

Abeer Anwar covers Egypt's preparations for the 2024 Paralympics, the grand sporting spectacle in Paris that the world is waiting for

# Final touches

The Egyptian Paralympic Committee unveiled the details of its participation in the Paris Paralympics



Sobhi



The Egyptian Paralympic Committee, chaired by Hossameddin Mustafa, held a press conference to announce the specifics of their participation in the Paralympic Games to be held in Paris from 28 August to 8 September.

The two-day presser starting Saturday was attended by Minister of Youth and Sports Ashraf Sobhi, Assistant Minister Amr Haddad, director of the Central Administration for Specialised Federations Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, members of the Paralympic Committee's board and French Embassy representative Nadine Dolitier.

Alongside the conference, a protocol was signed between the Paralympic Committee and a hospital to provide medical care for the Paralympic delegation.

Mustafa said the committee and the Paralympic teams had been preparing for the Paris Paralympic Games for two and a half years.

He expressed gratitude to Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi for his unwavering support and encouragement of people with disabilities and the decision by the Egyptian government to ensure equality between the Olympic and Paralympic delegations.

Mustafa said 54 athletes, including 25 wheelchair-bound users and seven athletes with visual impairments, will represent Egypt in 10 sports at the Games.

Minister Sobhi took the opportunity to thank the French Embassy for their support of the Paralympic delegation. He noted that three sports — canoeing, rowing and boccia (related to

lawn bowling) — will be making their debut in this year's Games.

He also sent a congratulatory message to President Al-Sisi, highlighting the shift in societal attitudes since 2014 towards persons with disabilities. He highlighted the transformation "from a sense of shame among some families to a sense of pride and celebration".

Sobhi also announced that there will be equal rewards for Olympic and Paralympic medalists. He added that the opening ceremony will be held at the Place de la Concorde beside the Egyptian Pharaonic Obelisk in Paris.

Dolitier said that while the French ambassador was currently not in Egypt he would return to support the Paralympic delegation before their departure to Paris.

During the press conference detailing the Paralympic Games, Dolitier said she anticipated an "historic and remarkable event", noting that Egypt has a legacy of Paralympic champions such as the legendary world record holder and Egyptian Paralympic powerlifter Fatma Omar and Sherif Osman, who participated in four Summer Paralympic Games, winning three gold medals and one silver in weightlifting.

She added that France "eagerly awaits the champions in the majestic historic venues that have been transformed into sports arenas for the Paralympics". She emphasised the importance of ongoing cooperation between Egypt and France.

She said some athletes had been taught the basics of the French language in preparation for their trip to Paris, and re-

iterated France's support for the Paralympic Committee's social responsibility programme which aims to bridge the gap between Olympians and Paralympians.

Dolitier stressed the special arrangements that have been made in Paris for the athletes, including transportation and stadium access. She assured the athletes that they will be celebrated and cheered on and expressed her hope that this Paralympic Games will mark a new chapter of success on their journey. She highlighted that the Paris edition of the Paralympic will witness equality in the number of female and male participants. "It is a great opportunity for us to see both female and male Para athletes competing on equal grounds. We also hope that our message will be delivered to the whole world that there should be equal opportunities given to Para athletes and the able bodied."

A meeting was held between Sobhi and the Egyptian Paralympic delegation in a show of support and encouragement to the Egyptian Paralympic athletes ahead of the Games. It was attended by Mustafa who is heading the delegation. "Our hearts are with the Egyptian delegation at the Paralympic Games," Sobhi said.

He emphasised the importance of "upholding the dignity of the nation by ensuring complete discipline within the delegation". He stressed the importance of coordination between the Paralympic Committee, the ministry and the Egyptian Embassy in France. "We are all ambassadors representing the image of Egypt and the most important element in the sports system

is the athlete."

Sobhi sent his best wishes for success, saying he hoped to hear the Egyptian national anthem being played during the Games. He urged strict adherence to all organisational and administrative instructions issued by the responsible authorities.

Sobhi said the entire Egyptian Paralympic delegation had to bear in mind the shared goal of honorable representation in the Games. He noted that the political leadership had given unprecedented attention to athletes, especially Paralympic champions, by providing every means of support and success "which had positively influenced the international perception of sports in Egypt", benefiting both the sport and its participants.

Mustafa expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the Egyptian state and the Ministry of Youth and Sports for their "unwavering support" for the delegation participating in the Paris Paralympic Games. He vowed that the delegation would work to raise Egypt's name high in the Games.

