

ICC Hosts Insightful Talk Show with Ex-Olympians, Discussing Road to Success and India's 2024 Paris Olympics Prospects

Kolkata, 12th July 2024: Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) organised a talk show with ex-Olympians on Friday, 12th July 2024, at ITC Royal Bengal. The event featured two panels: "The Hard Work Behind Reaching the World Stage" and "India's Perspective on the 2024 Paris Olympics." The evening was graced by eminent dignitaries, including Mr. Bisweswar Nandi, Gymnast; Mr. Gurbux Singh, Hockey Player; Mr. Rahul Banerjee, Archer; Mr. Pravin Thipsay, Grandmaster; Ms. Dola Banerjee, Archer; Ms. Dipa Karmakar, Gymnast; Mr. Joydeep Karmakar, Shooter; and Ms. Soma Biswas, Heptathlete; Mr. Anirban Aditya, Chairman of the ICC National Expert Committee on Sports and Chairman of the Aditya Group; and Mr. Boria Majumdar, who served as the moderator. The talk show provided valuable insights into the dedication required to excel at the world stage and discussed India's outlook for the upcoming 2024 Paris Olympics.

While delivering the welcome address, Anirban Aditya, Chairman of the ICC National Expert Committee on Sports and Chairman of the Aditya Group, said, "The Olympic journey is a tale of passion and perseverance. India's growth has been remarkable over the years with a legendary legacy in hockey, winning eight gold medals from 1928-1980. The 2008 Beijing Olympics marked a turning point with our first individual gold medal in shooting, inspiring a new generation of athletes. Success followed in wrestling, boxing and more. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics were notable for the gold in Javelin Throw and historic performances in various sports. With growing support for sports infrastructure and development, India is poised to reach greater heights in the coming years."

In the first panel, the following athletes offered their valuable insights to inspire the audience:

Gurbux Singh, Hockey Player, said, "From 1928 to 1956, we secured continuous gold medals. However, after losing to Pakistan and England in 1960, our team went through a transformative phase. By 1964, I believed that from 1963 to 1968, Indian hockey experienced its second golden period. During our New Zealand tour, we initially lost to them 3-1, but after I shifted to left half, we beat them 5-2, setting the tone for our success. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics was particularly memorable. With both India and Pakistan teams predominantly composed of Punjabis, the buildup was intense. Nicknamed 'Professor' by the Pakistanis due to my specs, I recall our captain Taranjit emphasizing non-violence before the final. Ultimately, our focus was solely on winning for our team and country. The feeling of playing against Pakistan for the gold medal was exhilarating and full of national pride."

Bisweswar Nandi, Gymnast, shared, "Preparing Dipa for the vault was a daunting task due to its unprecedented risk, never attempted in history by any athlete. Upon discovering the vault on YouTube, I immediately envisioned Dipa's potential with her remarkable speed. Mentally preparing myself, I embarked on training her without initially revealing the specifics. Observing her perfect synchronisation with the vault and her confidence in mastering it, I researched its success rates despite my initial apprehensions about its safety. Consulting with Chief Coach Gurdial Singh Bawa, we hesitated but ultimately believed in Dipa's capabilities. When Dipa successfully performed the vault, earning accolades from the head coach, she went on to secure bronze and gold medals, inspiring a generation with her exceptional performance at the Rio Olympics."

Rahul Banerjee, Archer, said, "For my sister and me, archery has been everything except an Olympic medal, though we achieved success in para-archery last year. This time, I'm optimistic about our high chances with Tarun, Dipika, Pravin, Dhiraj, Ankita and Bhajan in excellent form. It's heartening to see a

mixed team for two years and Dipika's return after becoming a mother is incredible. Archery is unpredictable; the world's top team can lose to rank 32 and then lose again immediately after. Consistency is key; shooting 29 out of 30 targets is the aim. Despite global parity in equipment and performance, our mental game needs improvement. With support from psychologists, I believe we can overcome this hurdle and achieve success."

Joydeep Karmakar, Shooter, said, "Despite the Indian shooting team's underperformance in Rio and Tokyo, my interest in the team remains strong. The policy where the quota belongs to the shooting team for 2.5 years, regardless of the form, is intriguing. This policy, devised by Joydeep Karmakar's National Coach, included multiple trials to prepare shooters under pressure for the Olympics. This policy has had a significantly positive impact on the team's readiness for the Olympics. The trials were designed to test and prepare the shooters effectively. While acknowledging past shortcomings, I believe our medal chances are better this year. In dynamic sports like shooting, where exertion and stamina play crucial roles, performances can vary unpredictably even among stalwarts. However, I'm optimistic about our improved performance this time around."

In the second panel, the following athletes shared their experiences and visions to enlighten the audience:

Pravin Thipsay, Grandmaster, commented on India's potential in chess, stating, "We are stronger than Russia, whether through individual efforts or collective teamwork. As a junior, winning the bronze medal in the Asian Junior Games marked a milestone as the first Indian chess player to achieve this in an Asian tournament. Vishwanathan Anand, a decade younger, became World Champion at 22, reaching the rank of World No. 5. This sparked belief that India could produce a World Champion, following Garry Kasparov's achievement in 2022. Anand's brilliance further affirmed this potential with subsequent generations surpassing the 2600 mark, starting with Suresh and Sankar in 2000. The dream of an Indian World Champion is within reach."

Soma Biswas, Heptathlete, said, "As an athlete, we take immense pride in Neeraj Chopra, the greatest Indian athlete ever. During his Olympic journey, his words 'Is baar dil se medal bolchi ekta medal pabo' ('This time, my heart says I will win a medal') resonate deeply with me. In my time, athletes aimed to become Olympians and by my second Olympics, being a finalist—ranking within the top 12—became a significant career milestone. By 2004, the focus shifted to striving for Olympic medals, a testament to our evolving aspirations. This transformation wasn't achieved overnight. Over the years, support from the Government of India and various states, along with crucial technical backing, played pivotal roles. In my era, coaches served as psychologists, mentors and everything in between. However, post-2012, athletics underwent significant systemic changes."

Dola Banerjee, Archer, said, "I began my archery journey at Baranagar Archery Club at the age of 9, starting with just watching my seniors play for a month before I got my hands on a bow and arrow. Within 6 to 7 months, I won my first medal in a state meet. In 2003, our team made history by qualifying for the Olympics, where I qualified individually and both our men's and women's teams qualified—a first for India alongside Korea and Ukraine. At the senior level, we had only 10 girls and across all segments—sub-junior, junior and senior—there were barely 400 archers in the entire country. Despite limited space, players like Deepika Kumari have made significant strides. I first competed with her at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, where she overcame doubts to win a gold medal. Today, Tarundeep Rai and Deepika Kumari are the pillars of the Indian Archery Team."

Dipa Karmakar, Gymnast, responded to criticism about women in sports, stating, "If there's a will, there's a way. A gymnast can excel in any sport because gymnastics is the mother of all sports. Initially, we lacked a roadmap to reach the Olympics through gymnastics. In 2010, Ashish Da won India's first gold medal in

the Commonwealth Games but our foreign coach then doubted Indian gymnastics was suitable for girls. We even had to schedule our practice around the men's sessions. In preparation for the 2014 Commonwealth Games, we spent a year at a training camp in Glasgow, determined to change this mindset—and we succeeded."