calcutta in 1895, is the world's oldest organised hockey tournament and is deservedly known as the "heritage tournament" for annually attracting a large number of crack teams across the country without any break whatsoever even during the second great world war-II and successfully conducting competitions on 'natural' grass.

The 112th edition of the century-old tournament was won by Indian Airlines (only the second time) who beat last year's losing finalists BSF (Jalandhar) 1-0 in the final played at the Mohun Bagan Club ground in Kolkata on April 10, 2007. The Securitymen were last year's runners-up. An angular shot by four-time Olympian, mercurial Dhanraj Pillay was all that the airmen needed to win the coveted cup, which had attracted this year as many as 23 teams. It was nonetheless a sweet revenge for the airmen, who suffered a 1-3 defeat at the hands of the securitymen in the quarter-final league earlier. The Securitymen had won the Cup in 2005.

With a galaxy of Olympians and World Cuppers, the Airlines made it to the semi-final round after beating the two local outfits Calcutta customs (8-1) and Calcutta's Punjab Sports Club (9-1) in the last eight league phase. Then they went on to topple defending champions Punjab & Sind Bank (PSB) 6-5 via tie-breaker in the semi-final. BSF, on the other hand, had a comfortable passage into the summit round with wins over Indian Airlines (3-1), Calcutta Customs (1-0) and Calcutta's Punjab S.C. (5-1) in the league phase before eliminating Indian Oil 2-1 in the semi-final.

The Indian Airlines received Rs. 1 lakh as winners cash award while runners-up BSF took home half that amount. The Fair Play Trophy along with the cash award of Rs. 7,500 went to the Indian Oil. The Cup organisers also honoured the following players on the occasion viz Best Goalkeeper K.M. Subbaiah (BSF), Best Full Back Kushmeet Singh (Indian Oil), Best Half Back Vikram Pillay (Indian Airlines) and Best Forward Dhanraj Pillay (Indian Airlines). All of them received Rs. 5,000 each as cash award.

SULTAN AZLAN SHAH TOURNAMENT

The 16th edition of the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup Hockey Tournament, held at Ipoh (Malaysia) during May 5-13 was in

more ways than one a litmus test for Indian hockey and its new coach Joaquim Carvalho. It was yet another opportunity for Indian hockey for a resurgence.

The Indians had a lot at stake in this tournament as they were defending their bronze medal finish in the last edition. India were pitted in the tough pool-A along with Olympic Champions Australia, Argentina and China. Indians had a lot to prove here. They had the task of proving that the Doha Asian Games loss to China was an aberration. Last year's winners Holland were conspicuous by their absence.

In the end, India achieved what the team had set before the tournament by finishing on the podium for the second successive edition. A 56th minute goal by Sardara Singh guided India to a 1-0 win over Asian Games Champions South Korea and finish third. The manner in which the Indians demonstrated the value of ball possession was commendable. The defence was tight throughout, but for all the consistency maintained by the attack, the frontline failed to make full use of the chances created. Goalkeeper Bharat Chettri's contribution needs special mention. He made three saves off penalty-corners, showing excellent athleticism and superb sense of anticipation.

India began their campaign against a new-look Australian squad which was without seven regular players. For nearly 50 minutes India held Australia scoreless. The Aussies utilised the match to blood a few new faces. They forced four penalty-corners in the second half against the one by India in the entire match. It was Rob Hammond's longdrive that culminated in Edward Ockenden's chance deflection that went past a shocked Indian goalkeeper Baljit Singh.

The next encounter against China was very important. It was a chance to avenge the Doha defeat. As expected, India wiped the stain with a 5-4 verdict. Shocked by a third minute goal off a penalty-corner, Indians recovered to lead 3-2 at the breather. Prabhjot Singh, Raghunath and Rajpal Singh (stroke) scored for India. China made it 3-3 soon after resumption but Raghunath and Bimal Lakra (stroke) put the issue beyond China. The match saw as many as 14 penalty-corners awarded, eight of them to China and six to India.

In a dramatic finish, India, in the last match of their pool, overpowered Argentina 2-0 with goals from Bharath Chikkara and Tushar Khandekar. The Indians played to a plan defending tightly. The attack maintained its rhythm, supported by the mid-field. The win compensated for the 2-3 loss to Argentina in the World Cup at Monchengladbach (Germany). India's goals came in the 67th and last minute of the match to put them in the semi-finals.

