



Athletics
Federation
of India

NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2024

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NEWSLETTER



AHMEDABAD IS NEW DESTINATION FOR NIDJAM

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-says World Champion Neeraj Chopra



Sprawling **Gujarat University** Campus will play host to **NIDJAM**



The sprawling Gujarat University Campus spread over 300 acres will play host to Athletics Federation of India's (AFI) flagship event—NIDJAM (National Inter District Junior Athletics Meet) this year.

The prestigious event will be conducted in coordination with the government of Gujarat and Sports Authority of Gujarat.

The 19th edition of NIDJAM, scheduled to be held from February 16 to 18 in Ahmedabad, is expected to attract more than 7,000 budding athletes from 615 districts in the country.

Each district is eligible to field a 13-member team, including one male and one female official. All district teams are entitled to travel allowance and free boarding and lodging.

The three-day competition will give youngsters from far flung areas of the country the chance to showcase their potential at a bigger platform.

The Gujarat University campus has an eight-lane synthetic track and a spacious warm-up area. "The preliminary rounds of long jump, shot put and kids javelin event will be held off the main arena," Adille Sumariwalla, president of the AFI disclosed.

National and International athletics fraternity too have been invited to witness the biggest grassroots programme in India.

Before the competition starts, the competitors will have to go for the biometric and age verification system. The eligible athletes will be given bib numbers.

To update the knowledge of the budding athletes, a seminar on the side effects of over training and use of performance enhancing drugs will be conducted.

The competitors will be provided three meals a day. Each district contingent head will be given coupons to avoid confusion. The dining area is huge and at least 2,000 athletes can be seated at a time.

Breakfast time will be from 6 to 10am. Lunch time is 12 to 4pm, while dinner will start at 6pm and continue until 10.

In addition to the main kitchen, there will be refreshment stalls close to the ground and for athletes competing in triathlon. "There will be a provision to have refreshments at the waiting arena for those athletes competing in triathlon events," the AFI president added.

Last year the AFI talent identification team had shortlisted 900 athletes having potential to excel in future international events. A 15-day summer camp was also organised to further assess the capabilities and abilities of the promising athletes.

"A similar pattern of scouting talent will be followed this year in Ahmedabad," Sumariwalla added.

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AFI president

FOCUS IS TO BUILD STRENGTH IN PLEASANT CLIMES OF POTCHEFSTROOM IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE SUMMER

-says World Champion Neeraj Chopra



Reigning Olympic and world champion, Neeraj Chopra, was candid in saying he wasn't able to spend quality time with family and friends in 2023 as his goal was to excel at the Budapest World Athletics Championships.

"I normally get seven to eight weeks in a year to be with my parents and enjoy home food. During a short break, before I start preparing for next season, it is also time to do some personal work," the 26-year-old javelin thrower said from his training base in South Africa.

"The remaining 10 months of the year is all about criss-crossing the globe to achieve new goals. I've to follow a strict diet regimen; lift lots of weight in the gym to be successful at the global level."

Being an Olympic year, the celebrated Indian javelin thrower has a hectic schedule in the coming months. Currently based out of Potchefstroom in South Africa, he later plans to shift his training base to Europe ahead of the Paris Olympic Games. "The warm and pleasant weather in Potchefstroom at this time of the year is conducive to building a good foundation," he added.

Potchefstroom has often been a training destination for Chopra during these months in the past. However, this time he has made slight changes in his off-season training plan.

"I've included strength and conditioning trainer Spencer Mackay in the coaching staff," he disclosed. "Otherwise, it's a normal routine training programme."

Mackay is head of the strength and conditioning team at Inspire Institute of Sports in Vijayanagar, Karnataka.

Chopra had battled a groin injury in 2023. Despite the niggle he was unstoppable both at the Budapest World Athletics Championships and Hangzhou Asian Games.

According to champion javelin thrower, since his



focus is to build strength in the off season, he prefers to have a protein rich diet from natural food. "If required I do take food supplements too," he added.

Overall, he said, there hasn't been any change in the diet plan. "The diet plan is generally the same throughout the year. Except during the competitive season, I sometimes go for a carb- rich diet," he said.

Chopra is expected to open his 2024 season in May. Other build-up competitions to prepare for the Olympic Games will be decided later. "We will move step by step," he said.

After the South Africa training stint, Turkey will be his training base. However, the main training venue ahead of the Paris is still to be decided.

"We are still in the process of shortlisting the final practice venue ahead of the 2024 Olympic Games. But it is certain the training venue will be close to Paris and should have all the facilities we need for the final preparation," the champion said.

First step is to qualify for Paris Olympic Games at World Relays in Bahamas

The basic plan for the core group of 400m sprinters is to move forward step by step, Raj Mohan, deputy chief athletics coach said. The main focus this year is to achieve Paris Olympic Games qualification time in longer relay events at the World Relays scheduled to be held in Bahamas on May 4 and 5. "Top 14 nations during the World Relays will get an automatic qualification to the 2024 Paris Olympic Games," the national athletics coach added.

