**Sports opportunities**

On **Aug 3, 2022**

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Like so many public sector challenges, sports in Pakistan have seen a steady decline; there could be a hundred and one reasons for that; however, declining health and sports environment is one major factor which has adversely affected the growth of sports in Pakistan. In the heydays of sports in the seventies and eighties, Pakistan ruled the world of sports in hockey, squash, snooker, boxing, wrestling, kabaddi, cricket and even some track and field areas of athletics. Gradually, and due to a lack of focus, Pakistan lost her place in the world of sports and barring cricket, sports culture has tremendously declined. Since its inception, Pakistan’s place in the sports arena was supported by the public sector and its enterprises like PIA, Railways, Defence Services, Police, Customs, banks, concerned ministries and occasional participation of corporate or private sector. As per Wikipedia, the Pakistan Sports Board was created in 1962 by the Ministry of Education as a corporate body to promote and develop uniform standards of competition in sports in Pakistan comparable to the standards prevailing internationally, and to regulate and control sports in Pakistan on a national basis. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, now has control over the Pakistan Sports Board. The PSB controls all 39 sporting federations. The Pakistan Sports Board is supported by the Pakistan Sports Trust, which assists hard-up players and associations so they can continue participating in sports.
Despite a good start, even the Pakistan Sports Board and its subsidiaries have not been able to harness the total potential of sports in Pakistan. Overall, Pakistan sports have declined over a period of the last three decades, Pakistan’s position in hockey and squash which was the envy of its time declined to an extent that Pakistan struggles to qualify for major championships. There are a few examples of individuals and entities, who through their sheer hard work have achieved some laurels at the international level, one example is Arshad Nadeem, who has shown his talent in javelin throw and displayed his prowess to compete in international events. Today, Pakistan, a nation of almost 230 million people, with a youth bulge accounting for almost 63 percent of the population is left far behind comparatively smaller countries. Despite the availability of modern technology for training in sports and the implosion of sports and fitness culture across the world, somehow Pakistani hierarchy has been found wanting in developing sports and fitness culture and creating a sports-friendly environment. Economic challenges, lack of jobs and growing political instability has created a sense of deprivation and despondency in the masses. Glancing at neighbouring countries, even within the SAARC region, one finds growth in sports and fitness culture. For example, corporate India has led the idea of developing sports at the national and international levels.
In the last 20 years, India has grown in several sports that include cricket, football, hockey, wrestling, badminton, kabaddi, shooting, archery, field and track and even squash. Demographically, Pakistan with a 230 million population and more than 60 percent youth has enormous potential to perform well in sports at the National and international levels. An important factor, which has adversely affected the sports environment in Pakistan is the War on Terror in the last two decades, it adversely affected the arrival of international sports teams in Pakistan as Pakistan was unable to host any major international sports event. Adding to security environment challenges is the lack of motivation to develop sports arenas of international standards by private enterprises.
So what are the options available to kick start and re-invigorate sports culture in Pakistan? One option is for the government to take a comprehensive stock of this challenge and create state-of-the-art sports facilities, not only in big cities but also in suburbs and rural areas to place Pakistan back on the global scene. Another option is the incorporation of corporate Pakistan into the sports arena, this could take the form of initiatives by corporate conglomerates and businessmen who could create sports cities which are then sponsored by the state. There is a need to make it compulsory for the private sector and real estate developers to add a state-of-the-art sports arena to their housing projects. This would create a healthy environment so that Pakistani people can not only live in healthy cities but also participate in sports activities, paving the way for the grooming of sportsmen and sportswomen at the national and international levels.
The big question is what can the government of Pakistan as well as provincial governments do to support initiatives? There is a need for recognition of projects and bringing public sector enterprises into it. The government can also help in the development of a communication network to link these projects with large cities.