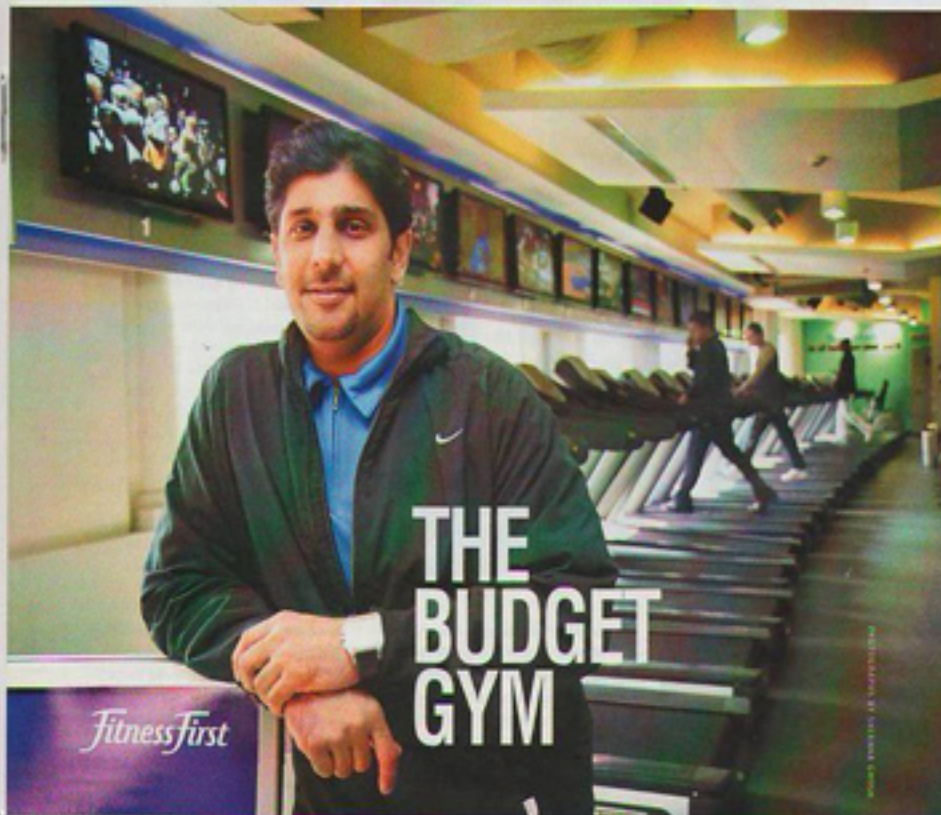


Health

Maintaining the Temple

● DELHI'S NEW GYM ● PRABHDEV SINGH ON GOLF



Fitness First

THE BUDGET GYM

Built for a staggering \$4 million, the latest Fitness First club in Delhi is offering health solutions for Rs 99 a day. Is this the shape of things to come? ANUMEHA CHATURVEDI

Occupying around 24,000 square feet of Delhi's buzzing Connaught Place, the new Fitness First outlet is being touted as India's largest health club.

Bigger even than their branch in Gurgaon, a vast expanse of gleaming metal and blinking lights. "Oh, you've seen the Gurgaon one!" says Vikram Bhatia, Managing Director of Fitness

First. Tall, strapping and casually dressed, Bhatia is taking me on a comprehensive tour of the premises. "The look and feel is the same, but what sets this club apart from its Gurgaon counterpart is

Health FITNESS



Bhatia is bullish—if the takers don't exist yet, he'll create them. "I am not here because of the demand," he says. "Rather, I am here to create it. We have around 2,000 members in our Gurgaon outlet and about 40 per cent had never exercised before!"

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Having worked in the fitness industry for a good 18 years, Bhatia ought to know what works and what doesn't. After graduating in Economics from St. Stephen's College, he worked as a fitness consultant and set up concept fitness facilities for Reebok and five-star hotels across India. He also ran his own gym and happens to be both a Spin Cycling Instructor and a professional trainer from the International Sports Science Association of America. Does he still find time to practice what he preaches?

"I do a lot of cross-training about 3-4 times a week," he says. "I was a tennis player in school and still like a good game of squash or tennis on the weekends." And he's not alone. His entire team has the training bug. "We have a rigorous training regimen called 'operation shape-up', that all employees go through. I consider spending money on your health and overall well being the biggest investment." ■

Fitness First
N-Block, Outer Circle, Connaught Place
Contact: 011-43669900
Membership Fee: Rs 2,500-3,500
depending on duration of membership

its sheer size."

He has a point. The features are all the same—the treadmills and steppers, the exercise studios with the spring board flooring—but the scale is something else. The Gurgaon branch is spread across two floors, and consists of a staggering \$4 million investment.

It sounds like an immense number. Usually, things that cost a bomb aren't necessarily the most affordable. But the way Bhatia sees it, Fitness First is attempting to be more mass market than exclusive. "We're a poor man's golf club minus the golf," he says. "Our fee is Rs 99 a day, the same as a budget meal at McDonald's!"

It's interesting that Bhatia should

mention McDonald's, the pinnacle of mass market success. But while McDonald's is hardly haute cuisine, Fitness First has the best workout equipment, a highly qualified staff, special beverage counters, group exercise studios—everything you'd expect in an exclusive gym. For all the services provided, it does sound like a neat deal.

But physical fitness is still a nascent business in India, hardly a staple industry, and India remains the diabetes capital of the world, after all. So, how does he justify investing a staggering Rs 200 crore over the next three years in a country like India? Are we ready for a fitness revolution yet? Where are the takers? Bhatia is bullish—if the takers don't exist yet,