

With I-Day speech, Modi set to sound the 2019 poll bugle



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PHOTO: DALIP KUMAR

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In his last Independence Day speech before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will present a report card of his government's flagship initiatives as well as policy measures and sound the bugle for the election season.

On August 15, Modi may also dedicate to the nation a 190-km railway line between Dadri in Uttar Pradesh and Phulera in Rajasthan, which fall under the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC).

The ₹ 814-billion-project of Eastern and Western DFCs will cover 3,360 km. Of this, around 1,500 km falls in the western region, starting from Dadri to Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust.

Ministries and departments from across the central government have sent their inputs to the Prime Minister's Office ahead of his speech from the ramparts of Red Fort in New Delhi. The Prime Minister is also expected to lay out long-term targets for job creation, rural sector, economy, trade and exports, education and health under the government's 'New India 2022 development goals'. "Since this is the fifth year of the government, the Centre is in consolidation mode of schemes rather than announcing new ones. In terms of specific forward-looking announcements, there may be details only on the universal health insurance scheme, Aayushman Bharat. Apart from that, the PM will speak of the achievements so far in other schemes," said a government official. Aayushman Bharat or the National Health Protection scheme is aimed at providing tertiary healthcare to all. Those featuring in the social economic cast census can avail of this scheme. While some states have opted for the insurance model, others have chosen the trust or hybrid model. This, experts say, will be the world's largest health scheme and

replace the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana that has been used for many years. Even private hospitals have been allowed to empanel with the government for this scheme.

Apart from policy issues, the PM will set the tone for the 2019 elections and could touch upon issues such as internal security, terrorism, agriculture, key social legislative steps like the Triple Talaq Bill and the SC/ST Bill, as well as the contentious National Register of Citizens (NRC) of India.

Achievements that will be highlighted include affordable housing, Swachh Bharat, the Saubhagya electricity scheme, Namami Gange, Ujjwala scheme for cooking gas, steps taken to curb black money and increase tax base, and other programmes, *Business Standard* has learnt.

On agriculture, he is expected to speak at length about the recent government decision to hike MSP of kharif crops by 1.5 times their cost of production.

Already, the PM has addressed several farmer rallies in the past few months, wherein he extensively talked about the issue and the same could be expected from the ramparts of Red Fort as well. He is also expected to spell down the Centre's decision to frame a new scheme to ensure procurement of crops other than wheat and rice in MSP.

Last year, the Union government announced a new scheme called Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojna (Saubhagya) to speed up electrification of 35 million urban and rural households.

The Centre announced last Sunday that it has achieved 100 per cent electrification of 10 million households and the balance target would be met by December 2018 - four months ahead of the stipulated deadline. It would entail electrifying 1,50,000 households per day.