

'The nation is waiting for a strong, experienced leader'



Will he, won't he?

How long will Gujarat Chief Minister **Narendra Modi** stay on in the state? Does he harbour prime ministerial ambition? Does he see a greater role for himself at the Centre if a Bharatiya Janata Party-led dispensation were to assume power after the election? Does he see a connection between the anti-Muslims riots that rocked his state in 2002 and terrorism?

Rediff.com's Saisuresh Sivaswamy and Nikhil Lakshman met Modi at the chief minister's home in Gandhinagar to find out the answers. The first part of a 70-minute exclusive interview:

Why do you believe that L K Advani is a better leader than Manmohan Singh?

It's very simple, Dr Manmohan Singhji in reality is not a leader, and he has himself said that he is not a leader. The nation cannot be ruled by an academician, it can be run only by a leader. What was Indiraji (*Indira Gandhi*)'s education was never an issue, but she was a leader. (*P V*) Narasimha Rao was a leader. Only those who know the pulse of the nation can run it.

Lal Bahadur Shastri knew the pulse of the nation very well, which is why he was able to leave his imprint on the nation in such a short time. Atal Bihari Vajpayee knew the pulse of the nation, Morarjibhai (*Morarji Desai*) knew the pulse of the nation, Chandra Shekharji was a mass leader. We also had (*H D*) Deve Gowdaji who had never left Karnataka, Indra Kumar Gujralji thankfully never made any claims. Manmohan Singhji is like that.

That is why I say the nation needs a leader. Dr Manmohan Singh has not even visited all the states in the five years of his prime ministership, while Advaniji is a leader who has, at some point in time, spent a night in our 400 districts.

He knows the entire land, there is not a stain on him, he is blemishless, has vast administrative experience having served in various Cabinets, and fulfilled his responsibilities to everyone's satisfaction, whether it was as the chief executive of the Delhi metropolitan council or as information and broadcasting minister or deputy prime minister. Advaniji rose from the ranks to become a mass leader, there's a world of difference between the two.

It is said that in a nation where some 540 million people are under the age of 30, Advani seems out of sync with them, and the nation needs a leader like Narendra Modi.

If you are using age as the basis, how are you differentiating between Advaniji and Manmohan Singh?

I am thankful to the Congress for at least announcing that Manmohan Singh is their prime ministerial candidate, it will help the people decide in whose hand to hand over the reins of power. The nation will now choose between Manmohan Singh and Advaniji. There is no third option before us, so there is no need to get into that debate and waste our time. Now see the age factor for both, there's no problem.

'Time is in the hands of the people'



How do you feel when people talk about you as a potential prime minister?

But no one has said that to me!

Industrialists have endorsed your leadership and said...

You please read their statement carefully, none of them has used the words 'prime minister', none. You check it, no one has said it.

If you were to look at the postings on *rediff* message boards, in any story about Indian politics at least 50 per cent of the readers say we need Narendra Modi as prime minister.

But have they stated any timeframe? (*laughs*) Please ask them about the time, too.

Time is in your hands, obviously.

Time is in the hands of the people.

Anyway, I have no idea of this, because wherever I go, when I announce that Advaniji will be the next prime minister the people are happy and cheer wildly. This is what I hear.

If the NDA were to win the election what will be your role?

I am the chief minister of Gujarat, and I believe no one will remove me as the chief minister of Gujarat.

But how long will you stay in Gujarat, after all you came here from Delhi...

I don't even worry about what is going to happen this evening, so what you ask is not on Narendra Modi's agenda.

'I work like a labourer, not a model'



You are seen as the poster boy of development in the country.

I don't understand, what is poster boy? I work like a labourer, not like a model. I am a man who works 24 hours a day. In eight years have not taken even a 15-minute vacation.

What is your vision for India?

Given the present situation in the world, India has a great chance to become a powerful nation. The 21st century can become India's if only all of us strove together with all our energies.

Another thing I believe is that development must be a mass movement. The 100 crore citizens should feel motivated to take the nation forward -- we must create such an atmosphere. Media must be a part of development. (*Then President A P J*) Abdul Kalam used to say the media's role in development is very important.

What is your mantra for management?

