

# Opinion

SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 2019

THE ELECTION COMMISSION sounded the bugle on Sunday, March 10, 2019. They had done their last act of favour to the government. The announcement was received with a huge sigh of relief by the people: there will be no more foundation stones, no more ordinances, and no more desperate 'launch' of ill-conceived and under-funded schemes. By one count, the Prime Minister had 'inaugurated' or 'laid the stone for' 155 schemes since the end of the Parliament session on February 13.

Here is a hilarious example. The Ahmedabad Metro was long in the making, since the work had started on March 14, 2015. It did not show much progress. The government of Gujarat was the object of ridicule. It was decided to 'complete' a section and inaugurate the 'service'. So, 6.5 km of the Metro line were hurriedly completed. On March 4, 2019, the Prime Minister proudly inaugurated the service.

The story does not end there. There are 6.5 km of tracks but only two stations; the other stations are under construction. What's running now is virtually a joy train — no tickets, no charges, just a free ride!

## Say yes or no

Now, to serious issues. About 90 crore eligible voters will vote to elect a new government. The main issue will be the performance of the Modi government. Some questions are pertinent:

1. Do you feel that you are a free citizen in a free country and are not afraid of being lynched or stripped or beaten up or boycotted or discriminated against because of your religion or caste or language? If you are a female, are you unafraid of being harassed or molested?
2. Are you confident that your conversations or messages will not be snooped upon by the government?
3. Do you think that a large number of jobs were actually created in the last five years? If you are a parent, are you confident that your son/daughter will soon find a job? (According to the CMIE, 312 lakh persons were actively seeking jobs at the end of February 2019.)
4. If you are a farmer, do you think your lot has improved in the last five years? Has your income increased? Are you happy to be a farmer and will you encourage your son/daughter to be a farmer?
5. Do you think demonetisation was a good idea? Do you think you benefited from demonetisation? Do you think the economy of the country benefited from demonetisation?
6. Do you think the GST, with its multiple tax rates and three returns a month, benefited micro, small and medium industries? Do you think it is easy for a small businessperson to comply with the GST law? Do you think businesspersons are happy with the manner in which the GST was implemented?
7. Did the Modi government keep its key election promises — ₹15 lakh in the bank account of every person, ₹2 crore jobs a year, bringing back the black money stashed abroad, ₹40 to an American dollar, ending terrorism especially in Jammu & Kashmir and, more generally, that *achhe din* will come to India?
8. Do you think that the Modi government's muscular, militaristic, majoritarian approach to Jammu & Kashmir will end violence and bring peace to that

## ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



# Mr Modi's Balakot dream



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi

state, especially the Kashmir Valley?

## Mr Modi & friends

9. Do you believe that Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi fled India without the knowledge of the government?
10. Do you think that the Rafale deal struck by the Modi government was squeaky clean and there was no favour shown to a private company at the cost of HAL? Do you think that nothing requires to be investigated in the Rafale deal — pricing, reduced number of aircraft, waivers granted, delivery schedule, choice of offset partner, etc?
11. Do you think that premier investigating agencies like the CBI, ED, Income Tax etc have been fair and independent? Did the infighting in the CBI enhance the credibility of the agency?

12. Was it correct to give all six airport privatisation contracts (Ahmedabad, Guwahati, Jaipur, Lucknow, Mangaluru and Thiruvananthapuram) to one business house from Gujarat? Do you think it was a routine decision?

## Frenzy or wisdom

These questions capture the real issues facing the country. If you, as a citizen, are concerned about the real issues, I request you to answer the questions. You may say yes or you may say no, but you cannot ignore the questions. The last-ditch hope of the Modi government is you will ignore the questions or, at any rate, they will be swept away by the 'fervour' of nationalism following the Indian Air Force's strike on Balakot in Pakistan.

The IAF belongs to the country and

made every Indian proud. Pulwama was a failure of the government, Balakot was the success of the IAF, the retaliation by Pakistan the next day was another failure of the government.

