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From the editor-in-chief

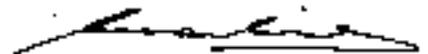
Jet lag is clearly injurious to the health of journalism. I was in America, and still a bit bleary-eyed and sleep-deprived when we took an unusual decision: to split the cover. This is jargon for changing the cover for some editions; so while the content of the magazine remained the same worldwide, the cover that went to our readers in south India displayed the phenomenal Rajinikanth, while our other readers saw Omar Abdullah on the cover. This meant writing two versions of 'Letter from the Editor'. Not being an acknowledged expert on the delightful southern superstar, I asked Delhi for some inputs. Unfortunately, a couple of sentences lifted from another article were sent to me. An excuse is not an explanation. So, without any reservations, mea culpa. Apologies.

The durability of leaders like Pranab Mukherjee is matched only by their dependability. At 75, he is the most experienced and trusted member in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's cabinet, the rock of the administration whose brief goes far beyond his portfolio of finance. He is a man for all seasons. His self-effacing manner and legendary institutional memory have made him a valuable asset in every government he has served. But it is a career that has also been touched by a wistful regret, born of the tragedy of being the perennial Number Two. His tryst with political power began in 1973, when he became a deputy minister in the government of Indira Gandhi. He has served in all the Congress ministries since then, handling almost all the major portfolios, from finance to defence to external affairs. In an exclusive interview that will be quoted endlessly, Mukherjee tells Senior Editor Priya Sahgal something that you will not hear easily from a Congress leader: No. He will not, he indicates, serve in a Rahul Gandhi Cabinet. His specific answer says it all: "There is a limit beyond which I cannot go... I have overstayed my wicket." This is a stunning revelation from a politician belonging to a party in which all members have an almost unnatural obsession with the dynasty which is only matched by their hunger for office. By saying what he did Mukherjee has renounced both. The cover story further reveals intimate details about him, as of his daily habit of writing a diary. This should set publishers on the hunt to secure the rights for his memoirs. A nostalgic Mukherjee told Sahgal how he gave up smoking and dealt with other temptations. For someone who is running the government he seemed remarkably at ease with his past, present and future.

Mukherjee, who has contributed so much to the Congress's past, seems to have decided not to be part of the Congress's future. This has serious implications for the party, since while the Rahul Gandhi generation may have energy, vision and commitment, it will still need the experience that enables a government find its way through the problem-infested waters of our politics. The shape of 'Congress tomorrow' is still a trifle nebulous, and has been made even more uncertain by the decision of its most important heavyweight to opt out. Mukherjee's achievements are testimony to what the future will miss by his absence.



**OUR JULY
 2009 COVER**



(Aroon Purie)