

Ladakh has emerged as India's hub for winter sports: LG Kavinder LG Ladakh declares 6th Khelo India Winter Games 2026 open in Leh Says 3rd consecutive hosting of KIWG shows Ladakh's readiness for major high-altitude events Underscores his commitment to strengthening winter sports infrastructure in Ladakh Says India's sports ecosystem transformed under PM Modi's leadership Thanks Sports Ministry, SAI for entrusting Ladakh with Khelo India Winter Games

Leh: The Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, Shri Kavinder Gupta, on Tuesday declared open the 6th edition of the Khelo India Winter Games 2026 at the state-of-the-art NDS Ice Hockey Stadium, Leh, marking another milestone in Ladakh's journey as India's emerging hub for winter sports.

Addressing the inaugural session, the Lt Governor said that hosting the Khelo India Winter Games for the third consecutive year reflects the confidence reposed by the nation in Ladakh's capability, commitment and preparedness to organise major sporting events in challenging high-altitude conditions. He noted that the Games are playing a crucial role in promoting winter sports, nurturing young talent and strengthening the sporting ecosystem in the region.

The 6th Khelo India Winter Games are being held over seven days and will conclude on January 26, coinciding with the celebration of Republic Day. Teams from 19 States comprising 1,060 participants, including athletes, technical officials, support staff, and volunteers, along with the Indian Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, are participating in the Games. The competitions include Ice Hockey, Speed Skating and, for the first time, Figure Skating.

Highlighting the significance of the inclusion of Figure Skating, the Lt Governor said it marks an important step in the evolution of winter sports in India. He added that plans are underway to include additional disciplines such as Curling in future editions to further broaden the scope of winter sports in the country.

The Lt Governor also underlined the importance of world-class infrastructure for the development of sports, stating that key venues including the NDS Ice Hockey Rink, Gupuk Pond and the Ladakh Scouts Regimental Centre Rink have been fully prepared for the Games. He referred to the 24x7 Ice Hockey Rink worth Rs 53.58 crore at NDS Stadium, Leh as a landmark achievement and informed that construction of another modern Ice Hockey Rink in Kargil is progressing, which will further strengthen winter sports infrastructure in Ladakh. "Where ice hockey and skating were once limited to 2-3 winter months, athletes can now practice year-round, significantly enhancing their skills and performance," he emphasised.

Shri Kavinder Gupta also highlighted Ladakh's recently launched comprehensive Sports Policy, positioning the UT as a winter sports powerhouse with talent identification at school level, inclusive environment for women and differently-abled athletes, 4% job reservation for outstanding sportspersons, guaranteed scholarships, up to Rs 100 crore cash awards, excellence centers, advanced training facilities, coach incentives, sports-education integration, and sports tourism promotion. He said the policy will provide structured opportunities for youth to pursue sports professionally.

The Lt Governor highlighted the relationship between sports and tourism in Ladakh, citing successful events like Climate Cup Football, Ladakh Marathon, and Khelo India Winter Games. "These mega events create employment, showcase Ladakh globally, and inspire youth to pursue winter sports professionally," he noted.

The Lt Governor said that under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has witnessed a transformative shift in its sports ecosystem. He noted that the Khelo India initiative has placed youth empowerment, fitness and sporting excellence at the centre of national priorities. He added that the inclusion of winter sports in the national sports framework and the organisation of international-level events in remote and high-altitude regions like Ladakh reflect the Prime Minister's inclusive and forward-looking vision. He further said that the continued encouragement and support of the Prime Minister have provided new opportunities and confidence to the youth of Ladakh.

The Lt Governor expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the Sports Authority of India for entrusting Ladakh with the hosting of the prestigious Games and for their continued support. He also appreciated the efforts of the Ladakh Administration, armed forces, volunteers and all stakeholders involved in the successful conduct of the event. Wishing the athletes success, the Lt Governor said the Khelo India Winter Games will continue to inspire the youth, promote sportsmanship and position Ladakh as a leading destination for winter sports in India.

Chairman/CEC, LAHDC Kargil, Dr Mohd Jaffer Akhoon, thanked the Government of India and the UT Administration for promoting winter sports and providing local youth a national platform. He emphasised grooming of national-level players through Khelo India Winter Games and hoped for the operation of Kargil's ice hockey stadium with the chilling plant soon. He also highlighted Suru Valley and Drass's ice-skating potential.

Chief Secretary Shri Ashish Kundra expressed hope that participants were experiencing Ladakh's hospitality despite chilling conditions, and congratulated the people of Ladakh on third consecutive hosting of Khelo India Winter Games. He confirmed world-class 24x7 NDS Ice Hockey Stadium readiness, and anticipated early completion of a similar ice hockey stadium facility in Kargil. Calling Ladakhi youth talented, he envisioned local ice hockey players, who are the backbone of national ice hockey teams, qualifying for the Winter Olympics.

Administrative Secretary, Youth Services and Sports, Shri Moses Kunzang, welcoming guests, highlighted the best arrangements despite challenges, along with health advisories issued to participants. He informed about measures taken to ensure environmentally sustainable organisation of the Games, and the aspiration of UT Administration to host Khelo India Winter Games in future also.

Earlier, the participating teams' colourful parade drew loud cheers from the crowd. Another major highlight of the opening ceremony was the musical performance by the Ladakh Scouts' Pipe Band along with vibrant dance performances by young artists. A video on Khelo India Winter Games was also screened on the occasion.

An ice hockey exhibition match between UT Ladakh and Army was played on the occasion. Similarly, ice skaters from UT Ladakh displayed their skills during the opening ceremony.

Among those present on the occasion were First Lady Smt Bindu Gupta, DGP Ladakh Shri Mukesh Singh, GOC 14 Corps Lt Gen Hitesh Bhalla, Deputy Commissioner Leh Romil Singh Donk; officials from Sports Authority of India, Joint Director, Youth Services and Sports, Shri Tahir Hussain, officials from Ice Hockey Federation of India and Ice Hockey Association of Ladakh, along with other officials from Indian Army, YSS UT Ladakh and senior officials from UT Administration.





