English rendering of PM's speech during interaction with India’s Asian Para Games Champions

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My colleagues in the Cabinet, Shri Mansukh Mandaviya ji and Smt. Raksha Khadse ji, all representatives of the Paralympic Committee of India and the National Sports Federations, other distinguished guests, all medal-winning athletes, ladies and gentlemen.

I had been eagerly waiting to meet all of you. Just a few weeks ago, I met the athletes who participated in the Asian Games, and now I have got the opportunity to meet all of you energetic companions who participated in the Para Asian Games. Your outstanding performance shows that India is rapidly emerging as a major power in the world of sports. On such a large platform, you have not only won medals, but you have also won the hearts of crores of Indians. Once again, all of you para-athletes have demonstrated that the highest flights are achieved through determination and courage. On behalf of 140 crore countrymen, I congratulate all of you wholeheartedly.

Your families, trainers, and coaches have also played a crucial role in this achievement. I congratulate them as well. And as I have said before, the amount of effort a coach has to put in for an athlete is immense, but for a Paralympic athlete, many times more effort is required. Only then do such remarkable results emerge. Therefore, I extend special congratulations and appreciation to them.

Friends,

There was a time when India's participation in most sports was considered merely a formality. In para-sports too, the country was far behind. At the 2010 Asian Para Games, India won only one gold medal. Altogether, we managed to win just fourteen medals in that tournament. Fourteen. This time, however, our athletes have returned with one hundred and fourteen medals. Just think about this journey from fourteen to one hundred and fourteen. It is the result of the highest level of your hard work. It is the outcome of your dedication to sports and the ecosystem that has developed around it. This time, with thirty golds, thirty-five silvers, forty-nine bronzes, five new world records, and nine Asian records, you have filled the entire nation with pride. Out of fifty-six women athletes, thirty-four daughters became medal winners. And in four events, all three podium positions belonged to India. India won the gold, and in the same event, India also won the silver and

the bronze. Even on the last day of the competition, you performed wonders by winning nine gold medals. It seemed as though you had decided that as long as the Games continued, the medal-winning streak would not stop.

Friends,

This time, our athletes won gold medals in disciplines where India had never achieved such success before. Mona Agarwal created a world record in para shooting. Honey broke his own previous world record. Himanshu, Ravi, and Jehan showed the world through their performances how physical challenges can be overcome.

Friends,

Whether it is the personal achievement of an athlete or the collective success of a nation, the world sees only the shine of victory. But the years of hard work behind that moment, the sweat shed day and night, and the unwavering dedication and perseverance required to reach that point are what form the foundation on which the towering structure of success stands. For example, Rinku ji lost her mother just two months before the Asian Para Games. Even amidst such great sorrow, she maintained her courage. And when she won the gold medal, she raised her mother's photograph and dedicated that medal to her. That moment touched the hearts of all Indians.

Friends,

Your struggles and achievements are an inspiration to every Indian. And in this journey, your path and the nation’s path have been very similar. That is why today, your efforts and the efforts of the nation are combining and creating an even greater force together.

Friends,

After 2014, when the country began its journey towards bigger goals, the situation was very different. Most parents were afraid to send their children into sports and the children themselves were often hesitant. There was disorder in the system, a lack of resources, a lack of support, and a lack of transparency. People used to say that nothing could change in such a system. They had accepted it as a reality. But just as you never accepted defeat before any challenge, the country too kept its eyes fixed only on its goals. We resolved that we would not allow the talent of our youth to go to waste. Therefore, we decided to change the very system that prevented young people like you from moving forward. As a result, a new approach towards sports emerged. Today, if a young athlete has faith in his or her talent, that athlete also believes that the country stands with them. Our para-sports ecosystem itself is one of the biggest examples of this. In sports where India’s representation was once extremely limited, our presence is now growing stronger. In archery, athletics, shooting, swimming, table tennis, badminton, judo, powerlifting, and many other sports, new young athletes are emerging. We are discovering new champions. This time, sixty-one of our athletes participated in the Asian Para Games for the first time. Sixty-one completely new athletes. And among those first-time participants, thirty-six returned home with medals. Sandeep even created a world record in his debut itself. This participation of young athletes reflects the India of today and announces the India of the future.

