

SP, BSP invited to UPA anniversary dinner

In a move aimed at winning new allies in time for next year's parliamentary election, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) has invited the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) to its dinner party May 22 marking four years in power.

The Congress has a love-hate relationship with both the Samajwadi Party and the BSP, which are bitter rivals of each other in Uttar Pradesh.

While sources from these two parties confirmed they had received invitations, they were yet to decide who will represent the parties at the dinner.

'We have received the invitation and we welcome the move that is aimed at moving closer to our party,' Samajwadi Party MP Mohan Singh told reporters.

The Samajwadi Party and the BSP support the UPA government from outside.

In 2004 when the UPA government was formed, Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh had virtually gate-crashed into a dinner hosted by the coalition.

Singh then accompanied Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) leader Harkishan Singh Surjeet but was ignored by Congress president Sonia Gandhi and had to spend the evening in a corner as other leaders too cold-shouldered him.

Singh had earlier opposed Gandhi's possible candidature for prime ministership.

His office confirmed to IANS that an invitation had been sent to him.

The Samajwadi Party continued to support the UPA despite this fiasco. And, lately its ties with the Congress are improving. On March 31, Congress general secretary Digvijay Singh said in Kanpur that an alliance with a secular party like the Samajwadi Party was always possible.

The dinner invitation to the BSP has also come as a surprise to many.

The Congress and the BSP had warm relations after BSP chief Mayawati formed a government in Uttar Pradesh in May 2007. The BSP supported Congress nominee Pratibha Patil's candidature for the post of president. In return, the Congress allegedly put on the backburner the corruption cases against Mayawati being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

But their ties soured when the Congress realised that the BSP was eating into its traditional base among Dalits. This became clear in the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh elections. Their tussle has continued in the ongoing polls in Karnataka too.

Mayawati has publicly criticised Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi for his interactions with Dalits in Uttar Pradesh, terming these as gimmicks.

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