

Greetings from Special Olympics Bharat

### India welcomes the SO Bharat Athletes back from the Berlin Games 2023



The Berlin experience holds dear in the hearts of 193 Athletes and Unified Partners and 57 Coaches who represented India at the Special Olympics World Summer Games held in Berlin Germany from 17-25 June 2023. The World Games witnessed an overall presence of 6,500 athletes, 18,000 volunteers from 126 countries, 9,000 family members, 1,800 media and more than 330,000 visitors.

In a grand welcome ceremony at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi on Tuesday, the Indian contingent was honoured on stage for finishing their campaign with 202

medals (76 gold, 75 silver and 51 bronze). The event took place in the presence of Chief Guest Hon'ble 14th President of India, Shri Ramnath Kovind Ji and Guest of Honours Hon'ble Minister of Ports, Waterways & Shipping and Minister of AYUSH Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, Hon'ble Members of Parliament Shri Manoj Tiwari and Shri Gautam Gambhir, and Leader of Opposition, Legislative Assembly, Delhi Shri Ramvir Singh Bidhuri.

Motivating the Athletes, Shri Kovind said that the World Games is a platform to showcase talents and sheer determination. He expressed pride at the achievements of the Athletes, encouraging them to dream big, to keep their targets high and to never forget the unimaginable power of within

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Member of Parliament and former Indian cricketer **Shri Gautam Gambhir** said, "I want to congratulate all the medallists and the athletes who did not 'win', as they represented a population of 140 crore people. In sports, we always talk about statistics and numbers. But as a sports person, I know how much effort and dedication is needed to represent a country"

### Determination and Skill of the Athletes hailed by the States



The Athletes received a hero's welcome on reaching back their hometowns as everyone had a story of grit and determination to tell. The welcoming of Athletes and Coaches by the states carried different hues of joy and celebration.

The Odisha Governor, Prof Ganeshi Lal and sports minister Shri Tusharkanti Behera, felicitated all the Athletes for their performance. The Chief Minister of the state awarded cash prizes to the Medallists. The Chief Minister of Goa Dr Pramod Sawant, honoured the Athletes of Goa and announced cash awards for them. He was accompanied with the Social Welfare Minister, Shri Subhash Phal Desai, who had travelled to Germany to witness the games. The General Manager of Novotel Hyderabad, felicitated the Swimming Medallist Siddhanth Murali Kumar with a special hamper and a cash prize.

In Uttar Pradesh, Shri Anil Chaudhary, Principal Assistant Directorate of Sports Lucknow UP welcomed the Athletes at the station, having travelled approx. 150 kms to Itawah, where the Athletes belong. The welcome ceremony in Punjab was held at the Railway Station too, in Ludhiana, followed by honouring the Athletes at Hotel Taksonz. West Bengal welcomed their Athletes at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport. The ceremonies go on as the local and state authorities, and several other stakeholders choose to honour and celebrate diverse abilities demonstrated by their Athletes who have made them proud.



## *India's Berlin Story*

### **Warm Hospitality by Frankfurt, the Host Town for India**

The Scandic Hotel at Frankfurt welcomed Team India sparking the Host Town Program with much warmth and joy. The DALs (Delegation Assistant Liaison) embraced the Athletes and Coaches who glowed with hope and determination.



