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Rahul walks out of defence panel meet

'Focus should be on better equipment'

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Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, along with two party colleagues, walked out of a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence on Wednesday after a sharp exchange in which Mr. Gandhi alleged that the panel's time was being wasted by discussing about uniforms of the armed forces instead of "strategic issues of national security".

Sources said panel chairman Jai Oram (BJP) did not allow Mr. Gandhi to speak on issues such as providing better equipment to soldiers on the border in Ladakh.

Officials of the Defence Ministry had made a presentation to the panel on the colour of uniforms in the Army, Navy and the Air Force.

Soon after the presentation, when Mr. Oram asked if members had any comments to make, the BJP's Rajya Sabha member Lt. Gen. (retd.) D.P. Vats raised the issue of disparity in uniforms among the three forces and cited the example of the U.S. armed forces.

Mr. Gandhi said politicians should not tell the Army, Navy or the Air Force which uniform to wear.

"It is neither their [politicians'] jurisdiction nor do-



Rahul Gandhi

main and [they] should not belittle them or insult them," Mr. Gandhi was quoted as saying by an MP present at the meeting.

"The leadership should also focus on how to push back the enemy and support and strengthen the armed forces rather than dictating the colour of their uniforms... The political leadership should instead provide hot tents, boots and equip the soldiers who are braving out at the border and are fighting the Chinese in Ladakh," he added.

Though Congress MP Rajeev Satav asked the chairman to allow the Congress leader to speak his mind and other Opposition members backed Mr. Gandhi, the chairman of the panel did not allow it. In protest, the Congress members informed Mr. Oram that they were walking out.