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Home	Citie	s India	Explaine	ed Opini	ion Entertainment	Sports	Politics	Lifestyle	Tech	Education	Investiga
TRENDI	10	Mini		Latest	UPSC	Asian	Pre	emium	Expr	ess	Health
	NG	Crosswor	ds —	News	— Special —	Games	s	tories —	et a	al. —	Specials
News / Sports / Asian Games / Asian Games 2023: Sports Minister Anurag Thakur cancels China trip after											

News / Sports / Asian Games / Asian Games 2023: Sports Minister Anurag Thakur cancels China trip after Arunachal Pradesh athletes are denied entry

Asian Games 2023: Sports Minister Anurag Thakur cancels China trip after Arunachal Pradesh athletes are denied entry

"China's action violates both the spirit of the Asian Games and the rules governing their conduct, which explicitly prohibits discrimination against competitors from member states," said Arindam Bagchi.

Written by Mihir Vasavda Follow
Hangzhou | Updated: September 23, 2023 01:28 IST

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Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur. (PTI)

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Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur called off his trip to China Friday on the eve of the opening ceremony of the 19th Asian Games in protest after three athletes all wushu martial arts players — from Arunachal Pradesh were denied accreditation cards and instead offered stapled visas.

Accreditation cards have the dual purpose of being an ID card for the Asian Games as well as a visa.

Indian citizens from Arunachal Pradesh are not allowed to travel to other countries with stapled visas and the wushu players could not board the flight from New Delhi.

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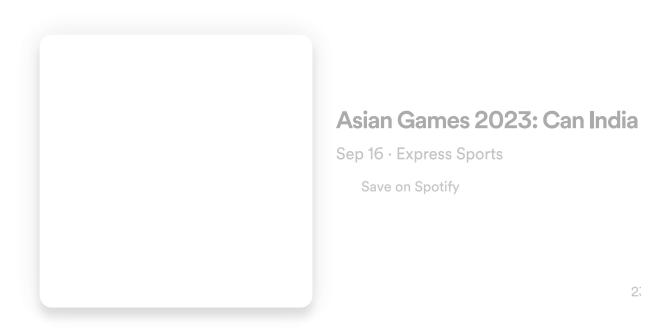
The Asian Games opening ceremony will be held Saturday in the presence of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

In a strongly-worded statement, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson

Arindam Bagchi said the Chinese authorities "discriminated" in a "targeted and premeditated manner" and that a "strong protest has been lodged in New I and Beijing against China's deliberate and selective obstruction of some of o sportspersons".

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"Further, as a mark of our protest against the Chinese action, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Youth Affairs and Sports of India has cancelled his scheduled visit to China for the Games. The Government of India reserves the right to take suitable measures to safeguard our interests," it stated.



India's riposte and Thakur's decision to cancel his tour came a day after the wushu players were not allowed to board the flight from New Delhi.

The athletes – Nyeman Wangsu, Onulu Tega and Mepung Lamgu – were scheduled to take part in the opening ceremony on Saturday evening and compete in their event the following morning.

Lifetime Vice-President of the Olympic Council of Asia, Wei Jizhong of China, said the host country has not violated any rule and it is China's prerogative as to which type of visa should be issued. Jizhong, former secretary general of the Chinese Olympic Committee, said at a media briefing: "I should clarify that these Indian athletes got a visa to enter China China didn't refuse any visa but the problem is, according to the Chinese government regulations, we have the right to give them a different kind of v have an arrival visa, paper visa, and visa in passport. This is the host countr government regulation."

EXPLAINED | What is a stapled visa, and why does China issue these to Indians from Arunachal and J&K?

"So, I make it very clear that the Chinese government gave them a visa. They can enter China. Unfortunately, these athletes didn't accept the visa."

In July, the same wushu athletes – Wangsu, Tega and Lamgu – were denied valid visas by China, which made them miss the World University Games.

For the Asiad, one player was given an incomplete accreditation card – which was valid only till Hong Kong – two others could not register and download their electronic accreditation cards while they were trying to check-in for their flight late Wednesday night.

A team official said that when the issue was taken up with the Chinese authorities, they offered them stapled visas instead.

"In line with our long-standing and consistent position, India firmly rejects differential treatment of Indian citizens on the basis of domicile or ethnicity. Arunachal Pradesh was, is and will remain an integral and inalienable part of India," the MEA spokesperson said in the statement.

"China's action violates both the spirit of the Asian Games and the rules governing their conduct, which explicitly prohibits discrimination against competitors from member states," the statement said.

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China has consistently denied stamped visas to Indian citizens from Arunachal Pradesh, citing territorial dispute while the Indian government does not allow people to travel on stapled visas.

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