

straightforward

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Modi still soars above the fray

In his three years in office, many things have gone wrong. But the PM retains his magic touch

Three years ago, on May 16, the people of this country put a stamp of approval on Narendra Damodardas Modi becoming prime minister. In response Modi had politely described himself as *pradhan sevak* (principal servant). Three years later, it may be appropriate to ask how Modi has fared during his tenure of service.

The people's verdict can be interpreted as a report card for politicians. He has done well on this parameter. Whether it was smaller civic body elections in Mumbai and Delhi, or the assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh, Modi was the BJP's face. In the beginning his party may have faced defeat in the Delhi and Bihar assemblies, but in the other elections it got the numbers required for a majority. How do you see it? Modi has emerged as the boldest incumbent prime minister since Indira Gandhi.

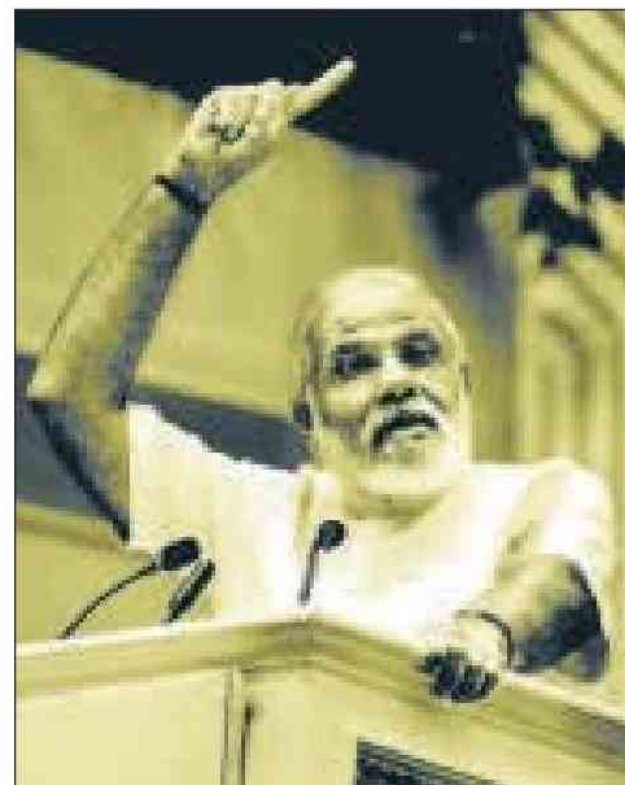
Whether it is talking tough with China, teaching a lesson to terrorists flourishing in Pakistani territory or suddenly deciding to stop circulation of large currency notes, he has displayed an irrepressible capacity to take big decisions. The people have appreciated this because the largest democracy in the world has discovered that it has the capability to become a powerful nation. That is why it has begun to admire strong leaders. Narendra

Modi and his colleagues recognise this.

Modi also knows that many of the promises that he made haven't been fulfilled. The incidence of Maoist terror hasn't come down despite demonetisation. Pakistan has responded to the surgical strikes by mutilating our soldiers. The stone-pelters are back in Kashmir. The promises to create one crore jobs every year and depositing ₹15 lakh in every account are yet to be met. The Opposition was expecting that after the passage of two years, the shadows of unfulfilled promises will take some sheen off Modi's magic. Even the brute majority enjoyed by Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi was eclipsed by these factors. But the results of the five assembly elections have dashed the Opposition's hopes.

Over the past three years, the prime minister and his ministers have set new records for hard work. There is no significant corruption charge against his colleagues or him. Not just this, on every occasion, Modi has projected himself as a person from humble origins. You would remember that after attaining a majority, before climbing up the flight of stairs, Modi had touched the steps of Parliament with his forehead like a devotee.

That is not all. The way he has addressed issues such as VIP culture, cleanliness and patriotism have touched the people's hearts.



■ Prime Minister Narendra Modi realises no poll victory is meaningful without a strong organisational structure SUSHIL KUMAR/HT

The common man loves his way of doing things. It is not as if there is a drought of honest and hardworking leaders in the country.

Their political adversaries don't raise questions over the personal integrity and honesty of Nitish Kumar in Bihar and Manik Sarkar in Tripura. I also wanted to mention Arvind Kejriwal in this list of upright CMs but... The PM's penchant for change management has compelled the Opposition space to shrink. When

he faced criticism about wearing a suit priced at ₹10 lakh and that his was a 'suit-boot' government, instead of defending himself with words he focused on changing his appearance.

He realises that no electoral victory is meaningful without a strong organisational structure. Which is why he appointed his trusted colleague Amit Shah as party president. As was expected, Shah has not left any stone unturned in making the BJP relevant in the current context. Today if some of the faces of the party are people who earned their spurs in the RSS shakhas, there are other office-bearers who've studied at Wharton and Cambridge. If army generals occupy key party positions, so do farmers.

Modi is anticipating that he may have to fight a united Opposition in 2019. The battle won't be easy. Since there is little room for error, the NDA has already announced that Modi will be their prime ministerial candidate. The Opposition needs to act, and fast. But can such decisions be taken in haste?

Political pundits are keeping an eagle eye on the forthcoming presidential elections. It is clear that an NDA candidate will win the elections for India's first citizen and even if the Opposition camp puts up a contest, it will only be symbolic. Symbols and personalities have enormous significance in a democracy. Clearly, it will be the first litmus test for a united Opposition and its reverberations will be felt till the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

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