



## CM Omar articulates vision to make Gulmarg international ski destination

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS  
JAMMU, FEB 23

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today reaffirmed that it is not merely the government's intention but its consistent and sustained effort to develop Gulmarg into an international ski destination, emphasizing that this vision will create opportunities and benefit all sectors associated with sports and tourism in the region.

The Chief Minister was addressing the inaugural ceremony of the 6th edition of the Khelo India Winter Games, which were formally inaugurated earlier in the day by Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha at the picturesque ski resort of Gulmarg.

Welcoming athletes, officials and guests from across the country, the Chief Minister said, "In this 6th Khelo India Winter Games, I welcome all players, team members, ladies and gentlemen to your beautiful flowery valley—Gulmarg. A few weeks ago, we witnessed intense cold here. We had no idea that when the Games begin, there would be such warmth that skiing would become challenging. We may have to make some adjustments."

Referring to global winter sporting events, he said, "In the last few days, we were watching the Winter Olympics in Cortina, Italy. I congratulate India's skier, our own Arif Khan, who proudly waved the national flag and represented the country. I hope that from this edition of Khelo India Winter Games, a new Arif Khan will emerge."

The Chief Minister ex-



pressed concern over India's performance in international winter sporting events. "It is a matter of regret that despite our vast population, we have not yet secured a medal in the Asian Winter Games or the Olympic Winter Games. Whether you are a skier, skater or associated with any winter sport, I hope one among you will change that narrative." Highlighting the challenges posed by climate variability, he said, "The truth is we cannot rely solely on nature.

We decide the dates for the Games at the beginning of the year without knowing when snowfall will occur or how much snow will be there. I request the organizers not to fix dates in advance. Let us decide to hold the Games 10 to 15 days after sufficient snowfall."

Stressing the need for long-term infrastructure, the Chief Minister called for investment in artificial snow generation systems. "Time

has come for us to move towards artificial snow generation. I understand concerns about water and electricity usage, but if we do not create this infrastructure, a day may come when we will not even be able to ski in Gulmarg, and that would be truly unfortunate."

Reiterating his government's commitment, he said, "Not only it is our intention, but our full effort is to develop Gulmarg as an international ski resort. This will strengthen sports and provide economic security to all those connected with tourism."

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah underscored the livelihood dimension of winter tourism. "People associated with tourism like sledge operators, ski guides, ski instructors, ATV drivers, all make their living from this snow. It is our duty to provide the means and infrastructure that promote tourism and ensure its sustenance."

Encouraging the participants, he remarked, "I once again welcome all players who have come from across the country. I hope the next three days are wonderful for you. As always said, winning is not as important as participating. You have come here to participate, and we thank you for that."

Minister for Youth Services & Sports Satish Sharma, Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani, MLA Gulmarg Farooq Ahmad Shah, Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, Commandant of the High Altitude Warfare School (HAWs) Major General Puneet Doval, Commissioner Secretary Youth Services & Sports Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Anshul Garg, IGP Kashmir V.K. Birdi, Deputy Commissioner Baramulla Minga Sherpa, delegates, participants and other senior officers were present on the occasion.

## Open District Cricket Tournament: Quarter Final matches held across Kathua

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS  
JAMMU, FEB 23

The Quarter Final matches of the Open District Cricket Tournament, organized by District Administration Kathua in collaboration with the Social Welfare Department under the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan, were held today across various subdivisions of the district amid enthusiastic participation of youth and active presence of senior officers.

At Billawar, the match was played at Playground Bhaddu between A.K. Billawar and Deccan Charges Billawar in the presence of ADC Vinay Khosla. After a competitive contest, Deccan Charges Billawar emerged victorious and secured its place in the next round.

The Quarter Final match at Basohli was held at Model Higher Secondary School, ground in the presence of ADC Pankaj Bhagotra. The match between Basohli and Plassi teams witnessed spir-



ited play, with the former clinching victory.

At Bani, the match was held at Government Degree College between Team Bani and Backen in the presence of SDM Sandeep Sharma. Team Bani won the match and advanced to the Semi-Finals. Similarly, in Hiranagar, the Quarter Final match

was played between Hiranagar Cricket Club and Mukesh 11 Cricket Club in the presence of SDM Phulail Singh. Hiranagar Cricket Club won the match and qualified for the next stage.