Pulwama-Balakot is not an answer to any of the questions listed above. It will not banish fear or bring jobs or relieve farmers' distress or revive MSMEs or bring back Mallya or Nirav Modi or Choksi or restrain investigative agencies or return peace to the Kashmir Valley.

Mr Narendra Modi's election speeches are centred on the IAF's action in Balakot and are intended to whip up a frenzy among the voters. He hopes that Balakot will carry him to victory. I believe the people of India are wiser.

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## INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

### Art of recovery?

An ego clash between two wings of the finance ministry could have serious implications in recovering dues from absconding diamondaire Nirav Modi. The Enforcement Directorate is attempting at the eleventh hour to sabotage an auction organised by the Income Tax authorities for the end of March to sell 68 contemporary and modern Indian art paintings by leading artists worth between ₹30 - ₹50 crore, seized during raids on the Mumbai office of Camelot Enterprises Private Ltd. It is believed to be a shell company of Modi, who owes ₹96 crore in taxes. Someone from the ED claimed to a TV channel that the directorate has already attached the very same paintings and will file an FIR if the IT attempts to go ahead with the auction. The ED's unprofessional approach will not merely frighten away potential buyers, but also make India look foolish in the eyes of the world, since the auction is well-publicised. Modi had excellent taste in art even if some of his diamonds were duds.

### Bowled out at start

Former cricketer and sitting BJP MP from Darbhanga Kirti Azad had been suspended from the party in 2015 after he targeted Arun Jaitley, who headed the Delhi and District Cricket Association at the time. Azad, however, did not resign from the BJP as he would have lost his seat. But with elections around the corner, last month, Azad joined the Congress in the presence of Rahul Gandhi. It was gharwapsi for him since his father, Bhagwat Jha Azad, was a Bihar Congress chief minister and central minister. Azad presumed that he would be contesting from the family seat Darbhanga, but discovered to his shock that Congress ally Lalu Prasad was insistent that the constituency go to the RJD. Azad has made some 10 trips to meet the jailed Lalu, but has had no success in making him change his mind. The former cricketer is unwilling to stand from any other parliamentary seat in Bihar.

### Taking a back seat

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's debut on the national scene in Gujarat was not quite the command performance that the Congress had been hoping for. There were cutouts of Indira Gandhi at the rally, but Priyanka's appearance and style did not quite replicate her grandmother's. Her delivery was measured and not strident. But her savvy political instincts and spontaneity are far more pronounced than Rahul's. In her

short speech Priyanka emphasised issues which common people relate to and reminded them of broken promises by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. She did not harp on Rafale or bandy words about Pulwama and Balakot, as did her brother. At the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, she won many hearts by taking an interest in all its activities and asked detailed questions about spinning a *charkha*. Priyanka did not want to overshadow Rahul and at the Gandhi ashram, she sat quietly in the fourth row, not with her mother and brother. At the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting, her only suggestion was an acronym for the Congress promise of minimum income guarantee — Nyuntam Aay Yojana, or NYAY.

### Gen next out

2019 will be the first election when the BJP leaders once described by the media as the party's Gen Next will be mostly out of the fray. Student leaders who came into prominence during the JP movement and the Emergency, they are now in their mid- or late 60s and will not be standing for the Lok Sabha elections. Arun Jaitley, though in charge of the party's publicity campaign, and Sushma Swaraj are not contesting because of health issues. Ananth Kumar and Pramod Mahajan have passed away. Venkaiah Naidu is the vice-president. Only Ravi Shankar Prasad will represent Gen Next at the hustings. While Prime Minister Modi is in the same age bracket as Gen Next, the former *pracharak* emerged on the political scene much later than them. Some reports suggest that party president Amit Shah will permit L.K Advani, 91, Murli Manohar Joshi, 84, Shanta Kumar, 85, and Bhagat Singh Koshyari, 77, to stand from their constituencies, though they will be given no ministerial berths. But the older generation has not actually been sounded out so far about standing for elections.

