

PR SENSE

Spreading Positive Vibrations

Issue No 84 – Mar 2014
Published by Prime Point Foundation

Institution of the Month



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Contact

www.corpezine.com

editor@corpezine.com



From the Desk of Editor-in-Chief

We are pleased to release the 84th Edition (March 2014) of your ezine PreSense with a special focus on the forthcoming elections. Within the next few weeks, India will vote for a new Government.



The theme in our last edition (Feb 2014) was 'Celebrate Democracy'. This edition is Election Special II on the same theme 'Celebrate Democracy'.

In this edition, we feature the role of the Office of the Election Commission. We

also feature and analyse the Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi. Congress' Election manifesto is also included. We are confident that you will continue to enjoy this edition.

In April, people of many parts of India will be celebrating their new year in their respective regions. The Editorial Team wishes all the readers a happy and prosperous New Year.

K. Srinivasan



Shri T N Ashok, one of the popular economic journalists of our country, joins our Editorial Team this month. He was the Economic Editor of Press Trust of India (PTI). He served in several leading multinational PR Agencies and companies as their adviser on Corporate Communication. He has more than three decades of experience in journalism and corporate communication. Currently, he writes for twelve leading journals. He lives in New Delhi.

PreSense welcomes him on board.

- K. Srinivasan, Editor in Chief

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(our Political Analysis)

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(Sansad Ratna Awards for outstanding Parliamentarians)



Celebrate Democracy: Cover Story Institution of the Month – Election Commission of India



India’s electorate will visit polling booths during April-May 2014 to vote with faith and confidence in the fair conduct of general elections this year because of the one constitutional body in charge of the process –the Election Commission of India.

The Election Commission was established on 25th January 1950 under Article 324 of the Indian Constitution. It is empowered to conduct free and fair elections to the national and state legislatures.

The Office is headed by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), usually a member of the Indian Civil Service, and is appointed by the President of India. Mr. Sukumar Sen was the first Chief Election Commissioner, appointed in March 1950. Ms V. S. Ramadevi is the only woman so far to head the Election Commission during 1990. The present incumbent, Mr. V.S.Sampath who will hold office till his retirement age of 65 years in January 2015, is the 18th CEC of independent India. The Chief Election Commissioner is a constitutional authority.

The Election Commission functions out of its headquarters in Nirvachan Sadan, New Delhi. At the state level, a Chief Electoral Officer functions with a core staff of varying numbers. At the district and constituency level, officers and staff of the civil administration double up as election officials. During the actual conduct of elections, a vast number of additional staff are temporarily drafted. They function mainly as polling and counting officials.

There are three key officials who monitor the election process. The General Observer oversees the conduct of elections in the booths and outside. The second official is the Law and Order Observer who monitors the security arrangements inside and outside the booths. The third official is the Expenditure Observer who closely monitors expenses of candidates and ensures there is no violation of the code of conduct laid down for the candidates by the Election Commission. All the three officers are drawn from the Central Government and are deployed in any part of India.



V S Sampath,
18th Chief Election Commissioner of India

The functions of the Election Commission, among others, include demarcation of constituencies, distribution of voters’ ID,



preparation of electoral rolls, recognition of political parties and allotment of symbols, scrutiny of nomination papers, conduct of polls, and scrutiny of election expenses of candidates.

The Election Commission was a single-member body when it was first set up in 1950. It is now a three-member body, with one Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.

The Election Commission will conduct the forthcoming General Elections in nine phases from April 7 until May 12, 2014. The vote counting will take place on May 16, 2014 and the results will be announced the same day. Thereafter, the 16th Lok Sabha will be constituted with 543 MPs chosen from across India. Of these, 131 seats are reserved for candidates from the country's scheduled castes and tribes. Two other MPs can be appointed to the Lok Sabha by the President of India, to ensure the representation of India's tiny Anglo-Indian community, taking the total number of MPs to 545. A political party needs to secure at least 272 seats to form the Government.

About 23 million eligible voters have been enrolled in the 18-19 years age group, constituting nearly 3 percent of India's voters of 814.5 million eligible voters. 28,314 identify themselves as transgender and their gender is listed as "other". There are 11,844 non-resident Indians registered to vote in the election this year. Voters will have a 'None of the Above' (NOTA) option on the voting machines. The nationwide exercise of the General Elections involving 6.4 lakh places, 9.3 lakh polling stations, 11 lakh Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) and deploying nearly 10 million Government officials/Security forces is one of the world wonders.



