

Wrestlers protest: How a meeting with HM Amit Shah last Saturday set the stage for talks with Sports Minister Anurag Thakur

A month-and-a-half after India's top wrestlers restarted their protest against Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, accusing him of sexually harassing women athletes, there was finally a thaw.

After Wednesday's six-hour-long negotiations with Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur, following the midnight meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday, the Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik-led delegation agreed to suspend their protests till June 15, by when the Delhi Police is expected to complete its investigation and file a chargesheet.

Thakur, after the meeting, told the media that the government has accepted the wrestlers' demand of withdrawal of police cases against them wrestler after the May 28 protest at Jantar Mantar, promised police protection to the complainants and also assured them that Singh, or his associates, wouldn't be allowed to participate in the WFI elections at the end of this month.

"Government has discussed all the points with the wrestlers and their supporters. We have agreed that June 15 will be the deadline for filing the charge sheet after the investigation," he said.



Meanwhile, Bajrang, said that in case there was no action against Singh, they would relaunch their protest. "We will put forth all the points in front of the other wrestlers, khap leaders, and our supporters. If no action is taken by June 15, we will continue our protest," Bajrang was quoted as saying by ANI.

The reason for the headway has been the hectic parleys over the last five days. While the police investigation into the allegations of sexual harassment continued, with the next court hearing scheduled for June 27, the breakthrough came days after a delegation of wrestlers met Shah at his official residence last Saturday. Although the meeting remained inconclusive,

sources said it set the stage for the talks with Thakur.

Wednesday's meeting between the wrestlers and the government was the third in less than two weeks. But this time, there was one big difference – the government publicly invited the wrestlers for talks.

"The government is willing to have a discussion with the wrestlers on their issues," Thakur tweeted at 12.47am on Wednesday. "I have once again invited the wrestlers for the same."

The invite is seen as a response to one of the key demands made by the wrestlers after their meeting with Shah, which was a hushed affair. Following those negotiations, the wrestlers demanded that all future talks should take place

publicly for the sake of transparency.

"Since the government wanted to engage in talks, the wrestlers insisted that they do so publicly and not in a secret manner. This was to ensure there was no ambiguity and a picture wasn't portrayed that the wrestlers were looking for a settlement," a source said. "If they refused to do it, the wrestlers indicated they wouldn't meet any official."

Following Thakur's invitation, the wrestlers met him at his official residence in New Delhi where a majority of the issues discussed on Wednesday were in continuation of the previous talks with Shah.

While both sides dug their heels on this issue, there were signs of the govern-

ment's stance softening on other key topics in a bid to end the protests. The election of the WFI's new office-bearers, after the earlier election process was declared null and void by the sports ministry, was another issue discussed between Shah and the wrestlers. The government extended them an olive branch by offering one of the wrestlers a key position in the new executive body of the federation. However, after deliberating amongst themselves, the wrestlers decided against it. "It would have created a perception that they staged these protests to get a position of power. Hence, that suggestion has been turned down," a source said.

The wrestlers also raised the issue of the FIR filed against them by the Delhi Police on May 28 after they tried to march towards the new Parliament while it was being inaugurated. In actions that were condemned by the world's top sports bodies and some of India's biggest athletes, the Delhi Police handled the wrestlers and detained them before filing FIRs under multiple sections, including rioting. It is learnt that the wrestlers discussed their return to the mat, seeking to compete in the selection trials for the World Championships – which doubles up as a quali-

fying event for next year's Paris Olympics – and the Asian Games. The two major competitions will be held back-to-back in September and October and the selection trials for the same were originally scheduled to be held towards the end of this month.

However, after the wrestlers' request, the trials are likely to be postponed so that they have enough time to prepare for the same. The wrestlers also sought assurances that their jobs with the Railways, which they got under the sports quota, won't be under threat.

On Wednesday, the government and the wrestlers found common ground on most of these issues. But the meeting ended with another stalemate. The Sports Minister, it is learnt, wanted to issue a joint statement immediately after their talks ended.

The wrestlers, however, demanded to 'discuss' it with Vinesh, who wasn't present there, and the khap leaders before making a joint statement with the government. Eventually, after a lot of back and forth, Bajrang and Sakshi left Thakur's home more than six hours after they reached.

There would be no joint announcement. But after weeks of deadlock, there was a breakthrough at last.

