



" From Heritage to High Performance": Smt. Raksha Nikhil Khadse Says Khelo India Tribal Games is Building Champions from India's Tribal Heartland

3,800 participants, 9 sports disciplines and 106 gold medals mark India's first dedicated national platform for tribal sporting talent

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Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs & Sports, Smt. Raksha Nikhil Khadse, today visited the venues of the 1st edition of Khelo India Tribal Games (KITG) 2026 being held across Raipur, Jagdalpur and Sarguja from March 25 to April 3, 2026, and described the initiative as a transformative platform for tribal empowerment, grassroots talent identification and nation-building through sports.

The inaugural edition of KITG has brought together around 3,800 participants, including athletes, coaches and officials, across 9 sports disciplines, including 7 medal sports and 2 demonstration sports, with 106 gold medals at stake. The event mascot, 'मोरवीर' (Mor Veer), symbolises courage, pride and the valour of India's more than 700 tribal communities.

Addressing the gathering, Smt. Khadse stated that sports is not merely a competitive activity but a powerful instrument of empowerment, confidence building and national integration. She said that the Khelo India Tribal Games is a social movement to revive India's sporting heritage, empower tribal youth and build an India where every village has a champion.

Referring to the vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, she said that India is committed to becoming a Top-10 sporting nation by the 2036 Olympics and entering the Top-5 by Viksit Bharat @ 2047, and that initiatives such as KITG will play a crucial role in achieving this national objective.

Smt. Khadse observed that traditional sporting initiatives such as the Bastar Olympics and Sarguja Olympics demonstrate the strong and vibrant grassroots sporting culture already present in tribal regions. She noted that the Games provide an institutional pathway to identify and nurture this existing talent.

Highlighting the Ministry's focus on women's participation, she referred to the success of the ASMITA Leagues, under which 124 leagues have enabled participation of nearly 14,000 girls in sports such as football and hockey, including in sensitive and Left Wing Extremism affected areas. She stated that such initiatives are playing an important role in strengthening women through sports and expanding opportunities for girls from rural and tribal regions.

Smt. Khadse further informed that Sports Authority of India coaches have been deployed at all seven competition venues to identify emerging talent during the Games. She said that top-performing athletes will be directly integrated into the Khelo India ecosystem, thereby creating a seamless pathway from grassroots to podium.

Emphasising India's civilisational sporting legacy, she said that tribal communities have historically been pioneers and practitioners of traditional sports, including teerandazi (archery), and that the Games also serve as an effort to revive and celebrate this rich heritage spanning thousands of years.

Appreciating the enthusiastic participation across venues, Smt. Khadse stated that the Khelo India Tribal Games has emerged as a significant step towards tribal empowerment, youth development and national sporting excellence.

During her visit to Jagdalpur, Smt. Khadse was accompanied by senior digniy including Shri Sanjay Pandey, Mayor, Jagdalpur; Shri Mayank Srivastava, IPS, DDG Khelo India; Shri Shalabh Sinha, IPS, Superintendent of Police; Shri Akash Chhikara, IAS, District Magistrate; Shri Pratik Jain, IAS, CEO, Zila Panchayat; Shri Rishikesh Tiwari, SDM, Jagdalpur; Smt. Tanuja Salam, Director (Sports), Chhattisgarh; Ms. Mamta Shree Ojha, Director, Khelo India; and Shri Doman Singh, IAS, Commissioner, Bastar.

The programme concluded with interactions with athletes, coaches and officials, and a review of talent identification efforts underway at the competition venues.

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