

Congress MP quits party, attacks Rahul 'coterie'

Congress MP and former central minister Akhilesh Das Tuesday quit the party and the Rajya Sabha and hit out at 'flatterers and inexperienced coterie' surrounding general secretary Rahul Gandhi, whom he derisively dubbed a 'yuvraj'.

In the first spark of revolt against Congress president Sonia Gandhi's son who is seen by his admirers as a possible prime minister, Das dramatically announced the resignation in parliament by submitting his resignation to Rajya Sabha chairman Hamid Ansari.

Minutes later, a visibly angry Das - son of former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Banarsi Das - told reporters that he had lost faith in the Congress and its leadership.

'I have no faith in the Congress,' said Das, who at one time was considered close to Rahul Gandhi but who was dropped from the council of ministers -- where he was the minister of state for steel -- by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last month.

'There is a powerful coterie around Rahul and it is unfortunate that it is only that coterie that can get access to Rahul,' the 46-year-old former Lucknow mayor said.

In no time, in a move that appeared to be well planned, Das shot off an angry seven-page resignation letter to Sonia Gandhi

'These few inexperienced flatterers, with their knowledge of computers, Internet and e-mail are experts at distorting facts. These foreign educated people, who fancy themselves as political experts, surround the party's 'future' and 'yuvraj' (prince) all the time,' said Das.

'How can a dedicated and responsible individual be a mute spectator?' he asked

Das named Kanishka Singh, a former student of Delhi's St. Stephens College who manages Rahul Gandhi's campaign tours, as part of the 'coterie'.

He also blamed Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee president Rita Bahuguna Joshi for carrying out the wishes of the 'coterie'.

But more seriously, Das alleged that the Manmohan Singh government had 'insulted' Dalits and the weaker sections by not doing enough for them.

The Congress said Das' resignation would have no effect on the party. 'Many people like him come and go without a ripple in the Congress,' party spokeswoman Jayanthi Natarajan told the media.

'His comments were made out of frustration for not including him in the council of ministers,' she said. 'We reject his allegations with contempt.'

Das was dropped from the council of ministers April 6. His term in the Rajya Sabha was to end in November 2008. He was replaced by another Uttar Pradesh MP, Jitin Prasad.

Das' fury was directed at Kanishka Singh, a former World Bank employee who is considered very

close to Rahul Gandhi.

'Kanishka Singh's father has been appointed the governor of Rajasthan despite the fact that he is close to Natwar Singh (who was expelled from the Congress). Natwar Singh is close to Rajasthan Chief Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Vasundhara Raje,' Das said in his resignation submitted to Sonia Gandhi.

'The Rajasthan governor, prodded by Natwar Singh, is helping the BJP,' he said.

'Rita Bahuguna Joshi lost her deposit from Allahabad. But the coterie made her UPCC chief. How can a person who could not win an election help others - MPs and MLAs - to win elections?' asked Das.

Bahuguna, he alleged, was a 'party hopper'.

'She had announced at a press conference on the eve of the Congress conclave in Kanpur in March that a resolution would be passed demanding prime ministership for Rahul Gandhi,' said Das.

At the same time, he added that Bahugana had authored a book in which she had criticised former prime ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

In Uttar Pradesh, Congress leaders said Das was known to be gravitating towards the ruling Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

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