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The 2010 Commonwealth Games: India's Triumph or Disaster?

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Abstract

India's successful bid to host the 19th Commonwealth Games in October 2010 seems like the South Asian giant's chance to showcase its growth and progress. Additionally, coming on the heels of China's triumph with the Beijing Olympics in 2008, anything less than a successful event would be an embarrassment for India. However, preparations for the Commonwealth Games appear to have been blighted by delays and allegations of corruption and inefficiency. Thus, what was supposed to signify India's arrival on the world stage now appears to typify the problems of governance in India, in terms of both policy-making and implementation.

India's successful bid to host the nineteenth Commonwealth Games in 2010 marks a chance for the South Asian giant to showcase its rapid growth and development to the world. The games, which begin on 3 October 2010, are expected to attract two million tourists, in addition to the approximately 10,000 athletes from 54 Commonwealth member states, to New Delhi.² In preparation, the Indian government has allocated a generous budget of well over US\$1.6 billion – the largest yet for the Commonwealth Games (CWG) – to prepare the infrastructure and spruce

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² 'India fears Commonwealth Games venues will not be ready', *Taragana.com* (31 May 2010), <http://blog.taragana.com/sports/2010/05/31/india-fears-commonwealth-games-venues-will-not-be-ready-106876/>. Accessed 12 June 2010.

up the capital ahead of the games.³ Clearly, the CWG, which will be the most high profile sporting event to be held in India since it hosted the Asian Games in 1982,⁴ is being viewed by the Indian establishment as a chance to signal its coming of age as an economic and regional power, if not a burgeoning global power. This is especially true coming on the heels of Beijing's Olympic success in 2008 and (albeit to a lesser degree) South Africa's success with the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) soccer World Cup in June and July 2010.

Unfortunately, preparations for the games have been riddled with delays in the construction of event venues and related infrastructure. In September 2009, a government report found that 'work on 13 out of the 19 sports venues were behind schedule'.⁵ At the same time, the Commonwealth Games Federation chief, Mike Fennell, warned that India was behind schedule in its preparations. In a letter to the Indian organising committee, Fennel said that it was 'reasonable to conclude that the current situation pos[ed] a serious risk to the Commonwealth Games in 2010'.⁶ This warning is said to have 'caused alarm among Indian ministers who regard the Delhi Commonwealth Games as a "coming of age" party to herald the arrival of India as a major power... its failure would be regarded as a national humiliation'.⁷

While these warnings seem to have sped up construction, there still appear to be delays in meeting deadlines.⁸ Reports indicate that at the end of May 2010, with around four months to go, work on the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium (the main stadium), the swimming pool and other venues was still overdue.⁹ Other games-related infrastructure, like roads, bridges and hotels were also

³ '2010 Commonwealth Games 6-8 pct over budget', *ExpressIndia.com* (4 June 2010), www.expressindia.com/latest-news/2010-Commonwealth-Games-68-pct-over-budget/471229/. Accessed 12 June 2010; and Jenny Franklin, 'Bracing For Commonwealth Games 2010', *ArticleSnatch.com* (n.d.), www.articlesnatch.com/Article/Bracing-For-Commonwealth-Games-2010/1109320#ixzz0rC1VEGhi. Accessed 13 June 2010.

⁴ 'India Says It is Ready for 2010 Commonwealth Games', *VOA News* (14 September 2009). Accessed 12 June 2010.

⁵ 'India admits 2010 Games problems', *BBC News* (15 September 2009), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8256127.stm. Accessed on 12 June 2010.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Dean Nelson, 'Delhi Commonwealth Games "at grave risk of collapse"', *Daily Telegraph* (15 September 2009), www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/6190118/Delhi-Commonwealth-Games-at-grave-risk-of-collapse.html. Accessed on 12 June 2010.

⁸ 'Delhi risks failure in many areas: cocom report', *Hindustan Times* (23 December 2009), www.hindustantimes.com/special-news-report/commonwealth2010/Delhi-risks-failure-in-many-areas-cocom-report/Article3-489875.aspx. Accessed on 13 June 2010; '2010 dawns, but Delhi unprepared for Commonwealth Games', *Times of India* (31 December 2009), <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/sports/events-tournaments/commonwealth-games-2010/2010-dawns-but-Delhi-unprepared-for-Commonwealth-Games/articleshow/5399511.cms>. Accessed 13 June 2010; and '2010 Commonwealth Games: CGF Coordination Commission Report – Meeting of 14-16 December 2009', *CGF Coordination Commission* (22 December 2009), www.thecgf.com/games/future/CoCom%20Report%20December%202009.pdf. Accessed 13 June 2010.