The electronic voting machines are transported under armed escort and stored in strong rooms, with a double lock system and guarded 24X7 by armed police, and CCTV coverage. Political parties and the candidates are also allowed to keep a watch on them.

The basic minimum facilities for polling stations include drinking water, shed, toilet, ramp for disabled voters. Security forces are deployed on high alert to prevent any disruption of the democratic process of elections, especially along the north-eastern regions and borders. The international border with Bangladesh has also been sealed to avoid any cross-border infiltration.

Incidentally, the Election Commission will conduct elections to state assemblies in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim simultaneously with the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

On behalf of PreSense, we interviewed Mr T S Krishna Murthy, 13th Chief Election Commissioner of India, who conducted the General Elections in 2004. Excerpts:

Q. The task of the first Chief Election Commissioner must have been a challenging one, considering he oversaw the nation's first General Elections post-independence. Right from that period, what were the landmark decisions implemented by the CEC's Office over the years that have raised the standard of the electoral system?



A; The first general election in post-independence period was an easy period because of the 'festive' mood of the electorate as well as a challenging one, as the first Chief Election Commissioner's Office functioned in a system that had no prior experience of electoral manpower management. The polling officers had to be trained from the basics. The voters' list had to be prepared for the first time before the first elections in 1951. However, with the minimal number of political parties then, political party management and monitoring was easier than what it is today.

Thereafter, the Chief Election Commissioner's Office functioned somewhat as a part of the machinery of the Indian Government till 1991, when Mr.T.N.Seshan implemented steps that brought more credibility to the Election Commission. He issued instructions for better management of the elections and better regulation of the political parties.



**T S Krishna Murthy,
13th Chief Election
Commissioner of India**

During my tenure, the Electronic Voting Machinery (EVM) was introduced in all the 543 Lok Sabha constituencies. The photo ID was also introduced and implemented in three states. The rest of the country was covered in the succeeding tenure.

Mr. N. Gopalaswamy is instrumental in the introduction of micro-observers in the polling booths. They ensured, through detailed observation in the conduct of polling, that the election process was conducted in a free and fair manner with no violation of any kind.

The Election Commission continues to improvise on and fine-tune the functioning of the electoral system, issuing periodic guidelines and instructions.

Q You had submitted a proposal recommending Electoral Reforms to the Prime Minister of India, when you were in office. Are there any further recommendations of critical reforms necessary to improve the electoral system of the country in the future?

There are three reforms that are strongly recommended.

In today's system of elections, there is an imbalance in the representation of the voters' mandate. A candidate who has won by even one vote is elected as the representative when he does not rightfully represent the majority of the people. There should be an alternative system of elections where the candidate needs to win by at least one-third majority, to be elected. Alternative systems of elections, such as the proportional system or the preference system (See article in e-zine issue February 2014 on this topic) need to be examined.

There needs to be a separate law for political parties for their better management. This suggestion already features as one of the recommendations for constitutional reforms.

There should be a National Election Fund that can be funded by the State as well as the public and corporate bodies. It should enjoy 100% tax exemption. It will streamline corporate funding of political parties, which is currently unorganised and undisclosed. This move will also protect against the prevailing nexus between the corporate and the political parties/Government.

By Susan Koshy, Editor, PreSense



Ancient Indian wisdom Electoral system in ancient India



D K Hari showing the inscriptions

The concept of People's Republic (Janapada) has been in existence in India since ancient times. Historical evidence in the form of inscriptions were found on the walls of the village temples in South India. These inscriptions in the village of Uttaramerur in Tamil Nadu indicate the existence of electoral systems and electoral code of conduct. They date back to the reign of the Chola King, Parantaka Deva Parkesari Varman between 907 to 955 CE. Scholars are of the view that while village assemblies might have existed even before the period of Parantaka Chola, it was during his reign that the village administration was honed into a perfect system through elections.

The inscriptions throw light on the mode of election and governance. The village assembly or panchayat consisted 30 wards. The period of the assembly was for one year. The area of operation of the village assembly, viz. the panchayat, included the village sabha - Grama Sabha, garden sabha - Thotam Sabha and tank sabha - Eri Sabha.

The inscriptions also give details about the constitution of the wards, the qualification of the candidates standing for elections, the disqualification norms, the mode of election, the constitution of committees with elected members, the functions of those committees, the power to remove the wrongdoer, and so on. The villagers even had the right to recall the elected representatives if they failed in their duty.