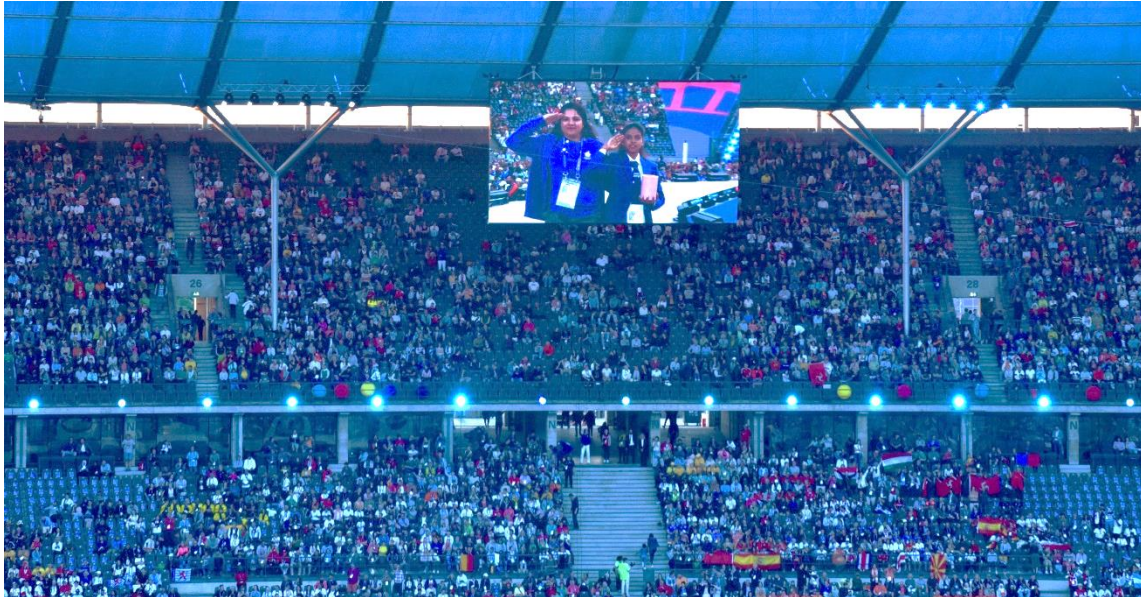
While the daily fitness regime & sports practises kept the Athletes focussed on their respective sports, the Torch Run, City Hall gathering, Museum visit, Tuesday Night Skating and the farewell dinner delightfully added a cultural memory that would last forever. Gathering at the Hafenpark brings back memories of the delicious ice cream and the Themed Stilt Walkers amusing the Athletes, Coaches, and officials alike. After covering about 2-2.5 km, the Torch run concluded with a ceremony held at the Kaisersaal, Frankfurter Römer. The official welcome of the Indian team was extended by the lord Mayor Mr Mike Josef, Ms Sylvia Ruppel President SO Hessen and Dr Amit Telang, Consul General, Republic of India.

The Roller-Skating Athletes from India were overjoyed to join the Tuesday Night skaters in the sports city of Frankfurt. The experience took them through 5kms of the 30-35 km stretch covered by the regular skaters, supported by an impressive infrastructure besides the emergency services, including the traffic signals designed specifically for the purpose. Ffor the Roller-Skaters who won the maximum medals at the World Games, the experience of skating through the city of Frankfurt would certainly match up, if not get higher, to the achievement on the victory stand. The farewell dinner became a celebration of gathering invaluable experiences along with a hope of successfully achieving the purpose of travelling to Germany.

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## The Opening Ceremony and the River of Unity

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The Opening Ceremony of the World Games was held at the iconic Olympiastadion Berlin — a stage that has hosted the 2006 FIFA World Cup final and currently serves as the home of Hertha Berlin SC. Over 50,000 visitors witnessed the ceremony that marked the beginning of World's Largest Sporting and Humanitarian Event in 2023. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Chairman Special Olympics Timothy Shriver were among the key attendees for an opening ceremony that featured local

and international musical talent and a brilliant choreography display.

India's delegation was led by roller skater Aryan Nagalli, one of the most promising athletes, for the World Games 2023. As a child, Nagalli was denied a chance to participate in a roller-skating competition due to his being a special needs athlete. It was a rejection that spurred his parents to establish a roller-skating academy that caters to over 70 skaters. Alongwith Nagalli, three more athletes from three different parts of the country led the line for the Indian contingent — handball player Ankush Kumar, from Delhi, athlete Geetanjali Nagvelar from Goa and cyclist Kalpana Jena from Odisha.

One of the highlights of the Opening Ceremony was the Parade of Athletes, which weaved its way through the Marathon Gate into the stadium. Each delegation was asked to bring water from their home country. Like Kalpana Jena, Cyclist from Odisha India, one member from each delegation then broke away from their team to pour this water into a watercourse, forming an Olympic River, standing as a symbol for the unity of all of those participating at the Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023.

### **Lawn Tennis**



The entry of SO Bharat into the discipline began during the pandemic that locked people in their homes with little hope. In retrospect, when the virtual world had no alternative back then, a new path was taking shape marking the entry of SO Bharat into Lawn Tennis. In 2020, a tennis training Webinar opened a new chapter, training Coaches from 22 States of India and was led by Ms. Teresa Leitao, Director Sports & Unified Sports Special Olympics Brazil.