Representing the Para athletes, Inas Al-Gebali, the first Para powerlifter to compete at the Paralympics and the first female dwarf to qualify for the Paralympics, said she was "very proud to be given a chance to participate in the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games as the first female dwarf. I thank the country under the leadership of President Al-Sisi for giving us, as dwarfs, the chance to compete and shine after years of negligence. I promise to do my best and collect a medal and set a record by being the first Egyptian dwarf to win a medal in the Paralympic Games."

## Historic first for Egyptian Paralympics in Paris

Egyptian Paralympic Committee President Hossameddin Mustafa tells *Al-Ahram Weekly* that holding the opening ceremony next to the Egyptian Obelisk was a monumental decision

In a landmark event for the Egyptian Paralympic movement, the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games will feature an opening ceremony at Place de la Concorde (or Concord Square) next to the iconic Egyptian Obelisk, marking the first time the ceremony will be held in an open-air setting, just like the Paris Olympics. President of the Egyptian Paralympic Committee Hossameddin Mustafa said how enthusiastic he was about the historic occasion and its significance for both athletes and spectators.

The Paralympic Games, to be held from 28 August to 8 September, involves athletes with a range of disabilities. The tournament begins shortly following the end of the 2024 Paris Olympics.

"Holding the opening ceremony at Concord Square next to the Egyptian Obelisk is a monumental decision," Mustafa said in an exclusive interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "It highlights the grandeur and historical significance of both the location and the event itself. This open-air setting will provide a unique and memorable experience for everyone involved."

The Egyptian Paralympic delegation in Paris will be the largest in the country's history as well as the biggest from Africa. Mustafa said Egypt will be participating in 20 sports, the highest number ever for the country. This includes the debut of canoe, rowing, and boccia (related to lawn bowling), showcasing the growing diversity and capabilities of Egyptian Paralympic athletes.

"Our delegation will be the biggest in the history of Egyptian Paralympic delegations and also the largest from Africa," Mustafa stated. "For the first time ever, we will compete in canoe, rowing and boccia. This is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our athletes and the support they have received."

In addition to the new sports, Egypt will also be making its inaugural Paralympic participation in table tennis, with an athlete with an intellectual disability. This inclusion marks a significant step forward in the representation and support of athletes with various disabilities in international



Mustafa

sports. "We are particularly proud to have an athlete with an intellectual disability competing in table tennis for the first time," Mustafa added. "This inclusion reflects our commitment to providing opportunities for all athletes, regardless of their disability, to showcase their talents on the world stage."

The excitement surrounding the Egyptian delegation is palpable as they prepare to make history at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. The combination of a historic opening ceremony, the largest and most diverse delegation, and the inclusion of new sports and athletes highlights Egypt's dedication to advancing Paralympic sports and supporting its athletes.

"As the head of the delegation, I want to emphasise that I will be there for everyone," Mustafa said. "I prefer not to speculate on the number of medals Egypt might secure, it's important to remember that success in sports often hinges on the athlete and the circumstances on the day of the competition."

"For the first time ever, we have included sports psychiatrists who have supported our Para athletes throughout their preparation and will continue to do so during the Games in Paris. I believe this will significantly impact their performance."

"Additionally, Egypt's presence in the Paralympic Games extends beyond our athletes. We are proud to have five Egyptian referees, three of them women, officiating in five sports — powerlifting, table tennis, goalball, badminton, and kayaking — under the auspices of their respective international federations. This, without a doubt, showcases Egypt's excellence and leadership across various fields."

Mustafa wished all the members of the Egyptian delegation the very best of luck. "We hope to improve our medal count in Paris, especially after not securing a gold medal at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics. The support and cheers from 110 million Egyptians will be invaluable as our Para athletes compete on the world stage."

## Mascot's mission is to inspire



THE PARALYMPIC Phryge, the spirited mascot for the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, alongside its Olympic counterpart, embodies the essence of French values and the spirit of inclusivity. Inspired by the iconic Phrygian cap, a historical symbol of liberty and freedom, the Paralympic Phryge brings this legacy into the world of sports. Known for its rich history and representation of freedom, the Phrygian cap has been a part of many significant moments in French his-

tory, making it a fitting symbol for the Games.

The Paralympic Phryge is on a mission to inspire and lead a revolution through sport. Always ready with its trainers on, this mascot encourages everyone to incorporate sport into their daily lives, highlighting the transformative power of physical activity on health, relationships and society.

With a visible running blade, the Paralympic Phryge proudly represents athletes with dis-

abilities, promoting the values of the Paralympic Games.

The Paralympic Phryge is a vibrant and energetic character, known for its spontaneity and fearlessness. It rallies everyone around with its enthusiasm, making it the ultimate cheerleader for Para athletes competing at the Paris 2024 Games.

Together with the Olympic Phryge, it will explore various sports and activities, embodying the joy and spirit of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.