

■ CURRENT TOPICS

Big Relief

THERE will be understandable relief all round that India's hockey team has earned a berth in the Barcelona Olympics. It was bad enough that India, once the acknowledged masters of the game, had to go through the qualifying event at Auckland. It would have been damaging in the extreme had India failed to make the grade. They came perilously close to it, after being held goalless by France and being beaten, 2-3, by Malaysia. In the event they were saved a great deal of embarrassment thanks to Malaysia's victory over Belgium in the last round of the league. India's players and officials must have prayed hard for such a verdict as Belgium would have clinched a place had they won.

On the face of it, India and Malaysia were the two best teams in the group and it would have been most unfortunate had India been nosed out. In fact, India had been billed as the favourites to win the tournament and they can still do so since they are in the semi-finals. However, their performance in the league phase left a lot to be desired, considering that they had defeated

Malaysia, 4-1, in the Azlan Shah tournament at Ipoh recently. Indeed, India had raised great hopes by putting it across fancied Pakistan and winning the title at Ipoh.

Though handicapped by the absence through injury of star forward Jagbir Singh, India's struggle to cope with the pressures and the opposition at Auckland underlines their deficiencies. Whether we engage a foreign coach, as Mr Ashwini Kumar, a former president of the Indian Hockey Federation, has suggested, or persist with Balkishen Singh, who has done a fair job, there can be no denying that a great deal of planning and hard work will be needed if India are to acquit themselves with credit at Barcelona.

Dalits' Defence

THE organisation by an Andhra Naxalite group of Samantha volunteer force, an army of youth trained in self-defence to counter attacks on Dalits, is a significant development. The Naxalites are putting across the message that the Dalits can no longer look to the state to ensure their security. Andhra's failure to protect them from the physical assaults by the upper castes in the recent Chundur carnage gives the

message a large measure of credibility. Indeed, the Chundur incidents drove the Dalits to desperate retaliation, refusing even relief in protest against the state's failure to protect them from high-caste violence.

The emergence of this volunteer resistance movement against upper-caste atrocities is inspired by the success of the Indian People's Front in Bihar in providing security to the Dalits against upper-caste attacks. Such movements have apparently become inevitable as upper-caste Hindus, refusing to see the writing on the wall, increasingly resist the upward mobility of the Dalits in the countryside. The inability of the state to bring perpetrators of such atrocities to book has obviously shaken the belief of Dalits in the rule of law.

While the growing determination of the Dalits to uphold their rights is a good sign, insofar as it can help them to obtain greater equity, those who organise them must ensure that their movement does not deteriorate into mindless reprisals. The discipline which marks the functioning of the IPF cadres in Bihar may perhaps offer a model for the new organisation in Andhra Pradesh.