

## **'COMMENTARAO' IN "THE TELEGRAPH" OF APRIL 14 2014**

### **"Rebuilding the Congress-Defeat may lead to Rejuvenation" by S L Rao**

**A Democracy with universal suffrage must give electors a choice. There must be at least two national political parties. More of them would merely split the vote and not offer a clear choice to voters.**

**The election results on May 16 is expected to give us a new, non-UPA/Congress government. With less than 100 seats predicted for the Congress, it will be the smallest it has ever been in Parliament. Even if the Gandhi mother and son get elected, their past record as legislators does not suggest that they can lead an effective Opposition in Parliament. Neither is an effective speaker or debater, and unable to think on their feet. They do not have the required networking skills that this tallest club in India demands from effective leaders. Worst of all they both lack a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues that have to be dealt with. At the same time they have little choice but to hang on to their most valuable family inheritance, the Congress party.**

**Narasimha Rao and Vajpayee treated assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's widow with consideration and respect. Unlike the many investigations of Indira Gandhi by the Janata party governments, Sonya Gandhi faced no investigations. Even the media were kind to her. Vajpayee continued the various generous facilities given to her by the Narasimha Rao government. The allegations of the large amounts she and her family have in Swiss bank accounts surfaced during the years of the UPA government. However, Narasimha Rao marginalized Sonya Gandhi politically. This explains why the Family and hence the Congress has for sixteen years tried to bury his memory. When the Congress's turn for power came, Sonya Gandhi looked for the most unlikely person with no political affiliations or base to be Prime Minister when her foreign origin would make it impossible for her to occupy the position. Sonya Gandhi handed over the government to an obedient and pliable political nonentity. With the party, she will not hand it over to someone else except her son or daughter, for fear of losing it altogether.**

**When Indira Gandhi was subjected to humiliation by the Janata government,**

**she fought back with the help of her son Sanjay. She was helped by the many helpful administrators including police personnel, that the Congress had planted and developed over its years since 1947 (three fourths since independence. If the zero results of the many investigations by the Janata government into Indira Gandhi are any indication, administrators will drag similarly their feet over investigations into the current Gandhi family as well. They will fudge evidence, lose it, make errors in presentations to the Courts, and find every way to keep the proceedings going. They have done this in the past, and particularly with the charges against Congressmen over the killings during the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. The clever maneuvering and manipulation of Janata leaders by Indira and Sanjay Gandhi, led to bickering in the Janata party. Janata's enabled the two to emerge unscathed. Charan Singh achieved his ambition to be Prime Minister for a while. Indira Gandhi withdrew outside support to his government in six months as she had always intended. Charan Singh's government collapsed. Mrs. Gandhi rode back to power. Her cleverness in building alliances led her to try and build Sikh support by supporting dangerous separatist Sikh militant Bindranwale. After she raided the holiest temple of the Sikhs, her Sikh bodyguards assassinated her. This led to Rajiv Gandhi to power with an unprecedented majority.**

**A new BJP/NDA government under Narendra Modi is unlikely to treat Sonya Gandhi and her family with kid gloves. We can expect serious and coordinated investigations into the various scams of the last ten years and the alleged wealth of the First Family in India and abroad. Do Sonya Gandhi, her two children and son-in-law have the cleverness, persistence, determination and networking skills to do what Indira Gandhi and her younger son did to the Janata? They have not demonstrated these abilities. Further, the BJP will be firmly under control of one man, Narendra Modi, not a consultative group as under Vajpayee. Modi as Prime Minister is likely to centralize all power with himself. He will develop the objectives and the strategies and ensure implementation by his Ministers and bureaucrats. His personality does not suggest compassion for his opponents. The Gandhis are unlikely to receive the same consideration during his regime as they did earlier. They will not only be pursued by the law. They might well lose many of the privileges that they have enjoyed as members of the Dynasty.**

**When the Congress party lost to the Janata and others, many left the**

**party and joined others. Some even became Ministers in the disparate coalition governments that followed. Many will leave it after May 2014. Those who stay might be energized by the hounding and humiliation of the Gandhi family by the new government. They could help create a new base for the party to rebuild itself.**

**The rebuilding of the Congress will be the responsibility of Rahul Gandhi. For ten years past he has tried to inject democracy into and find leadership in the Youth Congress. Only time will tell how effective has been his effort. He will now have to take on the much bigger task of rebuilding the Congress from the village/mohalla level, talukas, districts and states. He must weed out the corrupt and ineffective and bring in hard driving honest younger people. It will take him ten years. At the same time he must lead an effective Opposition and get to power in panchayats, municipalities and state governments as their elections come up. He must discard the family practise of encouraging dissidents against Congress Chief Ministers, and enable them to grow and become powerful.**

**The party must develop common purpose, ideology and policies that grow the people and the nation, not borrow from the future to buy present voters as they have done. Apart from rebuilding the party therefore, Rahul Gandhi's task will be to give Congress a different approach from that of his grandmother and mother. His challenge is to achieve growth with low inflation, accelerate savings, investment and employment, and provide health, education and nutrition to the poor who must be properly identified and targeted.**

**If he can do these he will be a natural Prime Ministerial candidate-not just because he is a Gandhi. Whether he does these or not, Congress must condevelop many power Centers among its Chief Ministers and others. Rahul must be willing to be replaced by one of them. If he resists, the Congress will certainly break up into a number of state units. In states which it rules, the Chief Ministers will be the power centres, not the "High Command" .**

**This is truly a watershed election. It passes the baton to Narendra Modi, a state leader in an opposition party, who might last for ten years. His party and he have a distinctively different ideology and policies than the Congress. Which appeal to the electorate.**

**The imminent defeat at the Centre of the Congress party might lead to the rebuilding of the nation and Congress party. The Dynasty has been a Cross that the Congress and the nation have borne for ten years. Its demise will do both great good. (1228)**