The Indian team will compete in all three longer relays—men; women and mixed. A big batch of 18 sprinters, including four in the women's section, are currently camping at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Campus in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

The main focus during this time of the year is to build a strong foundation so that the athletes are able to perform at optimum level during the competitive season from May to July.

"We have at least three sessions of weight at the gym to build up overall strength. There are two core sessions in a week. Focus is also on improving specific endurance," the national coach said.

According to the national athletics coach, practice sessions from mid-January will change slightly as the athletes will have to compete in domestic competition in March. "The competition in March will give us a fair idea about overall winter preparation," the coach added.

The performance during the buildup competitions will be to evaluate capabilities of an individual as the main goal is to qualify for Paris Olympic Games in relay at the World Relays in Bahamas. "The next step will be to give better performance during the Olympic Games," the coach added.

The core group of athletes will go for an international exposure ahead of the Bahamas World Relays.



"We will compete in Jamaica's domestic events to sharpen up competitive skills," the national athletics coach said.

The national men's 4x400m relay team had an outstanding 2023 season. The Indian quartet finished fifth at the 2023 Budapest World Athletics Championships held in Hungary.

The team also shattered the continental record in 4x400m relay and twice clocked below three minutes to set a new benchmark. The Indian team continued their good work and clinched gold at the Hangzhou Asian Games in China.

The women 4x400m and mixed 4x400m relay team claimed silver at the Asian Games. The national athletics coach is hopeful of good results during the World Relays in Bahamas. "We are expecting all three relay teams to make the cut for the Olympic Games," Raj Mohan said.

Core group of distance runners are gearing up for a consistent performance

A core group of five male distance runners, including Asian Games medallists Kartik Kumar and Gulveer Singh, are logging steady miles this winter in Bengaluru to earn a consistent performance in the competitive season.

"The main goal is to achieve qualification for the Paris Olympic Games scheduled to be held in July," Surrender Singh Bhandari, national athletics coach associated with the national camp, said.

Mohan Saini, Sandeep Singh and Dinesh Kumar are the other distance runners in the men's section.

Ankita Dhyani and Seema are two prominent female distance runners in the camp which is in progress at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Campus in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

At the July 26 to August 11 Paris Olympic Games, 1,810 athletes including 905 women are expected to compete. In an individual event, a maximum of three athletes from each National Olympic Committee (NOC) can compete. Each NOC can field one relay team.

The qualification standards in track and field are very challenging for the Paris, the national coach said.

In men, automatic qualification time for 5,000m is 13:05.00, while it is 14:52.00 for the women. For men, 10,000m qualification time is 27:00.00, and 30:40.00 for women. Apart from automatic qualification the athletes can also achieve a berth for the Games through the world ranking system. A maximum of 42 athletes can compete in 5,000m, while the number in 10,000m is restricted to 27 athletes.

The qualification window will close on June 30. In the 2023 season, none of India's top male or



female distance runners were able to achieve the challenging automatic qualification standards in the distance track races.

However, Avinash Sable and Parul Chaudhary were able to win Olympic Games berths for men and women's 3000m steeplechase last year. The qualification time in men is xxx and 9:23 in women.

The training of distance runners, said the national coach, is on expected lines. "The athletes have potential. They are training hard. We are hopeful of consistent performance in the upcoming competition season," the national coach added.

“A consistent performance will ensure the athletes are able to earn valuable world ranking points before the qualification deadline of June 30.”

Training sessions in winters are primarily focused on building general and specific endurance to withstand the challenging competition season.

“The average weekly mileage for the male distance runner is between 170-180km, while the longest weekly run is 30km,” the coach added. “The average pace for the long runs is generally three minutes 50 seconds. As the athletes get stronger,

the average pace of the long runs will get faster.”

The average pace during long runs for the women is around four minutes 20 seconds. “We are aiming for good performances in quality competitions in May/June,” the coach said.

AFI select 15-member team for the Asian Indoor in Tehran

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) shortlisted a 15-member squad for the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships scheduled to be held next month in Tehran, Iran.

India's Asian Games champion, Tajinderpal Singh Toor is among the 15-member team that will compete in the 11th Asian Indoor Athletics Championships to be held from February 17 to 19 in Iran. Hangzhou Asian Games silver medalist and national record holder in women's 100m hurdles, Jyothi Yarraji, will compete in 60m hurdles. While Tejas Ashok Shrise will compete in the men's 60m hurdles.

Distance runners Gulveer Singh and Ankita will compete in the 3000m track race in their respective groups.

Team: Men: Elakkiyadasan VK (60m), Tejas Ashok Shrise (60m hurdles), Mohammed Afsal (800m), Ajay Kumar Saroj (1500m), Gulveer Singh (3000m), Tajinderpal Singh Toor and Dhanvir



Singh (shot put). Women: Jyothi Yarraji (60m hurdles), Harmilan Bains (1500m), Ankita (3000m), Nayana James, Shaili Singh (long jump), Pooja (high jump), Pavithra Venkatesh, Baranica Elangovan (pole vault).



The 2023 was outstanding year for the **Athletics Federation of India** (AFI). The AFI was honoured with as many as four awards, including Best Member Federation by Asian Athletics body.