### Not in one voice

Anand Sharma, who heads the Congress's 2019 publicity campaign, briefed the media after the CWC meeting in Ahmedabad. This seems to have ruffled Randeep Surjewala, head of the party's communication cell and normally the Congress's chief spokesperson. Surjewala put out on WhatsApp that he would not be going to Gujarat as he had injured his back and could not travel. The excuse would have sounded more convincing had he not addressed a press briefing in Delhi the very next afternoon.

# The second coming

Zidane will reportedly be given unprecedented power this time and has been promised three superstar signings in the summer

## RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty

JOSE MOURINHO SEEMINGLY has become a *persona non grata* in the all the clubs he managed and maybe beyond. Zinedine Zidane's re-appointment as the Real Madrid manager further attested Mourinho's slip down the managerial pecking order, with regards to the elite clubs in Europe. Santiago Solari's position as the Real Madrid boss became untenable following a 4-1 hiding at the hands of Ajax in the Champions League pre-quarterfinals at the Bernabeu. Mourinho had been tipped to make a grand return, but the 13-time European champions chose Zidane instead.

Player power prevented Mourinho's return to Madrid. The Portuguese is now a TV pundit after being sacked by Manchester United in December. Of late he had been waxing eloquent about his former Spanish club. For a yester-

day's man like him, it was understandable that he still reveled in his '100-point' La Liga glory with Real Madrid in 2011-12. After that, as is his wont, Mourinho had spectacularly fallen out with the club icons like Iker Casillas and Sergio Ramos during his third season in charge. The latter is a reason why Mourinho wasn't offered the job this time. Ramos still bears a grudge against the self-styled special one.

"The dressing-room leaders pushed to reject the possibility of Jose Mourinho. He left a lot of problems and I think he would have been another problem to the ones we already have if he had come.

"I think Jose Mourinho would have been a step backwards, there was a lot of problems and controversy when he was here. He is a good coach with a lot of trophies but many of the leaders in the dressing-room didn't like him and I think that was important in the decision-making," former Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon told *Sky Sports*.

Over to Zidane, who had left the club just nine months ago, much to the play-



New Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane after a press conference announcing his return, in Madrid, Spain

ers' chagrin. "The players loved him and he was able to change the ideas of coaches like Rafa Benitez and Jose Mourinho who managed with a strong hand. And of course he is an idol with the fans; playing for the club as

well as managing them to three Champions League trophies in a row," Calderon said.

Grapevine had it that the club president Florentino Perez didn't agree with Zidane's transfer demands and also the

club's decision to offload Cristiano Ronaldo to Juventus. Madrid presidents are not used to face opposition from the club managers.

No wonder that Perez had refused to walk the extra mile to retain Zidane, notwithstanding the latter's status as a club legend and also that he guided Madrid to three successive Champions League titles as the manager. A season of upheaval has somewhat forced the recall.

The season started with Julen Lopetegui becoming the Madrid manager at the expense of his Spanish national team job. It all happened during the World Cup. Lopetegui preferred Madrid over Spain but the move spectacularly backfired.

He got the boot only after four-and-a-half months in charge. A 5-1 El Clasico defeat to Barcelona proved to be the final straw. Solari came, but he was always going to be a stopgap in a team of the galacticos. The Madrid managerial job demands strong characters, who unlike Mourinho would be adept at man-management. Zidane perfectly ticks the box.

The Spanish press has reported that Zidane will be given unprecedented power this time. "The incoming boss has also been assured that he will be fully in charge of every aspect of the running of the team, including signings," *AS* wrote. "Zidane is back at Real Madrid with *carte blanche* to renew the

squad," *El Pais* mentioned.

The new boss has been promised three superstar signings in the summer and the Paris Saint-Germain forward Kylian Mbappe reportedly tops the list. The club president has already spoken about the French connection.

"He (Zidane) is French. Perhaps he can do something (with regards to Mbappe's arrival)," Perez said tongue in cheek. Neymar, too, is said to be on the radar, plus Eden Hazard and Paul Pogba. Zidane admires Hazard, which is bad news for Chelsea. Some reports suggest, Zidane would be handed £300 million war chest to rebuild Madrid.