⁹ 'India fears Commonwealth Games venues will not be ready'.

behind time.¹⁰ Additionally, the promise to generate surplus power by 2010 in readiness for the CWG has also fallen by the wayside with daily power cuts in Delhi.¹¹ Hence, for many national and international observers, what was supposed to symbolise India's triumphant ascendance to the world stage has now come to epitomise the problems of governance in India, in terms of both policy-making and implementation.

One of the most oft-mentioned challenges to governance in India is the endemic corruption. Corruption can lead to inefficiency in two major ways. One, misspent and misappropriated funds can cause budgetary strain, which can take time to resolve. Two, corruption can also lead to the appointment of incompetent individuals in positions of power. This can lead to extensive inefficiency, especially in a bureaucratic setting. Additionally, perceptions of corruption can also cause delays as they create controversy and impede the timely implementation of projects. According to a study of governance indicators worldwide commissioned by the World Bank, India's percentile rank for control of corruption is 44.4, giving it a score of -0.37.¹² The preparations for the games have also been surrounded by allegations of corruption. Leaders of the opposition, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), including Vijay Kumar Malhotra, who is a senior vice-president of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and Vijay Goel have accused the government of 'mindlessly' spending money on the CWG and have alleged that 'there has been mass corruption in the [CWG] funds as suggested by the unaudited increase in the budget of various projects'.¹³ According to Malhotra, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) – a civic agency – 'under pressure from the builders' cartel', was forced to fork out over US\$2 million towards the completion of the Games village.¹⁴ Members of various civil societies have also heaped accusations of corruption. Allegedly, of the US\$70 million accumulated by builders for a workers' welfare fund – as required by the 1996 Building and Other Construction Workers Act – only US\$30,000 have trickled down as benefits for workers.¹⁵ Activists have also accused the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Rajeev Ranjan Roy, 'Delhi will have surplus power by 2010', *India eNews* (21 March 2008), www.indiaenews.com/india/20080321/105643.htm. Accessed on 14 June 2010; and Shambhavi Rai, 'Delhiites battle heat, long power-cuts', *CNN-IBN* (26 April 2010), <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/powercut-free-summer-a-dream-for-delhiites/113963-3.html>. Accessed on 14 June 2010.

¹² The governance scores ranges from -2.5 to +2.5, with higher values corresponding to better governance. Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay and Massimo Mastruzzi, 'Governance Matters VIII: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators, 1996-2008', 29 June 2009, http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/sc_chart.asp#. Accessed 15 June 2010.

¹³ Duncan Mackay, 'Run held to protest against Delhi Commonwealth Games delays', *InsideTheGames.com* (6 December 2009), www.insidethegames.biz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8332:run-held-to-protest-against-delhi-commonwealth-games-delays&catid=75:new-delhi-2010-news&Itemid=94. Accessed 15 June 2010.

¹⁴ 'Delay in 2010 CWG Projects Will Lead to Corruption', *Outlook India* (28 May 2009), <http://news.outlookindia.com/item.aspx?660539>. Accessed 15 June 2010.

¹⁵ 'Allegations Surround New Delhi Commonwealth Games and Labor Law Violations', *GovMonitor.com* (4 March 2010), www.thegovmonitor.com/world_news/middle_east_and_africa/allegations-surround-new-delhi-commonwealth-games-and-labor-law-violations-25323.html. Accessed 14 June 2010.

police of ignoring cases of construction-site accidents.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has accused the Union Power Ministry and the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) – which is to provide additional power to the capital for the games – of corruption.¹⁷ Since then DVC engineers have admitted that the power company, which was to provide 2,500 megawatts of power to Delhi, will not be able to provide even ‘a single megawatt (of power) for the Commonwealth Games’.¹⁸