The election ballot was in the form of a pot, in which the electors polled the votes for the candidates of their choice. Each person's preference vote was inscribed on a palm leaf and dropped into the ballot pot. (Picture on right)



Some of the qualifying criteria for candidates, standing for elections were that they must know Mantrabrahmana, be well read, have general knowledge to teach others, be conversant with business and should not have been on any other committee for the previous three years. People in the age group of 35 to 70 only can contest elections. They had also prescribed a minimum land or property holding to become eligible for contest.

Those charged were barred from standing as electoral candidates for life. The kith and kin of candidates standing for elections were not eligible to stand for the elections.

These inscriptions reflect a far superior practice of democracy and a fair system of elections and governance in the ancient times, as against the flawed practices that prevail these days.

By Susan Koshy, Editor, PreSense with input from D K Hari www.bharathgyan.com/



Celebrate Democracy: Indian General Elections 2014 – An Overview



The BJP-led NDA and UPA-led Congress will fight it out for power in the ensuing General Elections of 2014, beginning on April 07 and ending on May 12, 2014. While NDA has upped its ante in the election campaign declaring the charismatic Narendra Modi, presently Chief Minister of Gujarat, as its Prime Ministerial (PM) candidate, UPA has not declared anyone as its PM candidate though there has been a demand within the party to project the Congress Vice-President, Rahul Gandhi. UPA Chairperson, Ms Sonia Gandhi has clearly stated that it is the convention of the Congress as also the UPA alliance, not to declare the PM candidate before the elections but only after the elections following a consensus from within the front.

Normally, the general elections in India are a two-cornered fight between the BJP-led NDA and the UPA-led Congress. This time, however, the elections in almost every state promises to be a multi-cornered contest. An addition to the fray is the fledgling outfit of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of the self-styled anti-corruption messiah, Arvind Kejriwal, who achieved fame in the Delhi assembly elections. AAP defeated the formidable Congress, which had ruled uninterrupted for 15 years. AAP also upset the calculations of the BJP which were expected to seize power on the back of an anti-corruption campaign. This credit was however hijacked by AAP.

AAP, largely claimed to be a media creation, has successfully grabbed public attention projecting itself through the English and vernacular language TV Channels. It may not have a national presence like the BJP or the Congress or other major national parties. But it appears to have some presence in the urban and metro agglomerates such as Delhi, Lucknow, Allahabad, Chandigarh, Bangalore, and Mumbai.

While Congress is the first to release its election manifesto, other parties including BJP are yet to do so despite the elections being just a fortnight away. There is a third front, initiated by the left parties. However, it appears to be a non-starter. Since Mr Narendra Modi has been declared the PM candidate, after an elaborate study, your ezine, PreSense decided to feature him. For this purpose, we contacted many people, including his personal friends, bureaucrats, retired officials and general public to get a fair and balanced view.

By K. Srinivasan and T N Ashok, Editorial Team





Election Commission of India

Be Proud to be a Voter Vote with Conscience



GENERAL ELECTIONS 2014

POLL DAYS TOTAL **543**

| POLL DAY | DATE OF POLL | NUMBER OF STATES & UTs | NUMBER OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES |
|----------|--------------|------------------------|--|
| 1 | APRIL | 7 | 2 |
| 2 | | 9 | 5 |
| 3 | | 10 | 14 |
| 4 | | 12 | 3 |
| 5 | | 17 | 13 |
| 6 | | 24 | 12 |
| 7 | | 30 | 9 |
| 8 | MAY | 7 | 7 |
| 9 | | 12 | 3 |