Friends,

We do not view sports merely as a collection of national and international events. For us, sports are also a powerful medium for character-building and nation-building. It is sports that teach young people how to win after losing. Sports teach discipline and the meaning of team spirit.

Friends,

With this vision, we are building a modern sports ecosystem for the country. Campaigns are being run at schools and at the grassroots level. A large number of Khelo India Centres have been established. We also launched the TOPS Scheme so that athletes could receive Olympic-level training. Keeping the Olympics in mind, I called upon young people from the Red Fort this time to come forward through the Talent Hunt campaign.

Friends,

Para-sports are being given equal importance in all these efforts. As a result, athletes like you are emerging with excellence and bringing glory to the nation at major events. We saw this once again in the recently concluded Para Games. In this competition, athletes receiving support under TOPS won forty-one medals, while Khelo India athletes won nineteen medals. This shows that our efforts are moving in the right direction.

Friends,

Today, modern sports policies in India are creating many new opportunities for young people, even beyond the playing field. Sports infrastructure development, sports equipment production, and the sports broadcasting economy are all expanding rapidly.

Friends,

Just a few days ago, the government approved the Khelo India Sports Goods Manufacturing Scheme worth more than ₹1,800 crore. Now it is time for our sports goods manufacturing industry to achieve new milestones. When an Indian or foreign athlete steps onto a field anywhere in the world, their sports gear should also be Made in India. Their clothing and footwear should also be Made in India. We want India to produce not only world-class athletes but also world-class sports equipment. We want Indian sports products to reach markets across the world. This will strengthen India’s MSME sector and create new opportunities in small towns and rural areas.

Friends,

After today’s event, all of you will also be invited to schools, colleges, and various institutions, where young people will want to listen to you and learn from you. When you speak with them, teach them the secrets of winning on the field, but also tell them about the opportunities connected with sports beyond the field. And you should also explain to them the extensive efforts being made by the country to make life easier for our differently-abled brothers and sisters. Just a few days ago, the Cabinet took an important decision regarding pensions for persons with disabilities. We increased the pension amount. The disability benchmark that was previously 80 percent has been reduced to 40 percent. Earlier, a person had to be eighteen years old to become eligible for a pension. Now, the path for pensions has been opened even for eligible children with disabilities from birth. Similarly, significant efforts have been made to promote Indian Sign Language. A sign language dictionary containing more than ten thousand words has been developed.

School textbooks are also being made available in sign language. Through the Accessible India Campaign, public places are being made more accessible for persons with disabilities. Our effort is to ensure that every differently-abled person in the country receives both dignity and equal opportunities, and is able to move forward in life on the strength of their own abilities.

Friends,

The podium at Aichi-Nagoya is not the final destination of your journey. Keep that in mind. You should use this success as a launching pad for even bigger goals. The next target for India, and for most of you athletes, is L.A. 2028. Avani and Manish have already secured their quota places for Los Angeles. Our goal should be to ensure that as many Indian athletes as possible participate in L.A. 2028 and bring home as many medals as possible. Therefore, celebrate this moment wholeheartedly, but also begin preparing for the next challenge right away. The country stands with you, and so do I. The entire nation is waiting for your next victory. Once again, many congratulations and best wishes to all of you.

The grand festival of Diwali has already begun. This time, celebrate Diwali with great pride, enthusiasm, and splendour. But along with celebrating Diwali, also set your next goal in your mind and move forward with a new resolve. My very best wishes to all of you.

Thank you very much.

DISCLAIMER: This is the approximate translation of the Prime Minister's address. Original address was delivered in Hindi.

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