In India, matters are complicated by overlapping jurisdictions in certain matters. According to the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the centre and the state have separate jurisdiction over some items and joint jurisdiction over others. For example, items on the ‘Union list’, like foreign policy, defence policy, banking and currency are under the sole purview of the central government.¹⁹ Other items, like public health, land and certain duties, and taxes are under the ‘State list’ and are the responsibility of the respective state governments.²⁰ However, items like criminal law, social insurance and forests are on the ‘Concurrent list’ and are jointly administered by the central and state governments.²¹ This last list can lead to some time-consuming wrangling when the state and central governments are not in agreement over certain issues or policies. With regard to the CWG, matters are still more convoluted as the games are being hosted in the National Capital Region, which not only comprises Delhi, but also Noida, which is in Uttar Pradesh and Gurgaon, which is in Haryana. As a result, not only are the central and Delhi state governments involved in the policy formulation and implementation concerning the CWG, but in certain matters such as land acquisition for the Games Village in Noida, the state authorities are also involved. Tellingly, it has been noted that Delhi’s chief minister has often ‘complained’ about the lack of cooperation from agencies like the DDA and Delhi Police, both of which are under the central government’s, and not the Delhi government’s control.²² These factors are likely to have contributed to the delay in construction. Finally, accusations of environmental damage by activists also delayed land acquisition for the Games Village.²³

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Sumon K Chakrabarti, ‘Shinde under scanner, 2010 Games in darkness’, *CNN-IBN* (24 March 2010), <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/shinde-under-scanner-2010-games-in-darkness/111978-3.html>. Accessed 16 June 2010.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The Constitution of India, Seventh Schedule. Available at <http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/coiason29july08.pdf>. Accessed 17 June 2010.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² ‘Perfect coordination among all agencies for Games: Dikshit’, *Taragana.com* (29 March 2010), <http://blog.taragana.com/sports/2010/03/29/perfect-coordination-among-all-agencies-for-games-dikshit-89083/>. Accessed 17 June 2010.

²³ Avishek G Dastidar, ‘A year on, the fight to save the Yamuna continues’, *Hindustan Times* (31 July 2008), www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/newdelhi/A-year-on-the-fight-to-save-the-Yamuna-continues/Article1-327780.aspx. Accessed 17 June 2010.

Another problem that has exacerbated matters and arguably also contributed to the opportunities available for corruption is the lack of communication and cooperation amongst the various committees and agencies involved in the preparations for the games. As mentioned above, Delhi's chief minister has often found central government agencies like DDA, the police and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) uncooperative.²⁴ This plays out on a more 'micro' level as well. According to Randhir Singh, secretary-general of the IOA, the chairmen of the 23 organising committees 'hardly ever meet'.²⁵ He also said that the committees needed to be run more 'professionally'.²⁶ Moreover, various complaints about discrepancies in the work under the purview of agencies like the DDA, New Delhi Municipal Corporation, MCD and the Central Public Works Development have led to the CVC to post vigilance officials at the agencies to 'double check' procurement and other procedures.²⁷ The organising committees have also been blighted by much in-fighting and lack of cooperation. In one such incident, Goel, who claimed to have been expelled from the CWG Organising Committee, said the chairman of the committee, Suresh Kalmadi, was a 'short-tempered', 'autocratic' and 'arrogant' man, and also accused him of 'rampant corruption'.²⁸ On another occasion, a tussle between Kalmadi, who is also president of the IAO and Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, M. S. Gill over the tenure duration of sports officials, also, arguably, distracted attention and effort away from the CWG.

These delays and accusations also highlight the challenges faced by the central government in implementing policy. Given the sometimes uneasy relations India has had with China, their concurrent economic rise and the resultant competitiveness between the two, India's success in hosting the CWG is seen as a major foreign policy goal, especially in light of China's success with the Olympics. However, despite assurances (and undoubted effort) by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the second United Progressive Alliance (UPA-II) government,²⁹ clearly,

²⁴ 'Perfect coordination among all agencies for Games: Dikshit'.

²⁵ 'Olympic official calls for revamp of Delhi Games committee', *Reuters* (15 September 2009), <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-42471320090915>. Accessed 17 June 2010.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ 'India: Commonwealth Games Projects Under Anti-Corruption Scanner', *Brunei FM* (23 February 2010), <http://news.brunel.fm/2010/02/23/india-commonwealth-games-projects-under-anti-corruption-scanner/>. Accessed 19 June 2010.