The tournament is being organized to channelize the energy of youth towards constructive pursuits and to

reinforce the message of drug-free society under the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan through sports-based interventions.

The winning teams from all subdivisions will now compete in the Semi-Finals scheduled to be held at Sports Stadium Kathua on February 25, 2026.

## Indian women's team steam past Perth Azzurri 7-2 in friendly

PERTH, FEB 23: The Indian senior women's national football team defeated Australian club side Perth Azzurri 7-2 in a closed-door friendly at Macedonia Park in Perth on Monday, February 23, according to the All India Football Federation (AIFF).

Australian club side Perth Azzurri took the lead early on through a penalty, but Dangmei Grace equalised soon after, as the two sides went into the break level at 1-1.

The Blue Tigresses tore ahead of their opponents in the second half, as Grace put them in the lead minutes after the restart, before Rimpa Haldar and Babina Devi Lisham added two more goals, giving India a 4-1 advantage.

While Perth Azzurri pulled one back, India added three more towards the end - Kaviya Pakkirisamy scoring once, while Sangita Basfore added two more.

The Indian senior women's team's 26-member squad for the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Women's Asian Cup Australia 2026 was an-



nounced on February 20.

The top two sides from each group, along with the two best third-placed teams, will progress to the quarter-finals. The four quarter-final winners will qualify for the FIFA Women's World Cup Brazil 2027. The losing quarter-finalists will contest the play-offs for the two remaining direct spots allocated to the AFC for the World Cup. The two play-off losers will have another chance of qualifying for Brazil via the Play-off Tournament.

-India's squad for the AFC Women's Asian Cup Australia 2026:

Goalkeepers: Panthoi Chanu Elangbam, Shreya Hooda, Sowmiya Narayanamsamy.

Defenders: Astam Oraon, Juli Kishan, Martina Thokchom, Nirmala Devi Phanjoubam, Sanju, Sarita Yumnam, Shilky Devi Hemam, Sushmita Lepcha, Sweetie Devi Ngangbam.

Midfielders: Anju Tamang, Aveka Singh, Babina Devi Lisham, Jasoda Munda, Sanfida Nongrum,

Sangita Basfore.

Forwards: Grace Dangmei, Kaviya Pakkirisamy, Lynda Kom Serto, Malavika P, Manisha Kalyan, Pyari Xaxa, Rimpa Haldar, Soumya Guguloth.

Head coach: Amelia Valverde

Assistant coach: Crispin Chettri

Assistant coach: Priya PV

Goalkeeping coach: Eli Avila

Goalkeeping coach: Mario Aguiar

Strength and conditioning coach: Jose Sanchez.

## Overconfident India needed to get rid of their ego, adapt to conditions: Gavaskar

AHMEDABAD, FEB 23: India needed to take a cue from South Africa's innings, shed their ego and adapt to the conditions instead of walking out with overconfidence and throwing their bats at everything in their T20 World Cup clash, feels batting legend Sunil Gavaskar.

South Africa snapped India's 12-match unbeaten streak at the T20 World Cup, handing the defending champions a heavy 76-run defeat.

"Having seen how Brevis and Miller built their partnership, that was the approach needed from the Indian batters," Gavaskar said on JioStar.

"The Indian batters did not do that. They came out with overconfidence, threw their bat at everything and lost wickets. South Africa clearly outsmarted India and it was a well-deserved win for them."

After losing early wickets, Miller and Brevis stitched a partnership to take the Pro-



teas to 187/7.

India then produced a below-par batting effort, repeatedly losing wickets be bowled out for 111 in 18.5 overs.

"India did not take notes from South Africa's innings. They came out and threw their bat at every delivery hoping for a boundary. That is not how you play T20 cricket.

"You have to learn from the opposition. If they have scored well on a tricky surface like this, you have to get rid of your ego, observe and adjust."

India lost their top three --

Ishan Kishan (0), Abhishek Sharma (15) and Tilak Varma (1) -- inside the power play to slip to 26/3.

