

Greetings from Special Olympics Bharat

## The first Disability Sports Stadium in the country opens in Gwalior Madhya Pradesh



2<sup>nd</sup> October 2023 documented a landmark victory for Gwalior, a historically renowned city located in Madhya Pradesh. The hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modiji inaugurated the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Training Centre for Disability Sports . He was joined by Dr Virender Kumar, Hon'ble Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment. Approx 70 SO Bharat Athletes were part of over 130 Athletes with disabilities, who were from Paralympics and Deaflympics etc as well. The Special Olympics Athletes enlivened the stadium playing, Bocce, 5-a-side football, Badminton, Table Tennis and, Swimming. The stadium would provide sporting facilities for seven sports to begin with, including Athletics and Judo to the mentioned sports. The Social Justice Minister announced support for sports participation of 208 Athletes with Disabilities all-round the year. 10-12 Coaches will be appointed by the Government who will be assisted by approx. 6-7 Special Olympics Coaches. A coaches training by Special Olympics will be conducted for the Govt appointed Coaches in due course.



Speaking on the occasion Mr Dipankar Banerjee, Area Director of SO Bharat – Madhya Pradesh said, “I am grateful for the support extended by our hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Modiji towards sports for Divyangjan (persons with disabilities). The inauguration marks a significant step towards providing sports as a tool for development and Inclusion. In conjunction with the

mission of Special Olympics we will be able to provide ‘year – round’ sports training through world class facilities”. He continued to discuss his plans of gradually training & inducting Athlete leaders as assistant coaches. The team of Madhya Pradesh continues to be engaged in suitable discussions with relevant stakeholders to incorporate aspects, that would specifically smoothen the experience for persons with intellectual disabilities, making the stadium all-inclusive and totally barrier-free

## National Sports Day celebrated at the Scottish High International School Gurugram

A group of staff volunteers from Macquarie Group engaged with the Athletes of Haryana, many of whom had recently represented India at the Berlin World Games held in June 2023 on the National Sports Day on 29 August. *India commemorates the birth anniversary of hockey legend Major Dhyan Chand Singh this day every year.*



The sports celebration unfolded at the Scottish High International School, Gurugram where the Macquarie team received a warm welcome followed by an introduction to Intellectual Disabilities by the Chairman of the school, Dr (Cmdr) Katikay Saini. The session took them through a video presentation of 'Unified Sports' with its essence and power to touch lives. Badminton and Table Tennis were played and were the prime objective of the event. After playing, the team spent quality time in open interactions and exploring potential future engagements with the officials from Scottish High International, Cmdr Saini and Ms Ekta Jha and with the representatives of Special Olympics Bharat, Mr Virender Kumar, Mr Siddhant Nath and Ms Kalash Kaushal.

Expressing his experiences with SO Bharat, Mr Shashank Gupta from Macquarie said, " I admire the energy and enthusiasm of the athletes. Their love for life & sports & zeal to learn is truly commendable. Every time I have met the athletes, I have learnt the true meaning of this quote or rather I should say that have witnessed this quote coming to life: *Never say never, because limits, like fears, are often just an illusion – Michael Jordan.* Associating with SO Bharat, is creating more awareness on Intellectual Disabilities within our organisation. It is helping us understand what role we can play in creating an inclusive environment. The impact goes beyond professional lives, as having more awareness helps in creating a much better and empathetic socio-economic environment.

## Bhibha Rani, Youth leader from Odisha, scales Mount Kilimanjaro



On 20 September 2023 at 8:30AM, Bhibha Rani scaled the Uhuru peak (5895Mtrs) of Mount Kilimanjaro the highest mountain of Africa. Swelling with pride, she unfurled the flag of India and a banner that highlighted organisations that made this feat possible for her. She was seen displaying several messages of saving the environment from atop the peak. The Hon'ble Union Education Minister Mr Dharmendra Pradhan wished her luck before she embarked the courageous journey. On her return, he congratulated her saying, " she is a true embodiment of the strength and unyielding spirit of women". He further blessed her with conquering the highest peaks of success and the power to shatter stereotypes". Bibha also met His excellency Shri Ganesh Lal on her return.

