

WINTER IS HERE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC BOYCOTT OF BEIJING WINTER OLYMPICS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

On the eve of the opening of the Winter Olympics in Beijing on Friday, [India announced a diplomatic boycott of the games](#). The MEA said no Indian official will be present at the opening or closing ceremonies of the games, which run from February 4 to 20. The decision for an official boycott of the games — a lone Indian athlete who qualified, skier Arif Khan, will still take part in both the games and in the opening ceremony along with support staff — followed [China's move this week to choose a PLA commander as one of the participants of the traditional torch relay](#). The commander was involved in [the June 15, 2020 clash in Galwan Valley](#). He was subsequently given military honours by Beijing. The MEA said the commander's participation in the torch relay was "regrettable". Until this week, New Delhi was considering having its top diplomat in Beijing attend the games. Only in November, India joined Russia in expressing support for the games, following a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, India and China. If India, dealing with its own long list of problems with China and a continuing stand-off along the Line of Actual Control, had initially planned to not involve itself in the politics surrounding the games, Beijing's torch relay changed that calculus. The broader context of the selection of the PLA commander is an on-going campaign by China to publicise Galwan and highlight the "bravery" of PLA troops.

India's statement of support for the games in November had come amid the U.S. and its allies announcing a diplomatic boycott because of rights violations in Xinjiang, where minority Uighurs have been sent to "reeducation" camps. China first denied the existence of the camps, but later said they were for "vocational training". China denounced the diplomatic boycott by around a dozen countries — which India has now joined albeit for different reasons — as "politicising" the games. It is another matter that Olympic Games, through history, have been inherently political events. For host nations, holding a successful games carries the promise of burnishing the legitimacy of the government of the day. The games within China have certainly taken on particular political significance domestically, in the context of the country's battle against COVID-19. Last month, President Xi Jinping noted that the 2022 Olympics would be "the first international multi-sport event to be held as scheduled since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic". The underlying message is that the successful holding of the games amid the pandemic is another example of the superiority of the Chinese political model, which has been highlighted as a sharp contrast especially with how the U.S. handled the pandemic. Last year, the IOA added the word "together" to the official Olympic motto of "faster, higher, stronger". If that is certainly a laudable aspiration, it is clear that as far as the Olympics are concerned, the politics is never far away. That will certainly be the case in Beijing as the latest games, both on and off the ski slopes, begin.

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