

Modi tops list of BJP's star poll campaigners

Ahmedabad: It seems the BJP is building up Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi as a potential prime ministerial candidate next only to LK Advani. The party undoubtedly considers him its most charismatic politician after Advani for it has chosen Modi to address more than 300 public meetings - the highest by any BJP leader - in over 14 states during the Lok Sabha poll campaign. Even Advani, the party's current prime ministerial candidate, will address just 300 public meetings across the country.

Modi, who is known for his brilliant oratory, can keep crowds spellbound by his speeches. The other powerful orator in the BJP, former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, is not going to campaign this time because of ill health. In his absence, Modi has emerged as the star campaigner of the BJP and has already made headlines by his utterances against the Gandhi family, prime minister Manmohan Singh and the Congress party.

Modi has just returned to his state after addressing more than 75 public meetings in 10 states. Highly placed sources in the party said Modi is top in the BJP's list of star campaigners and all state units of the party want him to address public meetings in their constituencies.

"Modi will be speaking at 300 to 350 public meetings in over 15 states," a source said. "Advani, on the other hand, will speak at 300 meetings or perhaps even less."

The BJP has made Modi the overall in-charge of the party's Lok Sabha campaign in 78 constituencies, including the 26 in Gujarat. The other seats are of Maharashtra, Goa, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. "Modi's schedule these days is very hectic," the source said. "He attends four to five public meetings daily. The party has, therefore, allocated him a special helicopter."

The other leaders of the party have been given much less responsibility than Modi and Advani. Rajnath Singh, Sushma Swaraj, Arun Jaitely, Shatrughan Sinha and Navjot Singh Sidhu will be addressing between 100 and 200 public meetings only. "The BJP president, Rajnath Singh, another star campaigner of the party, is also the party's candidate from the Ghaziabad Lok Sabha constituency. He will, therefore, be able to address just around 250 meetings," the BJP source said.

"Another star campaigner of the party, Sushma Swaraj, is also contesting the election from the Vidisha constituency in Madhya Pradesh. She will, therefore, be able to address just 150 election meeting."

Sources said former BJP president Venkaiah Naidu will address about 200 election meetings while party general secretary Ananth Kumar will speak at around 100 public meetings in Karnataka. Celebrity star campaigners like Shatrughna Sinha, Navjot Singh Sidhu and Smriti Irani have also been given limited responsibility and would be addressing between 80 and 100 public gatherings.