

Olympian Heights India must be wary of the complexities of hosting the Olympiad

From time immemorial, the Olympics has been used as a soft power medium. Governments worldwide have bet on the sporting, economic and socio-cultural impact the games can leave, as well as on the political legitimacy the hosting of the event can bring. Post World War Europe, post-apartheid South Africa and Brazil of the 2010s are vivid examples. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) session in Mumbai that India "would leave no stone unturned" in its efforts to organise the 2036 edition of the quadrennial extravaganza is to be seen in this light.

That India has also expressed an interest in the Youth Olympics as a precursor is a clear signal that it wants to shed the reticence that came with the unsavoury happenings at the scam ridden and ineptly handled 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games. Though the ratification of the host city for 2036 will take time — Brisbane was selected for the 2032 edition only in July 2021, and there will be other claimants, the move lays bare India's global ambitions.

The tag of an Olympic host can give it a vantage position in a shifting world order. Sporting wise, it is clear that India wants to benefit from the strong tailwind produced by the stellar 107-medal show at the recently concluded Asian Games. Ever since Abhinav Bindra won the nation's first ever individual Olympic gold at Beijing 2008, there has been a steady uptick in performances at multi-disciplinary competitions. There is even a firm belief that India will win double-digit medals at Paris 2024.

While such confidence is not entirely misplaced, conducting a mega event such as the Olympics presents a humongous challenge. Costs are often prohibitive, as seen from the fierce public outcry during both Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020. In the case of Tokyo, the financial burden was said to have ballooned to \$15.4 billion, more than double the initial estimate. Recently, the Australian state of Victoria pulled out of hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games because of mounting expenditure and the Canadian province of Alberta withdrew a bid for the 2030 edition.