French Open: Top seed Alcaraz hunts down Tsitsipas to set up Djokovic showdown



The 20-year-old will now face third seed Novak Djokovic in a mouth-watering semi-final on Friday with the Spaniard chasing a second Grand Slam title.

World number one Carlos Alcaraz survived a third-set wobble to cruise past fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece 6-2 6-1 7-6(5) on Tuesday and earn a spot in the French Open last four.

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz plays a shot against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas during their quarterfinal match of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros stadium in Paris, Tuesday, June 6, 2023. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus)(AP)

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz plays a shot against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas during their quarterfinal match of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros stadium in Paris, Tuesday, June 6, 2023. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus). For almost three sets Alcaraz played jaw-dropping tennis, having pulverised his opponent, who staged a brief comeback to force a tiebreak in the third.

The 20-year-old will now face third seed Novak Djokovic in a mouth-watering semi-final on Friday with the Spaniard chasing a second Grand Slam title after winning the U.S. Open crown last year and the Serbian veteran on course for a record-breaking 23rd men's singles major.

"This match is what everyone wanted to watch and it is going to be a really good match to play and to watch," Alcaraz said of Friday's semi-final.

"If you want to be the best you have to beat the best and he (Djokovic) is one of the best players in the world."

Alcaraz did not take long to put Tsitsipas under pressure, breaking him on his second service game.

The 24-year-old Greek, still searching for an elusive first Grand Slam title, could not match Alcaraz's power and precision and the Spaniard broke him to love with a sensational running forehand down the line to go 5-2 up.

He wrapped up the first set, winning 12 of the last 14 points played, but he was equally relentless in the second to break Tsitsipas in the very first game to love.

Norway Chess: D Gukesh prevails in Armageddon against Anish Giri



India's young stalwart Grandmaster D Gukesh continued his great run of form in the 7th round of the 2023 Norway Chess tournament, beating sole leader Fabiano Caruana in the Armageddon on Tuesday.

17-year-old Gukesh was solid in the Classical game to play out a draw. In the Armageddon, though he was lost in the queen endgame, he was in luck as Caruana ran out of time and lost the game.

Time trouble is something that Caruana has been finding difficult all through this tournament. Though he

won his Classical game on Monday against GM Nodirbek Abdusattorov, he couldn't easily lose the match for taking too long.

"The time control is such that once you get into time trouble you never get out and when it's very complicated basically you just are out of control. And I was fully out of control, but somehow it worked out," he said after the game on Monday.

The loss to Gukesh didn't affect the American's position as sole leader with 14.5/21 followed by Hikaru Nakamura 12.5/21.

Nakamura defeated Shakhriyar Mamedyarov in a thrilling Armageddon in a back and forth game.

With the victory, Gukesh now moved to fifth position on the leaderboard with a score of 10/21. Gukesh has had some strong performances at this tournament, even beating Dutch GM and winner of this year Tata Steel Chess Anish Giri in the earlier round. He plays Aryan Tari on Thursday, with Wednesday being a rest day.

The talk of the tournament has been five-time World Champion Magnus Carlsen's struggle to win a Classical game at this event. That winless streak continued on Tuesday as he drew the game with Alireza Firouzja. Carlsen, who chose not to compete at this year's World Championships, was too good for Firouzja in Armageddon though. He's currently languishing in seventh position with a score of 9/21.

So leapfrogs to third place Nodirbek Abdusattorov suffered his second consecutive loss, third overall in Classical games at this event. This win allowed Wesley So to jump to the third spot in the standings 10.5/21.

Pro Panja League announces IGI Stadium as venue for inaugural edition



With the final set to take place on August 13, the 17-day event is touted to take arm wrestling across India to the next level and revolutionise globally.

The Pro Panja League announced Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, New Delhi as the venue for the inaugural edition of the league. The co-founders - Parvin Dabas and Preeti Jhangiani made the announcement at the Le Meridien Hotel in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Asia's biggest arm wrestling promotion, Pro Panja League, will premiere on Sony Sports Network on July 28 2023. With the final set to take place on August 13, the 17-day sporting event is touted to take arm wrestling across India to the next level and revolutionise globally.

