

PLAYTIME: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE 36TH NATIONAL GAMES

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Human resources, Youth, Sports and related issues

In an initiative to use the power of sports to reach out to people of a poll-bound State, the Gujarat government volunteered to host the [36th National Games](#) across six cities — Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Vadodara, Surat, Bhavnagar and Rajkot — in a short time. The fact that other States took years to prepare and the Goa edition was cancelled after several postponements revealed the enormous challenge that Gujarat had to deal with in organising this large-scale event. Odisha had set a new benchmark by organising the 2017 Asian Athletics Championships in three months and Gujarat equalled the feat by staging a multi-sport event in a similar time frame. With the same party — the Bharatiya Janata Party — ruling in the State and the Centre, the cooperation was smooth in the run-up to the event, which was last held in Kerala seven years ago. The Narendra Modi Stadium — the biggest cricket venue seating over a lakh — staged the Games' spectacular opening ceremony at Ahmedabad. A show of light and sound, it showcased Gujarat's rich cultural heritage and blended with it the country's technological advancement. It was reflected in the use of eye-catching augmented reality technology by Doordarshan during the live coverage of the inaugural extravaganza.

For the Games, involving 8,000-plus athletes from 36 teams in 35 sporting categories, Gujarat used its existing infrastructure instead of building new venues that often turn out to be white elephants. It converted some international standard expo centres into indoor sports facilities. Instead of building a Games Village, it used hotels to provide accommodation to the athletes and ensured business to the State's hotel industry. The Games, which began as the Indian Olympic Games in Lahore in 1924 before being rechristened as the National Games after Independence, stays relevant in its 98th year by providing young athletes an opportunity to get a feel of a multi-discipline Games and compete with world-class athletes such as Mirabai Chanu, Shiva Thapa and Avinash Sable before they step on to the international platform. For Gujarat, organising the Games was in sync with the State's ambition to host the Olympics in future. The efforts to set up the Swarnim Gujarat Sports University in Vadodara, encouraging the use of technology in sports and promoting skill development through sports are steps in this direction. Inaugurating the 2022 Gujarat edition, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared his Government's intention to use the soft power of sports for the country's overall development while for the athletes, the National Games offers a stepping stone to greater progress.

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