

BHAKER, GUKESH, HARMANPREET & PRAVEEN BAG MAJOR DHYAN CHAND KHEL RATNA



President Droupadi Murmu presents Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award to Olympic-medallist shooter Manu Bhaker during the National Sports and Adventure Awards 2024 at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi, on Friday



Chess world champion D Gukesh receives the award



Award presented to hockey player Harmanpreet Singh



Award conferred on Praveen Kumar in recognition of his outstanding achievements in Para-Athletics

PTI, NEW DELHI: Manu Bhaker and D Gukesh provided a sprinkling of stardust but it was India's perseverant para-athletes who walked away with the most boisterous applause when President Droupadi Murmu bestowed the National Sports Awards in a regal ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here on Friday.

Double Olympic-medallist Bhaker, 18-year-old chess world champion Gukesh, men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh and Paralympic gold-winning high jumper Praveen Kumar were presented the country's highest sporting honour -- the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna.

The 22-year-old Bhaker became independent India's first athlete to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics with her bronze-winning show in the

10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team events in August last year.

"Slow and steady wins the race, and I firmly believe that. Khel Ratna is one of the most prestigious awards in our country. I am grateful to everyone who supported me," Bhaker told PTI Videos after the ceremony.

Harmanpreet was a part of the national sides that won bronze medals in the Tokyo as well as Paris Olympics. Praveen, on the other hand, upgraded his silver at the Japanese capital to a gold in Paris. He was born with a short left leg.

The 18-year-old Gukesh was crowned the youngest ever chess world champion after he beat China's Ding Liren last month. He is only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to achieve this title.

He was also a crucial

MAJOR DHYAN CHAND KHEL RATNA AWARD: D Gukesh (Chess), Harmanpreet Singh (Hockey), Praveen Kumar (Para-Athletics), Manu Bhaker (Shooting).

ARJUNA AWARDS: Jyothi Yarraji (Athletics), Annu Rani (Athletics), Nitu (Boxing), Saweety (Boxing), Vantika Agrawal (Chess), Salima Tete (Hockey), Abhishek (Hockey), Sanjay (Hockey), Jarmanpreet Singh (Hockey), Sukhjeet Singh (Hockey), Rakesh Kumar (Para-Archery), Preeti Pal (Para-Athletics), Jeevanji Deepthi (Para-Athletics), Ajeet Singh (Para-Athletics), Sachin Sarjerao Khilari (Para-Athletics), Dharambir (Para-Athletics), Pranav Soorma

THE AWARD-WINNERS

(Para-Athletics), H Hokato Sema (Para-Athletics), Simran (Para-Athletics), Navdeep (Para-Athletics), Nitesh Kumar (Para-Badminton), Thulasimathi Murugesan (Para-Badminton), Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan (Para-Badminton), Manisha Ramadass (Para-Badminton), Kapil Parmar (Para-Judo), Mona Agarwal (Para-Shooting), Rubina Francis (Para-Shooting), Swapnil Suresh Kusale (Shooting), Sarabjot Singh (Shooting), Abhay Singh (Squash), Sajjan Prakash (Swimming), Aman (Wrestling).

ARJUNA AWARDS (LIFETIME): Sucha Singh (Athletics), Murlikanth Rajaram Petkar (Para-Swimming).

DRONACHARYA AWARD: Subhash Rana (Para-Shooting), Deepali Deshpande (Shooting), Sandeep Sangwan (Hockey), S Muralidharan (Badminton)

RASHTRIYA KHEL PROTSAHAN PURASKAR: Physical Education Foundation of India

MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD (MAKA) TROPHY FOR TOP-PERFORMING UNIVERSITY IN THE KHELO INDIA UNIVERSITY GAMES: Chandigarh University, Lovely Professional University and Guru Nanak Dev University.

factor in India winning the men's gold in the Chess Olympiad in September last.

Thirty-two athletes were honoured with the Arjuna Award out of which an un-

precedented 17 were para-athletes.

The athletes selected for the Arjuna award included Paris Olympics bronze medal-winning group of

wrestler Aman Sehrawat, shooters Swapnil Kusale and Sarabjot Singh (Bhaker's partner in the 10m air pistol mixed competition of Olympics) and the men's

hockey team players Jarmanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Sanjay and Abhishek. The para-athletes outnumbered the able-bodied ones in the list this time due

to the magnificent Paris Paralympics performance in which they returned with 29 medals, including seven gold and nine silver.

President Murmu repeatedly broke from tradition to receive some wheelchair-bound athletes such as Pranav Soorma, who got the Arjuna for his Paralympic silver in club throw.

The most heart-warming moment of the ceremony was when India's first Paralympic gold-medallist Murlikanth Petkar walked up to the President on crutches to receive the Arjuna award (lifetime).

Murmu met the 80-year-old war hero half way to present him the award.

Dignitaries, including Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, Parliamentary and Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, Sports Secretary Sujata Chaturve-

di, were among those who attended the ceremony that lasted a little over an hour.

