



Union MoS Raksha Khadse Highlights Role of India-New Zealand Rugby Series in Advancing Sports Diplomacy and Youth Development

Rajgir, Bihar hosts historic U20 series marking 100 years of sporting ties, bringing young athletes together through international competition and cultural exchange

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Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports Smt. Raksha Khadse addressed the significance of the India-New Zealand U20 Rugby Series in strengthening sports diplomacy, expanding international exposure for young athletes and advancing cooperation in sports development. Held at the Rajgir Sports Complex in Bihar under the 100 Years of Unity through Sport initiative, the series marks a century of sporting ties between India and New Zealand.

The historic India-New Zealand U20 Rugby Series concluded at the Rajgir Sports Complex in Bihar on Tuesday, marking an important milestone in the sporting relationship between the two countries as part of the 100 Years of Unity through Sport initiative.



The event was graced by Shri Samrat Chaudhary, Chief Minister of Bihar, Smt Raksha Khadse, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India; Ms Shreyasi Singh, Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, Government of Bihar; Shri Matt Ayers, Acting High Commissioner of New Zealand in India; Shri Sanjay Mayukh, President, Rugby Football Association of Bihar and Member of Legislative Council - Bihar; and Mr Rahul Bose, President, Rugby India.

100 years of India-New Zealand sporting ties

The series formed part of the 100 Years of Unity through Sport initiative, reflecting the role of sport in strengthening India's international relationships and cultural connections. Bringing together young athletes from India and New Zealand, the exchange highlighted how sport can serve as a powerful instrument of soft power, fostering mutual understanding, friendship and long-term collaboration between nations.

India-New Zealand U20 Rugby Series Brings Young Athletes Together

Bringing together the U20 men's and women's teams from India and New Zealand, the series provided a platform for young athletes to connect through rugby, shared learning and cultural exchange. The programme featured joint training sessions, cultural interactions and four highly-competitive Rugby Sevens matches, including for the first time in history, two mixed-team matches in which national players from two nations played alongside each other, resulting in free-flowing exciting rugby. There can be no better example of sport dissolving boundaries.



Smt Raksha Khadse, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, said, "Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, India continues to strengthen its global engagement through sport, recognising its potential as a powerful instrument of soft power. The India–New Zealand U20 Rugby Series exemplifies how sport can transcend borders, foster mutual understanding and bring nations together through a shared spirit of unity and friendship. As India and New Zealand celebrate 100 years of sporting ties, exchanges such as this demonstrate how sporting partnerships can strengthen bilateral relations, encourage cultural dialogue and create lasting connections between young people across nations."

Ms Shreyasi Singh, Minister of Sports and Industries, Government of Bihar, said, "Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and the guidance of Hon'ble Chief Minister of Bihar Shri Samrat Chaudhary, Bihar is committed to strengthening its sporting ecosystem and creating greater opportunities for young athletes. It is a matter of pride for Bihar to host this special India–New Zealand rugby exchange in Rajgir, celebrating 100 years of sporting ties between the two countries. Sport brings people and cultures together, and this series provides young athletes from both nations an opportunity to share experiences, learn from one another and build lasting connections, further strengthening international sporting collaboration and cultural understanding."



Mr Rahul Bose, President, Rugby India, said, “The India-New Zealand U20 Rugby Series is about much more than the game itself. As we mark 100 years of sporting ties between our countries, bringing these young players together reflects the values that make rugby special: respect, teamwork and friendship. The mixed-team matches were a particularly meaningful part of this exchange, with Indian and New Zealand players standing alongside one another as teammates. We hope the relationships built here in Rajgir will endure and create a foundation for continued collaboration between Rugby India and New Zealand Rugby.”

The visiting New Zealand delegation comprised the U20 men’s team, Tama Toa, and the U20 women’s team, Hine Toa, featuring 24 young Māori players. Their visit provided an opportunity for the players to experience Indian culture while sharing their own traditions and perspectives with their Indian counterparts.

Strengthening Bilateral Cooperation in Rugby Development

The series also builds on the growing collaboration between Rugby India and New Zealand Rugby. In May 2026, Rugby India hosted New Zealand Rugby coaching educators at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar for a coaching development programme involving 35 Indian coaches. The programme focused on strengthening coaching capabilities and supporting the continued development of rugby in India.



As India and New Zealand celebrate a century of sporting ties, the series in Rajgir underscores the power of sport to strengthen bilateral relationships, encourage cultural understanding and create lasting connections between young people. It also reflects the growing role of sport in India's international engagement, demonstrating how shared sporting experiences can build bridges between nations and contribute to a more connected global sporting community.

Ayushman Kumar

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