

# PM Modi's address from the Red Fort: Which way will he go to the 2019 front?

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi's last address in his present term from the Red Fort is being eagerly awaited amid expectations that he would deliver the punch to his detractors by launching an ambitious campaign for the battle of 2019. The Independence Day address would offer the last chance to Modi to

reach out to the nation through the Prime Minister's address and he is generally known to excel in such situations. Next week will show whether Modi sets the tone for the 2019 polls from the Red Fort. Whether he hits the bull's eye or misses his mark?

He needs to come out with a compelling narrative for the re-election pitch as 2019 is vastly different from that of 2014. Much water has flown down the Ganga since then. That time his slate was clean and he was seen as a knight in the shining armour. His every word was lapped up. Believed.

Now several of his own MPs have been feeling that there has been a delivery deficit and severe one at that. Only last week, one of the BJP MPs from Punjab wrote an article that the greatest Prime Minister of India since independence was undoubtedly Pandit Nehru. Certainly something is wrong.

The 48 months of the Modi dispensation were far more productive and purposeful than the 48-years Congress rule. Modi has moved mountains as against the snail's pace of development earlier, goes the BJP line.

The Prime Minister lost a golden opportunity over a fortnight back when he failed to respond to a variety of issues including lynchings, Rafale deal, unemployment, agrarian distress and a host of concerns raised by the Opposition including the Nirav Modi scam while replying to the no confidence motion against his ministry.

What needs to be realised is that the silence of the Prime Minister on issues is made capital of by the Opposition and that too



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the nation during Independence Day 2017 at the Red Fort in New Delhi

aggressively. The Opposition campaign is going to be built upon the issues on which Modi has chosen to keep mum and Modi will keep mum.

So drafting the Independence day address is going to be a Herculean as also a tricky task.

Given the political importance of the speech this time, reports had it that perhaps for the first time an informal group of ministers has been set up under Home Minister Rajnath Singh to suggest new ideas to the Prime Minister.

The speech is being billed as a political statement that will set the tone for PM's 2019 re-election, but it is still unclear as to what would be the big

idea. The promise of "Achhe din" had worked wonders in 2014 coupled with the assurance of depositing ₹15 lakh in each bank account by acting against black money stashed abroad. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

PM has also sought suggestions from people through a specially created forum on the Narendra Modi App.

BJP's National Executive scheduled soon after Independence day has been timed appropriately to devise ways and measures to take the message from the Red Fort to people.

It goes without saying that the Prime Minister needed to come out with a

'new deal' for the farmer, worker, the jobless youth and the weaker sections including women. After that, he also has to ensure that it has started making the difference.

Much would be made by Modi of the passage of bill by Parliament to give statutory status to the Commission that looks after the cause of the backward classes. It is undoubtedly a welcome move. Modi himself belongs to this section of society.

But what would the Prime Minister say on the demands for reservation for dominant castes like Marathas, Jats and Patidars. He has been silent so far despite the Maratha reservation agitation has

turned violent in Maharashtra a fortnight back as the dominant community is becoming increasingly restive. He will have to make a tight rope walk as other sections of society, some of which are uneasy with the demands, are watching silently but intently.

The bill being brought to do away with the dilution of the SC/ST atrocities of prevention Act is expected to be proudly stated by the Prime Minister to reach out to the dalits who were feeling neglected. What message it would send to certain upper castes is certainly a point of deliberation for the ruling party. For instance, the agitating Marathas have also been demanding the dilution of

the SC/ST Act alleging that it is being grossly misused.

However, it is certain that the politics of polarisation would be played up by harping on issues of terrorism, national security and nationalism. BJP leaders insist that Hindutva will be the main theme in the campaign. The NRC controversy is expected to come in handy so also the situation in the Kashmir valley.

The Prime Minister will have to go the extra mile to reach out to people this time, promising a time-bound action plan to remove accusations of just resorting to 'jumlebaazi'.

Modi is knowing that the Opposition is getting its act together as never before in his four-year-term. Some Opposition leaders are going to the extent of asserting that the poll ahead needed to be won as the coming elections resembled one with the one held in 1977 by Indira Gandhi after the controversial Emergency.

Reply of the Prime Minister to the day-long no confidence motion in his ministry had left much to be desired. It had left many wonder what had happened to the master communicator who had not only a way with words but has the knack of keeping people spellbound.

Some felt that the lengthy speech showed that Modi has been 'tamed' by bureaucracy. Opposition had claimed that Rahul Gandhi's sharp attack unsettled the Prime Minister from which he failed to fully recover.

On Independence day, what BJP needs is a Modi of 2013-2014 to bring that magic back for the re-election pitch of 2019. Nothing else will do.