While the Khel Ratna comes with a cash prize of Rs 25 lakh, the Arjuna and Dronacharya awards include a cash prize of Rs 15 lakh.

Among the most prominent Dronacharya winners this year was shooting coach Deepali Deshpande, who mentored Kusale, and former national football manager Armando Colaco.

The Arjuna Awards are given to sportspersons who have demonstrated good performance over the past four years and have shown qualities of leadership, sportsmanship, and discipline.

The annual honours are decided by a points system in which the maximum emphasis is on performances delivered at the Olympics and the World Championships.

Bumrah's fitness, Jaiswal's slot in focus as selectors to pick CT squad today

PTI, MUMBAI: The selection committee, headed by Ajit Agarkar, will convene, here, on Saturday to pick India's squad for the Champions Trophy, and they will have to deal with two tricky scenarios - the fitness of premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah and how to fit in Yashasvi Jaiswal in the provisional 15.

Bumrah had suffered back spasms during the recent Sydney Test against Australia and did not bowl on the final day at SCG. He has been advised "off-loading" and his fitness is being monitored closely by the physios at the BCCI Centre of Excellence.

So, Agarkar and his colleagues along with head coach Gautam Gambhir and skipper Rohit Sharma will ponder deeply over Bumrah's fitness status before taking a final call on his inclusion. A clarity over the vexed scenario will be given once Agarkar and Rohit address a press conference post the selection committee meeting. That Rohit attending the press do is also the clearest indi-



Jasprit Bumrah



Yashasvi Jaiswal

cation of him retaining the captaincy in the ODIs, despite swirling speculations about his future in Test cricket after a dismal tour to Australia. In an Instagram video, the 37-year-old was seen playing his signature shots, including flicks, drives, lofted hits, and pulls against the white ball during a training session here.

Then there has also been a clamour from all corners to include Jaiswal in the squad. The 23-year-old is in fine form right now, and he will also offer the left-hand variety at the top, reasons listed in favour of his selection.

But Jaiswal's selection could put him in direct competition with KL Rahul as Rohit, Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer are casualties as India's top four. So, if you need Jaiswal too in the squad then it's a tough proposition for the selectors. It could also be that Jaiswal will be given a chance against England in the three-match ODI series, and prefer Rahul for the ICC event. The squad for the rubber against England too will be picked on Saturday.

The primary wicketkeeper batter slot could be allotted to Rishabh Pant as Sanju

Samson skipping the Vijay Hazare Trophy has not gone down well with the powers that be. Dhruv Jurel could come into picture in that scenario as second stumper.

Senior pacer Mohammed Shami will be in the squad given that he has played most of the domestic matches, and has also been drafted into India's squad for the five-match home T20I series against England. The other name that could come up for discussion is that of on-song Karun Nair, who has so far hammered 752 runs in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Tro-

phy at an average of 752 with five hundreds.

But it is tough to find a place for him in the already densely populated middle-order that will also have all-rounder Hardik Pandya.

However, Karun could get a call for the one-dayers against England. The selectors will also seek clarity on star wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav's fitness, as he has been recuperating from a long-standing groin injury.

Pacer Prasidh Krishna too could be on the flight to Dubai, where India will open the campaign against Bangladesh on February 20.

India gear up to defend U-19 Women's T20 WC

PTI, KUALA LUMPUR: India's GenNext cricketers will be eager to extend their dominance in the global stage as they seek to defend the title of the ICC U-19 Women's T20 World Cup beginning here, on Saturday.

Clubbed with the West Indies, Sri Lanka and hosts Malaysia in Group A, India will begin their campaign against the Caribbeans at the Bayuemas Oval here on Sunday.

SQUAD

Niki Prasad (Captain), Sanika Chalke (Vice-captain), G Tri-sha, Kamalini G (WK), Bhavika Ahire (WK), Ishwari Awasare, Mithila Vinod, Joshitha VJ, Sonam Yadav, Parunika Siodiya, Kesari Drithi, Aayushi Shukla, Anandita Kishor, MD Shabnam, Vaishnavi S; Standby players: Nandhana S, Ira J and Anadi T.

THE GROUPS

Group A: India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, West Indies; **Group B:** England, Ireland, Pakistan, United States; **Group C:** New Zealand, Nigeria, Samoa, South Africa; **Group D:** Australia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Scotland.

sportspopup

Satwik-Chirag storm into semis; Sindhu and Kiran exit India Open Super 750

NEW DELHI: Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu's valiant fight ended in disappointment, but Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty lifted the spirits of the Indian camp with a dominant performance as they stormed into the semifinals of the India Open Super 750 badminton tournament on Friday. Satwik and Chirag, the 2022 champions, pulverised the Korean pair of Jin Yong and Kang Min Hyuk with a barrage of attacking shots, winning 21-10, 21-17 in just 41 minutes. The victory marked their third consecutive semifinal appearance on the tour, following finishes in the last four at the China Masters and Malaysia Super 1000 last year. Earlier, Sindhu, a former champion, suffered a 9-21, 21-19, 17-21 loss to Paris bronze medallist Indonesia's Gregoria Mariska Tunjung in a gripping 62-minute women's singles quarter-final.

