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Push Pranab for smooth presidential election

The Congress has kept everyone guessing on whom it will push as the UPA government's presidential candidate, but it could do worse than getting finance minister Pranab Mukherjee to throw his hat in the ring. Congress president Sonia Gandhi has initiated a series of consultations with a range of allies from the UPA's single largest constituent, the DMK to Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal. Many have endorsed Mukherjee's candidature. True, there's still a question mark hanging over Trinamool Congress leader and eternal party-poopster Mamata Banerjee's support to Mukherjee. But given Mamata's penchant for Bengal, it's unlikely that she will go against the presidential aspirations of a fellow Bengali. It's important here to recall the support extended by Congress adversary Shiv Sena to the current UPA-backed president Pratibha Patil. The same regional sentiment is likely to move Mamata.

At a time when nothing is working right for the Congress, a consensus-based presidential candidate projected by the party could help it recover a measure of its lost credibility. And a veteran politician like Mukherjee, who knows the ropes of the political system, has a deep knowledge of the Constitution and commands respect across the political spectrum, is the best candidate to secure such a consensus. It's also true that Mukherjee hasn't really been the best finance minister the country ever had. The economy has plummeted to an all-time low since 1991 and another finance minister may well do better in Mukherjee's stead. The presidential elections are being seen as an indicator of future political alignments. By demonstrating an ability to push its candidate through, the Congress will firm up its badly eroded authority.