Bhibha Rani, is a youth leader (without Intellectual Disabilities) from Odisha who had participated at the Global youth summit held alongside the 2019 Special Olympics World Summer games in Abu Dhabi. She has been a proactive youth leader who with her athlete pair, Indramani, reached out to the local communities and the neglected terrain in the state, spreading the Special Olympics movement there. As in the other endeavours, this too, had Mr Prakash Rath, Area Director SO Bharat Odisha and Ms Arpita Mohapatra, national trainer, supporting her all the way.

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## Selection trials held at the National Coaching Camp in Haryana



45 participants including 13 Athletes, 9 Unified Partners & 11 Coaches participated in the selection trials held for the SOAP South Asia Unified Football Competition to be held in Dhaka Bangladesh from 1-5 December 2023. The Coaching Camp was held from 23-26 September 2023 at the Manav Rachna University, Faridabad Haryana. The participation was from Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Jharkhand, West Bengal. The camp also upheld the SO Bharat partnership with the Manav Rachna University that once again made its world-class facilities available for a fruitful sports experience. Two more national coaching camps will be held before a final team is announced. They will be held in Gujarat and in West Bengal.

Finally, two teams, a male and a female, will represent SO Bharat in the 7 a-side competition following the round robin league format at the international event in December 2023

## Delhi opens its first Special Olympics Bharat Sports Centre at Maitreyi College



In conjunction with the Special Olympics strategy the Sports centres which are opening all over India, promise a more sports-infused future for the Athletes, strengthening local programming.

Recently, Maitreyi College signed a Memorandum of Understanding with SO Bharat for running a Sports centre, in Delhi. Supported by Kangaro, the stationary manufacturers from Ludhiana, Punjab, Maitreyi College is Delhi's first Sports Center.

The Sports Centre that will be the 21st in India, is geared to conduct Basketball, Football & Volleyball along with fitness sessions. More sports will be added in due course. An SO Bharat Coach will be-in-charge of the facility that would make sports accessible to approx. 350 Athletes residing within a 5-7 km radius. The Coach will be assisted by Ms Suman, an Athlete who has represented India at the Special Olympics World Winter Games held in South Korea in 2013. The two would be joined by the Coaches of the College as well. Two-hour sessions each in the mornings and evenings, will be conducted five days in a week, at the College. The state plans to open a sports centre in each of its 11 districts by the end of the year 2023, creating a network of sports spaces accessible to Athletes with Intellectual Disabilities and multiplying opportunities of playing and interacting with the surrounding communities.

In the words of Prof. Haritma Chopra, Principal of the College, "The national education policy envisages academic institutions to be the ambassador of an inclusive society, where every individual gets an opportunity to be self-reliant and lead a respectable life"

Expressing gratitude to the College, Dr Mallika Nadda said, "The National Health Fest for Divyangjan, held in April 2022 initiated the concept of Sports Centers and marks a step closer to our target of 750 pan-India." Since September 2022, 21 Sports Centers have opened, spanning 7 States with the inclusion of Delhi. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Leh (Ladakh) and Tripura are the other states that have Sports Centres running regularly through the support of NHPC.

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## Annual general meeting & Elections



Special Olympics Bharat (SO Bharat) held the quadrennial (once in four years) elections of the office bearers & members of the Executive Committee at the Annual General Meeting held on 26 September 2023 at Hotel The Lalit, New Delhi. The electoral college included the elected members of the state committees who underwent a similar process in their respective states. Each state which had conducted elections recommended two delegates to form the electoral college.

