

LI KEQIANG: A PREMIER IN THE MAKING

BO Zhiyue

EAI Background Brief No. 603

Date of Publication: 23 February 2011

Executive Summary

1. China is grooming its next premier—Li Keqiang (李克强). This seems to be one of the major tasks of Premier Wen Jiabao in his last term of office.
2. Grooming the next premier is a new political development in the history of the People's Republic of China. Premier Zhou Enlai (周恩来) was China's chief administrator for 26 years. He served the country until his death in 1976.
3. Zhou's successor, Premier Hua Guofeng (华国锋), was handpicked by Chairman Mao Zedong (毛泽东) without a grooming process. Zhao Ziyang (赵紫阳) replaced Hua Guofeng in 1980 in a power struggle between the reformers and the "whateverist faction" (凡是派) (i.e., Hua's supporters).
4. In 1987, Li Peng (李鹏) became premier because Zhao Ziyang was promoted to general secretary of the Party instead of Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦). Zhu Rongji (朱镕基) was transferred from Shanghai to Beijing in 1991 to manage market-oriented transformation on behalf of Deng Xiaoping (邓小平).
5. Wen Jiabao (温家宝) actually was not the strongest candidate for the position of premier. Among the four vice premiers from 1998 to 2003, he was listed the last. He became premier partly because of strong recommendation from his predecessor, Zhu Rongji.
6. If appointed, Li Keqiang would become the first premier in China that goes through an explicit grooming process.
7. In addition to a place on the Politburo Standing Committee and the executive vice premier of the State Council, Li Keqiang has recently been given more responsibilities on two super-ministerial commissions.

8. In the newly created National Energy Commission headed by Premier Wen Jiabao, Vice Premier Li Keqiang is made its vice chairman.
9. In another newly created Food Safety Commission of the State Council, Vice Premier Li Keqiang is made its chairman and Vice Premiers Hui Liangyu (回良玉) and Wang Qishan (王岐山) its vice chairmen.
10. At an annual training session for provincial and ministerial leaders at the Central Party School in February 2010, Li Keqiang gave a speech in addition to those made by Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) and Wen Jiabao.
11. Li Keqiang is also gaining experience in international affairs. He has visited 13 countries so far and attended the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 2010. He is learning to deal with the United States as well.