Actually, I am not a manager, I am simply an organiser. And since my childhood I had training in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, so I know the human wealth, what is the value of human wealth and how to use human resources, how to form teamwork. This is my training and because I got exposure as a CM, I tasted success.

Although you had no real experience in running a state before this, your style of running a state has become a model for other chief ministers. Everyone wants to become another Modi.

I don't claim so. As far as Narendra Modi is concerned I think it's my responsibility, I have to deliver the goods as it is my commitment to the people of Gujarat. And if anything new is there, I try to learn. Even I am a student.

I believe you get up very early in the morning, and look at the Internet and read all newspapers on the Net and check what's going on, so you continuously invent yourself as a politician...

Actually I am a student of political science, so it's my natural habit. The second thing is, I was in Delhi for a long time so I used to read newspapers on the Internet, particularly Gujarati newspapers. When I left Delhi and came to Gujarat I was habituated to read the Delhi newspapers, so I was using the Internet.

I do believe that one must have information channels. If a person is well informed, he can take better decisions, he can guide the people, he can make a proper judgement of the situation. So for me the Net is a source of information, the mobile phone is a source of information, it connects me with the people. I can reach out to everyone through this. That information helps me take decisions.

'The era of coalitions will continue'



As a student of political science, how do you see the coming elections?

There are three camps in this election. One is the BJP-led NDA, the second is the Congress-led UPA, and the third is those who left the UPA, those who have not accepted anyone, those who want their own, they have their own problems. They are working as a Third Front.

On one side we have the family-oriented ideology of the Congress, another side we have money power, and then we have the nationalist ideology of the BJP. This is inevitable.

As the election nears, polarisation will happen, towards the BJP-led camp or the Congress-led camp. The rest are inconsequential, nothing much will happen.

And I am seeing it clearly that the nation wants a strong government, the nation is waiting for an experienced, strong leader.

For all these reasons... on the other hand, the failures of the government, price rise, unemployment, and their many false promises.

I can understand if the nation's expectations are not fulfilled, but when the government's promises are not fulfilled -- I am unable to swallow it.

They first said we will provide employment to 1.5 crore people, but are now saying that five lakh people will lose jobs. This is a major contradiction! They say -- we are the government of the *aam-aadmi* (*common man*), but they have been unable to halt price rise. In Atalji's time, when his government demitted office, onions were sold at Rs 8 a kg, today it costs Rs 16 a kg. Cooking gas cylinder was available for Rs 270, today it costs Rs 370. Their failures are linked to the *aam-aadmi*.

Security is an important issue, how do you propose to deal with security when the Taliban is poised to take over over all of Pakistan, they have reached Karachi. Naturally, the common man is perturbed.

Bhai, who do we trust to safeguard us? Like this there are many reasons why they are rejecting the UPA or Manmohan Singh.

Do you think the era of coalition governments in India will soon come to an end?

The era of coalitions will continue, but it will be good if the national party is strong and the regional parties add to that strength. That will be the best model.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee had given us such a model for governance -- first you arrive at a consensus in the Cabinet and then you take decisions. That was the best model.

How do you explain the fact that both Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh have opted for a stable one-party government while the country itself chooses coalitions?

The two are different. If you start comparing the states versus the Centre, the point is regional aspirations are growing, and I think national parties will have to address it and carry everyone along. They will have to keep in mind the development-related issues of the smaller states.

What are the deficiencies in our democracy, in your opinion, and how can it be rectified?

I think after independence we have laid greater emphasis on right, and less emphasis on duty. It would be better if we give more emphasis to duty.

In Gujarat, for instance, I have laid emphasis on a public-private partnership, like with rainwater harvesting, I involve the public. Because crores are helping, my rainwater harvesting is doing well. I have aroused the sense of duty in them, and if the same can be done nationwide it will be good.

For us democracy has become a vote-giving exercise, and we give out five-year contracts to run the government. We ask for accountability after five years. But I think this way we have extracted only the least from democracy. I believe that in everything we do, the people's involvement should be there.

After voting the people and government go their different ways -- this is not acceptable. Gujarat has developed the model where the public has a stake in everything, the people are carried along in everything.