Source: Election Commission

PTI GRAPHICS



Voting is not only your right; It is your fundamental duty

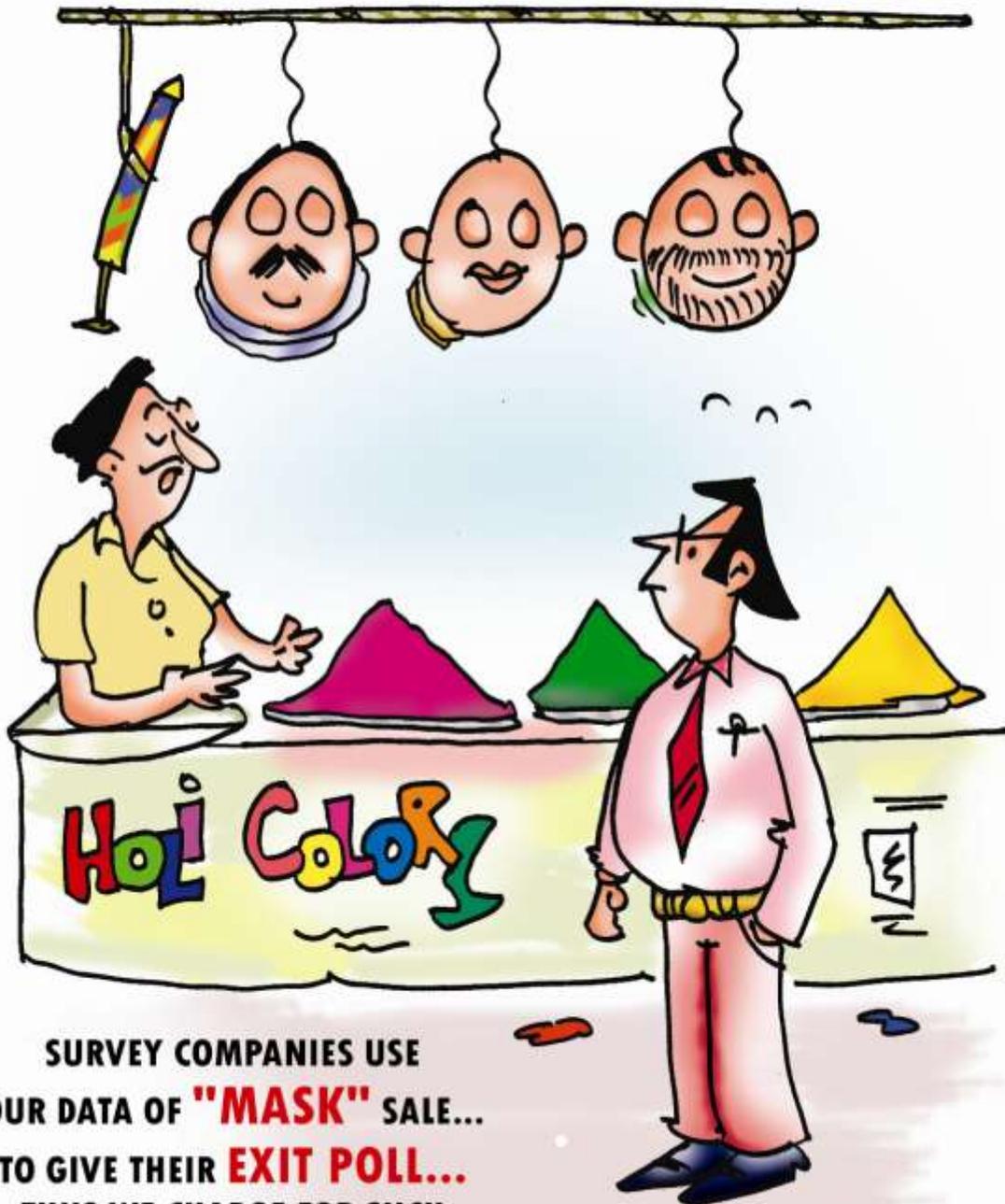


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By- TRIAMBAK SHARMA



www.cartoonwatchindia.com, cartoonwatch@gmail.com



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Narendra Modi, Prime Ministerial candidate – An analysis



Early days of Narendra Modi

Even as political parties hit the campaign trail with their leaders delivering spirited speeches to elect them to power, it is worth looking at the profile of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, who has virtually become a household name in every nook and corner of the country. Billboards dot every city in the country showing the vest-coated Modi with the slogan "Ab ki baar, Modi ki sarkar" (this time round it is Modi's reign). Radio spots tout a woman called corruption, wanting to quit the country after 10 years because Modi is now coming to clean the stable (the country) of corruption.

After having missed the bus in 2004 despite a successful run by then PM, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and again in 2009 because of party in-fighting, BJP has now mounted a powerful nation-wide campaign, projecting Narendra Modi as the man of the hour to fight corruption and inefficiency, and to take bold decisions to kickstart the economy that has remained stagnant during the past few years.

BJP's gamble on the strong, no-nonsense man, Modi, acclaimed for his Gujarat-type development model, has evoked mixed responses nation-wide, with some swearing by him and some others questioning the efficacy of his economic fundamentals. Yet, sixty-four year old Narendra Damodardas Modi, born in Sep 1950 in Vadnagar, Gujarat, has occupied mind space across the nation.

