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Oppn. walks out from Houses over quota issue

Members charge Centre with failure to defend reservation in promotions

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Opposition parties on Monday staged a walkout from both Houses of Parliament after Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Thaawarchand Gehlot said the Centre was not a party to the case in which the Supreme Court held that reservation in promotions in public posts could not be claimed as a fundamental right.

He said that though the Centre was neither asked to file an affidavit nor made a party to the case, the matter was being discussed at the "highest level" and "appropriate steps" would be taken. His remarks were in response to the Opposition's charge that the Centre had failed to defend the reservation.

Refutes charge

Refuting the Opposition allegation, the Minister reiterated the Narendra Modi go-

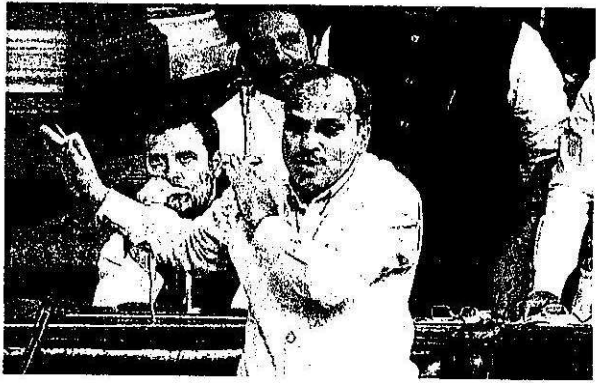
vernment's commitment to reservation for the Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and pointed out that the order pertained to a 2012 decision of the Uttarakhand government when the Congress was in power in the State.

Last Friday, the court ruled that the State governments were not bound to give reservation in promotion without data showing an imbalance in the representation of certain communities.

The order pertained to an appeal against the Uttarakhand High Court's order on promotions to Assistant Engineers (Civil) in the Public Works Department.

When Mr. Gehlot talked about the Congress being in power in Uttarakhand then, Opposition MPs shouted "shame, shame" and walked out.

The issue was raised by



Leading the charge: Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury speaking in the Lok Sabha Monday. ■PTI

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury as soon as the Question Hour began.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who is also the Deputy Leader of the Lok Sabha, said, "The Congress is politicising the issue."

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi urged Speaker Om Birla to expunge comments from Opposition leaders who had linked the Centre with the judgment.

In the Rajya Sabha, Minister for Food and Consumer Affairs Ramvilas Paswan said, "We have been de-

manding two things: there be a separate judiciary service with due reservation for the SCs/STs; and the reservation clause be part of Schedule 9 of the Constitution so that it can't be tampered with."

Leader of the Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad said, "None of us could have imagined that the reservation would be revoked. We were hopeful that Mr. Gehlot would say the government would file a review petition or bring in a law to make the judgment null and void."

BJP, RSS conspiring to end quota, says Congress

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
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The Congress accused the BJP and the RSS of conspiring to end reservation for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes after the Supreme Court held that quota in promotions could not be claimed as a fundamental right.

It also accused Minister for Social Justice Thaawarchand Gehlot of "misleading" the Lok Sabha and said it would move a privilege motion against him.

"The issue is that the RSS and the BJP cannot stand the idea that the Dalits, the tribals and the OBCs have reservation. It is in their DNA. They wake every morning and this irritates them, right! Except, it is in our Constitution and these rights are guaranteed by our Constitution," former Congress

president Rahul Gandhi told reporters in Parliament.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat might be "dreaming" of ending reservation, but the Congress would not let it happen.

"Understand the BJP's bid to end reservation - RSS people consistently make statements against reservation.

The BJP government of Uttarakhand makes an appeal in the Supreme Court to abolish the fundamental right to reservation. The Uttar Pradesh government also immediately starts tampering with the rules of reservation. The BJP first tried to weaken the law to curb atrocities on Dalits and tribals. Now, it is trying to weaken equal rights given to them by the Constitution and Babasaheb [B.R. Ambedkar]," party general secretary Prianka Gandhi Vadra said in a tweet.