

Will stay in Gujarat if NDA voted to power: Modi

Saisuresh Sivaswamy, Nikhil Lakshman in Gandhinagar

April 03, 2009

How long will Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi [Images] remain in his present position? Does he harbour ambitions to move to New Delhi [Images], perhaps even make a bid for the prime ministership some day?

These were some of the questions *rediff.com* editors posed to Modi during an hour-long interview at his home in Gandhinagar on Thursday.

"I have to deliver the goods, it is my commitment to the people of Gujarat, and if anything new is there I will have to learn, I will learn it," he said in response to a question about his continuance in the politically critical state.

Welcoming the Congress party's decision to name Dr Manmohan Singh [Images] as its prime ministerial candidate if the United Progressive Alliance were to be voted back to power, Modi said, "It is a good thing, the people can now decide in whose hands they will entrust the nation."

"You may compare the two leaders' experience and see for yourself. Manmohan Singh *ji* has himself said he is not a leader; we all know that India needs a leader who knows its people, and its various regions intimately," the Gujarat chief minister added. "Advani [Images] *ji* has spent at least a night in each of the 400 zillas in the country, he knows the nation. Manmohan Singh has not even visited some states in these five years."

About his own chances of becoming prime minister, Modi said, "But no one has said I should become PM! You please go through the various statements carefully, no one has said this outright, so you don't expect me to react to non-statements."

Asked about the opinion expressed on the *Rediff* message boards that he should be made prime minister, Modi laughed and asked rhetorically, "But has anyone put a timeline on it?" and answered it himself: "Time is in the hands of the people, but as for myself I have no such ambitions. Whenever I say Advani *ji* is our prime ministerial candidate, there is so much applause, people are so happy about it."

Asked what role he will play if the National Democratic Alliance were to be voted to power, Modi said, "I am the chief minister of Gujarat, and I believe I will not be removed as CM."

About how long he sees himself in Gujarat, Modi ducked the question, saying, "I don't even worry about what is going to happen in the evening, so how can I be expected to know what will happen in the future."

Declaring that coalition governments were here to stay in India, Modi felt the path was shown by then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and that was the way for national parties to accommodate regional parties and govern through consensus.