

AN ANACHRONISM: ON THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES

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With less than three years to go, the decision of the Government of Victoria, [Australia, to withdraw from the hosting of the 2026 Commonwealth Games \(CWG\)](#) has come as a mighty blow to the sporting movement. After Birmingham replaced Durban for the 2022 edition, this is the second consecutive occasion when the original host city is unable to host the games due to financial issues. Victoria, which had uniquely proposed to organise the games over a region, had initially estimated a budget of AUS\$2.6 billion, but its Premier, Daniel Andrews, said the costs could go beyond AUS\$6 billion, which to him is too much for a 12-day sporting event. Without federal funding and with Victoria struggling due to its increasing debts, he said he could not take money out of hospitals and schools in order to fund the event. Even though the development has come as a huge embarrassment for Australia, which has hosted five CWG editions (including 2018 Gold Coast), Prime Minister Anthony Albanese looked forward to hosting the women's football World Cup and 2032 Brisbane Olympics, which would run on a different revenue model over a longer period of time. Still, the country may have to deal with credibility issues in the run-up to Brisbane 2032. According to the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), which was given only an eight hours notice, the decision to add more sports and changed plans for venues added considerable expenses.

Commonwealth Games Australia chief executive Craig Phillips said that the costs overrun was a gross exaggeration while Victoria's Leader of Opposition John Pesutto termed the cancellation 'a massive humiliation'. The development has put a question mark over the future of big-ticket multi-sport events because of the staggering financial burden involved with the hosting. While the hosts have been looking at ways of controlling cost escalation, the rising expenses have made the conduct of such games virtually a privilege for bigger economies. That only five countries have staged 18 out of 22 editions of the CWG, which began as the British Empire Games (1930), and no African nation has ever hosted the Olympics, point to this. The uncertainty surrounding the CWG will disappoint the Indian sportspersons, who have done well in these games, including in 2010 when Delhi hosted it. Thousands of athletes from 72 Commonwealth nations and territories will hope that the CGF succeeds in the onerous task of finding an alternative host. But questions will continue to be asked on the need for what many might consider an anachronistic event, a coming together of nations on the basis of shared colonial history, and not geography.

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