

Maharashtra Minister Manikrao Kokate Shifts Portfolios Following Rummy Controversy



Maharashtra's Agriculture Minister, Manikrao Kokate, has been reassigned to the sports and youth welfare portfolio following a political firestorm sparked by a video that appeared to show him playing an online card game in the legislative council. The reshuffle, announced on Thursday, follows intense pressure from the opposition and public criticism over the incident. Kokate's former position has been given to Dattatrey Bharne, the previous sports minister.

The controversy originated from a video clip shared on social media by Rohit Pawar, a leader from the rival Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) faction. The video allegedly showed Kokate playing a mobile card game during a session of the state legislature, drawing immediate condemnation. Critics pointed to the timing of the incident, arguing it demonstrated a disregard for pressing agricultural issues, including farmer suicides in the state.

Manikrao Kokate, a five-time Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Sinnar, defended himself by stating he was not playing a game but was trying to close an online advertisement that had popped up on his phone while he was attempting to view proceedings from the lower house. He described the video as selectively edited and a politically motivated attempt to defame him.

The incident is the latest in a series of controversies involving the minister. Earlier this year, Kokate faced backlash for allegedly making a statement that compared farmers to beggars. The reassignment of his portfolio, however, is a direct response to the "rummy row." The move is seen as a way for the Mahayuti government to contain the political damage and address the

public's concerns without completely removing the minister from the cabinet. Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, a leader of the NCP faction to which Kokate belongs, had been under pressure to take action. The portfolio change serves as a clear message that such conduct in the legislature is not acceptable.

While the reshuffle provides a resolution to the immediate controversy, it remains to be seen if this will be the final chapter. The opposition has continued to demand a full inquiry, while the government hopes the move will put an end to the distractions and allow the administration to focus on its agenda.