Let us look at the profile of this much discussed man, described by his detractors as an autocrat of Hitler's mettle and some others calling him a strong administrator, who could



crack the whip to get the administration and its bureaucrats moving. In 1970, Modi joined the right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as a full-time pracharak (propagandist). He also helped his father and his brother in the family business of a tea stall. He was an average student at school, but he was recognised for his brilliant oratory skills.

Modi was appointed the National Secretary of BJP after the successful 1995 Gujarat Elections, during which campaign he demonstrated his organisational skills and his ability to return his party to power in the state. He continues to successfully retain power for over a decade, winning every election since then, convincingly.

Bharath Matha Mohan, one of Modi's close associates from 1978 till date, said, "Modi is affectionate with all the people, and is deeply committed to the nation. He has never shied away from taking up any challenging responsibility. He has an amazing, photographic memory and he can remember a person and recall the association and the conversations even after many years".



Bharath Matha Mohan

Taking over as Chief Minister of Gujarat

Narendra Modi led BJP to a massive victory in 1995 (121 seats) and 1998 (117 seats) in the State Elections in Gujarat. BJP came to power in 1995 for the first time and since then it has retained power. In January 2001, when Keshubai Patel was the Chief Minister, a massive earthquake devastated the state, hitting Bhuj. Nearly 20,000 people died and properties worth thousands of crore were damaged. Keshubai Patel was not in good health at that time and the administrative machinery was not equipped well enough to handle a calamity of such magnitude. BJP faced much criticism from the public.

Seeing his immense capabilities, the BJP leadership then entrusted the task of Chief Ministership to Narendra Modi. Modi was not even an MLA and lacked any experience in governance. After a long deliberation, BJP confidently decided to make him the Chief Minister because of his effective organising abilities and dedication. "It is a rarest of the rare decision in politics" said Mohan, recalling those tumultuous days. On 7th October 2001, Modi took charge as the Chief Minister, from Keshubai Patel.



Impact of Bhuj earthquake – totally restored in 3 years

which normally could have taken more than 10 years.

With minimal experience in disaster management, Modi rose to the occasion displaying his remarkable leadership skills in organising relief to the victims. He rebuilt the entire devastated area within three years,

Major challenge – History of Communal riots

Gujarat has been in the grip of communal riots since 1714. Even in the post-independence era, thousands of people belonging to different communities continued to die in communal



clashes. Justice Reddy Commission and Justice Davy Commission, which examined the issue of communal riots in Gujarat, recorded 2938 such instances in the 1960s. Though the official estimate of the death toll in the 1969 riots was 5000, the actual death toll was reported to be more than 15,000. 1980s and 1990s also saw many communal clashes, resulting in huge loss of human lives and properties, belonging to the Hindus and the Muslims. Many parts of Gujarat were under curfew for many days.

On 27th Feb 2002, 58 Hindu Karsevaks were burnt alive by some miscreants in Godhra Railway Station. This sparked a communal clash between the Hindus and the Muslims the following day, in 36 different places in the state.

Though the army took control of the situation the following day i.e. on 1st March 2002, 1100 lives of both communities were lost by that time.

Facing adverse criticism as a man new to the government, Modi resigned and dissolved the assembly in July 2002. The Governor however, requested him to continue in office. On 24th Sep 2002, the famed Akshardam Temple was attacked by Pakistani terrorists. This created yet another big challenge to the Gujarat Government. In the Dec 2002 elections, BJP, led by Modi, secured 127 out of the 182 seats in the Assembly, and he became the Chief Minister for a second term.

A more confident Modi launched initiatives to overcome the challenges, facing the state, and he set himself to improve the governance of the state.

In the 2007 elections, he secured 117 seats and in 2012 elections, he secured 115 seats. Modi thus assumed his office for the fourth term as Chief Minister, a rare feat by any chief minister. The closest anyone has come to this record is the Congress ex-Chief Minister of Delhi, Ms Shiela Dikshit. She was successfully elected for three terms. She is now the governor of the state of Kerala.



United Nations Award for better Governance

Gujarat to find out why this was so and how much of it was myth and how much of it, reality.

“Modi became CM in 2001 during acute Gujarat crisis without any governance experience; Got UN Award for excellence in Governance in 2010” – Bharath Matha Mohan

After 2002, not a single incidence of communal clashes or death has been reported in Gujarat. The state has not placed any area under curfew ever since.