Speaking on the occasion, Dabas said: "I have been born and brought up in New Delhi and the city is in my blood. This is where I

PV Sindhu's form not a concern, she remains one of India's best: Pullela Gopichand

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu's lack of consistency after coming back from an injury should not be a cause of "concern", feels chief national badminton coach Pullela Gopichand.

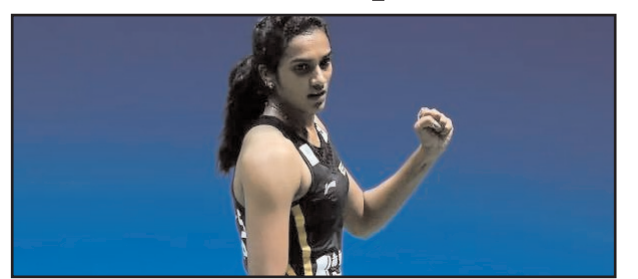
Sindhu suffered yet another first round exit on Tuesday when she lost to world number 1 Akane Yamaguchi in the Singapore Open.

"She's very young in saying that she's just 26-27. It's a good age, there is no reason for concern," Gopichand told PTI in a virtual interaction.

A silver medallist at the 2016 Rio Olympics and bronze winner in the Tokyo Games, Sindhu suffered an ankle injury in August last year to be slipped out of top-10 in the BWF women's singles rankings. She remained out of action for four months because of that injury. Sindhu's final and semi-final finish at Madrid Spain Masters and Malaysia Masters respectively were her best results this season. She reached a low with a first round exit at the Thailand Open when she lost to Canada's Michelle Li.

But Gopichand, a former All England champion who guided Sindhu since she was 10 till she became an Olympic medallist, firmly believed she would bounce back stronger.

"She has come out on top in the six-eight months. She is starting to play well. I do expect her to play well in



future. She is definitely one of India's bets for the future," Gopichand said.

Terming it a mixed season for Sindhu, Gopichand said: "It's the beginning of the season and beginning of Olympic qualification. The results have been mixed so far.

"We have a lot of pressure on players to perform. We have to just back them up and hope that they are playing the big tournaments." The high point of the season for Indian badminton was HS Prannoy's title win at the Malaysia Masters last month, the 30-year-old's first men's singles triumph since 2017 US Open. "From our perspective in general, Prannoy winning in Malaysia was a good one that's something I'm really happy about. It's the beginning of the season, it's early.

"We have not done well at the Sudirman Cup, it was kind of a negative note. Lakshya Sen did well to get to the semi-finals in Thailand, and I do believe that the next few weeks will be very critical and we have big tournaments coming

up," said the 49-year-old Gopichand. The top shuttlers of the country are currently training with personal coaches. Sindhu is training with Vidhi Chaudhary, while the struggling Kidambi Srikanth has roped in Wiempie Mahardi of Indonesia with an eye on Paris Olympics next year.

"In general, the rigours of having to play back-to-back, players have started to feel that they need personal coaches," said Gopichand.

"If one has won then everybody starts to believe that they do need one. This is something that has been happening. "In the Olympic year, it's everybody's need to have that personal attention. I think it's a trend that has started, many also follow it in other sports. I'm okay with that."

Advisor of Indian Padel Federation

Gopichand will now be seen promoting padel sport as an advisor. The racket sport combines tennis and squash and is comparatively new to India. It is nicknamed 'Tennis with Walls' and 'Squash in the Sun'.

Stefanos Tsitsipas regrets using sleep aid melatonin before French Open loss to Carlos Alcaraz



Professional tennis players: They're just like you and me. Sometimes they take melatonin to try to get some Z's.

In the case of Stefanos Tsitsipas, he thought the sleep aid might have left him too drowsy on the court at the French Open on Tuesday night.

Tsitsipas, a 24-year-old from Greece, offered up an unusual explanation for his performance during a 6-2, 6-1, 7-6 (5) loss Carlos Alcaraz in the quarterfinals of the Grand Slam tournament.

The contest began at about 8:30 p.m. local time and lasted a little more than two hours. Tsitsipas apparently wanted to snooze a bit beforehand.

"One thing that I'm going to try to avoid in the future is (having) melatonin pills and naps before matches," Tsitsipas said, "because it clearly doesn't seem to be working."

Melatonin is a hormone that helps control the body's sleep cycle.