Out of the Champions League and placed third in the La Liga, 12 points off table-toppers Barcelona after 27 matches, the ongoing season has become a write-off for Europe's most decorated club side. Under Zidane, they will go all out to annex their 14th Champions League title next term.

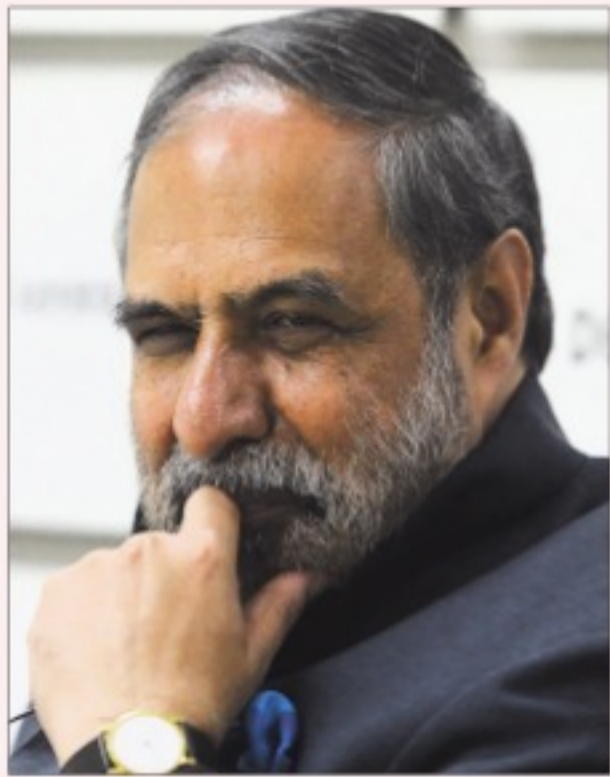
"I'm looking forward to this second project, with the president, the club and the fans," Zidane said at a press conference, adding: "It's a great challenge, I know that. But I'm really looking forward to it, to returning to coach. I want to work again and put this club back where it should be. The only thing for me is to start work tomorrow."

During his first spell as the Real Madrid boss, Zidane had won nine trophies in two-and-a-half years. He is probably a guarantee to success.

# Idea Exchange

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Electoral bonds worth ₹295 crore were bought from SBI branches, of which ₹290 crore went to BJP. ₹4 crore came to Cong and ₹1 crore to others. This is the gap if you see the resources available to BJP"



## WHY ANAND SHARMA

**THE BJP'S MOVE** to shift the narrative to national security post the Pulwama terror attack and the aerial strikes in Balakot, has forced the Congress to go back to the drawing board — despite the early momentum it got in the form of electoral successes in the Assembly polls in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Congress

Working Committee member and former Union minister Anand Sharma says the party is working on bringing the focus back to "real issues" such as unemployment and agrarian distress. As head of the Congress's publicity committee, Sharma is also devising the party's digital strategy

"In 2009, we all fought separately and had a post-poll coalition. All opposition parties are of one view, that post-poll coalition is on... 2019 won't be 2014. No matter what Modi, Amit Shah do, they can't repeat 2014



## We respect SP-BSP decision, but we can't euthanise ourselves. We can't kill Cong in UP

Senior Congress leader and deputy leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, Anand Sharma, talks about the challenge of catching up with the 'well-funded' BJP's digital campaign, accuses the Centre of deflecting discussion on real issues, calls PM Modi 'clueless' on terror and Pakistan and says the Congress won't cede seats to Oppn parties in states where there is a direct contest with the BJP

**PVAIDYANATHAN IYER:** With less than a month to go for the Lok Sabha elections, how is the Congress's publicity campaign shaping up?

It is something which evolves. It is not decided in a day. The narrative is changing. The new media is going to play an important role, much more than 2014. We are putting together an integrated campaign across platforms. How to reach the targeted audience, that is something we are grappling with. You will soon see the campaign picking up.