²⁸ 'CGW 2010 chief Kalmadi accused of corruption', *RediffSports.com* (8 December 2009), <http://sports.rediff.com/report/2009/dec/08/commonwealth-games-chief-kalmadi-corruption.htm>. Accessed 20 June 2010; and 'BJP's Goel expelled from CWG team', *India Today* (8 December 2009), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/specials/cwg/Story/74044/Sports/Goel+expelled+from+CWG+organising+committee.html>. Accessed 20 June 2010.

²⁹ In November 2009, the UPA-II government doubled its budget for the CWG to ensure the completion of all venues and related infrastructure on time and on 1 June 2010, the UPA-II report card, 'released' by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, said the preparations for the CWG were at an 'advanced stage'. See, 'Commonwealth Games budget more than double to Rs.1,620 crore', *Thaindian News* (5 November 2009), www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/commonwealth-games-budget-more-than-doubled-to-rs1620-crore-third-lead_100270476.html. Accessed 22 June 2010; and 'Preparations for Commonwealth Games on track', *Thaindian News* (2 June 2010), www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/preparations-for-commonwealth-games-on-track_100373492.html. Accessed 22 June 2010.

major projects are still behind time. According to a Hindustan Times report, with around a 100 days left to the start of the games, there are some areas of concern remain, including insufficient rooms to house the visitors expected for the games; the completion of roads, flyovers and bridges; and the completion of the parking facilities at the main stadium and other venues.³⁰ Only the Delhi Metro projects have been completed ahead of schedule.³¹

Certainly, the challenges to and problems of governance in India are well documented. And given that India has not hosted a major sporting event since 1982, it is not surprising that it has had some ‘teething problems’. Also, as India is a democracy with a robust press and civil society, it is not surprising that inter-agency disagreements, allegations of corruption and other problems have played out publicly in a fashion that may not be so apparent in other polities. However, in the midst of the chaos surrounding the CWG, it appears that preparations have accelerated significantly. As mentioned above, the metro projects were completed ahead of time. Also, while the main stadium is still not ready, latest reports indicate that a ‘majority of the stadia have been inaugurated’ and the new Terminal 3 at the Indira Gandhi Airport is expected to be ready by 3 July 2010.³² Indeed, in early January 2010 there had been fears that the revamped Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium – which is also a venue for the CWG – would not be ready for the Hockey World Cup held in February 2010.³³ Despite these fears, the stadium was reopened, refurbishments completed, just later that month.³⁴ Hence, it would appear that the authorities in India have a steep learning curve. Moreover, with all eyes on India, the central government certainly has sufficient motivation to ensure the realisation of all projects in time for the Games. While it remains to be seen whether it will achieve this goal, the preparations (or lack thereof) for the CWG highlight the systemic challenges India faces in terms of policy implementation. The overlap in authority, the lack of communication and coordination between agencies and the opportunities for corruption, and the subsequent squandering of funds and incompetence are problems all major projects in India are afflicted with. However, given the Indian government’s seeming ability to finish projects in the nick of time, it would be too soon to assume failure just yet. In addition, it is only after the conclusion of the CWG that the qualitative differences between the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 CWG can be evaluated. Nonetheless,

³⁰ ‘100 days left, Delhi gets its act together for Commonwealth Games’, *Hindustan Times* (23 June 2010), www.hindustantimes.com/100-days-left-Delhi-gets-its-act-together-for-Commonwealth-Games/Article1-561999.aspx. Accessed 24 June 2010.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ ‘Event to test facilities before Hockey World Cup scrapped’, *Taragana.com* (4 January 2010), <http://blog.taragana.com/sports/2010/01/04/event-to-test-facilities-before-hockey-world-cup-scrapped-62195/>. Accessed 25 June 2010.

³⁴ ‘Revamped Dhyan Chand Stadium to open’, *Times of India* (23 January 2010), <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/sports/events-tournaments/commonwealth-games/Revamped-Dhyan-Chand-Stadium-to-open/articleshow/5493024.cms>. Accessed 26 June 2010.

should the government complete all projects and successfully host the CWG; it would be safe to say that India, like China, will have effectively announced its arrival on the world stage.

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