

1-poll debate good for India, says PM

SIMULTANEOUS POLLS 'Discussion honours Atal legacy'

HT Correspondent

• letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said it was a "healthy sign for our democracy" that India was in the midst of a debate on holding state assembly elections at the same time as Lok Sabha elections, and said the discussions were a tribute to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who "changed India's political culture".

Modi's comments, in his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' radio address, come in the backdrop of chief election commissioner Om Prakash Rawat, on August 23,



➤ Atalji took bold steps to bring about fundamental reforms... discussions are being held about simultaneously holding the elections

NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister

ruling out the possibility of holding simultaneous assembly and parliamentary elections anytime soon on the grounds that first a legal framework must be put in place.

"You must have noticed how Atalji took bold steps to bring about fundamental reforms, whether in our election process

or about the shortcomings concerning the people's representatives. Similarly, you can see that presently efforts are afoot and discussions are being held about simultaneously holding the elections for Lok Sabha and for state assemblies," Modi said in the address.

CONTINUED ON P 6

One poll debate good for India, says PM

The issue of holding simultaneous assembly and Lok Sabha polls has divided parties. While Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Shiromani Akali Dal, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Samajwadi Party, and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi have supported the idea, Congress, the principal Opposition party, the Trinamool Congress, the Aam Aadmi Party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Telugu Desam Party, the Left parties, and the Janata Dal (Secular) are opposed to the move.

"The government and the Opposition, both are putting forth their viewpoints. This is a good development and a healthy sign for our democracy. I must say that developing healthy traditions for a sound democracy, making constant efforts to strengthen democracy, encouraging open-minded debates would also be appropriate tribute to Atalji," Modi said in his address.

The Election Commission has maintained that any extension or curtailment of the term of assemblies -- which will be needed if India adopts a simultaneous polls model -- will require a constitutional amendment, besides working out the logistics with regard to the availability of VVPAT (paper trail) for electronic voting machines.

In his address, Modi elaborated on Vajpayee's contribution to good governance, bringing up the 91st Amendment Act, 2003, that restricted the size of the Cabinet in states to 15% of the total seats in the state assembly, and talked about how he was instrumental in increasing the limit under the anti-defection law from one-thirds to two-thirds of the members of a party.

"India will remain ever grateful to Atalji for bringing the 91st Amendment Act, 2003.... For many years in India, the political culture of forming a very large Cabinet was being misused to constitute jumbo cabinets not only to create a divide, but also to appease political leaders. Atalji changed it," Modi said, adding that the effort resulted in saving of money and resources besides improving efficiency.

The amendments to the anti-defection law resulted in defining clear guidelines to disqualify the defector, the PM added.

The BJP is in the midst of organising events in memory of Vajpayee -- who died on August 16 -- in order to perpetuate his legacy.

Modi expressed gratitude to all MPs who presented an "ideal approach" in the Monsoon session of Parliament, which was one of the most productive sessions in recent years, with several important bills passed. These included the bill providing for death penalty to child rapists, the triple talaq bill, which was passed by the Lok Sabha, and bills amending the SC/ST prevention of atrocities act, and the bill giving constitutional authority to the black classes commission.

Modi also spoke about the floods in Kerala, which have caused widespread damage and

destruction in the state. Expressing solidarity with the people of Kerala, the PM said that citizens from all walks of life across the country have come in support of those whose lives were devastated in the floods.

“From Kutch to Kamrup, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, everyone is endeavouring to contribute in some way or the other so that wherever a disaster strikes -- be it Kerala or any other part of India -- human life returns to normalcy,” he said.

The Congress criticised the remarks made by the PM on the issue of simultaneous polls in his address. “There are 7-8 months left for the Lok Sabha polls and if the Prime Minister wants simultaneous elections, we wish him good luck. The Election Commission has ruled out simultaneous polls, nation says it can’t happen and logistically these are not possible,” said Congress spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi.