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India wants to be a great power. So why are its Commonwealth Games such a mess?

By Jason Overdorf
Sunday, October 3, 2010

NEW DELHI -- The Commonwealth Games, which begin here Sunday, were supposed to showcase New Delhi's emergence as a world-class city and India's ascent to major-power status. In a sort of Olympics-lite for the erstwhile British Empire, thousands of elite athletes from 71 nations and territories are to compete in everything from boxing to [lawn bowling](#). But in the days before the opening ceremony, the world was instead treated to a farce of failure and recrimination.

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Local hospitals, reeling from an epidemic of dengue fever, reported four patients to a bed. The road I take every morning to go jogging in a local park disintegrated into a minefield of craters under the monsoon rains. For the media tour last month, the competition venues looked impressive enough -- although showpiece Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium was still under construction. But that was the least of New Delhi's problems.

International sports officials touring the athletes' housing at the Games Village found [rooms littered with construction debris](#) and walls stained red with betel-leaf-colored spit. Monkeys and stray dogs ran amok, and an underpaid, overworked laborer had acrobatically left his own special signature -- a coil of excrement in one of the sinks. Instead of a celebration of Delhi on a global stage, the run-up to the games was [a series of humiliations](#).

It was also an ice-water wakeup. India's huge population and rapidly growing economy have long drawn parallels to China's, and India's debut on the international athletic stage naturally prompted comparisons with the dazzling [Beijing Olympics of 2008](#). But India, it turns out, is no China.

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"The lesson that we have to learn is that we have to improve our implementation," said Himanshu Jha of National Social Watch, an organization that monitors government

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