

Congress too in poll mode, Sonia sets up committees

Almost a week after the main opposition released its first list of candidates for the 2009 general elections, Congress president Sonia Gandhi Monday constituted two high-level committees for the party campaign and manifesto preparation.

The Sonia Gandhi-led campaign committee has External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee as vice-chairman and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as its member.

Senior cabinet ministers A.K. Antony, Arjun Singh, Kamal Nath, Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi, Vayalar Ravi, Meira Kumar and Ambika Soni also are members of the committee that will finalise the party's political strategy ahead of the general elections.

The 24-member committee also has party general secretaries as its members.

Another star campaigner of the party, MP Rahul Gandhi, will be on the panel that will work on the Congress manifesto for the crucial Lok Sabha elections due early next year.

The 21-member manifesto committee headed by Mukherjee will have senior ministers like P. Chidambaram, Arjun Singh, Mani Shankar Aiyer, Meira Kumar and Jairam Ramesh as its members.

Young Congress leaders like Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot have also been included in the panel.

Senior party leaders M. Vererappa Moily, Digvijay Singh, Kishore Chandra Deo, Ajit Jogi, Salman Khurshid and Margaret Alva have also been appointed as its members.

Gandhi also appointed Siddarth Patel, a legislator in the Gujarat state assembly, as the Pradesh Congress Committee president, while MP Tusharbhai Choudhary and legislators Kunwarjibhai Mohanbhai Bavali will function as working presidents.

In Himachal Pradesh, where the party faced a humiliating defeat last year, legislator Kaul Singh Thakur will head the state unit. In the faction-ridden Tamil Nadu unit, K.V. Thangabalu, a Lok Sabha MP, has been appointed state Congress president.

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