



**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL  
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**  
A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

# RSIS COMMENTARIES

RSIS Commentaries are intended to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy relevant background and analysis of contemporary developments. The views of the authors are their own and do not represent the official position of the S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced electronically or in print with prior permission from RSIS. Due recognition must be given to the author or authors and RSIS. Please email: [RSISPublication@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:RSISPublication@ntu.edu.sg) or call 6790 6982 to speak to the Editor RSIS Commentaries, Yang Razali Kassim.

No. 126/2010 dated 1 October 2010

## **The Commonwealth Games 2010: Dent to India's Image**

By Akanksha Mehta and Arabinda Acharya

### **Synopsis**

*Despite a long lead-time, India's preparations for the Commonwealth Games 2010 have met with pitfalls. This has undermined India's opportunities to host global events and affected its international image..*

### **Commentary**

TO THE pleasant surprise of many in India in 2003, New Delhi defeated the Canadian city of Hamilton by 46 votes to 22 to host of 19<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Games. Starting this weekend from Oct 3 until 14 October, the Games bring together over 30 sporting events, approximately 5,000 athletes from the 54-member Commonwealth of Britain and the 14 British overseas territories. An organising committee was named and the official budget of the Games was estimated to be US\$2.5 billion.

### **Controversies Galore**

Six years later, in September 2009, Commonwealth Games Federation chief Mike Fennel announced that the Games were at a serious risk of falling behind schedule; construction work on 13 out of 19 venues was far from complete. He also stressed that India needed to ensure high levels of security for the event. On September 19, 2010, a fortnight before the Games, unknown gunmen opened fire on a tourist bus outside the Jama Masjid in Delhi resulting in injuries to two foreign nationals. The incident put a question mark on the security ahead of the Games, raising concerns about safety of the athletes. Fresh in the minds of many was the March 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan Cricket Team in Lahore, Pakistan.

Additionally, delegations from several countries such as New Zealand, Canada, and Scotland, deemed the conditions in the Games Village as "filthy and unlivable". Safety of the Games' infrastructure was also questioned with the collapse of a footbridge near the main venue and the ceiling at the weightlifting venue. As New Delhi grapples with heavy monsoon and a dengue outbreak, such incidents have exposed the poor state of preparedness for the Games, leading to some countries calling for a boycott. A few athletes have already announced their withdrawal from the event.

### **What India has Done**

India's preparations for the Games were twofold: Firstly, facilities for the sporting events and athletes were created, including upgrading existing stadiums and constructing new ones as well as a Games Village.

Renovation and construction works were carried out within a “green” framework as India had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Environment Programme asserting its intent to host “sustainable games”. For instance, effective water management systems (including rainwater harvesting systems) as well as solar energy-based lighting systems have been installed at new facilities such as the Thyagaraj Sports Complex.

Secondly, to prepare New Delhi for such a large-scale event, steps were taken to improve transportation and other infrastructure of the city. The construction of the Delhi Metro, the upgrading of the Indira Gandhi International Airport, and the construction of several roads and flyovers are some examples.

Importantly, intelligence and security measures have been implemented to safeguard the event. CCTV cameras have been installed at all venues and over 100,000 security personnel, including those from Delhi police and the elite NSG Commandos have been deployed for the security of the Games. Army personnel have been placed on standby, and Air Force and helicopters as well as chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) teams of the Army are also being deployed.

### **What India Should Have Done**

In preparation for the Beijing Olympics 2008, China finished the construction of all 31 venues well ahead of schedule. Not only did this allow for effective lockdowns and security drills, it also led to international media coverage of the venues well ahead of the event, thereby increasing the influx of tourists into the city. To prepare for enhanced security, China organised the Conference on International Security Cooperation for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games in September 2007. The International Olympics Committee (IOC), the International Criminal Police Organisation (ICPO), and contingents from all participating countries discussed and formulated security strategies for the event. Different agencies and institutes also invited scores of consultants to understand the complex dynamics involving security, infrastructure, and mega-event management.

Not only did this lead to a more comprehensive security and event management strategy, it more importantly also allowed all stakeholders and participants to be a part of the planning process -- easing their concerns about security and infrastructure safety. Additionally, in efforts to “dress up Beijing like a bride” before the Olympics, China launched elaborate anti-littering and anti-spitting campaigns and even addressed issues linked to safety and hygiene of street food in tourist areas.

When India competed to host the Games there was an underlying expectation that international standards in sporting facilities and living conditions would be met. This is not only for the comfort of the visitors and smooth conduct of the Games, but also to showcase the prowess of a developing country rising rapidly both in terms of economic growth and democratic values. However, despite resources and a long lead time, infrastructural problems plagued preparations for the Games.

This is not due to corruption alone -- as has often been pointed out. India’s poor preparations are also the result of a deeply-rooted lack of professionalism and work ethic, a culture of inefficiency, and an attitude of indifference, among others. This is evident from the “blame game” among members of the organising committee and the political leadership as well as from irresponsible comments on “different standards of hygiene and living”, among others.

### **Security Not the Only Issue**

Usually, security issues would not deter a state from participating in the Games, as that would imply succumbing to the threats from terrorism. A number of countries, including Singapore, have made this abundantly clear. But it is difficult to compromise on concerns about safety and quality of the infrastructure, living conditions for athletes and health hazards. Unfortunately, this was lost on the people organising the Games.

After high-level interventions, the conditions appear to be improving and India may still be able to pull through the Games without any significant mishap. But the damage has already been done. An inept Games organising committee and an indifferent political leadership have failed the state and its people and severely dented India’s international reputation. This has undermined India’s opportunities to host global events and affected its international image.

*Arabinda Acharya is a Research Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, where Akanksha Mehta is an Associate Research Fellow. Both are Indian nationals.*