

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Earlier Stone-Pelters Used To Make Headlines, Now It's Sports: Union Minister Mandaviya

GULMARG, FEB 26: Asserting that earlier stone pelters used to make headlines, now it's sports Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday said Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing a shift in public narrative.

While addressing the valedictory ceremony of the Gulmarg leg of the Khelo India Winter Games-2026, Mandaviya said, "The region (J&K), once associated with unrest, is now gaining recognition for sporting events and youth participation. Newspapers that earlier focused on security challenges are now highlighting sports and development."

The Minister linked the change to developments after the revocation of Article 370, saying new opportunities and public confidence have emerged in Jammu and Kashmir. "After the abrogation of Article 370, there is newfound belief in J&K. Earlier stone-pelters used to make headlines now it is sports. Times are a changing in J&K and will have a massive role to meet PM Modi's dream of a Viksit Bharat by 2027," he added.

He said the region is contributing to a developed India through sports, tourism and youth engagement.

Calling Gulmarg one of the world's finest winter destinations, Mandaviya said its geographical advantage and sporting potential make it ideal for winter sports.

He expressed confidence that Gulmarg will develop



into a world-class winter sports centre with improved infrastructure and regular events. He said sports promote unity, discipline and constructive engagement for youth, adding that interactions with local athletes reflected growing enthusiasm and professionalism.

Mandaviya said the Khelo India Winter Games are helping build a winter sports ecosystem while strengthening Jammu and Kashmir's tourism profile nationally and internationally.

He announced that future editions of the Winter Games will be extended from four days to nearly 15 days, with the addition of a Fit India carnival and related activities.

While reaffirming the Government's commitment to transforming the region into a premier global winter sports hub, the Union Minister said, "Next Khelo India Winter Games in Gulmarg will be a 15-day festival."

He said, "The land of Kashmir has immense potential, Gulmarg will be the global hub for Winter Sports

in the coming times," Mandaviya emphasized that sports have the power to unite society, foster sportsmanship, create harmony and drive development.

Reflecting on his interaction with athletes and coaches at Khelo India Centres in Jammu & Kashmir, he noted the remarkable sporting spirit emerging from the region.

In a bid to promote sports, culture and tourism and to make Gulmarg a "world-class tourism destination", Mandaviya said the region's potential needed to be fully explored. "I have travelled to 55 countries and also travelled to Switzerland in Europe. Today when I was on the highest slopes of Pir Panjal and watched with awe the white beauty all around, it was simply breath-taking," he said.

"I am all for a 15-day festival in Gulmarg. It will not only have all the components of winter sports competition like skiing and snow mountaineering, it will also include a FIT India carnival and cultural programmes to give it a

festive atmosphere. To explore the amazing potential of the region, we need to do more to make a global tourism destination," he added.

Mandaviya felicitated the Indian Army team for defending the Khelo India Winter Games championship title. Army won five medals, including nine golds, six silvers and eight bronze. Runners-up Himachal Pradesh (14 medals including six golds, seven silvers and one bronze) and No. 3 Haryana were also handed their trophies by the Union minister.

He reiterated that the Khelo Bharat Niti has been transforming the face of Indian sports. "Khelo Bharat Niti will fulfil the aspirations of the youth of India. Times have changed and there can be no politics in sports. Our policies are athlete centric and not built in favour of national federations," said Dr Mandaviya.

Praising the Jammu and Kashmir administration for successfully conducting the Gulmarg leg of KIWG 2026, Dr Mandaviya congratulated all stakeholders, especially the security forces, for enabling a seamless Games.

The first phase of KIWG 2026 were held in Ladakh from January 20-26. More than 900 athletes from 25 states and Union Territories took part in six different sports between Gulmarg and Leh. The Union minister also said a National Centre of Excellence for winter sports will also be established in Jammu & Kashmir.

Rahul Gandhi alleges US pressure on PM over trade deal, says Indian farmers being "sacrificed"

KANNUR (KERALA), FEB 26: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that US President Donald Trump had used the Epstein files to threaten Prime Minister Narendra Modi into signing a trade deal that would "sacrifice" Indian farmers.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha was speaking at a farmers' convention in Peravoor, Kannur district.

He said the simple fact that farmers are the foundation of India is not understood by the government.

He said lengthy lectures were delivered about IT and other sectors, but nothing could be built without strengthening the foundation.

"If you do not respect the foundation, nothing can be built. The person who builds the foundation does not have respect or protection. We eat food every day but do not remember who puts it on our table," he said.

Gandhi alleged that the Prime Minister had signed a deal with the US President that was "like digging the foundation".

"Indian farmers are small farmers with low levels of mechanisation. American



farmers have massive farms and high levels of mechanisation. It is a criminal act to allow access to Indian markets for American companies," he said.

The Congress leader claimed that no previous prime minister would have allowed American farmers to sell products such as soybeans, vegetables and fruits in India.

