



# Text of PM's Speech on the occasion of the inauguration of Synthetic Track of the USHA School – via video conferencing

Posted On: 15 JUN 2017 2:06PM by PIB Chennai

Congrats to all sports lovers on the inauguration of the synthetic track in "Usha School of Athletics".

This track is an important landmark in the development of Usha School and will provide modern facilities to the trainees. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of our own Payyoli Express, 'Udan Pari' and 'Golden Girl' of India P.T. Usha ji for the development of this school.

P.T.Usha has been a shining light of sports in India.

She endured several challenges in life and went on to enter Olympics final, missing a medal only by a whisker.

In the history of Indian athletics very few have achieved a track record like hers.

Usha ji, the nation is proud of you. What is even better is that Usha ji has continued her association with sports. Her personal attention and focused approach have started bringing about good results and now her trainees like Miss Tintu Luka and Miss Jisna Mathew have already made their mark at the international level.

Like Usha ji, "USHA School" is making the best use of every opportunity by utilizing simple and limited resources.

I take this opportunity to also congratulate the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, Sports Authority of India and the CPWD for having completed this project, which suffered various hurdles resulting in delays.

But then, Better late than Never. One of the top-most priorities of our Government is speedy implementation and completion of projects in the designated time period.

In fact, the Project was sanctioned in 2011 but the work order for the synthetic track was awarded only in 2015. I have been informed that this track is full PUR track.

It has been designed so as to minimize the chances of injuries and is compatible with the international standards.

Sports is closely linked with the human resource development of a society.

I have always been of the view that in addition to keeping the body healthy, sports also transforms the personality, bringing about holistic development. It instills discipline and ethos of hard-work.

It provides learnings for life, which enrich our thought process. The sports field is a great teacher. One of the best things one learns on the sports field is equanimity – to face victory and defeat - as a part of life.

We learn to be humble in victory and at the same time, not to be bogged down by defeat. A defeat is not the end, in fact it is only the beginning to rise up again and achieve the desired results.

Sports enhance teamwork. It also brings a spirit of openness and powers us with the capability to accept others. It is essential that we adopt sports as a part of the lives of the youth in our country.

To me, sports includes the following attributes.

I will expand the word sports to share them:

**S for Skill;**

**P for Perseverance**

**O for Optimism;**

**R for Resilience;**

**T for Tenacity;**

**S for Stamina.**

Sports creates a spirit of sportsmanship, which matters both on and off the field.

That is why I often say - ***Jo Khele, Vo Khile***- those who play, shine.

In this inter-connected and inter-dependent world, a nation's soft power is vital. In addition to a nation's economic and military strength, a nation's soft power is seen as central to its identity. Sports has become an important part of soft power.

Given the global reach and fan following of various Sports and sports-persons, a country can carve its own niche in the world through sports.

Achievers in any sport are global sources of motivation. Youngsters draw inspiration from their success and struggles. During every major international competition, be it an Olympics or a world cup or any other such forum, the entire world takes joy in the achievements of other nations, however big or small they are.

This is the uniting power of sports. Sports and culture have a transformative potential in enabling stronger and deeper people to people ties. Even at home in India, a single player catches the imagination of the whole country. His or her performance acts as uniting force - every one prays for him or her when he or she is on the field.

The popularity of these athletes lives on beyond their times too. For years, sports, just like the pursuit of knowledge, is a part of Indian culture and tradition.

Sports activities like Archery, Swordsmanship, Wrestling, Malkhamb, Boat-Racing are known to have existed for ages.

In Kerala, sports such as Kuttiyumkolum, Kalari, have been popular.

I am also aware of how popular mud football is. I am sure many of you know about Sagol Kangjei, which is originally from Manipur. It is said to be older than polo and also played by a wider cross section of society.

We have to ensure our traditional games do not lose their popularity. Indigenous games too must be promoted as they have evolved organically from our own way of life.

