

## Sonia for focus on agriculture

Congress president Sonia Gandhi Monday called for 'new plans' to revive agricultural economy saying: 'Everything can wait but agriculture cannot.'

Addressing a mammoth public rally in this hill town, Gandhi also hit out at the opposition while calling upon the people to fight 'antinational' and 'sectarian' forces.

She said the welfare of the weaker sections and farming sector led the agenda of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

The Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee organised the public meeting, a day ahead of the 22nd anniversary of the assassination of then prime minister Indira Gandhi.

While quoting Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi reminded the people of his concern for farmers.

She said that to achieve higher growth in the agriculture sector, new plans would have to be evolved.

The government would set up a National Cultural and Technological Mission to spearhead the plans, the Congress chief said.

Kangra district being the bastion of other backward classes, Gandhi highlighted the government's priority to safeguard the interests of the economically weaker sections as well as minorities.

She appreciated the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh for its landmark achievements in school education but warned that employment avenues would have to be generated to meet the needs of the educated youth.

Underscoring the need to impart education to girls, Gandhi said: 'I understand that until women's empowerment is done, the country may not progress.'

Gandhi blasted the previous Bharatiya Janata Party government for allegedly discriminating against Congress-led state governments.

She said the 20-point programme, which seeks to bring about economic and social transformation, would be reviewed and implemented in the country.

Praising the valour of the Himachali youth, Gandhi made pointed references to the late Major Vikram Batra and Capt Saurav Kalia, who were killed during the Kargil war between India and Pakistan.

She said unveiling a statue of her slain husband Rajiv Gandhi at Paprola near here was proof that people of Himachal Pradesh respected and loved him.

Present on the rostrum with Sonia Gandhi were central ministers Ambika Soni and Anand Sharma, Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh, state Congress president Viplove Thakur as well as Chandresh Kumari, the local Congress legislator.

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