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Congress veteran Buta Singh passes away

The eight-time MP was first elected in 1962 and served as Home Minister under Rajiv Gandhi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader and former Home Minister Buta Singh died at AIIMS, Delhi early on Saturday morning. He was 86 and had been in coma since October last year after he suffered a brain haemorrhage. He is survived by a daughter and two sons.

Mr. Singh, started out as a Communist before switching to the Shiromani Akali Dal for a short stint and then joined the Congress in the early 1960s.

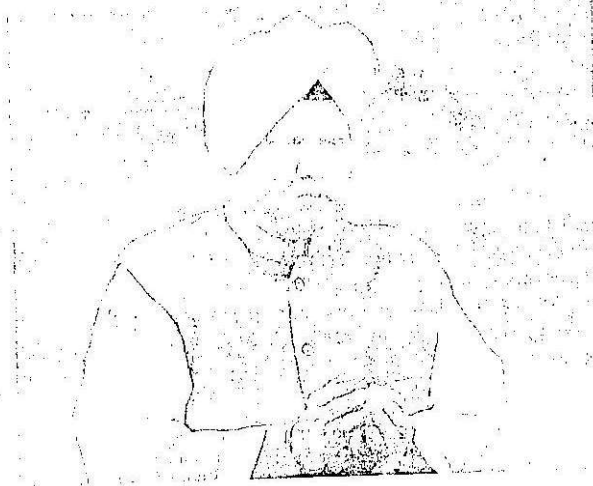
A prominent Dalit leader in the Congress, he was convenor of the All India Congress Committee's (AICC) Harijan cell in 1973-74, after which he became the AICC general secretary in 1978.

An eight-time Lok Sabha MP, he entered Parliament in 1962 from the Moga Lok Sabha constituency in Punjab. In 1974, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi elevated him to the post of Deputy Minister for Railways. He was considered her close confidante and was involved in Operation Blue Star, which led to much out-

rage among the Sikh community. Later, as a Union Minister, he was also involved in the reconstruction of the Golden Temple.

But his real career high came during his working with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. In 1981, he was made the Chairperson of the Organising Committee for Asian Games, the first major international games to come to India. Under Rajiv Gandhi, Mr. Singh became the country's Home Minister leaving a legacy of imposing President's Rule on many State governments. In February 2005, as the Governor of Bihar, Mr. Singh had recommended dissolution of the Bihar Assembly, hoping to stall a JD(U)-BJP government in the State. But within six months, fresh elections gave a clear majority to the JD(U)-BJP combine.

Under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, Mr. Singh held the portfolio of Union Minister of Civil Supplies, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution from 1995 to 1996.



Close confidante: In this photo dated November 19, 2010, Buta Singh pays tribute to Indira Gandhi. •PTI

He was appointed the chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2007. He held that post till 2010.

His demise was announced by his son Arvinder Singh Lovely Sidhu on Facebook. "My father passed away this morning. May Waheguru bless his soul," read the post in Hindi.

President Ram Nath Kovind led the nation in offering condolences.

"In the passing of Shri Buta Singh, the country has lost one of the longest serving parliamentarians with rich administrative experience. He championed the cause of the oppressed and marginalised. Condolences to his family and supporters," he tweeted.

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi said that with Mr Singh's death the country has lost a voice for the poor and downtrodden. He tweeted, "Shri Buta Singh Ji was an experienced administrator and effective voice for the welfare of the poor and the downtrodden. Saddened by his passing away. My condolences to his family and supporters."

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, tweeting in Hindi, said: "The country has lost a true public servant and a loyal leader with the death of Sardar Buta Singh Ji. He devoted his entire life to service to the country and people's well-being. For this, he will always be remembered. My condolences to his family members during this difficult time."

Congress general secretary in charge of communications Randeep Surjewala said Mr. Singh's death was a personal loss for him. "He always fought for the exploited and deprived sections of the society. I personally received his affection and guidance for years," he tweeted.