



2025:DHC:6853



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* **IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI**% **Date of Decision: 12.08.2025**+ **W.P.(C) 11189/2025**

DRAGON BOAT INDIA

AND TRADITIONAL SPORTS FEDERATION

.....Petitioner

Through: Mr. Ajeesh Kalathil Gopi and Ms.
Priya Jha, Advs.

versus

UNION OF INDIA & ANR.

.....Respondents

Through: Mr. Udit Dedhiya, SPC, Ms. Apurva
Sachdev, Mr. Dushyant Pratap Singh,
GP, UOI.**CORAM:****HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SACHIN DATTA****SACHIN DATTA, J. (ORAL)**

1. The present petition has been filed by the petitioner 'Dragon Boat India and Traditional Sports Federation', claiming to be the sole internationally recognised national body for the sport of 'Dragon Boat Racing', in India.
2. The petitioner is aggrieved by the exclusion of the said sport from the upcoming Khelo India Water Sports Festival, scheduled to be held at Dal Lake, Srinagar, from 21th to 23th August 2025.
3. It has been brought out in the petition that:
 - (i) By virtue of a decision taken by the Olympic Council Asia (OCA), Dragon Boat Racing was officially included in the sports programme of the 6th Asia Beach Games held in Sanya, China, from 28.11.2020 to 06.12.2020.



(ii) Dragon Boat Racing was also officially included in the sports program of the 19th Asian Games, held in Hangzhou from 10 to 25 September 2022.

(iii) The International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF) has certified that the Dragon Boat India and Traditional Sports Federation (the petitioner herein) is a member of the said international Federation.

(iv) The Asian Dragon Boat Federation (ADBF) has recognised the petitioner as the national governing body for Dragon Boat Racing in India.

4. In light of the above background, the petitioner has made repeated attempts to secure the inclusion of 'Dragon Boat Racing' as a competitive sport in various domestic sporting events. *Vide* order dated 23.01.2023, the High Court of Kerala, in W.P.(C) 595/2015 directed the Union of India to take a decision regarding the inclusion of the said sport in future events. However, the same did not yield any results.

5. Subsequently, an order dated 14.05.2025 was passed by this Court in W.P.(C) 6382/2025, pursuant to the petitioner's plea for inclusion of the concerned sport in the Khelo India Beach Games held from 19.05.2022 to 21.05.2022. The said order dated 14.05.2025 reads as under:

"1. By way of the present petition, it is sought that the sport of Dragon Boat Racing be included in the Khelo India Beach Games, 2025 scheduled from 19.05.2025 to 24.05.2025.

2. This Court is not inclined to issue a mandamus directing as to which game/s should be included or not in the Khelo India Beach Games, 2025. However, the respondent no.1/ Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports is directed to treat the present writ petition as a representation and endeavour to accommodate the request of the petitioner.

3. Let the matter be considered expeditiously by the respondent no.1/



2025:DHC:6853



Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and a reasoned order be passed before the commencement of the games in question.

4. The present petition is disposed of in the above terms.

5. Order dasti.”

6. Pursuant thereto, an order dated 16.05.2025 was passed by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS). It is noticed that the said order did not raise any objection in principle to inclusion of Dragon Boat Racing in sporting events. However, the said order noted that inclusion of the said sport in Khelo India Beach Games was contingent on multiple factors. It was also observed as under;

“b. The sports disciplines for Khelo India Beach Games scheduled to be held from 19th May to 24th May 2025 have been already finalized in March 2025 to ensure smooth conduct of the games, while the request for the inclusion of Dragon Boat in the upcoming KIBG 2025 has been received in May 2025

c. Prior to the conduct of the event, nominations of athletes, planning of logistics for movement of athletes, coaches, technical officials from various parts of country, venue readiness, etc., are vital. As the games are scheduled to begin in 3 days from today i.e. 16th May 2025 and considering the norms, standard of Khelo India Games, it is not possible to meet the pre-requisites and hence Dragon Boat racing cannot be included at this stage”

7. Consequently, the petitioner missed out on inclusion of the said sports in the aforementioned Khelo India Beach Games held at Diu in the Union Territory of Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu from 19 to 24 May, 2025. In the above conspectus, the present petition has been filed by the petitioner seeking that Dragon Boat Racing be included as a competitive sport in Khelo India Water Sports Festival scheduled to be held from 21.08.2025 to 23.08.2025 at Dal Lake, Srinagar.

8. In the counter-affidavit filed on behalf of the respondent no.1, it has



been stated that Dragon Boat Racing has been introduced as demonstrative sport, and not as a competitive sport, in the first Khelo India Water Sports Festival. It is further submitted that competitive sports are required to be organised in accordance with the technical rules prescribed by the concerned National Sports Federations (NSFs), aligned with international standards. Further, it has been emphasised as under:

“17. It is respectfully submitted that the Host State/Union Territory plays a pivotal role in the planning, preparation, and execution of the Khelo India Games. Upon finalization of the list of sports disciplines by the competent authorities, it is incumbent upon the Host State/UT to commence preparations in a time-bound manner. This includes, inter alia, making adequate arrangements for sports infrastructure, availability of equipment, logistical planning, nomination and selection of athletes, and ensuring compliance with technical requirements for the smooth conduct of each discipline.