It was a battle of nerves in the semi-final against hosts Malaysia in which an error-prone India paid the price for wasted opportunities. India went down 1-2, sparkling

intermittently. Shivendra Singh scored in the 13th minute for India's lone goal. The Indians looked sharper but were unable to capitalise on the chances. India's defeat meant Malaysia made it to the final after a gap of 22 years.

For the record, Argentina beat Pakistan 4-2 to finish fifth and China beat Canada 4-2 to end 7th. Australia reaffirmed its supremacy beating Malaysia 3-1, annexing the coveted trophy for the fifth time.

Although there is no reason to go ga-ga over India's performance at Ipoh, it is a proof that despite the odds, Indian hockey can still be a force to reckon with. Reaching the Semi-finals was a great boost to the team's confidence as even the IHF Chief KPS Gill had said before the tournament that "it was still too early to expect a podium finish". The IHF had sent a young side with an average age of 21. Considering the difficult period the Indian hockey was going through, this Azlan Shah performance should act as a boost to its confidence.

Final Placing : 1. Australia, 2. Malaysia, 3. India, 4. Korea, 5. Argentina, 6. Pakistan, 7. China, 8. Canada. **Player of the Tournament :** Andrew Smith (Australia); **Player of the Final :** Edward Ockenden (Australia); **Top Scorer :** Song Yi (China) - 6 goals; **Best Goalkeeper :** Kumar Subramaniam (Malaysia); **Fairplay Trophy :** Argentina.

AHF COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Asian hockey is assured of good days in the next four years as it is once again in the best hands of capable and experienced officials elected to the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) Council at its Congress held on January 14, 2007 in the Malaysian Capital of Kuala Lumpur.

The AHF Federation will once again be headed by the Malaysian Ruler, Sultan Azlan Shah, who has been elected unopposed. Tan Sri P. Alagendra has also returned unopposed as its Secretary-General. India seems to have been fairly represented in the Governing Council. Among the five elected Vice-Presidents, two are Indians viz Mr KPS Gill (President, Indian Hockey Federation) and Mrs Vidya Stokes (President, Indian Women's Hockey Federation). Mrs Amrit Bose (Secretary, IWHF) and Shri K. Jothikumaran (Secy-General IHF) are the two elected members of the nine-member Council.

A number of Indian officials have also been involved to function in various capacities in all the 12 Committees appointed by the Federation's Council. Mr KPS Gill is the Chairman of the Disciplinary Committee and also a member in the Finance Committee. The other Chairpersons are Mr S. Thyagarajan (Media & PR), Mr Hardeep Singh Dhillon (Equipment) and Mrs Vidya Stokes (Women's Development)

Dr. PSM Chandran will function as Secretary (Medical) and Mr Jothikumaran (Equipment). Mr Jothikumaran will also function as member of Competitions, Marketing and Athletes Committees. The other Indians involved as members are Mr M. P. Ganesh (Development & Coaching), Mr Suresh Sharma (Media & PR), Mr Kukoo Walia and Mr Gurbux Singh (Umpiring), Mrs. Vidya Stokes (Protocol) and Mrs Amrit Bose (Women's Development).

THIRD JUNIOR (U-18) NATIONALS

SAIL annex the Trophy

The Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) proved to be the best among the 34 participating teams in the Third Junior (U-18) National Hockey Championships, which was held at the Acharya Nagarjuna University Campus in Guntur (Andhra Pradesh) during April 14-22, 2007.

In an action-packed final played in front of a large hockey-loving crowd, SAIL defeated SAI (Combined) 4-2 and annexed the coveted trophy. Jharkhand beat Chhattisgarh 4-1 to take the third place.

SAIL scored wins over Namdhari (2-1 in the quarter-final league) and Chattisgarh (3-1 in the Semi-final) while SAI had beaten Orissa (1-0) and Jharkhand (5-1) on way to the final.

Last year's winners Karnataka had a poor outing losing by a solitary goal to Patiala in their Pool-A league encounter and failed to make it to the quarter-finals. Those who qualified for the last eight stage were SAIL, Namdhari, Jharkhand, SSCB, SAI (Combined), Orissa, Chattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. In the quarter-finals, SAIL beat Namdhari 2-0, Jharkhand beat SSCB 5-2, SAI (Combined) beat Orissa 1-0 and Chattisgarh beat Andhra Pradesh 2-1.