New initiatives

Narendra Modi is both the most admired as well as the most abused or maligned politician of this nation. We gathered some first-hand information from different sources in



Modi introduced new systems to improve the state governance and to maintain peace in the state. The State Wide Attention on Grievances with Application of Technology (SWAGAT), launched in April 2003, is an initiative to redress public grievances. On the fourth Thursday of every month, the Chief Minister holds a video conference with all his ministers, his secretaries, the district collectors and other field functionaries to review pending grievances and the progress of projects in the pipeline.



Narendra Modi addressing ATVT Chintan Shibir during October 2013

“The real test of good governance is its grievance redressal system. In an ideal democratic system, people should be able to voice their problems freely and also get them resolved quickly”, Modi had stated in one of his speeches.

In 2010, the United Nations presented an award in the category of ‘Improving Transparency, Accountability and Responsibility in Public Service’ to the Gujarat Government .

In order to give more microscopic attention to the villages and towns, Modi increased the number of districts from 26 to 33 and also divided the Taluks to facilitate better attention to the welfare of the people. He introduced the Apno Taluko, Vibrant Taluko (ATVT) Scheme to empower the officials at the grassroot level to take quick decisions.

Since 2003, Modi has been organising a three-day ‘Chintan Shibir’ (brain-storming session) annually in one of the resorts. All his Ministers, State Secretaries, and field-level IAS officers as well as other functionaries are invited to participate. Many eminent people like Dr Abdul Kalam, Secretaries from the Government of India, and experts from different fields were invited as guests, to share their views. During these three days, various group discussions are held on different problems, and at the end of it, the officials returned to their offices, equipped with effective decisions and solutions.

Modi would spend all the three days in the same campus. He would interact with the officials in small groups, during the breakfast, lunch and dinner sessions, to understand their problems. This Shibir is a unique governance model practised only in Gujarat and successfully running for the past 10 years. It is learnt that other states are planning to replicate this model. The Gujarat Government has received several awards at national and international levels, for its model of governance. In 2013, the Prime Minister presented an award for public administration to the Gujarat Government.



Prime Minister Dr Man Mohan Singh presenting Excellence in Public Administration Award to Gujarat Government in April 2013

When we spoke to one of the District Collectors of Gujarat (name withheld due to the moral code in force), he said that Modi used to



motivate all the officers with his oratory skill and would individually encourage them. "I am fortunate to work with Mr Modi. He is a good motivator. At the same time, he also ensures that projects are completed on time. He does not behave like a boss. He is always a leader and a mentor", the IAS officer said with pride.

Another senior bureaucrat from New Delhi said that Modi had been focusing on infrastructure development, education, healthcare, industry and trade for long term benefit. He would refer to the example of interlinking the rivers, Sabarmati and Narmada, as this has helped improve the irrigation and water supply in many parts of the state.

"Agriculture productivity is 9%, as against the national average of 2%. The latest reports indicate that this national average has now touched 4%. Modi is one leader capable of using existing and available resources for development", the bureaucrat added.

Criticisms against Narendra Modi

Although the people of Gujarat have voted Modi's government into power for the fourth term in succession, the opposition parties and some Muslim leaders criticise him, comparing him with Adolf Hitler and allege his involvement in the post-Godhra riots. They also allege that discrimination is shown by Modi to the people of a particular religious faith.

Some of his critics say that the development story of Gujarat as projected by Modi was a farce and they claim that many villages in the state, still do not have power and electricity.

How others perceive?

On behalf of ezine, PreSense, I spoke to Dastagir Sheik (56), a car driver from Ahmedabad. He has been living in Gujarat since his birth. He said that he had seen riots and curfew for many years in the earlier decades, but after 2002, the state had remained peaceful. The Hindu and Muslim communities were engaged profitably in their own avocations. "Earlier, some people from both the communities were not gainfully employed. Thus, they used to engage in rowdiness, creating communal tension. They were also involved in illegal activities. But now, the progress in the state's economic development has ensured that everyone was occupied. A strict vigil by the authorities deters people from unlawful acts" Dastagir added.