"It will destroy the foundation of Indian agriculture. The Green and White Revolutions happened for farmers," he said.

According to him, the India-US deal had been stalled for four months due to disagreements over agriculture.

"The Indian government did not want to open agriculture to American companies.

Nothing was moving, and the US President was threatening the Prime Minister," he alleged.

He further claimed that he was not allowed to speak in Parliament after the President's address because he intended to raise two issues.

"One issue was about 3.5 million Epstein files that are yet to come out, which are held secret by the US government and allegedly contain information about the Prime Minister of India. The second was the Adani case in America," he said.

The Union government had rejected references to PM Modi in the latest Jeffrey Epstein case files, describing it as "little more than trashy ruminations by a convicted criminal that deserves to be

dismissed with the utmost contempt".

He alleged that a case had been registered against the Adani Group in the US and that it was linked to the PM.

"These are the reasons why the Prime Minister is ready to destroy the foundation of India. Indian farmers are being sacrificed so that the Prime Minister can protect himself and the financial structure of the BJP," Gandhi alleged.

He said the Congress would not allow farmers of India and Kerala to be sacrificed.

Referring to Kerala, Gandhi said a manifesto was being prepared that would incorporate public issues, and that any future UDF government should remember that its foundation lay in farmers and labourers.

"The government should go to farmers as a service provider. Farmers need support prices, cold chains and storage facilities. They need protection in difficult times," he said.

Gandhi, a former MP from Wayanad, said he had witnessed the tragedy of man-animal conflict in the region and described it as a "complex issue" that could be resolved. (PTI)

Spiritual teachings of Bhagavad Gita can give new direction to today's youth: President

JAMSHEDPUR, FEB 26: President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday asserted that spiritual teachings in the Bhagavad Gita could give a new direction to today's youth and shape their lives.

Murmu was addressing a gathering after performing the ground-breaking ceremony of the Sri Jagannath Spiritual and Cultural Charitable Centre Trust at Kadma area in Jharkhand's Jamshedpur, and laying its foundation stone.

She said the proposed Jagannath cultural centre will propagate lessons from the scripture.

"The Lord Jagannath temple in Jamshedpur will be a



centre for spiritual learning and communal harmony. It will ensure education of poor children, including girls, at its hostel," Murmu said.

The teachings contained in the Bhagavad Gita are food for the soul, the President said. Murmu also lauded

those behind the proposed spiritual centre, which she said will help instil teachings of the Bhagavad Gita among the youth and shape their personality. Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan, speaking on the occasion, said so far over 500 Jagannath temples have been built across the nation.

S K Behera, the managing trustee of the Sri Jagannath Spiritual and Cultural Charitable Centre Trust, said it will be a replica of the 12th-century shrine in Odisha's Puri.

The centre will be developed over a 2.5-acre land near river Kharkhai at an estimated cost of Rs 100 crore.

The project is expected to boost religious tourism in Jharkhand and also serve as a hub for "character building and ethical development" of the younger generation.

"We aim to foster holistic personality development of today's youth and those pursuing higher education," Behera said. (PTI)

'RSS-driven exercise full of mischief': Congress slams rewriting of textbooks amid NCERT row

NEW DELHI, FEB 26: The Congress on Thursday said the Supreme Court is rightly agitated over critical references to the judiciary in NCERT textbooks and claimed that the rewriting of such books over the past decade has been an RSS-driven exercise full of "mischief and malice".

The opposition party's assertion came after the Supreme Court on Thursday imposed a "complete blanket ban" on the Class 8 NCERT book with a chapter on cor-

ruption in the judiciary and ordered that all copies, physical and digital, be seized.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The Supreme Court is rightly agitated over critical references to the judiciary in NCERT textbooks." "Actually, the way NCERT textbooks have been rewritten over the past decade is disgraceful, apart from being dangerous as well. It has been a RSS-driven exercise full of mischief

and malice. It is this racket that needs to be investigated," he said.

A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, and Justices Joy-malya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi also issued show cause notices to the NCERT director and the secretary of the department of school education and asked them to explain why contempt proceedings should not be initiated against those responsible. The bench had taken suo motu cognisance of the "ob-

jectionable" statements about the judiciary in the new textbook after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, alongside Abhishek Singhvi, mentioned the matter for urgent consideration.

The NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) social science textbook for Class 8 says corruption, a massive backlog of cases, and the lack of an adequate number of judges are among the challenges faced by the judicial system.

Mayawati slams Samajwadi Party over proposed 'PDA Day' on Kanshi Ram's birth anniversary

LUCKNOW, FEB 26: Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Thursday accused the Samajwadi Party of indulging in "political theatrics" by proposing to observe 'PDA Day' on the birth anniversary of BSP founder Kanshi Ram and alleged that the Akhilesh Yadav-led party has historically been opposed to Dalits, OBCs and the Bahujan community. SP chief Yadav coined the acronym PDA in June 2023, which stands for 'Pichhde' (backward classes), Dalits and 'Alpsankhyak' (minorities).

