New terminal at Leh's Kushok Bakula Rimpochee Airport – India's first with geothermal heating; opened by PM

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News

On 15 Oct 2026 Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated the new passenger terminal of Kushok Bakula Rimpochee Airport, Leh – one of 5 projects worth about ₹3,350 crore. Built for about ₹640 crore over 23,800 sq m, it is the country's first terminal with a geothermal heating and cooling system; it also uses solar power. It is designed to handle 35 lakh passengers a year. The project was executed by the Airports Authority of India (AAI).

Key facts

Inauguration	15 Oct 2026 – PM Modi (virtually)
Cost / Area	About ₹640 crore; 23,800 sq m
Capacity	35 lakh passengers a year; up to 54 flights a day
Geothermal system	457 boreholes (110–120 m deep each) – heating, cooling, hot water; rooftop solar PV
Airport	Elevation 3,256 m – India's highest commercial airport; IATA code IXL; owned by IAF, run by AAI

Other projects	Nimmu–Padum–Darcha road (298 km, BRO, via Shinkun La); Hanu 9 MW hydro project; Petroglyph park at Sindhu Ghat

Background

- Science: geothermal energy is heat from the Earth's interior. Shallow ground stays at a nearly constant temperature all year; ground-source heat pumps draw heat in during winter and push it out in summer to condition buildings.
- Geothermal in India: the Geological Survey of India (GSI) has mapped 381 hot springs; theoretical potential is about 10.6 GW. Key sites – Puga valley (Ladakh), Tattapani (Chhattisgarh), Manikaran (Himachal Pradesh). The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) notified the first 'National Policy on Geothermal Energy' in Sept 2025.
- Puga project: in Puga valley, eastern Ladakh (about 14,000 ft), the ONGC Energy Centre has drilled geothermal wells; the next phase is a 1 MW pilot power plant. It lies on the Indus suture zone.
- Name: the airport is named after the 19th Kushok Bakula Rimpochee, a Buddhist monk. The PM laid the foundation stone of the new terminal in Feb 2019.

Tamil Nadu link: Tamil Nadu has no geothermal airport project. Related fact – PM Modi inaugurated the new integrated terminal (over ₹1,100 crore) of Tiruchirappalli International Airport on 2 Jan 2024.

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