"Tilak Varma has been a very street-smart batter. But I was disappointed with his approach in this game. Ishan Kishan lost his wicket in the first over. The required rate was around 9.5 runs per over, not 15.

"So, Tilak could have given himself more time. At the other end, Abhishek Sharma had back-to-back ducks. So, the responsibility was on Tilak to stick around, build a partnership, and get past the first six overs, but

he failed to do that.

"You don't always need to score 70 runs in the Power-play. Even 55-60 runs would have been a good platform. But the reckless approach of the Indian batters led to their downfall in Ahmedabad."

India next take on Zimbabwe and Gavaskar said he would like to see Axar Patel return to the playing XI after missing the previous two games, with the team management opting for Washington Sundar.

"I would look at bringing Axar Patel back into the playing XI, keeping in mind the lack of too many left-handed batters in Zimbabwe's line-up. You could possibly bring him in place of Arshdeep Singh.

"But Arshdeep bowled so well against South Africa and you wouldn't want to change somebody who looked in such good rhythm. So, maybe they might not make a change and go with the same team.

## Hockey Pro League: India's Rourkela losses point to lack of team depth

CHANDIGARH, FEB 23: The Indian team's performance at the recent Rourkela leg of the FIH Pro League was shocking. It started with a 3-1 defeat against Belgium, in which they conceded twice in the final quarter, but spiralled into a four-match run of one-sided losses. As the goals stacked up, 19 conceded in four games, the crowd's reactions went from disbelief to indifference,

while chief coach Craig Fulton's emotions went from frustration to resignation.

This is not the first time India have had a poor run in the Pro League under the South African. They ended last season with seven losses in eight games to finish second-last, but those seven defeats on the trot were forgotten after their Asia Cup victory earned India a

berth in the World Cup.

The latest run of losses has come at the beginning of an important season, with the Asian Games and World Cup lined up in the second half of the year. With the team going through a transition, Fulton is trying out new players and different combinations. But even for an experimental team, the manner of the defeats is alarming.

BENGALURU, FEB 23: Indian Women's Hockey Team midfielder Sakshi Rana is utilising the ongoing national camp in Bengaluru to enhance her skills and tactical understanding under the guidance of Chief Coach Sjoerd Marijne and Scientific Advisor Wayne Lombard.

According to a release, the 18-year-old, who had a memorable senior debut last year by scoring against Spain, described the camp as a key environment for daily learning, physical conditioning, and improvement in game intelligence.

"Whatever things we are lacking in, they are making us work on that day by day," Sakshi shared regarding the camp's productive atmosphere. "Wayne, sir, is doing a

great job focusing on how much strength and fitness is needed, and teaching us the importance of recovery. As for the structure, they are explaining everything slowly and clearly. The senior players are also constantly pushing us juniors to give our absolute best," she said.

Playing in the midfield early in her career, Sakshi's naturally fast, attacking style of play was initially developed at the Pritam Siwach Academy in Sonapat under coach Kuldeep. Now, in the senior setup, the coaching staff is helping her balance that natural speed with tactical awareness.

"In our one-on-one meetings, the coach told me to keep doing what I am doing, but highlighted the need to

improve my pre-scanning and on-field communication since I play in the centre," Sakshi explained. "In team meetings, we are focusing heavily on structure—how to hold the ball instead of dodging, because at the international level, the pressure comes very quickly."

Her preparation has also benefited immensely from her recent stint in the Hero Hockey India League. Competing with top international talent provided her with crucial exposure and a better understanding of high-level match preparation.

"After playing in the Hero HIL, a lot of confidence came in terms of communication," she noted. "Watch-

ing foreign players like Yibbi Jansen play in the centre also taught me a lot about how to approach the game."

While her immediate focus is on absorbing everything she can at the camp, the team is simultaneously building up toward the upcoming FIH Hockey World Cup 2026 Qualifiers in Hyderabad, Telangana, scheduled from March 8 to 14. Taking inspiration from senior teammates like Neha Goyal, Sakshi is simply keeping her head down and working hard so she is ready if the opportunity arises.

"Every day I step out thinking that I have to give my best," Sakshi stated about her mindset. "If I go for the qualifying round, then I just have to come back winning."