



Astronomy enthusiasts from across India participate in the fourth HDSR Star Party

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Expert astrophotographers and amateur astronomers from across the country participated in the fourth edition of the Hanle Dark Sky Reserve Star Party from 7 – 12 September, 2026 at the Indian Astronomical Observatory in Hanle, Ladakh.

“The enthusiasm with which amateur astronomers as well as astrophotographers from across the country participated, highlighted the event’s role in underlining the importance of preserving its pristine dark skies, both for scientific research and for the public, said Prof. Annapurni Subramaniam, Director of IIA.

Around 40 amateur astronomers from Chandigarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, New Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. These selected participants travelled to Leh with their advanced equipment, to fully utilise the four nights under the dark skies of Hanle at the event organised jointly by the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Department of Wildlife Protection of UT Ladakh, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR).

The Open Night for the local communities and the nearby tourists on 10th September saw footfalls of more than 1200 people.

The Star Party participants, along with the HDSR Astronomy Ambassadors and the Observatory staff showed the visitors through specially designated amateur telescopes and answered their myriad questions throughout the evening. Senior officials from various organisations in the area were also invited to look through telescopes and were briefed on the importance of curtailing light pollution in the region.

Special training sessions were organised every evening for the HDSR Astronomy Ambassadors, the 25 local villagers who have been trained to conduct astronomy tours for tourists for the past three years, and who have been supplied with telescopes by the government of Ladakh. The expert participants also acted as mentors and helped in teaching many practical aspects of night sky watching and astrophotography to the Ambassadors.

The Hanle Dark Sky Reserve (HDSR) in Ladakh is renowned for its exceptionally dark night sky, making it a highly attractive location for astrophotographers and amateur astronomers. Notified as a dark sky reserve by the Government of Ladakh in December 2022, HDSR represents a novel astronomy based socio-economic development initiative. It is built on two key concepts: reducing light pollution for the benefit of continued research at the Observatory, and promoting astro-tourism that creates benefits for local communities.

The success of HDSR is enabled by the strong commitment of various stakeholders, including the UT Ladakh administration. HDSR is anchored by the Indian Astronomical Observatory at Hanle. The Observatory is operated by the IIA, an autonomous institution under the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

The annual HDSR Star Party underscores the importance of preserving the dark skies of Hanle for the future, and the diverse set of stakeholders for whom the Hanle skies are a vital and rare resource. “With the 3.7-m upgraded Himalayan Chandra Telescope and the 13.7-m National Large Optical-infrared Telescope that are proposed to come up in Hanle, it is imperative that we come together to safeguard its dark skies”, said Prof DK Sahu of IIA, Scientist in charge of the Observatory.



Fig: Group photo of the HDSR Star Party 2026 participants (credit: Ajay Talwar)

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