

complexes across the world, including the UK's Wembley Stadium, Tokyo Dome of Japan and Amsterdam Arena in the Netherlands.

"The flexibility in space utilisation will optimise the usage of the non-sporting area for a host of cultural and social activities," adds Sheth. He has acquired the exclusive licences for the patented 'T-Box' technology, which allows for modular and retractable seating systems for the first time in the country, as also the 'StadiArena' technology, which allows stand and seating convertibility, thus optimising space utilisation from a meagre 2 per cent to 70 per cent per annum. "These technologies are cost-effective and allow modularity and multiuse, which in turn catalyse revenues.

Sporting culture

With a robust urban renewal and city centre model, the business concept and plan will make TransStadia the most sought after venue for sports, entertainment, leisure and wellness events for all," says Sheth. He has placed his bet on this first public-private partnership (PPP) that entails an investment of ₹36 crore, which is in line with the government's idea of propelling India to a multi-sports culture, creating a sports infrastructure and ecosystem, where young talent can grow and develop. India's first PPP model urban sports infrastructure project, built on a design-build-finance-operate-transfer (DBFOT) model with a debt-equity ratio of 2:1 expects to break even in six-seven years. "It is a cash flow business and not a valuation game," says Sheth. He has consciously sidestepped cricket in his venture, owing to the politics and bureaucracy involved in the game.

Close on the heels of the opening of this project, last month, the Niti Aayog Bill is also in favour of encouraging development of sports infrastructure through private or PPP mode. For addressing the issue of deficit of sports infrastructure in the country, the ministry for youth & sports affairs had moved a proposal to include sports in the harmonised master list of infrastructure sub-sectors. This would mean that the sports



Sheth: breeding a sport culture

sector would be eligible for obtaining long-term financial support from banks and other financial institutions on the same principle as other infrastructure projects. This has been announced after a series of meetings in the ministry of finance and discussions with different agencies, including RBI.

The plan includes the provision of sports stadia and infrastructure for academies for training/research in sports and sports-related activities. "This inclusion would encourage private investment in a public good, which has socio-economic externalities in a country with a young population. It will also bolster investment in the sports infrastructure sector, which will contribute to the economy and help in promotion of health and fitness of the people of this country, as also provide opportunities for employment in the new and exciting sectors. Investment of the private sector will also widen the platform from where the country can become a sporting power in the future," states the Niti Aayog Bill.

"This is a great step that can promote private sector investment in sports infrastructure," explains Saumil Majmudar, founder, EduSports. "While access to capital is one of the key challenges to the creation of sports infrastructure, we also need availability of real estate in/

near residential areas at reasonable rental costs and an efficient public transport system to make any sports infrastructure project viable. Those two concerns (of real-estate costs and public transport) still remain but this is a great step in the right direction. For promoting a sporting culture, we need more neighbourhood playgrounds and sports venues. Not large stadiums," Majmudar adds.

"Over the past few years, the sports ecosystem in India has witnessed an exponential growth," claims Jitendra Joshi, co-founder & director, SportzConsult, Mumbai. "This initiative by the government will help entrepreneurs to create sports infrastructure-led business models and will definitely give a further fillip to sports in India. Today, the sporting experience for a participant (at the amateur level) or a spectator (of elite sport) is poor, largely due to lack of quality sports infrastructure/facilities". Joshi feels the government needs to ensure that funds are accessible to all the three levels of sports infrastructure development: at the grassroots level, where schools (and the neighborhood) have basic sports infrastructure; at the competition level, where amateurs and semi-professionals can compete in district level leagues and tournaments; and, at the elite level, where world class sporting facilities exist for both athletes and spectators.

And, with the sports industry in India booming, there is an opportunity to create numerous jobs. In most developed countries, sports contribute 2-4 per cent of total employment whereas in India, its contribution to the total employment is just .05 per cent, said a report by Ernst & Young in 2010.

Hailing the recent move by the government to include sports in the harmonised master list of infrastructure, Sheth estimates that sports infrastructure in India is a \$10 billion opportunity. He has already earmarked three cities - Bengaluru, Jaipur and Amravati, the new capital of Andhra Pradesh - for setting up projects *a la* Ahmedabad.

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