

Egypt NDP convention avoids succession issue

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Hosni Mubarak and his son Gamal Mubarak

The son of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak took center stage at his father's ruling-party conference Sunday. While the National Democratic Party meeting is avoiding the issue of who might succeed President Mubarak, 81, the question is very much on voters' minds

Gamal Mubarak presented a relatively youthful contrast to the graying leaders lining the front of the conference hall.

The sharply-dressed investment banker and rising star in the National Democratic Party assured those gathered the party does not monopolize Egypt's political scene.

His father has ruled the country for the past 28 years. Neither Hosni Mubarak nor his son has said whether either would run in the next presidential election in 2011. And both have repeatedly denied the younger Mubarak is being groomed for an eventual presidency.

Party officials said there would be no discussion at the three-day annual conference of who would next lead the party, pointing out such decisions would be made at a special convention.

Despite efforts to downplay the issue, NDP opponents last month launched "The Egyptian Campaign Against Presidential Succession". The anti-Gamal group is headed by Ayman Nour who ran in Egypt's first multi-party presidential elections in 2005 and was jailed shortly afterward on charges of fraud, which he says were politically motivated.

The coalition also includes the popular Muslim Brotherhood, banned under a constitutional prohibition against religion-based parties, but whose members have been successful as independent candidates for parliament.

Opponents hope to avoid any "hereditary democracy" and are rallying under the slogan "He shall not rule."

An indication of Gamal Mubarak's influence was the immediate appearance of this response video.

The singer argues in this song "Why shouldn't he rule?"

But opposition to Gamal is apparently not just coming from outside the party. Egyptian media report conflicts between the NDP old guard - Hosni Mubarak's contemporaries - and the new, mainly wealthy friends of his son's.

And some political observers wonder if the army, long the guarantor of presidential rule, would back Gamal Mubarak, who lacks any military background.

The younger Mubarak dismissed talk of an internal split.

He told the gathering that differences of opinion show the party's strength.

He also offered up plans for a variety of social and development programs.

Egypt suffers from a huge gap between rich and poor, something the Muslim Brotherhood has long tried to fill with its extensive charitable work.

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