

## Rane patches up with Congress, to stay

Deciding against quitting the party, suspended Maharashtra Congress leader Narayan Rane Saturday met senior party leaders here and buried the hatchet.

Rane, who met the Congress' disciplinary committee chairman and Defence Minister A.K. Antony, told reporters: 'I will remain with the party and meet (Congress president) Sonia Gandhi next week.'

He said he submitted an explanation to Antony on his utterances against the party, but did not disclose details.

The former Maharashtra revenue minister was suspended from the Congress last month for hitting out at the party leadership at the state and national level after losing out in the chief ministerial race that ensued in the wake of the Nov 26-29 [Mumbai](#) terror attacks that saw incumbent Vilasrao Deshmukh lose his job.

The rebel, whom Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan had persuaded to remain in the party, is in the national capital to complete the patch-up process initiated earlier this week in Mumbai.

Rane, who left for Mumbai after meeting Antony, is likely to meet Gandhi Monday.

Though he did not confirm this, the irrepressible rebel is believed to have expressed regrets for his remarks against the party leaders and assured the central leaders he would work for the party in the forthcoming parliamentary and assembly elections in Maharashtra.

On his part, Antony is believed to have promised he would prevail upon the party leadership to revoke Rane's suspension and give him an important assignment while offering a cabinet berth for two of his supporters, sources said.

The patch-up bid with Rane was initiated Tuesday - the day he was scheduled to announce his future political plans - by Chief Minister Chavan, who dissuaded him from quitting the party.

While former chief minister Deshmukh and Maharashtra Congress president Manikrao Thakre argued against taking a soft line towards Rane, the view that he should be retained in the party prevailed.

An ambitious leader with a strong support base in Maharashtra's Konkan region, Rane had left the Shiv Sena and joined the Congress three years ago. He had brought six Sena legislators to the Congress fold and promised to bring many more.

Though he accepted the revenue portfolio in the Deshmukh cabinet, a sulking Rane could never cease to suppress his chief ministerial aspirations.

The final outburst came following the naming of Ashok Chavan as chief minister in place of Deshmukh.

Rane then accused Sonia Gandhi's political advisor Ahmed Patel of colluding with Deshmukh and Thakre to manipulate the selection process in the legislature party meeting.

At a series of press conferences and in public utterances after that, Rane did not spare even Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi.

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