"The so-called secular English electronic media pry into Modi's affairs with microscopic scrutiny. Even trivial issues are exaggerated to malign him. In the past 10 years, he has brought about good model of governance. The media does not bother to talk about this" – N Vittal

Jaffar Sadig (32), a shop-keeper from Vadodra, endorsed similar views. He raved about the leadership of Narendra Modi. "Mr Modi is not a Hitler. He is a strong person. He has control over the entire administration. Corruption is

minimal in Gujarat. We should not linger on the past riots. We need to move ahead. I will definitely vote for Modi, who is standing from our constituency. Besides me, a majority of the Muslims will vote for him", he added confidently.



"It is pointless to continue accusing Modi for what happened in 2002. Even the Special Investigation Team (SIT) appointed by the Supreme Court has not found any valid allegation against him. In the past 11 years, there has not been a single instance of riot reported. I do not understand why the media is spreading false information and not covering the success stories.", Mohan added.

The District Collector (name withheld), with whom I spoke over the telephone, said that whenever the people came with their grievances, the Administration examines the issues to find suitable solutions for the people.

"In our district, we used to have low voltage and power fluctuation for various reasons. Immediately, we added a few more sub-stations and resolved the problem within a few days. We do not believe in ignoring the grievances. We believe in resolving them. Narendra Modi has set systems in place like Chintan Shibir, SWAGAT, ATVT, for effective functioning of the systems", he added.

When asked about the negative projection of the Modi Government by the media, all of those interviewed were unanimous in saying, "Let anybody visit Gujarat and see for themselves. We do not understand why the media is projecting incorrectly, when there are many positive results to cover and share".

What is unique in Modi that differentiates him from others?

When there were many leaders in the party, why was Modi chosen as the Prime Ministerial Candidate? What is the uniqueness in him that made him the PM candidate? When I asked this question to Mohan, his long-time friend, he immediately responded that his organising ability and effective administration were the main qualities and reason.

Mr.N. Vittal, retired IAS officer from the Gujarat cadre and the former Central Vigilance Commissioner of India, was closely associated with Narendra Modi in 2003, in establishing the good governance model. "The so-called secular English electronic media pry into Modi's affairs with microscopic scrutiny. Even trivial issues are exaggerated to malign him. In the past 10 years, he has brought about good model of governance. The media does not bother to talk about this", Vittal says.



N Vittal

"I have worked with several politicians. Mr Modi is a great listener and learner. He is like a sponge, which can absorb water immediately. He can absorb knowledge quickly. When you say something to him, he is able to comprehend and think ahead quickly. I have seen this quality only in Rajaji (C.Rajagopalachari)", Says Vittal.

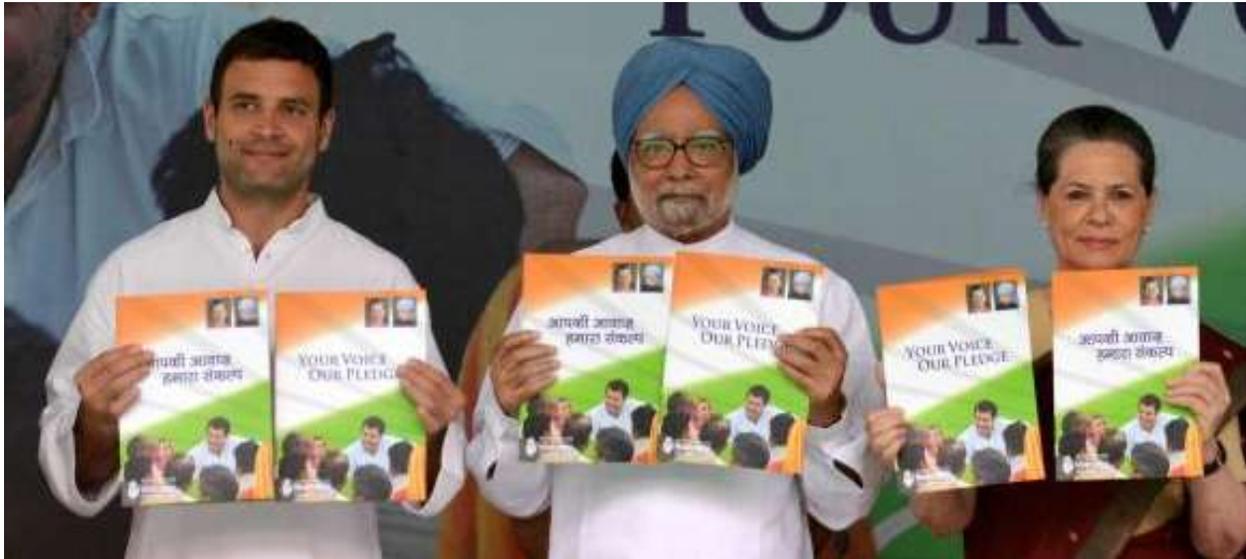
It was Dalai Lama who said, "When you talk or speak, you are only reiterating or recalling what you already know. But when you listen, you are on the learning curve; you learn a lot."

