Sports minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya urges athletes to utilise opportunity as Khelo India Winter Games 2026 set to begin in Leh

Figure skating, an Olympic discipline, has been added to the ice skating programme; Hosts UT Ladakh aim to finish on top of the medal tally like last season

Leh (Ladakh), Jan. 19: More than 1000 men and women will take part in the Ladakh leg of the 2026 Khelo India Winter Games starting in Leh on Tuesday. The Nawang Dorjan Stobdan (NDS) Stadium, the Army rink and the frozen Gupukh's Pond will be centres of attraction till the Games end on January 26. The opening ceremony of KIWG 2026 will take place Tuesday afternoon.

Four hundred and seventy-two athletes will take part in two ice sports – skating and hockey. The new attraction this year has been the introduction of figure skating, an Olympic event. In the Ladakh leg of KIWG last year, the hosts ended on top of the medal tally with four gold medals out of 13 at stake. Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra finished second and third.

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DTsHbANE0jb/?igsh=MTZrbTA1YWNyYmxvYg==

The first leg of Khelo India Winter Games 2026 is organised by the Youth Services and Sports department of the Union Territory of Ladakh under the supervision of the Sports Authority of India. The technical expertise for the conduct of the Games are provided by the national sports promotional bodies/federations managing ice sports.

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KIWG 2026 is the second event this year in the Khelo India calendar. The first event was the Khelo India Beach Games held in Diu from January 5-10. For all athletes and their support staff, the Leh Games will see how athletes perform under challenging high altitude climatic conditions like minus degree temperature and low oxygen.

"Like the Khelo India Beach Games in Diu, Leh will also challenge our athletes to push their limits in challenging conditions. The high-altitude and the oxygen factor are serious issues that athletes and coaches deal with and the Winter Games will be a good yardstick to measure how well they have prepared," said the Hon'ble Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, Dr Mansukh Mandaviya.

While ice hockey remains the showpiece sport in KIWG Ladakh, figure skating is being seen as a welcome addition. In the Asian Winter Games held in Harbin, China in February last year, India sent 23 ice skaters and a total of 59 athletes, the largest team ever for the Games. US-based Tara Prasad finished eighth overall, India's best figure skating finish in an Asian Games. Manjesh Tiwari finished 15th among men.

"In Harbin, we may not have won medals but we have shown that we can compete. More competition means more opportunities and that's why this edition of Khelo India Winter Games is a milestone," said Mohammad Abbas Nordak, a senior national coach from Ladakh.

Dr Mandaviya said the addition of figure skating in the ice skating programme is to "give more exposure and opportunity at the national level." "Khelo India is a pathway to excellence. Our skaters are making improvements at the continental level and we want to encourage them to achieve bigger goals. All athletes taking part in Khelo India events must take advantage of the opportunities coming their way," said Dr Mandaviya.

Haryana (62), Himachal Pradesh (55) and hosts Ladakh (52) have the biggest representation in terms of athletes among the 21 states and UTs taking part. There will be 17 gold medals at stake in the KIWG 2026 Ladakh leg. Of these, 15 will be for ice skating.

For more on KIWG: please click www.Winter.kheloindia.gov.in

ABOUT KHELO INDIA WINTER GAMES

Under the Khelo India Scheme, the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports (MYAS) organizes National-level competitions, i.e., Khelo India Youth Games, Khelo India University Games, Khelo India Para Games and Khelo India Winter Games to provide a platform for talented athletes to showcase their sporting and competitive skills. Starting in 2020, five editions of Khelo India Winter Games have been successfully conducted. While the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir have hosted all editions of KIWG, UT Ladakh started hosting the ice sports from 2024. This will be the third time UT Ladakh will be hosting the ice Games. Gulmarg in J&K will host the snow events. Apart from tapping talent, Khelo India Winter Games also showcase a region's art, culture, heritage, and promotes tourism through sports.

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