In a post in Hindi on X, Mayawati said the SP's "conduct, character and face" have historically reflected disrespect towards leaders and icons of the Bahujan society, and claimed that its move to mark Kanshi Ram's birth anniversary was aimed at garnering votes from marginalised communities.

She claimed that the SP's "casteist" politics dates back to the 1993 BSP-SP alliance. Despite conditions laid down to curb atrocities against weaker sections, she said, then chief minister and

SP patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav did not alter his approach, which led the BSP to withdraw support on June 1, 1995. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister also referred to the 1995 state guest house incident in Lucknow, calling it a "recorded instance of brutality" in which she was attacked.

Mayawati further alleged that successive SP governments disrespected Kanshi Ram by changing the names of districts and institutions associated with him.

Will Fix Accountability, Take Action Against Those Involved: Education Minister On NCERT Row

NEW DELHI, FEB 26: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday expressed anguish over NCERT coming up with a chapter on judicial corruption in its Class 8 textbook, while promising to fix accountability and take action against those involved in drafting the controversial portion.

He also underlined that the government has full respect for the judiciary and has no intent of disrespecting the institution.

The remarks came on a day the Supreme Court observed that there appeared to be a "well-orchestrated conspiracy" to defame the judiciary and imposed a "complete blanket ban" on the Class 8 NCERT book and ordered that all copies, physical and digital, be seized.

"They have fired the gunshot. The judiciary is bleeding," a bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant said, a day after the National



Council of Educational Research and Training apologised for "inappropriate content" in the social science textbook and said it would be rewritten in consultation with appropriate authorities.

The bench, also comprising Justices Joy-malya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, issued show cause notices to the NCERT director and the secretary of the department of school education and asked them to explain why contempt proceedings should not be initiated against those

responsible.

Reacting to the development, Pradhan said, "I am very sad at what has happened... There was no intention to insult the judiciary. An enquiry will be conducted and accountability fixed. Action will be taken against those involved in drafting the chapter."

As soon as we got to know (about it), the circulation of the textbooks was put on hold." "We have full respect for the judiciary, and we have taken the issue very seri-

Goa Nightclub Fire: Police File Chargesheet Against 13 Persons, Including Club Owners

Panaji, Feb 26: The Goa police on Thursday filed a chargesheet in a court against 13 persons in connection with the fire at Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub, which claimed 25 lives and left several others injured in December last year, officials said.

The 13 accused include owners of the nightclub, a police official said.

The Anjuna police filed the 4,150-page chargesheet before the Judicial Magistrate First Class, Mapusa, in connection with the case, in which statements of 305 witnesses have been recorded, he said.

The blaze occurred at the nightclub located in Arpora, in North Goa, on December 6, 2025, wherein 25 persons were killed and several others were injured.

The accused in the chargesheet include Ajay Gupta, Gaurav Luthra and his brother Saurabh Luthra, all partners of M/s Being GS Hospitality Goa Arpora LLP, which owned the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub. All three accused are currently in judicial custody, accord-



ing to the police.

The chargesheet has also named the nightclub's employees, Rajiv Modak (corporate, general manager), Vivek Singh (general manager) and Bijay Kumar Singh (operations manager), as accused. They are also in judicial custody.

The others accused named in the chargesheet are Roshan Redkar, then sarpanch of Arpora-Nagoa Panchayat, and Raghuvir Bagchar, then secretary of the panchayat, both currently in judicial custody, and Priyanshu Thakur (nightclub gate manager) and Rajveer Sing-

hania (bar manager), who are out on bail.

The Anjuna police have also chargesheeted Mayur Kolwalkar and Mohammad Afif Abdulsab Bateri, officials of an event management company which had organised a show at the club on that evening.

Surinder Kumar Khosla, a British National, who is currently on the run, has also been named as an accused in the chargesheet.

A Blue Corner Notice has been issued against him, the police said.

The police had registered an FIR against the accused

ously. The court's directives will be complied with," he told reporters in Jamshedpur.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) social science textbook for Class 8 in question states that corruption, a massive backlog of cases, and the lack of an adequate number of judges are among the challenges faced by the judicial system.

After stern words by the Supreme Court that it will not allow "anyone on earth" to tarnish the judiciary's integrity, the NCERT pulled the textbook from its website, with sources saying the government was livid with the controversial references in the curriculum.

The NCERT on Wednesday also apologised for "inappropriate content" after facing the Supreme Court's ire over the chapter and said the book will be rewritten in consultation with appropriate authorities. (Agencies)

Later, BNS sections 338 (forgery of valuable securities), 336 (forgery), 340 (using forged documents), 61 (criminal conspiracy), 238 (destruction of evidence), 241 (destruction of electronic documents) and 3 (7) (committing offence with common intention) were added against the club owners. (Agencies)