"Schedule has been a little bit difficult the last few days. I had some late-night sessions. Not super late, but late enough for me to kind of have my sleep schedule ruined, in a way," Tsitsipas said. "You know, sleep is a very vital, important thing, and recovery is the most important thing when competing and playing big Slams like this."

He said he also tried to take melatonin before playing against Novak Djokovic in a 2019 match at an indoor tournament in Paris. The result of that one? A 6-1, 6-2 loss for Tsitsipas.

Masters 6-A Side Hockey Championship held at Hakku Stadium

JAMMU: The Masters Hockey Association of Jammu and Kashmir organised the first ever two-day Masters 6-A Side Hockey Championship at Hakku stadium Jammu.

Four teams of Jammu and Kashmir veterans and participants from neighboring states Himachal Pradesh and Punjab gathered to compete at Hakku Stadium Jammu.

On the occasion, Advocate Purnima Sharma, BJP Spokesperson J&K and former Deputy Mayor was the Chief Guest while Mahant Rajesh Bittu, Chairman of Religious, Tourism, Cultural & Heritage Trust presided over. Mohan Giri, President of J&K Juna Akhada and Balwinder Singh Vice President J&K Gurudwara Prabhak Committee were the guests of honor. Suresh Bastra was also present.

The championship aimed to promote sports



among veteran athletes, and was overseen by the association's Chairman Jaswinder Singh, President Adeep Singh Mehta, Vice President Preetpal Singh and Secretary General Angad Singh.

Three teams of women veterans from Himachal Pradesh and Jammu took part in the women's league while eight men's teams participated in the main event.

The association also plans to promote hockey among the younger generation by hosting similar events for younger players. The Baba Bodhi Masters Hockey beat Himachal Pradesh Masters Hockey 4-1 in the final men's match, while women's finalists, Himachal Pradesh, beat Punjab 3-0. Kudos to Rtn Jaswinder Kuku Singh Secretary Rotary Club Jammu Helping Hands, for organising 7 A Side Men & Women Hockey Championship wherein teams from Punjab, Himachal Pradesh & Jammu participated.

During the event, Purnima Sharma praised the players for exemplifying good sportsmanship and emphasized the importance of steering youth away from drug use. She also acknowledged the Modi Government's efforts in promoting sports culture nationwide, encouraging young individuals to pursue a career in sports.

Mahant Rajesh Bittu, Chairman of Religious, Tourism, Cultural & Heritage Trust, expressed gratitude towards the tournament organizers for their hard work. Furthermore, he emphasized that the youth of J&K possess immense untapped potential, and encouraged them to channel their energy towards building the nation. A vote of thanks was extended by the association to the sports council of Jammu and Kashmir for the use of the AstroTurf at Hakku Stadium.

Ons Jabeur's Grand Slam dream in tatters after loss to Haddad Maia in French Open quarters



Jabeur was bidding to reach her third Grand Slam semis but her plans were scuppered by the 14th-seeded who booked her maiden last-four appearance in a major.

Seventh seed Ons Jabeur's hopes of becoming the first African woman to win a Grand Slam singles title lay in ruins on Wednesday after her 3-6 7-6(5) 6-1 defeat by Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia in the French Open quarterfinals. Jabeur was bidding to reach her third Grand Slam semi-final in less than a year but her plans were scuppered by the 14th-seeded left-hander who battled back bravely to book her own maiden last-four appearance in a major.

The world number 14 became the first Brazilian woman since Maria Bueno in 1968 to reach a Slam semi-final and the first female player from her country to book a last-four spot at Roland Garros in the Open Era. "In the middle of the second set my coach

showed me the clock," Haddad Maia said. "I had to be patient and keep doing the shots because she (Jabeur) is a pretty good player, one of the best in the world." "So I am proud of me and my team today because it is not easy playing her. You think you have another shot to play (in a rally) but then drop shot, winner. I always believed that the match is long." The last Brazilian to win a singles crown at the French Open was Gustavo Kuerten, who claimed his third Roland Garros men's titles in 2001. The Tunisian, a finalist at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open last year, bagged a couple of quick breaks to move into the driving seat as Haddad Maia struggled to deal with her opponent's flat groundstrokes.

The Brazilian, the first woman from her country to reach the quarter-finals at a Grand Slam for 55 years, decided to try to run Jabeur around.