BEGINNING OF HOCKEY RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

The hockey renaissance in India has begun. With a youthful-looking team retaining its third position in the just-concluded prestigious Sultan Azlan Shah Cup in Malaysia and India earning the right to host the 2010 World Cup in New Delhi in February 2010, just eight months before the mega Commonwealth Games competitions to be kicked off in the Union Capital, Indian hockey is surely on a revival path.

The success of the 'Promoting Indian Hockey', a project of the International Hockey Federation (FIH) in cooperation with the Indian Hockey Confederation (IHC), the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the Olympic Solidarity (IOC) has had a positive influence on India

getting the 2010 Hockey World Cup. The FIH has already expressed its confidence about India's ability to conduct the competition successfully, as was evident by the keen interest shown by the FIH President Ms Els van Breda Vriesman and the IOC President Jacques Rogge when they visited India in April this year.

The organisation of the 2010 World Cup will be a joint venture between the FIH and the Indian Hockey Confederation. A Governing Board consisting of six to eight persons to be appointed by the FIH and the IHC will have the overall responsibility for the organisation of the tournament. An Organising Committee will be responsible for the day-to-day organisation and conduct of the event. The Chairperson of the Organising Committee will also be a member of the Governing Board.

The FIH Executive Board will meet in New Delhi for the first time in November this year to study the progress report of the organisation of the 2010 Men's Hockey World Cup.

BIG-TIME TREAT FOR DELHI HOCKEY LOVERS

Delhi's hockey lovers who are treated to some exciting competitions annually through the Nehru Hockey tournaments in the Union capital's winter months are in for

more exciting fare during the year 2010 when major hockey-playing countries of the world will descend upon the Indian Capital to dish out some exhilarating display of hockey artistry.

The beginning of 2010 will see Delhi playing host to the 15th World Cup. Within the next eight months, the city will again see top teams figuring in the Commonwealth Games hockey competition in October.

With the Union Government and the Organising Committee well set to complete renovation work of various playfields and stadia, it looks to be a successful and most fruitful year for the Indian Hockey Confederation.

India has the experience of successfully conducting many mega hockey events, including the World Cup in Mumbai (1982) and the Champions Trophy in Chennai in December 2005. Delhi also had hosted the Indira Gandhi International Gold Cup earlier in October that year, which was another feather in the crown of the Indian Women's Hockey Federation. The Nehru Hockey Tournament Society, a name to reckon with in international hockey tournament scene, also held the Junior World Cup (Asian Zone Qualifying) in the Union capital in 1988.

With the organisation of these tournaments in able hands, hockey lovers are sure to get to see some vintage game.

INTERNATIONAL CALENDAR FOR THE YEARS 2007-2010 WITH INDIA'S PARTICIPATION

1.*	Champions Challenge Trophy (W)	Quilmes (Argentina)	January 13-21, 2007.
2.	16th Sultan Azlan Shah Cup Hockey Tournament	Ipoh (Malaysia)	May 5-13, 2007.
3.*	Four - Nation Cup	Lanzhou City (China)	May 30 - June 2, 2007.
4.	BDO Hockey Champions Challenge (M)	Antwerp - Boom (Belgium)	June 23 - July 1, 2007.
5.	8 Nation U-21 Invitational Tournament (M)	Monchengladbach (Germany)	August 6-12, 2007.
6.	7th Men's Asia Cup	Chennai (India)	Sept. 1-9, 2007.
7.	Singapore International Hockey Challenge Trophy	Singapore	Oct. 17-21, 2007.
8.*	Champions Trophy (M)	Lahore (Pakistan)	Dec. 1-9, 2007.
9.	Olympic Qualifiers	(i) Auckland (Newzealand)	Feb. 2-10, 2008.
		(ii) Santiago (Chile)	March 1-9, 2008.
		(iii) Kakamigahara (Japan)	April 5-13, 2008.
10.	Olympic Games	Beijing (China)	August 8-24, 2008.
11.	Boys U-18 Asia Cup	Delhi	Oct. 1-10, 2008.
12.	World Cup	Delhi	February, 2010.
13.	Asian Games	Guangzhou (China)	August 8-24, 2010
14.	Commonwealth Games	Delhi	Oct. 3-14, 2010

*NB: SI No. 1, 3 and 8 :- Indian not participating

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