



Skiing in Paradise

By **Naseer Ganai** from Srinagar

THE mercury dipped to an all time low of this winter season in the heartland of winter sports, Gulmarg, which received fresh snowfall on Friday morning.

With a snow-covered terrain, the ski resort went abuzz with hundreds of tourists and locals arriving in no time, all set with their skiing gear.

"Ski lovers flocked to the tourist destination to learn skiing and to enjoy the snow. Currently, only two ft snow has accumulated here but sports activities have begun. On Christmas we started with ice-skating, snow rugby and snow marathon," Mehmood Ahmad Shah of the Gulmarg Development Authority (GDA), said.

29 cm
is the snowfall recorded in Gulmarg on Friday

"We are getting a number of inquiries from foreigners and we are hopeful of a great season ahead," he added.

Known among winter sports enthusiasts as the best winter sports destination in the country and ranked Asia's seventh best ski destination Gulmarg is preparing itself for a grand season.

The IISM, GDA, Cable Car Corporation Gondola, Tourism Department and the Winter Games Association of Jammu and Kashmir (WGA) have joined hands to prepare for a grand show this season.

"We will be organising five big skating championships in January and February," Farooq Shah, president of the WGA, said.

"There will be ice skating camps, snow cycling, marathon, freestyle sl, bungee

and senior ski championship and ski touring," he added.

To make ski lovers at home, the GDA has organised a specialised avalanche preparedness training programme for joint ski-patrol rescuers at

rescue ski patrol teams will be stationed at Gulmarg and Kongdoori, round the clock.

In a major boost to Kashmir's tourism, a US-based international hotel chain set foot in Gulmarg. The Inter-

mir-based Khyber Group of Hotels opened the Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa in the hill station.

This is the first time that a major international hotel chain has ventured into



(Clockwise from top) A group of ski enthusiasts enjoy in Gulmarg.