18. That in the present case, the list of competitive and demo sports was finalized on 06.06.2025, and the Host State/UT thereafter initiated the preparatory processes accordingly. Consequently, any post-finalization inclusion of additional competitive sport, such as Dragon Boat Racing, without a prior request or proposal from the Host State/UT, poses significant administrative and logistical challenges, including but not limited to the feasibility of venue readiness, equipment procurement, and the selection and training of athletes within a limited time frame. Thus, the role of the Host State/UT is not only facilitative but also determinative in terms of assessing feasibility and ensuring successful implementation of the scheduled disciplines.”

9. It is observed that the petitioner has been persistent in its attempts to include Dragon Boat Racing as a competitive sport in various domestic events. However, on successive occasions, the petitioner has ostensibly lost out on account of logistical reasons and ‘time constraints’.

10. The fact that Dragon Boat Racing is recognised as a competitive sport in various international sporting events is not denied. Notably, the said sport was included in the 19th Asian Games, held in Hangzhou, China, from



2025:DHC:6853



23.09.2023 to 08.10.2023.

11. While it is true that the petitioner is not a duly recognised NSF, even in the order dated 16.05.2025 passed by the MYAS, it was not denied that Dragon Boat Racing is an emerging sport with a growing international footprint. It is also a fact that recognition of a body as an NSF is a gradual and evolving process. The fact that the petitioner is not yet a recognized NSF as on date, does not impinge upon the necessity of promoting the concerned sport.

12. The petitioner has asserted that the petitioner is the sole internationally recognized authority for Dragon Boat Racing in India, affiliated with both the International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF) and the Asian Dragon Boat Federation (ADBF), and representing India globally as one of the 74 IDBF member nations. All the recognitions are placed on record (Annexure P-9 to P-18). The petitioner has stated that it has a presence in 24 States and Union Territories, including in Jammu & Kashmir, and possesses equipment and has a pool of trained athletes and qualified technical officials. It is also brought out that the petitioner has successfully conducted international-standard events. Even the order dated 16.05.2025 passed by MYAS does not dispute the petitioner's significant involvement/credentials in the sport of Dragon Boat Racing.

13. The petitioner has also brought out that Dragon Boat Racing, has deep historical roots in Northeast and South India and forms part of India's sporting heritage and merits proactive promotion under both constitutional and policy mandates. The Khelo India Programme itself explicitly aims "to revive the sports culture in India at the grassroots level by building a strong



framework for all sports played in our country," with the "promotion of rural and indigenous/tribal games" as one of its core objectives. Inclusion of Dragon Boat Racing is therefore entirely consistent with the scheme's vision of revitalising traditional sports, nurturing indigenous talent, and advancing athletes from the grassroots to the highest international platforms, including the Olympic Games, a fact the respondents themselves have admitted in Para 14 of their reply.

14. Also, Dragon Boat Racing is an independent sport with an international governing body, prescribed competition rules, and an international calendar. This sport cannot be said to be under the aegis of any other recognized NSF.

15. Thus, the sport is internationally codified with established rules. Khelo India's guidelines do not exclude or obviate the possibility of emerging sports being included within its competitive calendar.

16. The petitioner also emphasised that with an established, affiliated unit in the host Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, it is fully equipped and prepared to deliver complete logistical and technical support, including the provision of dragon boats, trained technical officials, selection camps, and all the requisite infrastructure, without causing any difficulty or inconvenience to the hosting State.

17. Considering that the petitioner's previous attempts to secure the inclusion of Dragon Boat Racing as a competitive sport have failed only on account of logistical/time constraints, and in view of the aforesaid circumstances, the following directions are issued:

- i. The respondent no.1 is directed to pursue the matter with the



2025:DHC:6853



Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (host of the Khelo India Water Sports Festival, scheduled to be held from 21.08.2025 to 23.08.2025 at Dal Lake, Srinagar) for the inclusion of Dragon Boat Racing as a competitive sport in the said upcoming event. The same shall be subject to the petitioner providing complete logistical and technical support, including the provision of dragon boats, trained technical officials, selection camps, and all the requisite infrastructure, without causing any difficulty or inconvenience to the hosting State. The same shall also, necessarily, be subject to the approval/acquiescence of the UT of Jammu & Kashmir.

ii. The MYAS shall vigorously follow up with the organizers/ host UT with regard to the above it shall be ensured that immediate steps be taken for the above purpose. The MYAS is also directed to liase with the petitioner and the organisers (Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir).

iii. The above arrangement shall be only for the purpose of Khelo India Water Sports Festival scheduled to be held from 21.08.2025 to 23.08.2025, at Dal Lake, Srinagar and shall not create any equity or right in favour of the petitioner for the purpose of future recognition, and/or for 'grant in aid' or for any other purpose.

18. The present petition stands disposed of in the above terms.

SACHIN DATTA, J

AUGUST 12, 2025/at