People take to these games naturally and playing them will have huge positive impact on the personality and self-esteem of growing minds.

Their roots will become stronger. Today the world is taking renewed interest in Yoga. Yoga is being seen as a means to fitness and wellness, a means to lower stress. Our athletes should also consider making Yoga a regular part of their routine and training. The outstanding results will be for everyone to see.

Being the home of Yoga, it is our added responsibility to make Yoga even more popular across the world. And, like Yoga has become popular, we must think of ways to make our traditional sports popular globally.

In recent years, you have seen how games like Kabaddi first became a part of international competitions, and now even in the country, large scale kabaddi tournaments are being organized. Corporates are sponsoring these tournaments and I am told these tournaments are being seen widely.

Just like kabaddi, we have to bring other local indigenous sports from various corners of the country to the national level. In this, along with the government, other sports related bodies and the society also have a major role.

Ours is a country with rich and diverse culture which has almost 100 languages and more than 1600 dialects, different eating habits, dresses and festivals. Sports plays an important role in uniting us.

Continuous interaction, travel for competitions, matches, training etc gives us the opportunity to understand the culture and tradition of other regions of the country.

This strengthens the feeling of **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat** and contributes immensely to National integration.

We have no shortage of talent. But we need to provide right kind of opportunity and create an eco-system to nurture the talent. We launched a programme “**Khelo India**”. Under this programme, Competitions will be held in various disciplines from the School and college level to the National level. Focus will be on identifying talent and then nurture it by providing support.

Khelo India also supports sports infrastructure. Women in our country have made us proud by their achievements in all fields- more so in sports.

We must specially encourage our daughters and provide them with opportunities to take up sports. What is most gladdening is that in the last Paralympics our players showed their best performance ever.

Perhaps going beyond the sporting achievement, these Paralympics and the performance by our athletes have transformed our attitude towards our Divyang sisters and brothers. I shall never be able to forget what Deepa Malik, a household name in India, said when the medal was awarded to her.

She said – “**Through this medal I have actually defeated the disability itself.**”

There is great strength in this remark. We have to work continuously towards creating a mass base for sports.

During earlier decades there was an environment in which sports was not pursued as a career. Now this thinking has begun to change. Soon the results will be evident on the playground. A strong sporting culture can help the growth of a sporting economy.

Sports as a full-fledged ecosystem can contribute immensely to our economy apart from creating lots of employment opportunities. The sports industry sector provides opportunities in different segments such as professional leagues, sport equipment and surfaces, sports science, medicine, support personnel, apparels, nutrition, skill development, sports management among others.

Sports is a multi-billion dollar global industry propelled by enormous consumer demand. The global sports industry is estimated at around US dollars 600 billion. In India, the entire sports sector is estimated at US dollars 2 billion only.

However, India has huge potential in sports. India is a sports loving country. The passion with which my young friends watch the ongoing Cricket Champions Trophy is the same with which they will see the EPL football or the NBA basketball fixtures and the F1 Races.

And, as I said earlier, they are also getting drawn on to sports like Kabaddi. Our playgrounds and stadiums should be utilized to the maximum. Holidays should also be about going out and playing a sport. Grounds of schools and colleges or the stadiums with modern facilities in the district may be utilized.

Before I conclude my speech, I must appreciate the contribution made by Kerala in the field of sports and games. I congratulate each and every player who has played for India. I salute the determination of sports-persons who toil for excellence.

I also wish a bright future to USHA School and hope that the new synthetic track will facilitate them to achieve new heights. And hopefully contribute to our preparation for major international sports events, including the Tokyo Olympics in 2020.

I also urge the sports community to decide on a set of goals in sports when our nation marks 75 years of freedom in 2022 and pledge to realise them.

I am confident that Usha School will produce more champions in Track and Field events at Olympics and World events. Government of India will fully support you and will provide all possible help in achieving excellence in Athletics.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

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