

The Indian Express, Page no. 08, Date: 03.02.2025

and drinking in the wine and dine facility means paying for the premium service”.

### Figures speak

Data shared by the Prohibition & Excise (P&E) Department with *The Indian Express* showed that the number of active drinking licences till December 31, 2024 was 61,260, of which the health permits were 45,187 and the excise revenue earned in the financial year 2023-24, (till December) stood at Rs 142.06 crore.

As of now, 77 hotels and independent units are permitted to legally sell liquor from shops in their premises to the permit holders. According to the data, the annual health permits comprise over 70% of all active permits issued.

Non-health permits issued to non-Gujarat residents and foreigners have remained more or less consistent, barring the pandemic years (2020 and 2021). In 2024, 3,661 temporary permits were issued to those with residential permits, including foreigners, 4,569 seven-day permits were issued to visitors and 7,843 permits valid for one month were issued to foreign tourists. “Non-health permits increased from August 2022 onwards. There was no regulatory or policy change from the state, nor was there any disruption in issuance of non-health permits, except during Covid-19,” a Prohibition Department official told *The Indian Express*.

Gujarat has been a dry state since it separated from the Bombay Province in 1960. Residents and visitors need permits – health (for reasons ranging from ‘stress’ to heart ailments) and non-health (temporarily issued to non-Gujarat residents and foreigners to promote business and tourism) – to purchase foreign liquor from licensed vendors across Gujarat.

Ahmedabad-based hotelier Narendra Somani, who is also the President of Hotel and Restaurant Association, Gujarat sees the relaxation in GIFT City as a “gimmick” and argues how the price of liquor in Gujarat is a deterrent to drinking. “The VAT (Value Added Tax) on Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL) in Gujarat is 65% which is very high compared to other states, and the excise duty is also almost double”.

A bottle that costs Rs 2,500 in other states, costs Rs 7,500 in Gujarat as VAT in other states range between 5% and 15%, Somani said. (With inputs from Sohini Ghosh)

LEENA MISRA

AHMEDABAD, FEBRUARY 2

THE BJP government is having its fan moment. Attention may have moved on from Coldplay’s “record-breaking” Gujarat concerts to the other big gathering of the week, in Kumbh, but party leaders have not stopped talking about the rock band – specifically role of Narendra Modi Stadium in making its tour a success.

Coldplay’s post proclaiming Ahmedabad as their “biggest ever” concert has been the icing on the cake.

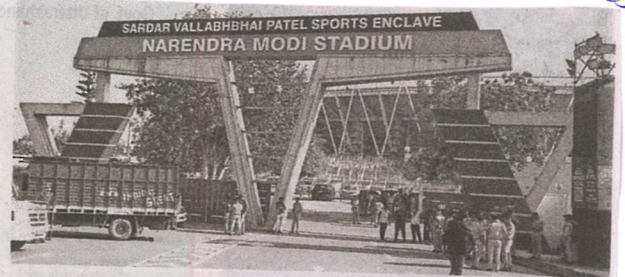
The stadium with 1.3 lakh capacity, owned by the Gujarat Cricket Association, has always been celebrated by the BJP government in the state and at the Centre as “the biggest in the world”. Two days after Coldplay wrapped up its Ahmedabad shows, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after whom the stadium is named, cited their success as an example of the potential of a “concert economy”, which could help “boost tourism and create jobs”. Modi was speaking at the inauguration of the Utkarsh Odisha Business Conclave.

Gujarat Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi shared that the stadium was filled to the gills over the two days of the Coldplay shows, on January 25 and 26. Of the total 2.5 lakh who attended, he noted, 1.70 lakh were from outside the state.

To others in the Gujarat government and BJP, the Coldplay success has boosted Ahmedabad’s bid to host the Olympics circa 2036. The Gujarat BJP posted as much on social media, promoting the show with the tagline ‘Ahmedabad Gearing up for Olympics 2036’.

Union Minister for Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw supplemented these voices, posting on X that the concerts “showcased India’s capability to host world-class events”.

Gujarat Metro Rail Corporation put out a statement saying that many more people took the Metro for the concerts than had done for cricket matches. For example, it said, its previous ridership high was 1.65 lakh people on the day it ran 439 trips for the IPL match in May last year. While it ran fewer trips, 406, for the concert, the corporation said, at least 2.13 lakh people rode the Metro. Western Railway posted on X that “17,000 fans had travelled on the 13 special trains run from



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Delhi and Mumbai to Ahmedabad for the concerts. Commandos of the National Security Guard were part of the 4,000-strong force deployed for security.

Before it was christened the Narendra Modi Stadium, the Motera venue had held its first big event when Modi hosted US President Donald Trump during his visit to India in February 2020. An estimated 1.25 lakh people had attended that event.

The Coldplay shows followed in the wake of two other big concerts held in Ahmedabad recently – by Diljit Dosanjh on November 17 last year and Arijit Singh on January 12 on the GIFT City grounds in Gandhinagar. They showcased Gujarat’s infrastructural prowess as much as the construction cranes at work which formed their backdrop.

A top government official said: “Today, if people Google ‘Ahmedabad’, the search will throw up all these events and the praise that (Coldplay lead singer) Chris Martin showered (on the show)... They will get to know (about Gujarat) for themselves.”

The official said unlike other big cities, Ahmedabad was “safe”, and that young girls and boys dressed in their best could be confident about “freely walking the streets without the fear of being harassed”. Apprehensions about safety are one of the prime considerations for concert organisers.

BJP Rajya Sabha MP Narhari Amin said that the smooth conduct of an event of this scale is “a very big thing”, and pointed to the facilities at the stadium – such as multiple entry and exit points – making it an apt venue.

Amin, who was once in the Congress, added that the Modi government began planning for “an event of the scale of the Olympics” a while back. “He had introduced Khel Mahakumbh when he was the Gujarat Chief

Minister. Even Amitbhai (Union Home Minister Amit Shah) encouraged building of sports infrastructure in Naranpura and several places in his constituency.”

An official from a sports body said: “Infrastructure wise, we are far ahead. We have 12 years to go (for the Olympics), and hosting it will not be a problem at all.”

Meanwhile, other events are coming Gujarat’s way. Earlier, CM Bhupendra Patel met President of the Commonwealth Games Federation, Chris Jenkins, to discuss preparations for hosting global events like Commonwealth Weightlifting Championships in 2025, the Under-20 Athletics Championships in 2028, and the World Police and Fire Games in 2029. Gujarat Congress chief and Rajya Sabha MP Shaktisinh Gohil questioned the BJP’s “hype” over the Coldplay concerts, saying: “Look at the plight of the diamond industry, the farmers, who are not getting the right prices (for their produce)... What is the BJP doing for them?”

Referring to the stampede at Prayagraj, Gohil said: “Instead of taking credit for someone else’s (Coldplay’s) success, they should have taken care of the common people at the Kumbh... They took care of only the VIPs.”

Gujarat Congress spokesperson Manish Doshi called the BJP’s statements a “diversionary tactic” from “the real issues of unemployment, price rise, education, health and so on”.

“While we welcome encouragement of culture and sports, the BJP has scrapped the posts of music teachers in schools and posts of physical education instructors in schools remain vacant. Building one playground per taluka would benefit the citizens much more than building and celebrating such large stadiums. These only give political mileage to the BJP,” Doshi said.