

Vishy at IIM-Nagpur: Govt making right moves to groom sport champs

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NAGPUR: Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand said that it is an appreciable sign that the country's outlook towards sports - beyond the immensely popular game of cricket - is changing gradually. The government has been more supportive towards the sportspersons than before is looking to chisel champion sportspersons. Speaking during Zero Mile Samvad at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Nagpur on Thursday, the chess wizard said that the seed of change was sown with the formation of Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ) in 2001 after the Sydney Olympics. "Geet Sethi and Prakash Padukone started OGQ to support, promote, encourage and groom Indian athletes with an aim to win gold medals at the Olympics. They (Sethi and Padukone) were

frustrated with the apathetic attitude of sports administrators. While participating in competitions - both domestic and abroad - sportspersons didn't think they had come on a mission. The whole vibe was replete with negativity."

This got Sethi and Padukone to join hands to turn things around and make Indian athletes competitive and put up a significant show, Anand said. "I joined many years later. A lot of things looked impossible then. But then Abhinav Bindra won a bronze medal (at the 2001 Munich World Cup). Now, we are eyeing 300 medals," he said. 'Now, athletes want to go for gold in Olympics'

Vishy - as Viswanathan Anand is lovingly called - the Indian chess grandmaster and a five-time former World Chess Champion asserted that the Indian sports scenario has undergone a major turnaround. "There has been a

sea change over the last 23 years. The government has come up with the idea of working with everyone in the ecosystem. Now, sports ministry officials are easily accessible on WhatsApp which was not the case earlier. Things get arranged quickly and the government is far more supportive than before," he said.

Anand said the athletes are no longer satisfied with merely participating in international events. "Athletes know that it is no longer good enough to say they participated in the Olympics but they want to go for gold and nothing less," he said.

The grandmaster said the higher expectations have also raised a demand for in-house resources. "Now, we realized we need our own coaches, physios, trainers, doctors, dieticians, and lawyers who understand Olympic legal codes. We are developing expertise in every segment and every discipline. The efforts have been fructifying as India is consistently winning 20% of medals on offer at big events," he said.

Talking to TOI, he said, "You should talk to athletes who played a decade ago to know about the massive transformation in approach of both the people and the government towards sports. Just look at how many sports do people follow nowadays - chess, badminton, soccer, golf, and also hockey - to name a few. So many sporting disciplines are grabbing attention in India. I like India's journey of transition towards excellence."

Vishy recalled his first visit to Nagpur. "I came in 1985 to compete in a national junior championship for 10 days. I have come to the city very often for stay and while in transit," he said.