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Rahul Gandhi's "Threat" Joke As Party Debates Key Role For Him In Lok Sabha

New Delhi: Rahul Gandhi's reluctance to take up the post of the Leader of the Opposition came up at the crucial Congress meeting this evening where the party took the decision that he would vacate Kerala's Wayanad, and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra would make her electoral debut from there. With Mr Gandhi's disinclination to take up the job that would herald the arrival of a resurgent Congress flashed on headlines, the leaders were asked about the matter at the post-meet media conference. Asked whether it was true that Mr Gandhi was threatened with action by the Congress chief in case of a refusal, Mallikarjun Kharge tried evasive tactics, saying he would announce it when a decision is made. "Par dhamki toh diye the (but he did threaten)," Rahul Gandhi said, grinning broadly. Sources had said that when the Congress Working Committee, the party's highest decision-making body, requested Mr Gandhi to become the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Kharge had jokingly said if he refused, "I will have to take disciplinary action". The Opposition will have a leader in the Lok Sabha after a decade following its hugely improved performance in the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls. Ninety-nine of its 232 seats have come from the Congress, and as the largest party in the Opposition benches,



it is expected to provide the Leader of the Opposition. Mr Gandhi, whose Bharat Jodo Yatra was widely cited as the reason for the Congress boost — the party won 44 seats in 2014 and 52 in 2019 — was expected to present the aggressive face of a muscular Opposition. The move could add to his stature, placing him on par with cabinet ministers and

making him the nodal point for allies. But the leader, who stepped down from the Congress chief's position after the party was trounced in the 2019 general election, has been unwilling to take any post since. The party, though, has not given up on the hope that he might be prevailed on to accept. Sources said his mother and

Rajya Sabha MP Sonia Gandhi has been trying to convince him. Meanwhile, three senior leaders Kumari Selja, Gaurav Gogoi and Manish Tiwari are being considered as back up. The Lok Sabha post or not, Mr Gandhi is expected to have his hands full, given his promise to Wayanad today that it would have "two Members of Parliament".



**'Happy Eid-ul-Zuha to
all of you': Rahul Gandhi**



Priyanka Gandhi To Contest from Wayanad, Rahul Gandhi Keeps Raebareli Seat

Making two major announcements, the Congress on Monday said that Rahul Gandhi has decided to give up the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in Kerala in favour of the family bastion of Raebareli in Uttar Pradesh and, capping years of speculation, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is finally making her electoral debut from the constituency he is vacating. Announcing the decisions after a high-level Congress meeting, party president Mallikarjun Kharge, who was flanked by the Gandhi siblings, said the call on which constituency to vacate was taken now as the last day for doing so is Tuesday. "The party has decided that Rahul Gandhi should keep the Raebareli seat because it has been close to him and his family for generations. The people of the constituency and people in the Congress feel this will be good for the party as well. More importantly, he has received love from the people

'Tough Decision'
The Congress leader said he has an emotional connection with both Raebareli and Wayanad and expressed his gratitude for the love he has got from the people in the Kerala constituency while he was a Member of Parliament from there the past five years. "Priyanka will contest from Wayanad, but I will also go there frequently and we will fulfil all the promises we made to the people there. I have an old connection with Raebareli and I am happy to represent them, but it wasn't an easy decision. It was a tough one. The people of Wayanad stood with me and supported me. They gave me energy to fight in a very difficult time. I will be available for the people of Wayanad," Mr Gandhi said. "I am confident she (Priyanka) will win the election and she will be a very good representative. The people of Wayanad can think about it like this: They now have two MPs, one is my sister and the other is me. My doors are always open to you for the rest of my life and I love every person in Wayanad," he added.

of Wayanad and people there want him to retain the seat. But the rules don't allow this. So we have decided that Priyanka ji will contest from Wayanad," he said in Hindi. "Priyanka Gandhi had said 'ladki hoon, lad sakti hoon' (I am a girl, I can fight) and this ladki can fight from there (Wayanad) now," he said to laughter as he went on to thank Ms Gandhi for the Congress' success in Amethi, Raebareli and other constituencies. When a reporter asked about

Mr Kharge's earlier claim, made in jest, that he would initiate disciplinary action if Rahul Gandhi did not follow the Congress Working Committee's decision, the party president sought to deflect but Mr Gandhi chimed in with "a threat has been given", eliciting more laughter. **'Both Constituencies Getting Two MPs'** : When Ms Gandhi was asked for a reaction, she said she was very happy and would not let the people of Wayanad feel her brother's absence.

"As he said, he will come many times with me. But I will work as hard and try to be a good representative. I have a very old connection with Raebareli and I have worked there for 20 years. That connection cannot break. I will help bhaiyya (big brother) in Raebareli and we will be available in both constituencies," she said. Rahul Gandhi interjected and said both constituencies are getting two MPs. Asked if she was nervous, Ms Gandhi said, "Not at all."



15 DEAD, 60 INJURED IN WEST BENGAL TRAIN COLLISION

A collision between the Kanchanjungha Express and a goods train near Rangapani station in Darjeeling district, West Bengal, has left several passengers injured. The incident occurred as the Sealdah-bound Kanchanjungha Express was hit by the goods train. The collision resulted in the derailment of two coaches of the Kanchanjungha Express, with further details of the accident awaited.