

2010 Games budget now stands at Rs.230 bn: study

The 2010 Commonwealth Games will cost the government exchequer around Rs.230 billion (\$5.70 billion) as against the initial estimate of Rs.17.72 billion, according to an independent study released Monday.

'In 2002, the Indian bid for the CWG was \$422 million (Rs.1,772 crores),' said the study report, 'How much does national prestige cost?', compiled by Hazards Centre and released here.

'However, since then the costs have escalated many times over. Even if one were to add up all the expenses that have been made public so far, the total amount comes to about Rs 23,000 crores,' said the city-based professional support group and resource centre.

The report provides a detailed break-up under separate heads, estimating the total Games budget as of now at Rs.228.87 billion.

Speaking at a press conference held to release the report, senior journalist Praful Bidwai said the Games would only widen the rich-poor divide in the capital.

'The Games are aimed at making the poor and the underprivileged in this city even more marginalized while allowing predatory capitalists - particularly real estate players - prevail over the city,' he said.

Stating that the Games are part of a design to necessitate major investment in the infrastructure, well-known architect and urban designer K.T. Ravindran said: 'The way they are implementing the projects for the Games, it will cause serious environmental and infrastructural damage to the city instead of improving these. This apart, there will be serious demographic imbalances.'

According to the report, thousands of small industrial units have been closed down as have shops and neighbourhood stores in view of the Games.

'The cycle rickshaw has been restricted; street vending has been zoned out; and hundreds and thousands of slum dwellers are being uprooted and pushed to the periphery of the city,' it stated.

According to Ravindran, thousands of labourers will have to be brought from outside the city and no one could know for sure whether they would get basic amenities during their stay here.

'We know how labourers after the 1982 Asian Games (in Delhi) settled in huge slums across the city,' he said.

'These labourers are usually brought in through middlemen and the main contractor or the government agency concerned does not know where they would be brought from. Will the government provide decent living conditions for the families of these workers in the next two years?' he asked.

According to the report, labour protection measures are often sacrificed because of the urgency of preparing for the Games.

It stated that the event would take a heavy toll on environment too.

'Apart from pollution, the biggest damage that the Games would cause is the destruction of the Yamuna flood plain,' said Bidwai.

'When you mess around with a natural flood plain, you destroy natural irrigation systems and natural fresh water discharge capacity.

'There is no evidence that such events popularise sports in the years to follow. All infrastructure remains grossly unutilised,' he said.

According to the report, the Games would also leave the city in debt. Sydney ran up debt that would take 10 years to clear after the 2000 Olympic games. Similarly, Athens, host of the 2004 Olympiad, has a 20-year debt liability.

'Is Rs.23,000 crore for a 10-day sports festival in a country with such unemployment and other socio-economic problems justified?' asked Hazards Centre director Dunu Roy.

'Why is it that a government that won't spend Rs.25,000 crore (Rs. 250 billion) on the NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) or allocate even two percent of the budget for health is going ahead with the Games?', he asked, adding that as many as eight Right to Information applications by Hazards Centre in connection with the Games have not been replied to.

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