

Odisha: A Guiding Light for Sports Tourism and Paradiplomacy

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Hosting the FIH Hockey Men's World Cup 2023, Odisha is the first state in India to host the event for the second time in a row. This is an important feat and highlights the fact that Odisha – along with Punjab – has emerged as a key nursery for Indian hockey. Odisha's focus on sports, especially hockey, also shows that every state should create its own template for economic prosperity and give a boost to tourism. Its success in hockey, where all stakeholders have worked in harmony, is important not just from the dimension of sports but also economy and para-diplomacy. Other states should seek to emulate its success!

For a long time, the study/research of participation by state governments in India's ties with the rest of the world – or what has been dubbed as 'para-diplomacy and constituent diplomacy' – has been focused on efforts of state governments towards drawing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) or the role of state governments in the context of ties between India and its neighbours.

Of late, there has been one more important dimension to para-diplomacy in India – India's state governments becoming key stakeholders in hosting international events. The latest illustration of this point is India's Presidency of G20, where meetings pertaining to G20 are being held in different cities (200 events are being held in 50 cities). These events will give an opportunity to different states to highlight their cultural strengths to the outside world – which could help them emerge in the future as important tourist

destinations. This is important since India is seeking to benefit from its Chairmanship of the G20 and declaring 2023 as a 'Visit India' year. Apart from this, infrastructure in these cities is also likely to be spruced up because of these events, and they will also get an important platform to highlight economic opportunities. State governments are working closely with the central government in the context of these events.

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The Eastern Indian state of Odisha, which is rich in natural resources, and has been seeking to reach out to the outside world – especially South-East Asia – with an eye on strengthening economic linkages has been trying to emerge as an important sporting centre in recent years. Odisha is hosting the FIH Hockey Men's World Cup 2023 (January 13, 2023- January 29, 2023). Odisha is the first state in India to host the event a second time in a row (the Eastern Indian state had also hosted the Hockey Men's world cup in 2018). Hockey world cup events are being held at Kalinga Stadium (Bhubaneswar) and Birsa Munda International Hockey Stadium (Rourkela)

This is an important feat and highlights the fact that Odisha – along with Punjab – has emerged as a key nursery for Indian hockey largely due to the efforts of Odisha CM, Naveen Patnaik (though the efforts of previous governments, as well as the impact of certain central government initiatives also needs to be recognized). It would be important to point out that Odisha became the first state government to sponsor the Indian national hockey team in 2018. Since 2018 it has hosted a number of other important events related to hockey such as; FIH Men's Series Final 2019, Olympic Hockey Qualifiers 2019, and Men's Junior World Cup Bhubaneswar 2021.

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After winning the bronze medal in the 2021 commonwealth games, India's Hockey Captain Manpreet Singh said: *"This dream won't be possible without the encouragement & vision of Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha Shri Naveen Patnaik ji, who has been supporting us throughout this journey – thank you so much, sir, from the team and I,"*

┆ Apart from youngsters getting motivated towards the sport of hockey, there is also scope for entrepreneurs to contribute towards Odisha's sports sector.

Hosting the Men's Hockey World Cup 2023 will not just give a further boost to the sport, spruce up infrastructure – including that related to sports – but also enhance the international image of the state, and help in giving a boost to the economy. Apart from youngsters getting motivated towards the sport of hockey, there is also scope for entrepreneurs to contribute towards Odisha's sports sector. In January 2020, SPORT IT 2020, dubbed as India's first sports and innovation festival, was organised in Odisha. This event was organised by Xavier Emlyon Business School (XEBS) and Odisha's government's sports and youth services department. The Odisha CM while speaking at the event sought the partnership of entrepreneurs and greater sporting innovation.

Said Patnaik: “*With SPORT IT 2020, we want to create an inclusive platform that would not only celebrate sports innovation and entrepreneurship but also involve sportspersons, start-ups, high-performance centres and students in a significant way*”.

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By hosting the hockey world cup and focusing on becoming an important international sporting destination, Odisha has come up with a new dimension for becoming assertive in foreign policy and highlighted a new dimension of what is referred to as para-diplomacy. In other countries such as China, the US, and Australia, sports have been used as an important tool of foreign policy not just by federal governments but also been an important tool of para-diplomacy. In recent years, Odisha has also been focusing on attracting international tourists, to visit historic sites as well as eco retreats (although, there has been a slump in the number of tourists visiting the state post-pandemic).

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If Odisha focuses on sports and is able to create a world-class sporting infrastructure capable of hosting more sporting events it could help in promoting ‘Sports Tourism’ in the state. This will benefit its economy. It is also important that significant sporting events are being hosted outside tier-1 cities.

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Odisha’s focus on sports, especially hockey, also shows that every state should create its own template for economic prosperity and give a boost to tourism. While a lot of the focus is often on drawing investment in FDI, state governments should aspire to promote tourism based on their strengths – this includes medical tourism and sports tourism. Odisha’s focus on sports tourism and greater investment by entrepreneurs into the sports sector also provides cues for states like Punjab which have immense sporting talent and a diaspora willing to invest back in the state to strengthen the sports sector. Odisha’s success in hockey, where all stakeholders have worked in harmony, is important not just from the dimension of sports but also economy and para-diplomacy. Other states should seek to emulate its success!

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