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## Rahul Gandhi "involved" with an Afghan princess

By S Venkat Narayan

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Rahul Gandhi, widely seen as India's future prime minister, may be "seriously involved" with a grand-daughter of the late Mohamed Zahir Shah, the hereditary King of Afghanistan, a local Sunday newspaper claimed today.

The Sunday Guardian said the Afghan expat community is a-twitter with this news. The young lady has not been identified by name.

"The charming Afghan princess is even reported to be a converted Christian," the weekly said.

Some informants speak of the pair "praying together on Sundays" in what they describe as a "home chapel" at the residence of Rahul's mother Sonia Gandhi here, it added.

Rahul Gandhi, who turned 43 last week, is a bachelor. Media reports in the past have linked him with more than one foreign girlfriend.

A fourth generation scion of the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty, he is an elected member of the Lok Sabha, Parliament's lower house, and a general secretary of the Congress Party, which leads the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

The Sunday Guardian said: "The two [Rahul and the Afghan princess] have reportedly been seen together in the Aman Hotel in Delhi, which is known to be a regular haunt of the future PM, who spends hours there in the Fitness Center, trying to develop biceps that can challenge those of Shah Rukh Khan and Robert Vadra.

"The young lady from the Afghan royal family is known to be very well brought up, with a gentle mien and a generous nature. Hence, Rahul's buddies hope that, this time around the future PM will not walk away from a lady friend [as he has on numerous occasions in the past], but will follow the example of Papa Rajiv [Gandhi] when he married Mamma Sonia in 1965."

The weekly went on: "The personable lady could emerge as a key asset for Rahul Gandhi as he seeks to win a fresh mandate for his battered party in 2014. She has undeniable appeal to the upwardly mobile youth vote."

The princess's grandfather Zahir Shah had reigned for four decades from 1933 until he was dethroned in a coup in 1973 by his own cousin Mohammed Daud Khan. The king abdicated and went to Italy to live in exile. He returned to Kabul in 2002, and was given the title of Father of the Nation. He passed away in 2007 at the age of 93.