

Sukhbir Badal sworn in as chief minister father's deputy

In an event not seen in India's political history so far, a father and son Wednesday began their rule over Punjab as chief minister and the deputy, with Sukhbir Singh Badal sworn in here as Parkash Singh Badal's second in command.

The oath-taking ceremony was attended by thousands of ruling Akali Dal and alliance partner Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supporters, many of them ferried to this Sikh holy city for the event.

Sukhbir Badal was administered the oaths of office and secrecy by Punjab Governor S.F. Rodrigues at the Ranjit Avenue grounds.

Dressed in a kurta-pyjama, the younger Badal took the oath in Punjabi.

Sukhbir, who is the sitting Akali Dal MP from Faridkot Lok Sabha seat, will have to get elected to the Punjab assembly within six months.

A visibly happy Chief Minister Badal, 83, said it was important to bring in more young blood into the government.

'I hope he (Sukhbir) will be able to take care of his new responsibility and duty well. We already have young blood in the government. It was important to get more young blood in the interest of the state,' Badal senior said here.

Sukhbir Badal's elevation as deputy chief minister is seen as the Akali Dal's attempt to target the young voters ahead of parliamentary elections April-May this year.

Badal senior brushed aside any resentment in alliance partner BJP over the elevation of his son as deputy chief minister.

'This is not my decision alone. It was taken by our party (Akali Dal) leadership. We consulted the leadership of the alliance partner (BJP) on this,' Badal said.

The chief minister said the portfolios of present ministers would not be disturbed to give ministerial assignments to Sukhbir.

'Giving portfolios is my discretion... We will decide it in one-two days. The portfolios will come from what I am holding or what (Bikram Singh) Majithia had,' Badal said.

He was referring to Sukhbir's brother-in-law (wife's brother) Bikram Singh Majithia, who resigned his cabinet berth last week to make way for Sukhbir to be sworn in as the deputy chief minister. Majithia had held the information and public relations and public health portfolios.

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