

Sania joins hands with NGO to help the needy

Involved in bringing aid to hapless daily wage-earners

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

Tennis star Sania Mirza, winner of six Grand Slam titles, is donning a different role – saviour to the needy in these troubled times.

Sania, who has just completed the mandatory 14-day self-quarantine on her return from the US, has joined hands with an NGO – Saha Society – to help daily wage-earners who have been badly hit by the lockdown.

Irrelevant

“The pandemic has made tennis, or for that matter, any sport irrelevant. Right now, I am not concerned about events getting cancelled, even Wimbledon. Tennis is a small part of our lives. We are fighting a larger issue,” said Sania in an exclusive chat with *The Hindu* on Tuesday.

“First I donated to the NGO, then I felt it would be great to be involved in a collective effort for better results. I am glad within one week we could raise ₹1.5 crore,” Sania said.

“This crisis has reminded us that we take many things for granted. I am saddened by visuals of people walking 800km just to reach their homes,” she said.

On her activity during the lockdown, Sania said. “Given the kind of response from across the country, it has been a really challenging task to identify real beneficiaries. But, we are taking utmost care that the needy are well and truly addressed in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, North Karnataka and Hyderabad to start with.”

Sania said she and her family had always honoured their social obligations and as such she was proud to be



Optimistic: On the post-virus scenario, Sania feels humans adapt easily and will move on. ■ FILE PHOTO: V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

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associated with this initiative.

On the post-virus scenario, she said, “Human beings adapt easily and we will move on.”

The difference between an injury-break and this lockdown, she said, was “when injured you are focused on getting back into rhythm, for you know the problem and there is a solution and a time-frame. Here

you are fighting a deadly disease,” she said.

“I will be back on the circuit, and, hopefully, win a few more titles for I do believe that I have a lot more to give on the tennis court,” she said.

Special day

April 12 is a special day for Sania, as it was on this day in 2015 that she became World No. 1 in women's doubles. “That is still the most memorable moment for me. And, also the fact that I finished two year-endings as numero uno,” she said.

Crisis deepens in AICF as president removes secretary

CHESS

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

The crisis-ridden All India Chess Federation (AICF) plunged into further turmoil when its president P.R. Venketrana Raja removed Bharat Singh Chauhan from the post of secretary of the federation on Monday.

In a three-page letter, dated March 30, addressed to Chauhan, Raja detailed the reasons for his action, and said he had no option but to exercise his “extraordinary powers as the president of AICF under Article 15 (a) of the AICF Constitution and Bye-Laws.”

It may be recalled that the AICF is awaiting a directive from the Madras High Court regarding fresh date of elections of its office-bearers.

In February, Chauhan (secretary), Ajay Patel (president) as well as three others were declared elected unopposed to the principal posts of AICF.

Later, the Madras High Court ordered fresh elections and the Supreme Court dismissed a Special Leave Petition challenging the verdict.

When contacted, Chauhan questioned Raja's authority and dismissed his action of removing him as a “malicious attempt to cover his tracks.”

He argued, “Raja ceased to be the AICF president from February 11, the date on which the court-appointed Returning Officer declared Mr. Patel as the newly elected AICF president.

“Despite the Hon'ble Madras High Court ordering fresh elections of AICF, Mr. Patel, being the last person to hold the AICF president's office, remains the interim president till fresh elections are conducted.”

Strange development

In another strange development, 12 affiliates have jointly called for AICF's Special/Extraordinary General Meeting on April 24 in the Capital.

The letter, written on Chandigarh Chess Association's letterhead claiming representations from 12 States and Union Territories and listing a nine-point agenda, read, “We had sent to Hon. secretary, AICF, a requisition in writing to call a Special/Extraordinary General Meeting of AICF as per the rights and powers vested in them under Article 11 of the Constitution of the AICF and Section 28 of the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act 1975. As the Hon. secretary of AICF has expressed in a letter dated 29.03.2020 his inability to call such a meeting we have decided to call for the meeting.”

The Hundred: ticket sales postponed

IANS
LONDON

In view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the tickets sale for the inaugural edition of The Hundred competition has been postponed.

“... We feel it is appropriate at this time to postpone opening our second priority ticket window and general sale. We will continue to review this and will let you know any further information in due course,” said an official statement on the tournament's website.

Bindra for revising Olympic selection

‘A year is a long time, especially in a sport like shooting’

SHOOTING

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Indian shooting was primed to finalise the team for Tokyo Olympics before the Games was postponed to 2021 due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Can the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) afford to select the team, when the situation settles down, more than a year in advance?

“It may not help to announce the team, and hope that they all would be in prime form when the Olympics comes around. A year is a long time, especially in a sport like shooting,” said former World and Olympic champion Abhinav Bindra.

Will clarity help?

Will it not help to give clarity for the shooters, to get the nod when the situation becomes normal, so that they have a long time to prepare for the Olympics?

“There can be argument



Abhinav Bindra.

■ PHOTO: KAMESH SRINIVASAN

“nounced.” With 15 Olympic quotas secured, most of the shooters who won them were in excellent form throughout the season.

Widen core group

“The core group can be widened a bit. But, don't open it for 30 shooters. One or two reserves in an event should be fine. Form the Olympic group, and back the shooters,” reasoned Bindra.

More than anything, the Beijing Olympics gold medalist in air rifle, Bindra emphasised the need to put the best minds to work on the right path ahead and form the guidelines.

“Get clarity, and find the right balance. And do it quickly.”

“Once you achieve clarity about what is required for the shooters to make the team, they will plan accordingly. There has to be coordination,” said Bindra.

The NRAI will swing into action once the sporting world springs back to normal life.