**PVAIDYANATHAN IYER:** What is your strategy for mediums like WhatsApp, where the BJP is very active?

There has been a significant improvement in the Congress's social media department. All state units, and all the frontal organisations such as the youth wing, Mahila Congress, have social media teams. There is a big network that has been created. My own committee has made a dedicated portal on which the data of users — party activists, sympathisers, from across the country — has been collated.

I agree that the BJP has been ahead and they have used mediums such as WhatsApp very effectively. It is because they have a formidable, well-funded machine. There is no match in terms of the resources available to them. Even in 2014, the BJP had beaten the Congress party when it came to money power and resources. We are depending more on our cadres and supporters. The BJP has dedicated infrastructure for it. They do it 24/7, 365 days. We do not have the exact numbers, but in states such as Gujarat, the BJP has 18,000 people employed doing only this work.

We have now brought in a digital media company, Silver Push. It has been formed by IITians in Delhi. They have invented technologies that I find very helpful.

Also, political parties have to be mindful of the kind of campaigns undertaken on social media. It is a double-edged sword. If you convey the correct message, it's fine. But if social media is abused, it is used for trolling, to spread fake news, there is a big danger there.

**PVAIDYANATHAN IYER:** What kind of expenditure do you see ahead of the Lok Sabha elections?

I don't deal with the party funds. Anyway, I don't think the Congress party is receiving that kind of support or money. I will give you one example. Electoral bonds worth ₹295 crore were purchased from various SBI branches, of which ₹290 crore went to the BJP. Of the remainder, ₹4 crore came to the Congress and ₹1 crore went to the others. This is the real gap if you see the resources available to the BJP and the others. There cannot be any comparison.

Secondly, as a political party, the BJP has emerged as the largest advertiser in the country. The government's spending power on advertisement and propaganda... Between January 15 and the day the Model Code of Conduct came into force, the government had spent ₹4,000 crore. The BJP has beaten Unilever, Amazon, Netflix, Tatas and Reliance Industries put together. In the previous three years they have spent ₹4,297 crore only on advertisements. This is unprecedented. The question is, should this kind of money be available to any political party, particularly a party in power?

**COOMI KAPOOR:** The BJP has come out with its election slogan, 'Modi hai toh mumkin hai'. Is the Congress slogan, which is not out yet, going to be focused on the party leader or the party?

Both are equally important. Our slogan will also be focused on people and their issues. In the last one month, there has been a well-orchestrated diversion, deflecting any discussion or questions on



Senior Congress leader Anand Sharma with Executive Editor (National Affairs) P Vaidyanathan Iyer in *The Indian Express* newsroom

ABHINAV SAHA

the real issues that confront India. Prime Minister Modi does not want to discuss what he said in 2014. The BJP campaign will not talk about jobs, they will not talk about farmers' distress, they will not talk about women's safety, social security, harmony in the country... On all these issues they are bound to be rejected.

**COOMI KAPOOR:** As the person in charge of the party's publicity, how do you prevent leaders in the Congress from speaking in different voices? Like the comment made by Sheila Dikshit that Manmohan Singh was not as strong as Modi in dealing with terror.

That is her view. It's not a question of controlling leaders. The BJP can do that. If the RSS diktat comes, they will shut up. The Congress party allows people to express their views. Sheila ji, who was earlier the Chief Minister of Delhi, will have one perception about how we could have addressed the issue (post-26/11). I was in the Central government, so I have a different view. I was privy to some of the decisions taken after the Mumbai attacks.

I know how effective our diplomacy was at the time, and how we succeeded vis-a-vis the Lashkar-e-Toiba, Hafiz Saeed.

Effectiveness comes from whether the country is more secure. India is far more vulnerable today than in 2014. Kashmir is violently unstable compared to 2014. If we had achieved the right results against terrorism, then why are our enemies across the border, Pakistan, bolder than they were in counter-attacking and openly supporting terror infrastructure on their soil? I personally feel that on the challenge of security, terrorism and dealing with Pakistan, the present Prime Minister has been clueless, incoherent. He believes in the transactional conduct of foreign policy. One day you go to Japan and say you are my best partner, the next day you receive the Chinese President and say you are my best partner. People aren't silly.