Dr Mallika Nadda was elected as the President, Ms Chitra Shah & Mr Pawan Kumar Patodia, the Vice Presidents, Dr DG Chaudhari, the General Secretary and Ms Upasna Arora, treasurer of SO Bharat. Aaynu Sharma, Badminton player (Abu Dhabi Games 2019), Anurag Prasad and Shivani, powerlifter, and cyclist (respectively) from the Berlin games 2023 are the athletes who have joined the office bearers of the executive committee. Several new and distinguished individuals have joined the movement committing to expand the reach of the program taking it forward on the path of sustained quality growth, as envisioned by Air Marshal Denzil Keelor PVSM, KrC, AVSM, VrC, the founder of the movement in India

The Sports Code, or National Sports Development Code of India, was introduced in 2011 by the Central government, which wanted good governance practices in the management of sports federations at the national level without interfering in the autonomy of the national sports bodies. The Sports code keeps national federations accountable and sets a standard for the smooth functioning of all such organizations. It has the sole aim to bring transparency and accountability to the functioning of national sports federations

## The Roller Skater from Kerala who is making his dream come true



Abhijith, the Roller Skater from Kerala, won two gold medals at the Special Olympics world summer games held in Berlin in June 2023. On his return, he was employed by Zomato (food delivery service). Sports made Abhijith dare to dream. He wanted to earn to support his mother's cancer treatment and his married sister who is going through challenges. Sports has shown him a way to re-build himself, his life and of those around him. He had long back, stopped expecting any support from his father who is struggling to overcome alcohol dependence. Special Olympics placed him on a platform that brought him recognition. He has come a long

way from being a non-compliant student, having caused theft too and questions by the law enforcers to, a gold medalist establishing a positive identity

Abhijith did not leave any opportunity to earn; he packaged, worked as a waiter in restaurants etc. He wanted to earn enough to travel to and from the government hospital where his mother is receiving free treatment. Abhijith would practice skating, five days a week for about an hour each day under the supervision of Coach Shaji, prior to the games. According to Sister Paulsy, supervisor at HOPE, the training centre that supported him, Abhijith's balance, and body movement improved tremendously with regular practices. He is determined, has a vision, enjoys sports and is confident to compete. His participation in the world games placed him on a productive path. She is pleased to see a change in his attitude, he would earlier spend on himself and now, spends on his family. These are the little things that are now becoming a part of him.

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## A Special event to celebrate the Berlin Athletes of Delhi

The Delhi Athletes from the Berlin games were treated to a special event organised jointly by the Select CITYWALK, a popular retail and entertainment outlet, and Decathlon, a sporting goods retailer. With an aim to spread awareness and enjoy a recreational evening, the interaction was organised right in the heart of the mall on a weekend, to leverage a high footfall. Students from Apeejay Saket, one of the Unified Champion Schools in Delhi, were invited to join the Athletes in their moment of victory and joy.



Speaking at the occasion, Mr. Yogeshwar Sharma, Executive Director and CEO Select CITYWALK said, " Meeting the Champions has been an eye-opening experience for all of us at Select, and we wish to continue our collaboration with SO Bharat in the future with similar events, so that we can do our best to support the cause" A jaw-dropping performance by the Rope Skipping Federation members added thrill to the session. The event rolled out an indoor mini version of Golf and Table Tennis. Mr Sharma, the students of Apeejay Saket, and the Indira Gandhi Institute volunteers partnered with the Athletes, later playing fun challenges too.

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## **The SO Bharat leadership & officials meet their Asia Pacific counterparts to deliberate viable strategy to expand and deepen the Special Olympics experience**

The leadership and officials from Bangladesh, Indonesia and India met the President & MD and, the staff of SOAP (Special Olympics -Asia Pacific) to revisit the impact of the pandemic that continues to haunt the turn-out of the Athletes in regular sports. The urgency of continuing to deliver quality sports to the Athletes, reclaiming the lost data due to coronavirus, formed the crux of the meeting. The three programs presented their respective status. To reclaim, expand and ensure that we have good quality athlete data- emerged as the goal for all the programs, while the regional office discussed avenues where they would support to enable the programs achieve targets. The meeting was a precursor to the upcoming SOAP Regional Leadership Conference to be held in Jakarta, Indonesia.





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