



BACKGROUNDS

Press Information Bureau
Government of India

Dal Lake to Shine with Khelo India Water Sports Festival

At the heart of Kashmir, where the Zabarwan mountains kiss the sky and the shikaras glide softly across shimmering waters, Dal Lake has for centuries symbolized the soul of Srinagar. Tourists from across the world have come to admire its beauty, culture, and heritage. Now, Dal Lake is ready to take on a new role, that of a sporting arena, where youthful energy and athletic spirit will ripple across its waters.

From **August 21 to 23**, Dal Lake will host the **first-ever Khelo India Water Sports Festival**, marking a historic moment when this jewel of Kashmir transforms into a national sporting destination.

About Khelo India Water Sports Festival 2025

- Dates: 21st to 23rd August, 2025
- Venue: Dal Lake, Srinagar
- Sports: Rowing, Canoeing, Kayaking (medal events) + Water Skiing, Dragon Boat, Shikara Sprint (demo events)
- Participants: 400+ athletes from 36 States/UTs
- Organisers: Sports Authority of India & J&K Sports Council
- Launched in 2017-18, the Khelo India programme aims to identify sporting talent at the grassroots level, promote active lifestyles, and strengthen India's sports infrastructure.

More than **400 athletes from 36 states and union territories** will converge on the lake to compete in three medal events: **rowing, canoeing, and kayaking**, along with exciting demonstration events like **water skiing, dragon boat race, and a shikara sprint**. This carnival of water sports is set to blend sporting excellence with cultural heritage, creating an unforgettable experience for participants and spectators alike.

A New Era for Sports in Jammu & Kashmir

The Government has been consistently working to position Jammu & Kashmir as one of India's premier sports hub. Gulmarg already

holds pride of place as the country's winter sports destination, having hosted **five successful editions of the Khelo India Winter Games**. Now, with Dal Lake stepping into the spotlight, J&K is set to become an important centre for water sports.

Organised jointly by the **Sports Authority of India (SAI)** and the **J&K Sports Council**, this festival is a direct result of the government's '**Khelo Bharat**' policy, aimed at boosting grassroots sports, generating livelihoods, and



rejuvenating local infrastructure. The festival is expected to bring economic benefits not just to athletes and coaches- but also to shikara owners, houseboat operators, and the wider tourism ecosystem.

Voices of Inspiration

Renowned Olympian and international canoeing judge **Bilquis Mir** reflected with pride: *"This is not just an event, but the beginning of a new era for water sports in our country. On behalf of all athletes, we sincerely thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sports Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, and the entire Khelo India team for prioritizing water sports and truly recognizing their importance."*

When I started paddling here in the 1990s at the age of 10, my dream was to represent India one day. That dream came true when I became the first Indian woman to participate in the World Cup. I am certain this event will be very exciting and serve as a major inspiration for our young athletes who dream of representing India on the biggest stage."

Water sports coach **Mohammad Imtiaz** said, *"It was the Khelo India Winter Sports Games that established Gulmarg as the country's winter sports hub. Similarly, the Khelo India Water Sports Festival will make Jammu and Kashmir renowned among water sports athletes across the nation."*

Many youths have pinned their hopes on this event. **Mohsin Ali**, a young water sports athlete preparing to participate in the kayaking event, is the state champion of Jammu & Kashmir and has won **15 medals, including three golds, in national-level competitions**. Like many other athletes, Mohsin is training hard with the hope of clinching the gold medal in these games being hosted here.

Dal Lake: Culture Meets Competition

Beyond sports, the event is conceived as a **celebration of Kashmir's culture and ecology**. Cleaning drives and weed removal operations have been intensified to preserve the natural beauty of the lake, while the festival's mascot, the **Himalayan Kingfisher** and its logo featuring a shikara proudly highlight the lake's identity.

Shikara operator **Mohammad Rafiq Malla**, a water sports athlete himself, sees this as a turning point:

"This festival will bring new opportunities not only for the athletes but also for people like me who live inside Dal Lake. I want to see young athletes from all over the country playing in Dal Lake. At the same time, I would also like them to enjoy their visit to Jammu and Kashmir and witness the bustling life inside Dal Lake. They should see the people of Dal swimming and taking lotus flowers and vegetables from floating gardens into their baskets, and admire the beauty of the Zabarwan mountains."



Dal Lake: An Iconic Waterfront



Dal Lake, often referred to as the jewel of Srinagar, is a sprawling urban lake located in the heart of Kashmir. This iconic water body spans over 18 square kms and is integral to the tourism and economy of the region. The lake's intricate network of waterways, floating gardens, and houseboats are framed by the majestic Himalayas, providing a picturesque setting.

Affectionately referred to as the "**Lake of Flowers**", the lake is crucial for local commerce, supporting industries such as fishing and the harvesting of aquatic plants.

The lake's shoreline is adorned with a boulevard lined with parks, Mughal-era gardens, houseboats, and hotels. Visitors can enjoy stunning views of Dal Lake from the historic Mughal gardens like Shalimar Bagh and Nishat Bagh.

Historically, travellers and poets have praised its beauty and vibrant life, contributing to its status as a symbol of the region.¹

A Landmark in India's Sporting Landscape

Dal Lake is more than just a venue; it is **a symbol of India's vision to take sports beyond stadiums and into its natural landscapes**. From the snowy slopes of Gulmarg to the sandy beaches of Diu, and now the sparkling waters of Srinagar, **Khelo India is redefining the country's sporting geography**.

As the first ripples of oar and paddle spread across Dal Lake during the festival, they will carry with them not just competition but also messages of **heritage, hope, and harmony**. In doing so, the **Khelo India Water Sports Festival 2025** is set to change the destiny of Dal Lake and elevate Jammu & Kashmir onto India's sporting map with an indelible mark.



As Dal Lake readies to echo with the splash of oars and cheers of athletes, it is not just hosting a festival, it is scripting a new chapter in Kashmir's sporting journey, where culture and competition flow together like its timeless waters.

To see more:

- <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNaNKxnSjWH/?igsh=YXN6MTdmd213cmMz>
- <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNXtHVsv0EK/?igsh=MXZnd3NlaWVvbmRmYw>

¹ <https://www.incredibleindia.gov.in/en/jammu-and-kashmir/srinagar/dal-lake>

References:

- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports: Khelo India Press Release
- Incredible India: <https://www.incredibleindia.gov.in/en/jammu-and-kashmir/srinagar/dal-lake>

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