BWF freezes rankings

Positions as on March 17 will be basis for entry, seedings in future events

BADMINTON

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Tuesday decided to freeze the world rankings, saying standings as on March 17 will be the basis for entry and seedings when it restarts the international calendar that has been thrown haywire owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was a clamour for freezing the world rankings with Indians Saina Nehwal, B. Sai Praneeth, P. Kashyap and H.S. Prannoy leading the way in expressing their concerns.

“The Badminton World Federation (BWF) can announce it will freeze World Rankings and World Junior Rankings until further notice.”

“The freezing of rankings will be backdated to Week 12, which is the week following the last international tournament that was played – the YONEX All England

Open 2020,” BWF said in a release.

“The ranking lists issued on 17 March 2020 will serve as a basis for entry and seeding into the next international tournaments – although it is difficult to say at this stage when this may be.”

Shuttlers in the singles competition have to be inside the top-16 of the world rankings to qualify for the Olympics. The cut-off for doubles is also top-16.

BWF said it will start reviewing the Olympic qualification system but a decision will take several weeks.

“Following Monday's announcement to reschedule the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games from 23 July to 8 August 2021, BWF will also initiate a review process to confirm any impact on the Olympic qualification system,” BWF said.

“Please note that the consequences of freezing the World Rankings will not apply to the Olympic qualification system.”

THE HINDU

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Is it time for a new normal?

As Corporate India continues to work remotely on a massive scale, this question is inevitable

PRINCE FREDERICK

The massive scale in which companies in India are remote-working now is a straw in the wind suggesting that the COVID-19 crisis will go down as a major inflexion point in the history of work.

It is going to nudge the fence-sitters really hard, and they would certainly land on the side of the corporate garden where one will be treading on these pavers: One, greater digitisation of work processes; two, greater reliance on distributed teams; and three, greater resolve to address long-pending questions around data protection.

Digitalisation mindset

“Before COVID-19, globally, even technologically much-advanced companies were willing to allow only 40 p.c. to 50 p.c. of their workforce to operate on the basis of a remote-working arrangement,” begins Rituparna Chakraborty, president, Indian Staffing Federation. “Globally, companies consider only one-third of those in the 25 to 65 age group eligible for a remote-working arrangement. Among those in the entry-level jobs, and aged below 25, only 7 p.c. are said to be allowed to remote-work. To remote-work, one has to rise to a particular role, and that usually comes with age. Now, the percentage is bound to change in all categories. Though I would not say there would be a dramatic

adoption of remote-working, post COVID-19, but I could safely say there would be a significant increase in the percentage of the workforce that would remote-work from now on, and that includes companies in India. At the least, there will be a greater openness to work in a format where the workforce is distributed. Another thing that is for sure: Undue dependence on physical structures of work will be questioned. The lockdown is unprecedented, and it has underlined the need to be prepared digitally. There would be a digitalisation mindset, with efforts being made to digitalise the work flow as much as possible. So, a scenario where on day one, fresh recruits are by default handed laptops that are fully configured for remote working is not a far-fetched idea.”

Dynamic workplaces

Aditya Mishra, director and CEO, CIEL HR, points out that if the lessons from COVID-19 are internalised, there will be a rise in the number of companies that have a hard-desking policy. At present, those that have one constitute a minuscule part of the corporate world.

“In a futuristic scenario arising organically from the COVID-19 experience, companies may be inclined to reduce costs incurred on account of real estate. On any given day, only a portion of the employees will report at office for work, and this will be done to effect savings on overheads. So, if an organisation has 1000 employees, say, only 500 desks may be provided for, and this would enable the company to work in a smaller work space. At any given

point, half of the workforce will be remote-working. As this workplace is dynamic, “desks” would be designed to fit roles, and not individuals. So, there won't be a specific desk for anyone to return to, day after day. There will be executive desks, and if you are an executive, you log in to an executive desk with a password, and the password will also ensure that the phone has your number for that day. Similarly, there will be manager desks, and a manager can log in to one of them.”

Business agenda

Rituparna says the COVID-19 crisis may signify a point from where one can only expect a broader leadership mandate for remote-working, as the possibility and benefits of remote-working, particularly in the area of transactional work, have stood to reason, even in the case of traditional companies, some of which may be having an in-built resistance to flexible working culture. “So far, remote working was only an HR agenda, and now the odds are high that it will become a business and finance agenda as well,” she explains.

The empathy factor

Earlier, the resistance to remote-working would have come from a section of the workforce, usually at the managerial level, and now when uniformly, across the board, the workforce is being pitchforked into a mass remote-working arrangement, there is bound to be marked difference in the way managers perceive remote-working.

“There is a tendency to look down upon those who opt for work-from-home often, and there are also compa-

nies that would consider restructuring the compensation package of those who work-from-home often. But now, with everyone from the top of the totem pole to the bottom having had a taste of remote-working, that too in an incredibly remarkable way, hopefully, remote-working is seen for what it is – a tool that can be extremely effective, if used wisely, as something that tackles productivity-sappers such as long commutes. It can also be a counter to a 9to5 work culture that has fallen into such a rut that clock-watchers manage to pass off undetected, despite lack of sufficient productivity. In a remote-working arrangement, the work completed at the end of the day alone matters. A well-planned remote-working system can augur in a metrics-driven work culture,” says Aditya.

Data security

One challenge that is as obvious as daylight is data security. Kamal Karanth, co-founder, Xpheno, says: “The corporate world is accustomed to scenarios where even contract-based work is carried out at the office due to the demand for data protection. Now, due to the current exigency, a lot of work is being carried out of the office, because there is no other way to do it. Though two or three weeks make a short sample size, from here, one can expect more openness to having non-IP work done outside office systems, either by remote-working employees or freelancers; and two, greater efforts to improve data security by making checks such as multi-factor authentication more cutting-edge.”

GENERAL



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