We can say that Modi is among the rare breed of politicians who has developed the ability to listen to others to emerge with solutions to public problems.

By K. Srinivasan and T N Ashok, Editorial Team



Election Manifesto 2014 Congress - 'Your Voice-Our Pledge'



The Indian National Congress, which ruled the country for the last 10 years, heading an alliance of parties under the UPA banner, was the first political party to release its election manifesto. It promises higher GDP growth, rapid infrastructure development, boosted industrial and agricultural growth, besides a new deal for the youth, the labour and minorities' section and women's empowerment. Here are the highlights of the 20-point programme enunciated by the Congress in its manifesto.

- 1) Restore GDP growth rate to 8% within the next three years
- 2) Create 10 crore new jobs and new entrepreneur opportunities
- 3) Strengthen labour force by providing health and pension cover. All migrant labour will be covered under the Aadhaar programme within one year.
- 4) Bring the SCs, STs and OBCs at par with other castes and provide them with opportunities in education and employment, through reservation. Enact a central legislation on the SC and ST Sub-Plans.
- 5) Enact the Women's Reservation Bill to reserve 33% of all seats in Parliament and State legislative assemblies for women. All laws for the welfare of children including the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, will be strictly enforced.
- 6) Ensure equal space for members of the minority communities. Committed to enact the Communal Violence Bill ensuring every community lives without fear of persecution from anyone.
- 7) Provide for holistic development of the youth and students. Policy thrust on improving the quality of education and sports in the country, focusing on spotting and nurturing talent.



- 8) Bring about a transformation in rural life. Land records to be digitised and a National Panchayati Raj Commission to be set up. Grievances of long neglected sections like development functionaries in villages, elderly and destitute women, to be addressed.
- 9) Continue to provide an impetus to agricultural growth, productivity and incomes. Provide all possible support to farmers, particularly women and small and marginal farmers.
- 10) Ensure manufacturing sector grows at 12-14% and its share of GDP increases to 25%. To support rapid acceleration in exports. Double trade in goods and services within 5 years.
- 11) Pledging a \$1 trillion investment on infrastructure upgradation. Continue to create world-class transportation network that will boost economic activity and connectivity.
- 12) Entrust the Mayors and Municipal Chairpersons with fully functional powers so that they can operate as CEO's of cities, with executive powers and responsibilities.
- 13) Provide affordable and quality housing for all sections. Right to Homestead is part of the charter of rights that the Congress plans to provide to the people of India.
- 14) Committed to sustainable development in its true spirit. Ensuring people in India have the right to a clean environment, which secures their health, livelihood and nutritional well-being.
- 15) Ensure continuance of Democratisation of Information. Ensure benefits of this transformation reaches a larger populace.
- 16) Eliminate corruption and prevent leakages by putting in place better delivery systems for public service programmes. Provide India a framework against corruption by passing the anti-graft Bills, (taking credit for Right to Information, the Lokpal and the Whistleblowers Protection Act).
- 17) Give highest priority to transparency in governance systems and its accessibility to the people. Ensure recommendations of the second Administrative Reforms Commission are implemented in letter and spirit.
- 18) Continue to deal firmly with internal security threats. Top priority to addressing the challenge of left wing extremism (LWE).
- 19) Bring about rapid modernisation of the defence forces ensuring procurement of state-of-the-art equipment is carried out in a transparent manner. Give a fresh impetus to upgrading existing manufacturing capabilities.
- 20) Foreign policy will address the issue of terrorism and enable greater levels of intelligence sharing with other countries, cutting out financial flows to terrorist outfits, and stopping money laundering.

By T N Ashok Editorial Team



Presenters of *PreSense*

Editorial Team



K. Srinivasan
Editor in Chief



Susan Koshy
Editor



V. Rajendran



Triambak Sharma

Editorial Team



Sukruti A Vadula

Editorial Advisors



V. Ponraj



T N Ashok



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Published by
Prime Point Foundation

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editor@corpezine.com

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