

# Misbegotten Games: Can India Overcome Its PR Mess?

by COREY FLINTOFF



Manpreet Romana/AFP/Getty Images

A handler leads a langur monkey at the Commonwealth Games site in New Delhi on Tuesday. The big monkeys have been deployed to keep the local wild monkeys from attacking spectators at the international sporting event.

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In India, the news media and opposition politicians are calling it a debacle. One prominent newspaper headlined that the upcoming Commonwealth Games were "India's shame."

Athletes from more than 70 nations are arriving in New Delhi for the start of the games on Sunday, and Indian officials are still scrambling to make sure the venues will be ready.

But some teams had said they were reconsidering whether to participate, fearful of dangers ranging from mosquito-borne dengue fever to poisonous snakes.

The games are the equivalent of the Olympics for nations that make up the Commonwealth, an association of countries formerly part of the British Empire. India is spending an estimated \$6 billion on the games in an effort to showcase its growing economic power and capacity, as China did during the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

But preparations for the games have been beset by delays, shoddy construction, corruption charges and security concerns. A partially built pedestrian bridge collapsed. The village built to house the athletes was unfinished long past the completion deadline, and visitors complained of flooded basements and overflowing toilets.

## Monkey Patrols

Because of fears that spectators would be attacked by the wild macaque monkeys that roam New Delhi,

officials brought in specially trained langurs — a monkey species that reportedly does not attack humans but is very effective at driving off other monkeys.

Indian television showed animal handlers patrolling with the long-tailed langurs on leashes outside the athletes' village

Analysts say the problems with the games are representative of much wider issues that India faces in its struggle to grow into a world economic power. It also presents a powerful contrast with the growth of China, an authoritarian government versus India's rambunctious democracy.

Eswar Prasad, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, says the Indian government has two major areas of concern in putting on the games.

"One is the domestic perception that the government is spending more on activities that favor the economic elite, rather than improving life for the common man," Prasad says.

### **A Test For Investors**

The other challenge is the perception of foreign investors, who may see the games as a measure of the Indian government's capacity to handle large-scale projects.

Prasad, who teaches economics at Cornell University, says China managed to blunt domestic criticism of the spending on the Beijing Olympics by casting the effort as a source of national pride that would demonstrate China's growing importance on the world stage.

Oded Shenkar, who teaches global business management at Ohio State University, says many foreign investors point to the 2008 Olympics as a sign that "China can get things done."

"The signal from India is much different," Shenkar says.

Part of the reason, Shenkar says, is that China is a dictatorship, "a regime that isn't very sensitive to the individual citizen," and the government can carry out many projects by decree.

Indian bureaucracy is another matter. In 2009, the World Bank ranked India 122nd out of 181 countries in terms of "ease of doing business."



Prasad says the problems with the Commonwealth Games are an example of "the dichotomy between India's very efficient and vibrant private sector versus an inept and corrupt government structure."

### **\$80 For What?!**

Indian media accounts of the preparation for the games have noted that lack of coordination and turf battles among various groups of officials contributed

**China can get things done. ... The signal from India is much different.**

***- Oded Shenkar on the contrast between the 2008 Beijing Games and India's Commonwealth Games set to begin Sunday***



Indian soldiers on Tuesday rebuild a pedestrian bridge that collapsed near the main stadium at the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi. The soldiers were called in amid fears the venues wouldn't be ready on time.

committee paid \$80 a roll for toilet paper.

Opposition political parties criticized the ruling Congress Party and its coalition partners for paying too little attention to the project as costs soared and crucial deadlines were missed.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh took personal charge of the games after the most serious problems became public about a month ago.

Even if the government manages to successfully bring off the games, it faces a far bigger challenge to keep developing at its current rate.

A recent report from the McKinsey Global Institute predicted that the country will need about \$1.2 trillion worth of capital investment to meet the demands of its growing urban population in the coming years.

India will have to build the equivalent of a new Chicago each year, to meet its needs for commercial and residential space by 2030, the report says.

After India won its bid for the Commonwealth Games, the prime minister said often that the games would highlight the country's growing economic strength and influence in the international community.

They could also help determine whether India can attract the foreign investment it needs to keep growing.

to the problems.

Sadanand Dhume, a columnist with *The Wall Street Journal*, told NPR's Steve Inskeep that allegations of corruption and price-gouging have been rampant — typified by the claim that the games' organizing

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@ Indian commenters complaining about the article: the article is saying simply that the photos, collapsing bridge, etc. made India look bad, not whether that perception is justified. Do you disagree that there were some serious issues with corruption and incompetence? The title wording is poorly chosen, it is true, but that hardly affects the message of the article.

Friday, October 01, 2010 5:35:20 PM

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What were they expecting? The country is a mess. It isn't P.C. to point it out because it offends the Indians. Well that's the truth. India is full of dirty cities, they don't properly look after the place. It's their own fault.

Friday, October 01, 2010 4:43:57 PM

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