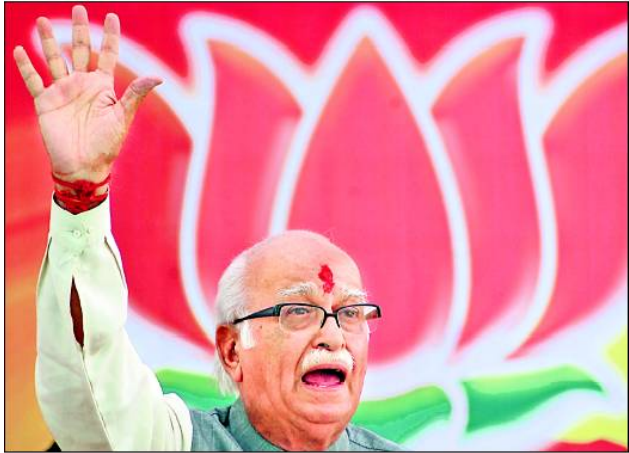


‘NDA has been better at running coalition govts’



Advani: Things Have Changed In Last Two Months, UPA Has Disintegrated, BJP's Stronger

From disciplinary issues in his party to the importance of coalition politics, Varun Gandhi to how the Tytler episode was an outcome of the Congress attitude... The PM-in-waiting, L K Advani, feels more confident about NDA forming govt after May 16 than he was two months ago, he tells Mohua Chatterjee.

You believe NDA will do well? Why?

Two months ago, it seemed there were small problems in the party. These were played up by the media. But they were not important because they had nothing to do with the people. Today, I am optimistic. I believe NDA will get a majority. Within a month of elections being declared, UPA has disintegrated. Lalu Prasad, Mulayam Singh, Ram Vilas Paswan have gone their way. NDA has a better history of participation in coalition politics. The way Atal Bihari Vajpayee ran the NDA government is there for people to judge.

What's your view on coalitions?

Coalition politics will be there for some time to come — till the polity of this country turns bipolar. Smaller parties are important to project the aspirations of regions in a pluralistic country. Punjab and Mizoram are two examples. The likes of Mizo National Front (MNF) or TDP cannot be wished away. What I am worried about are parties which have to do with caste politics and caste leaders. As for our own coalition, there are small differences between parties, but that makes no difference in our functioning. We did not compromise, like UPA. There has been criminalisation in politics, but it was the first time in Indian history that there were criminals in the ministry during the UPA regime.

Do you believe there is a problem of discipline in BJP?

There is no problem of discipline in the party. When the party is small and most of the work has to be done sitting in Opposition, then problems don't crop up. Problems come up when we become a party of governance and become very large. It is natural. No point crying about it.

Party of governance — what is the problem with that?

While in Opposition, what do you fight over? I did not get this post, I have not got my due... are issues that never came up earlier. I believe that in my generation, one came into politics for considerations that were totally different, not for posts. The inspiration was different, first to get independence, then nation building... after 40-50 years to expect that the new generation will also come with the same view to politics is unfair.

I often say about my young colleagues that in some fields, they are more capable than us. In others if they seem any less than us, that is because we have more experience. But these people (GenNext) are doing very well in different professions like law, medicine etc as well. They would like to acquaint themselves well with that profession too. There is nothing wrong about it. For many of us who joined politics at an early age, it was not a profession at all. It was purely a mission. I cannot expect the same from those who are joining BJP today.

What do you have to say about Varun Gandhi?

It is wrong to invoke NSA during elections. I have never compared him with Jaiprakash Narain. But those who think that by putting Varun behind bars, he will lose are wrong. BJP has nothing to do with what is being attributed to him. Varun himself has said that the CDs were fake and it was not his voice. We have asked all our candidates to exercise restraint.

NDA government did little on the Jagdish Tytler case...

As home minister, I went to the Rajya Sabha... it was December 6. Opposition Congress disrupted the House and it was adjourned. They do it every year. Afterwards, we sat together and Manmohan Singh was there and so were some others. I asked him if he had thought about the fact that there were some who had an interest in ensuring that December 6 wasn't forgotten. If I think purely politically, I can have an interest in ensuring that no Sikh in Punjab forgets October 31. But I did not do it. Because I have seen the kind of distress that was created in Punjab. I used to pray for it to end. And without thinking of any of this, you do this every December 6, just for votes.

Are you missing Vajpayee?

There are two things different in elections 2009. The first is an unhappy feeling — it's the first time that Vajpayeeji is not beside me. The second is a happy feeling — first time, we are fighting elections when the party has a government of its own in the south, in Karnataka. Before this, we were looked at as a north India-based party.