Manmohan Singh came from Pakistan after Partition. It was his desire also to visit Pakistan. But did he as Prime Minister? No, because the environment was not conducive. However, the present Prime Minister

did, whether invited or uninvited. When he landed there (in Lahore, December 2015), there was no salute of honour. The Pakistan army men refused to do it. It was an insult to my country. Will he then be considered a strong PM?

Diplomacy is not about photo-ops, there should be gravitas and depth. Diplomacy does not have to be loud, it has to be silent, you have to look at results. For the Prime Minister, everything is propaganda. He is a loud Prime Minister, who is clueless about foreign policy.

**PVAIDYANATHAN IYER:** Post-Balakot strikes, how has the political narrative changed?

We are proud of our armed forces who defend our borders. They make supreme sacrifices. It is important that the government of the day does not politicise the Indian Army. The armed forces belong to the nation, not to the Prime Minister or a political party. With what Prime Minister Modi is doing, he is setting a dangerous precedent, which must be curbed.

**HARISH DAMODARAN:** There are many issues facing the country — slowing economy, joblessness, rural wage stagnation. Why has the Congress not managed to leverage these issues, and is focusing only on national security?

We realise that the BJP wants to use this (national security) issue to deflect attention from the issues that you mentioned. We want to bring attention back to these them. The economy, despite

claims of the government, is struggling. All the four engines that fire the growth of the economy — the national investment rate, credit offtake, gross fixed capital formation and exports — they are all shut. How is the economy then flying?

We (the UPA) faced the financial crisis of 2008-09. In the last few years, there have been no shocks to the global economy. In fact the government has been fortunate. They have made windfall gains at the cost of the consumers, with the very low oil and commodity prices in the world. They are all talk and propaganda. Where is Make in India? Even its logo is not made in India, it is plagiarised, from a watch-maker in Geneva. It's a shame.

**HARISH DAMODARAN:** But Rahul Gandhi is only talking about Rafale, Digvijaya Singh is asking for proof of the aerial strikes in Pakistan...

Rahul Gandhi is also talking about jobs. He has been talking of farmers' loans, agrarian distress, women security.

Rafale, yes, because the Prime Minister is complicit and he is accountable. How can he refuse to answer questions on that? There is a defence procurement policy in place; you violate that. You have done away with the transfer of technology policy, you have cut out HAL. The PM has personally negotiated the deal. How can we not believe what former French president François Hollande said? The PM has not uttered a word, even in Parliament, because he knows if he makes false statements there he will be hauled up for breach of privilege.

**Manmohan Singh came from Pakistan after Partition. He too wanted to visit Pakistan. But did he as PM? No, it was not conducive. But Modi did...**

**When he went, he got no salute of honour. Is he then a strong PM?**



**ABANTIKA GHOSH:** Every day we see opposition leaders pledging to come together to fight the BJP. But you are fighting the SP-BSP in Uttar Pradesh, the TMC in West Bengal...

It is not because of lack of will on our part. We are very clear where to go for pre-poll alliance. There are states where we have done that — Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Kerala, Maharashtra, Jharkhand. The Congress has alliances in about 200 constituencies.

But there are states where we have some real issues. For example, if somebody wants an alliance with us in Rajasthan, or in Madhya Pradesh, or Punjab, we are not at all agreeable, because we want to win as many Lok Sabha seats as possible for ourselves. These are places where there is a direct fight between us and the BJP, and where we have demonstrated that we are capable of defeating them in their strongholds. In these heartland states we cannot cede space. In states where we feel that both the sides will gain with an alliance, like the RJD and Congress alliance, and the alliance with the NCP, we have done it.

UP is a large state. We respect the decision of the SP-BSP, but we cannot euthanise ourselves. There is always hope for revival. We cannot kill the Congress. Somebody gives us two seats and should we be happy and say you take 78 seats? We are not comfortable with that. Don't forget 2009, we all fought separately and later we had a post-poll coalition. All opposition parties are of one view, that post-poll coalition among all these parties is definitely on. I am very optimistic that people of India have maturity and wisdom. 2019 will be different from 2014. There is no way, no matter what Modi and Amit Shah do, that they can repeat 2014. That is a firm, firm no.

