

Sycophantic Congressmen See Survival in Rahul Succession



Who is in such a hurry to make Rahul Gandhi the prime minister? His mother, Sonia Gandhi? The Congress Party? Or those who conduct opinion polls? Constitutionally, there is no bar on Rahul from becoming prime minister. He is an elected Lok Sabha member. His party has 206-odd MPs who will be too willing to elect him as their leader. UPA's allies can write to the President extending their unconditional support to Rahul. But in Congress culture, such constitutional niceties are often ignored or forgotten. No decision has been taken to topple Prime Minister Manmohan Singh through press statements. The allies haven't met to express their non-confidence in him. But last week, Digvijaya Singh, known best for his destabilising acumen, unnerved the Government when he said that Rahul had matured and acquired all the necessary qualities to become prime minister. Diggy forgot that there is no vacancy. Manmohan Singh has no plans to quit in favour of the prime minister-in-waiting either. Both Sonia and Rahul have expressed their full confidence in Manmohan Singh's ability to lead the Government. Since she herself gave up the top job, Sonia can't be faulted for inspiring the sudden sycophantic swing in Rahul's favour.

Then, why is it that some Congress leaders associated with the Gandhi Parivar miss no opportunity to remind people that Manmohan Singh is a night watchman and Rahul will soon replace him? That too, at a time when the Government and the party are struggling to defend themselves from an aggressive opposition and an agitated civil society over corruption and non-governance? When in power, Congressmen enjoy the present, but they always plot and conspire to secure their future too. For majority of them, Manmohan Singh is a soon-to-be-past prime minister. Digvijaya and his clones are emboldened by opinion poll results on Rahul's rising popularity—barely a seven-year-old in politics, Rahul has become the most sought after youth icon in the country. With little administrative experience or ideological conviction, he is surprisingly perceived as India's best prime ministerial candidate, leaving the incumbent prime minister

far behind. More Congress leaders, chief ministers, Union ministers and even civil servants are seen hovering around 12 Tughlak Lane, Rahul's official address, than at 7 Race Course Road.

The stark reality is that Congress leaders can't think beyond the Gandhis as none have ever been able to acquire national acceptability on their own. If the Gandhis are their past, they will also ensure the rootless netas a prosperous future. Barring an accidental interregnum of five years between 1991 and 1996—when P V Narasimha Rao ruled both the

her assassination. Even before death, she had astutely made sure that key people were in place to ensure that only a Gandhi would be an acceptable alternative.

The reason the Congress slipped away from its First Family after Rajiv's death in 1991 was Sonia's refusal to head the party. In 1996, once Narsimha Rao was defeated and defamed, Rajiv loyalists struck and also ejected AICC president Sitaram Kesari from his office, and handed the party over to Sonia Gandhi. Since she wasn't interested in becoming the prime minister, Sonia predictably chose

Rahul in 2004 to contest the elections from Amethi—Rajiv's former constituency. Three years later, in 2007, he was appointed an AICC general secretary with a clear mandate to create a new Congress of young leaders and set the tone for future politics.

In fact, Congress leaders were all set to anoint Rahul as the prime minister had the party got an absolute majority in 2009. According to a senior Congress leader, no Gandhi would ever agree to be head a coalition in which he or she will have to deal with leaders like Mamata Banerjee, Lalu Prasad

Yadav or Mulayam Singh Yadav. Obviously, Rahul is in no tearing hurry. He was candid enough to admit at his first press conference that "my position gives me certain advantages to do certain things. I am the outcome of the system (but) that doesn't mean I can't change the system".

His occasional forays into tribal hills and Dalit hamlets have yielded little political dividends. His policy of 'Ekla chalo' in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh hasn't bettered the party's fortunes. His genuine attempts to democratise the Congress through elections have only brought the children of senior politicians into power. His core team of young MPs hasn't been given significant any government or party responsibility. As the countdown to 2014 elections begins, it is not Rahul who is in a hurry. For he knows, he can grab the prime ministership if his party has the requisite support. But his promoters are keen to protect their own present and future even if it means killing the goose which may lay golden eggs in the long run, but not just now.

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country and the Congress—only a Nehru-Gandhi has dictated, directed and decided the fate of the party. As long as a member of The Family was in power, no Congressman dared to name an outsider as a successor to the throne. Even when Jawahar Lal Nehru was around, the question "Who after Nehru?" was raised only when he fell ill. Once Indira took over in 1966, the Nehru-Gandhi-Congress merger was complete; at one stage the breakaway faction was even known as Congress (Indira). With Mrs G began dynastic succession in Indian politics. All the powerful regional satraps who could have challenged her plans were either marginalised or thrown out of the party. Pushed to the wall during the Emergency, Indira inducted her younger son Sanjay Gandhi into politics, who virtually ran the government for two years.

From 1975 to 1980, Congressmen saw in him a natural inheritor. After his untimely death, Indira opted for son Rajiv Gandhi rather than any other senior Congress leader. Her message was clear: only a Gandhi may succeed her—which is what happened after