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## SCHOOLS BUILD FACILITIES AS RIFLE SHOOTING GAINS GROUND

### Young shooters take aim beyond the bullseye

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Calcutta: When a 14-year-old girl says she doesn't focus on the target but on "a good shot", most people would assume she is talking about exam scores and grades.

But across schools, a growing number of students are taking a shot at real shooting.

With rising interest among children, several schools are now offering shooting as a sport, hiring professional coaches and developing infrastructure. These facilities, in turn, are drawing more students to the sport.

Last year, the number of shooters from the state reached 700 — a nearly 50 per cent jump over the past few years, said a member of the West Bengal Rifle Association.

The association held the 10th West Bengal Inter School Shooting Championship 2025, which concluded on Sunday.

The top performers from the tournament will advance to compete at the zonal level.

The five-day tournament at La Martiniere for Boys included both budding shooters and those who have competed at the national level.

Srija Das, 14, who competed in the nationals last year, came from Serampore in Hooghly. "I was drawn to the sport after watching videos on YouTube. When I shoot, I don't think about the bullseye — I think I have to give my best shot," she said.

Class X student Meher Bery took up the sport only because her school introduced it. "It's thrilling.



Participants in the 10th West Bengal Inter School Shooting Championship 2025 at La Martiniere for Boys. Picture by Sanat Kr Sinha

When you shoot, you have to keep your mind blank, which is difficult — thoughts keep cropping up, and you have to focus despite that," said the teenager, who has won some medals.

The La Martiniere schools, St Thomas' Church School, Howrah, and SPK Jain Futuristic Academy in New Town are some of the institutes that have set up shooting infrastructure in the last couple of years. The Heritage School, The Newtown School, and Delhi Public School Megaditya have been offering the sport for some years now.

"Our students have competed at the state level and won medals, triggering more interest in the sport," said Rupkatha Sarkar, principal, La Martiniere for Girls.

The La Martiniere schools inaugurated a shooting range in November 2023. SPK Jain Futuristic Academy, which inaugurated its shooting range in April this year, said 70 per

cent of its students chose shooting over gymnastics.

The availability of shooting ranges, which were rare just a few years ago, has helped popularise the sport.

Olympian Joydeep Karmakar began with a single shooting range and has since expanded to multiple locations, including Kasha, one near the airport, and Bally.

"Since 2015, we have trained nearly 1,300 students, and currently, 400 are enrolled at my academy. Parents bring children as young as two or two-and-a-half years old for training, but we have to turn them away because their bodies aren't strong enough to handle the weight of the gun," said Karmakar.

He said they encourage children to take up the sport at around seven or eight years old. "After two years of training, they can start competing at 10 years," Karmakar added. Amitabha Chatterjee.

who represented India at the Asian Games in 1978 and 1982 and is the chief jury of the inter-school shooting championship, said there has been a surge in infrastructure over the past five to six years.

"The International Shooting Sports Federation now permits shooting only in enclosed spaces. We started slowly, but the sport is steadily gaining momentum in our state. The increasing number of Olympians from India certainly draws more attention to the sport," said Chatterjee.

V.K. Dhall, president of the West Bengal Rifle Association and vice-president of the National Rifle Association of India, said the association tried to provide resources to shooters.

"We provide ammunition to the players at highly subsidised rates so that more of them get opportunities," said Dhall.



Participants in the 10th West Bengal Inter School Shooting Championship 2025 at La Martiniere for Boys. Picture by Sanat Kr Sinha

## Beyond the bullseye

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"There is a surge in interest, but we still lag behind states in the west or north. Offering more incentives and recognition to players who perform well at the national or international level will help the sport grow," said Dhall.

Tournament director Keshav Tiwari said students who have taken up shooting have shown improved concentration.

"Shooting naturally improves their focus — not just in the sport, but also in academics and other areas of life. It enriches their overall life experience. We have observed

students with ADHD communicate better and build stronger friendships after taking up shooting," said Tiwari.

While the inclusion of shooting in schools is a positive sign, Olympian Karmakar insists it should not be treated merely as an extracurricular activity, but as a serious sport.

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