Rohit trains with white-ball ahead of Champions Trophy

MUMBAI: India captain Rohit Sharma has been honing his white-ball skills in preparation for the upcoming ODI series against England and the Champions Trophy. In a video on Instagram, the 37-year-old was seen playing his signature shots, including flicks, drives, lofted hits, and pulls against the white ball during a training session. Following a disappointing tour of Australia, during which he even dropped himself from the final Test in Sydney, Rohit has been training with Mumbai's Ranji squad. Mumbai face Jammu and Kashmir on January 23, but Rohit's participation in the match remains in doubt. India's Champions Trophy campaign begins on February 20 against Bangladesh in Dubai, following the ODI series against England starting February 6. The past few weeks have been tumultuous for Rohit.

FIFA bans Panama soccer president for fat-shaming comment

PANAMA CITY: FIFA suspended the president of Panama's soccer federation for a fat-shaming comment about a star player in the women's national team. Manual Arias suggested midfielder Marta Cox was "fat" after she made critical comments about the set-up at the national team, which qualified for the 2023 Women's World Cup. "President Arias has been banned for six months, until July 14, 2025, during which he will not be able to participate in activities related to federated soccer," the Panamanian soccer federation said in a statement late Thursday. The ban removes Arias from a series of men's national team games in the CONCACAF region: Nations League games in March, two 2026 World Cup qualifiers in June and the Gold Cup tournament in the United States scheduled June 14-July 6. The federation said vice president Fernando Arce will act as interim leader until the ban expires, and acknowledged it still had work to do in women's soccer.

Haaland signs bumper new Man City deal until 2034

LONDON: Erling Haaland has signed a blockbuster new deal at Manchester City that will keep the prolific forward at the Etihad until 2034, the Premier League champions announced on Friday. The 24-year-old striker's existing contract was due to expire in June 2027 but he has now committed his future to the club for the next decade. The deal is the longest in the Premier League, eclipsing the nine-year contract Cole Palmer signed with Chelsea year and Haaland will reportedly earn around \$610,000 per week. A post on the club's X account read: "Erling's here to stay! We're thrilled to announce Erling Haaland has extended his contract at City to 2034." Haaland, who had been linked with a move to Real Madrid, said he is "City no matter what" after committing his future to the club, managed by Pep Guardiola.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates victory against Czech Republic's Tomas Machac

Fired-up Djokovic joins Alcaraz, Zverev in last 16

AFP, MELBOURNE: A "very hot-headed" Novak Djokovic produced a vintage display to join Carlos Alcaraz and Alexander Zverev in the Australian Open last 16 on Friday, but Naomi Osaka's bid for a third Melbourne crown is over

with injury. Also on day six, women's defending champion Aryna Sabalenka "pushed to the limit" to set up an intriguing showdown with teenage talent Mirra Andreeva. Red-hot Coco Gauff was an emphatic winner once again to underline her title credentials.

Djokovic, who is chasing a record-extending 11th Melbourne title and historic 25th Grand Slam crown, is on a collision course with Alcaraz in the quarter-finals. Both kept that tantalising prospect alive with ruthless victories.

Under new coach and old rival Andy Murray, the 37-year-old Djokovic needed four sets in both of his opening two matches. But not this time, swatting aside Czech 26th seed Tomas Machac 6-1, 6-4, 6-4 and letting out a roar at the

end. Djokovic also pointed to his ear and then someone in the Rod Laver Arena crowd.

Djokovic, who needed a medical break in the second set and used an inhaler, faces 24th seed Jiri Lehecka next. Spain's Alcaraz, who raced into the last 32 for the loss of just 12 games, suffered a wobble in the third set against Portugal's unseeded Nuno Borges. But the third seed, who

has won four majors but never been beyond the quarter-finals in Melbourne, regained his focus to ease through 6-2, 6-4, 6-7 (3/7), 6-2.

Germany's second seed Zverev also booked his place in the second week with a methodical 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 win over Britain's Jacob Fearnley. Sabalenka was broken four straight times at the start of the match but found her groove to win 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 after more than two hours of attritional tennis.

Bopanna-Zhang advance in second round

PTI, MELBOURNE: Indian ace Rohan Bopanna and his Chinese partner Shuai Zhang advanced to the second round of the Australian Open mixed doubles with a commanding 6-4, 6-4 victory over Ivan Dodig and Kristina Mladenovic, here, on Friday. Aiming to recover from an early exit in the men's doubles, the former world No. 1 Indian showed his mettle alongside Zhang, delivering a clinical performance to close out the match in one hour and 12 minutes.