

EDITORIAL

Dear IJPS readers,

This is my first editorial write-up since I took over as Editor of the Indian Journal of Political Science. In each issue, I propose to take up an important current issue related to the Indian political system. Seldom I plan to venture beyond that unless circumstances compel me to take up some different theme.

In this issue, I wish to dwell on the phrase 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance.' This catch phrase has been used by the present Prime Minister of India (PM), Narendra Modi, who began using it during his 2014 Lok Sabha election campaign. This phrase, along with other slogans like development, as a Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) Prime Ministerial nominee plus his forceful and heart winning oratory led to giving him and his party an absolute majority in Lok Sabha, something that had not happened perhaps for a decade when coalitions were the order of the day.

What does this phrase stand for? As defined by Modi himself, "I believe government has no business to do business. The focus should be on minimum government and maximum governance." This, he said, was his 'philosophy.' Delivering the Sri Ram Memorial Oration at Sri Ram College of Commerce, New Delhi, he dwelled on this theme, in detail. According to him, the nation is being ruined by vote bank politics. Instead, the nation should switch on to the politics of development. If we are able to do so we will soon be able to bring about a lasting change and progress.

While almost everyone knows what 'government' is, 'governance' simply means "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)."

Governance is not only confined to political governance but would also include all types of governance, such as, national governance, state or provincial or local governance. It is recognised that governance is about how an organisation steers itself and the processes and structures that are used to achieve its goal. Since the governance is the process of decision-making and the implementation of those decisions, governance focuses on the actors who make decisions and the structures that are involved in decision-making. These actors and structures could be both formal and informal, such

as, NGOs, religious leaders, financial institutions, etc. These we may call the 'civil society,' although in some countries the 'uncivil' part of the society, like mafias, crime syndicates, also influence decision-making.

Modi had tried 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance' model in Gujrat as its Chief Minister with success, hence when he was elevated as the Prime Minister of the country, he had no problem in bringing it into Government of India.

For decades, we have had extraordinarily large governments while ironically the quality of the governance has been very poor. Since our first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, our model has been 'Maximum Government and Minimum Governance.' Accordingly, more attention has been paid to the size of the government than its quality. The result has often been jumbo size Cabinets, both at the centre and in the states. This led to fixing a maximum number of members a Cabinet can have. A way out was found, mostly in the states, to overcome this hurdle by inducting some elected members as Parliamentary Secretaries who were technically not counted as members of the Cabinet but enjoyed almost similar perks. However, a better mode was developed by giving some of the chosen chairpersons of corporations and other similar bodies Cabinet rank. While excessive focus was on pleasing every elected member, sometimes even those defeated in the elections, because they were close to those in power or power that be or, more often, to maintain the precarious majority in the popularly elected house of the legislature, the governance was lost.

Modi is the first holistically anti-Nehruvian leader, hence his model is just the reverse. More important, he did not confine 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance' as an election gimmick, but began implementing it as he took oath as Prime Minister of India in May, 2014. It will be in order to give an idea of some of his actions in this regard. First, he has abolished the previous government's (UPA's) 29 committees of 'Group of Ministers' (GOMs) or empowered GOMs which means a layer in decision-making process has been taken off and this makes his specific ministers and bureaucrats responsible for the decisions in their respective areas. Second, his Cabinet is

smallest in last 16 years; this he has done by clubbing ministries. Third, he plans to scrap all rules which are no more relevant today, nonetheless hamper the working of administration, and action on this has already begun. Fourth, ministers should ensure time bound delivery of goods and services. The PM personally watches their presentations on targets and achievements. Fifth, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) monitors the implementation of all projects by various ministries. Sixth, the PM has given direct access to senior bureaucrats. Finally, the first union budget of the present government announced the creation of 'eBiz platform' that will make all business and investments related clearances available on line with an integrated payment gateway which is expected to do away with delays and expedite the process.

It will be too early to assess the impact of all these and similar initiatives, as the present government is only little over three months old. However, the initial signs are not very encouraging. Thus, for example, ministers are overburdened with each having so many departments under him; the bureaucrats, who carry a colonial legacy, are hesitant to act fast; there is excessive centralization of powers in the hands of PM/PMO; the ministers are hesitant to move files unless they get a feel from the PMO that it will be approved by the PM; there is nobody to quell the rumours floating about the behavior of ministers or their kins; and the PM has suddenly become inaccessible to the media (nor he has a media advisor to address the media) confining himself only to his tweets. It seems the PM is too busy with governance and his foreign policy. Already, the impact is visible as the Indian voter expects, at least from this government, too many things in too less a time. This is seen in jolts that the ruling dispensation has got in successive by- elections in the aftermath of its massive victory in 2014 Lok Sabha polls. This is a warning bell for the PM and the people around him. Before it is too late, he must realize that in a democracy the same voters who elect you can also use their voting power to throw you out if what has been said is not implemented within a reasonable time. The guiding principle should be that you should not only be working for the welfare of the people but also appear to be so in the eyes of the people. This calls for proper and continuous communication with the masses so that they know what is progress of achieving the promises made to them during the election campaign.

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