**KAUNAIN SHERIFFM:** In these general elections, most of the voters are going to be in the age group of 19-35. What alternative narrative will the Congress provide to this chunk of new voters?

The first issue is jobs and we will come up with an actionable plan to revive job creation in India for the youth. Secondly, we will take forward the national priori-

ties. Why has the government not spoken about industrial and freight corridors in the last five years? The Prime Minister's priority has been a bullet train. His priorities are wrong. India does not need bullet trains, India needs completion of work on these corridors, which will revolutionise job creation and economy.

**RAVISH TIWARI:** How are you looking at the Congress's 2019 numbers vis-a-vis previous elections. Have things changed? Also, what is your position in states such as Andhra Pradesh and Telangana?

There are states where we will improve upon even our 2009 performance. Don't count us out in UP either. We surprised in 2009 and we are going to pick up seats this time too. We are going to win many more seats than what people think we are capable of. We have some very good candidates.

Andhra has been a huge setback. It has been a sensitive issue. Some of us thought that the bifurcation should not have happened. Our calculations may have gone quite wrong in the Assembly polls in Telangana, but for Parliament, there will be a fight. I think we will do much better in Lok Sabha polls in Telangana.

We are also hoping to pick up a sizeable number of seats in the Hindi heartland, besides in west India. We got nil in Gujarat, that is not going to repeat. We got zero in Rajasthan, that's not going to happen. We got two seats in Madhya Pradesh, and another after a bypoll. That will not be repeated. Chhattisgarh had one and the BJP had 10. Look at the size of the mandate we got in the Assembly elections. Perhaps there are challenges... I can't speculate on the numbers. But I can tell you that the BJP numbers will come down, sharply. The Congress will emerge as a party with a strong presence in the Lok Sabha.

**RAVISH TIWARI:** Since the UP polls, Congress leaders seem reluctant to use the word 'secular' in their speeches. Is there a hesitation?

I don't think there is any hesitation. We talk about India's pluralism and diversity, and the importance of treating all religions equally in our campaigns. We have not moved away from that commitment. I feel politics and religion is a toxic mix and dangerous for any society. There is nothing wrong in going to a temple, mosque or gurdwara, but don't use religion to capture power, to divide society, to discriminate.

**ABANTIKA GHOSH:** Does poaching by the BJP worry you?

The same is happening with the BJP also. Why did Kirti Azad and the others leave? I am talking about sitting Lok Sabha members of the BJP. They left because they were disgusted with the politics of Modi and Amit Shah. In Gujarat, if the PM and BJP are so confident, why are they stealing MLAs? Poaching is one thing, but there is daylight dacoity. Look at what happened in Manipur, Goa, Arunachal... They tried it in Madhya Pradesh. They are still trying in Karnataka. (Poaching) is part of their political philosophy. It is in the BJP's political DNA to steal MLAs and governments.

**ABANTIKA GHOSH:** What role will Priyanka Gandhi Vadra play now?

She is a valuable addition to the Congress organisation. She has spoken about her intention to strengthen the party and she is in charge of Eastern UP. She is a forceful campaigner, orator. We cannot say when she will contest. It's her decision.

**RAVISH TIWARI:** Throughout its campaign, the BJP has spoken about having a clear, decisive leader. Who is the Opposition's leader?

The wisdom is in leaving the choice to all the coalition partners. We are very clear that for the Congress it is Rahul Gandhi. All leaders will decide together after the polls.

It is easy to use the word decisive and strong. You don't expect your PM to be a WWE wrestler. He should be strong in the mind, convictions... Modi fails on all parameters. He is not a strong leader. Will you call his move of demonetisation reckless or decisive? The hasty imposition of the GST, terming it second Independence. It was only imposing a tax! You don't have to be loud, shrill, to be decisive. My concern is that the political atmosphere is getting very vitiated. The PM and his party president are responsible for it. The PM's language has lowered the dignity of the discourse and his own office.