With the aim of participating in the sport at the Berlin Games 2023 athletes were trained. Four Athletes represented India in Lawn Tennis in Berlin, winning three medals (1 Silver and 2 Bronze)

### **Unified Beach Volley Ball**



A team of Beach Volleyball was a new entry for India as well. The team intriguingly demonstrated the essence of Inclusive sports. The partners overwhelmingly continued to motivate and cheer the Athletes in the playing area as well as outside. The motivation, determination, skill- monitoring, strength, and the nail-biting moments, swirling within the Athletes, Unified Partners and the Coaches won a Bronze for team India in their final clash with Costa Rica (F01)

With the rules being like those of regular Volleyball, the difference in the surface impacts performance. Safira Steffi D' Costa, the Coach of the team, having played Volleyball herself, several months preceding the World Games, played on the beach to experience the difference. She often visited the beach to witness mainstream National level matches to observe the players and the Coach. Over the traditional cousin, beach volleyball requires a higher strength and stamina, according to Safira. She recalled the inspiring spirit of her team when they continued to play despite rainfall, as also when they

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kept motivating each other after losing 3 matches. She delightfully shared that the playful, free & joyful ambience, generally, on the beach impacts the Athletes mentally. She added, “We need to increase opportunities of providing the athletes to play on a beach. However much they play Volleyball, the change of the surface comes with its own elements that require special focus”

### The beginning of the Medal rush



The delightful clatter of the medals began on 19 June 2023 with T Vishal winning four silver in powerlifting. The 16-year old from Puducherry, won a silver in the Men’s squat (122.50kg), deadlift (155 kg), bench press (85 kg) and the combined, to put India on the board at the Special Olympics World Games in Berlin. Encouraged by his parents to participate in extracurriculars and sports, Vishal only really took to sport when watching the Paralympics Games. Immediately he asked his parents to find him a coach who could teach him the techniques and the essentials of the sport. Almost obsessed with it, he

even scoured the Internet to find videos that would help him get better — to the point where his parents even wondered if this had become a dangerous obsession.

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India registered their first gold medal with Geetanjali Nagvekar winning gold in the 800m Level C. She ran nearly eight seconds ahead of her competitor to put India on the board early that morning. Indian athletes were in action in handball, badminton, powerlifting, swimming and roller skating, the same day. Dinesh Shanmugam, swimmer, brought home a silver in the Male 50m breaststroke, Level A, while Madhav confirmed the 5th Gold medal in the 25M Breaststroke.

Neel Yadav from Haryana, won his first medal, a bronze in the 5km road race coming at the end of a period where most of his peers had missed out on a medal by close margins. His win reinvigorated the team that followed with two Gold, including himself and two silver at 2KM Time Trials. The Cycling took place against one of the most pleasing backdrops across the city, located next to the Brandenburg gate that wears a halo of history - not just for Berlin and Germany but for Europe as a whole. The Medal rush sprung all the Athletes into furious action that unfolded throughout, with each challenging their limits



## The Special Olympics Healthy Athletes Screenings

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes®, supported by Golizano Foundation, is the world's largest program that provides free health screenings, education, and training to improve the care and wellbeing of individuals with intellectual disabilities. At the World Games, Special Olympics offered health screenings to all the participants in seven disciplines, namely, Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes (vision/eye health), Healthy Hearing (audiology), Special Smiles (dentistry) Health Promotion (prevention and nutrition) Strong Minds (emotional health) FUN fitness(physical therapy) Fit Feet (podiatry). Nearly all teams from India were screened as well





### Inclusion and Education



The first ever **Global Leadership Coalition for Inclusion**, held on the side-lines of the World Summer Games, brought together the international community to collectively address this critical issue of building a more inclusive and equitable society, partnering with Special Olympics. This initiative of Special Olympics Inc has a long-term goal of ensuring that we build an education system that champions Inclusion promoted by the highest levels in the government.

Two Athlete leaders (leaders with Intellectual Disabilities) from India participated at the Global Athlete Congress actively participating in discussions and making presentations for Athlete leaders, officials & representatives of several national programs. The **Global Youth Leadership Congress** too had two teams from India participating, with each team consisting of a Youth with and without Intellectual Disability and an adult mentor. over 150 people with and without intellectual disabilities came together between 16 and 20 June at the first ever Youth Leadership Summit, planned and lead by a Global Youth Council. The two teams have returned from the Summit, having shared their experience, and learnt valuable lessons, and now ready to incorporate those in their respective plans.

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We are grateful to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modiji for his wishes and compliments to the Athletes of Special Olympics Bharat



**Narendra Modi** ✓  
@narendramodi

Congratulations to our incredible athletes who represented India at the Special Olympics Summer Games in Berlin and won 202 medals including 76 Gold Medals. In their success, we celebrate the spirit of inclusivity and applaud the perseverance of these remarkable athletes.

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