

# Lack of sports facilities a hurdle for spl schools

Only a few institutions give the right kind of training; preconceived notion regarding abilities of special kids a handicap

RAJITHA S @ Hyderabad

IT is not easy. But with extreme dedication, para-athletes have made the country proud at the 2016 Summer Paralympic Games held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. While Mariyappan Thangavelu won a gold in the high jump category, Devendra Jhajharia clinched a gold in javelin throw for the second time. Also, Deepa Malik and Varun Singh Bhati made a special addition with a silver in shot put and a bronze in high jump, respectively.

While para-athletes are vocal about the lack of support, resources and funds, special schools have a different set of problems. Though children with special needs show enthusiasm and signs of development while at play, lack of facilities is a major hurdle before them.

S Rajashekar, a special teacher at the Rural Development Trust that works with children with disabilities, said sports played an important role in their development. He shared an instance where children displayed signs of cognitive development on the field.

"In March, we had travelled with nine children with cerebral palsy and multiple disabilities to Kolkata for a friendly match at the Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy. We had trained them in our school at Anantapur. One boy, an amputee with no hands, usually needed support to move around in his wheel chair. After we showed him some photos of how

he can throw the ball with his head, he used the technique on the field, much to our surprise," recalled Rajashekar, who was trained under a Spanish special sports coach in Boccia, a precision sport specifically played by persons with multiple disabilities.

They were highly involved and showed great levels of energy and willingness to learn, he added. However, not all schools have facilities to further such talents.

Sai Baba Goud, chairman of Devnar Foundation for the Blind here, said stigma attached to the abilities of such children posed a hurdle. "That is the first factor. Besides that, lack of a proper ground facility makes training a difficult job," he said.

Students of Devnar Foundation have been performing exceptionally well in cricket and regularly participate in national and international championships. The foundation itself conducts an all India cricket tournament.

"We do this to encourage children. They are also enthusiastic about swimming and running races, among others. But for us to regularly pursue such activities is a problem because we do not have a proper playground," said Goud.

The school is located in Begumpet, just opposite to the Hyderabad Public School that has two big playgrounds.

"We once requested them to share the ground,

## Breaking barriers

Kili Kili has developed a manual, 'Breaking Barriers Through Play', which will be launched in mid-October. It is a guide to make play spaces inclusive, instead of creating special spaces for persons/children with disabilities.

Divided into three sections, the manual includes the voices of children and their needs and idea of a play space. The second section talks about the policy guidelines of an inclusive play space and the third section, the method and equipment.

"Anyone who picks up the manual can understand how to do it. Our target group is all those who have the authority over a play space—government, municipal corporations, school principals etc.," informed Kavitha Krishnamoorthy.

but they refused. It would be of great help if the government assisted us," he said.

Prerana Special School here with 50 children, mainly with intellectual disabilities, faced the same problem. T Vijayalakshmi, founder of the school and parent of a child with multiple disabilities and a trained coach in special sports, said lack of a playground makes it difficult for them to encourage the children to take up sporting activities.

The now-defunct Special Olympic Committee (SOC) here was active in providing training and equipment. "Till three years ago, we used to get a lot of support from them. We had specialists come and train us in Boccia. We don't know what happened afterwards," said Meena Yellepeddy, founder of Medha Sampathi Special School here, which has 38 children with special needs.

The committee is, however, active in Bengaluru.

Kavitha Krishnamoorthy, founder of Kili Kili, which works to create inclusive public play spaces accessible for all children informed that the Special Olympic movement is a serious affair in Bengaluru.

"There has been a shift in play spaces in Bengaluru in the last 10 years. Required facilities for these children are not completely absent, neither are they adequate. Schools link up kids with good

sporting skills with the SOC and they take it forward," she said.

For adults, the need to engage them in an activity is stronger and hence yoga or basic physical exercise is included. But for children, it is still just an activity.

"Schools and parents are keen on correcting these children, to bring them as close as they can to being 'normal'. But sports is not a priority. They need to take it seriously. Some kids are really good at using their body," Kavitha added.

Sudha Ramamoorthy, a special educator for 17 years and currently working at Equals, Centre for Promotion of Social Justice, Chennai, said, "There are no special sports teachers like special educators.

The Rehabilitation Council of India, which sets guidelines and approves courses for these children, does not have anything much to do with special sports coaches. This is a general perspective. Look at sports in mainstream schools, no one is thinking about this even though it is a right and the Right to Education Act is in place."

These children do not require anything specific, explained Madhavi Latha, president, Wheelchair Basketball Federation. "People think that we require separate spaces. But with just a few changes, existing facilities can be used and be accessible. That would also make the spaces inclusive. Inaccessible stadia, infrastructure and non-availability of sporting equipment are other challenges," she said, adding that importing equipment is a costly affair. "It would be helpful if someone starts making equipment and gear locally," she said.



SUVAJIT DEY

EXPRESS READ

# New probe into forensic lapses in Soumya case

ABHILASH CHANDRAN @ Kottayam

THE government has ordered a third round inquiry into the forensic lapses in the Soumya murder case. JDME K Sreekumar will conduct the inquiry.

The probe has been ordered as a part of completing the departmental disciplinary proceedings against associate professor A K Unmesh, who had commenced the autopsy procedure along with assistant professor Rajendra Prasad at the Thrissur Government Medical College.

However, as per the documents in possession of Express, the final report of the autopsy was prepared and presented in the court by a forensic doctor, who was partially present in the autopsy procedures.

Sherly Vasu, the then head of

the Department of Forensic Medicine, GMC, Thrissur, who prepared the final report and appeared in the court, had reached the autopsy room 20-30 minutes after the commencement of the post-mortem proceedings. The statement of an



Sherly Vasu who prepared the final report had joined the autopsy late. She did not do the postmortem, but gave suggestions

Autopsy team member

autopsy team member had also revealed that, though Sherly Vasu had joined the team late, "she did not do the post-mortem examination, but gave suggestions (only)."

This has raised questions on the validity of her submission before the Supreme Court regarding the post-mortem. Another major loophole from the Forensic side was that Sherly Vasu had added some additional points in the work report, prepared by Unmesh and Rajendra Prasad, which had weakened the forensic findings.

## CRASH LANDING

# Tirupati flight shoots off runway by 500 metres

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Tirupati

ALL flight operations were cancelled at the Tirupati international airport on Sunday, following the crash landing of the SpiceJet flight on Saturday night.

Nearly 70 passengers and crew members of SpiceJet flight (no 1047) had a narrow escape from a mishap when a flight

The flight took off from Hyderabad at around 7 pm and landed at 8.10 pm in Tirupati on Saturday night.

The passengers onboard the flight stated that they experienced heavy jolts due to the vibrations but as the flight was on the verge of stopping, it did not receive a major impact. Several important persons including former minister Anam Ramanna and Deputy Minister