**‘Governance behind Modi acceptability …But can’t leave ideological identity’ | The Indian Express**

Related. In this Idea Exchange,Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Arun Jaitley talks about how the 2014 elections will be a referendum on leadership,why the food Bill is an optical exercise and why Modis critics must grow out of 2002. This session was moderated by Senior Assistant Editor Ravish Tiwari. RAVISH TIWARI: There have been two recent developments in the BJPthe announcement of the prime ministerial candidate and how the party behaved in Parliament. I see the next election moving broadly in two directions. I think this will be a huge anti-incumbency election and anti-incumbency will be because of the state of the economy. The Prime Ministers USP as an economist who could manage this has been affected. Corruption has also soured the credibility,along with indecisiveness and the inability to inspire,also inability to overrule others and take decisions. There is a vacuum of effective leadership. Therefore,unlike in earlier elections,this could also become an election with a leadership referendum. So the BJP had to take a decision,and there was an alleged criticism that we were not able to put our house in order. This was a decision dictated by the cadres. The BJPs rank and file and the largest supporting constituency had zeroed in on the choice. We went through the process but the overwhelming view was in one directionNarendra Modi. The parliamentary board formally recognised that and took a decision. As for Parliament,in this session,whatever time was lost was predominantly on account of the Andhra Pradesh MPsnot us. And that was really because it was bad political management on the decision of Telangana. The only disruption which could be attributed to us was on the coal block files. We wanted the government to make a statement as to what happened to the files. This was a parliamentary tactic… SHEKHAR GUPTA: Modi was the predominant view,but was any other name mentioned or was the decision basically between naming somebody and not naming somebody yet? I cant disclose everything. But frankly,there is nothing very wrong in it. A political party should be as open as possible. As far as rank and file and leadership were concerned,it was an overwhelming one-way opinion. There was a small alternative view on when to namenow or after the Assembly elections. D K SINGH: The general perception is that Modi as NDAs PM candidate should have 200-plus seats. Anything below 180 or 170… will you look for anyone else? There are elections which are entirely dictated by arithmetic and calculations based on that. And there are elections where arithmetic completely collapses because the chemistry on the ground has changed. The 2004 elections were dictated by arithmetic,so you total your states and we totalled ours and both came close. 2009 was a combination of both. The way I see 2014,conventional arithmetic will collapse in this election. I think there is going to be a huge all-India thread in 2014. In the Northwest and Central zones,where we have a sizeable presence,I see a significant strike rate for the BJP. In other parts,where we were brushed aside,you will find as the poll nears,our vote percentage significantly increasing. Then there will be states where we cant be ignored. SUNIL JAIN: How do the food Bill and land Bill fit into Modis development agenda? We are in the business of running a political party,contesting elections,trying to win elections. Therefore,when we analyse these Bills,either we take a position which at a larger level is not acceptable to the support base or…Take the land Bill for instance. I think its universally recognised,and also by us,that the compensation levels in India needed to be enhanced. Now,will it stop or hinder the economic activity that we were planning? Keeping that in mind,two improvements were made in the standing committee. The first was that 17 legislations that deal with infrastructure which were not kept out by the original Bill were kept out. Two,private transactions were kept out. Industrial townships and corridors were kept out. After being passed in the Lok Sabha,when it came back to the Rajya Sabha,we noticed that irrigation projects would get stalled or delayed. With regard to irrigation projects,there was dilution. The food security Bill,which the media refers to as the flagship project,I think is more an optical exercise than a real exercise because its a repackaging of all existing schemes. You take the net total of all food schemes that exist todaythe amount of outlay has not increased,the coverage has not increased,you give less to some and expand the horizontal base. But I think we have managed to extract a very important concession that wherever states think they can give better schemes,the better schemes will prevail. The only difference is that the earlier schemes were under executive instructions,now it is a statutory entitlement. But that entitlement says up to 75 per cent in rural areas and 50 per cent in urban areas. That also gives a little bit of flexibility to the state. From this crisis of the economy,Ive learned five lessons. First,the PM must be a political leader with the ability to overrule others. Two,his weakness,coupled with the fact that there was a taller person outside the government,in the party,who was taking several decisions. So,you had a lot of money ostensibly going into areas that you thought is social sector spending. Three,the impact of corruption in the last three years. The PM should have stepped in,like in the 2G case,and stopped it. See the effect. They cancelled the licences and at the end of the day,in a booming sector,you had investments confiscated. In the coal block allocation case…you try and doctor the status report of the CBI and now the files have disappeared. The net effect is that a coal-surplus country is importing $20 billion of coal… The fourth factor is retrospective taxation. You write a letter to the British PM and then do exactly the opposite. And the fifth is the complete breakdown between the government and Opposition. COOMI KAPOOR: What is going to be your main campaign issue,Hindutva or development? Things have moved on. When he (Modi) became the CM and those unfortunate developments took place in 2002,this was the impression created. But the expansion of his acceptability is really because of governance issues,decisiveness,integrity,developmental politics and the emphasis of that. In every election,there is a particular mood of the country. And the mood today is broadly about these issues. But you are not going to leave your ideological identity. Y P RAJESH: How do you compare Bharat Nirman to India Shining? India Shining was because Indias acceptability in the world was increasing and we were being showcased as an economy that was attracting investments. It sounded like a good slogan. For Bharat Nirman,they took up expanding telecom,highways,Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan…everything is Bharat Nirman. There is a commonality between the two. When governments advertise extensively,they are the only ones who watch their ads. They fall into the trap of buying their own propaganda. MANEESH CHHIBBER: The government has been accusing the Opposition of going back on the National Judicial Commission. I said this in Parliament that we had the original ideas on the National Judicial Commission. I am personally in favour of the Bill (National Judicial Appointments Commission Bill). It may need some modification…At some stage,when we put it to the government,we felt that the Bill should go to the standing committee in this session. Let the standing committee consider the constitutional amendments of the Bill. You come up with the Bill in the Winter Session when youve made a huge change in the system…there are stakeholders. The standing committee is a system where you have former chief justices,bar councils,bar associations,litigants and social bodies of concerned citizens…Now,the government has decided that,come what may,we will pass the constitutional amendment in this session and the Bill. You are moving towards an election,what if the Bill goes beyond it? The moment you amend the Constitution,and the amendment,instead of saying judges will now be appointed in consultation with chief justices,you say in consultation with the National Judicial Commission,the chief justices lose power and an alternative mechanism is not being created. So,can Parliament legislate so as to create a constitutional hiatus,without having a system to appoint judges? AMBREEN KHAN: When you have a candidate like Modi,Muslims come together. Dont you think this will work against the BJP? It is in the backdrop of 2002 that this comment is made. I said this earlier too,I would urge all members of the minority to judge him (Modi) for his overall performance. Gujarat has had a very unfortunate history of communal trouble for 40 years. But subsequently,after 2002,it has seen 11 years of complete peace and this is the largest such phase as far as Gujarat is concerned. The growth the state has shown…everybody,including the minorities,has benefited. D K SINGH: Why is your party so eager for the Congress to announce Rahul Gandhi as their PM candidate? The Congress does not know how to deal with the situation. If you look at Gujarat,what they do is first start a personal tirade. Then they pretend that the election was fought on what the Surat municipality didsometimes it is maut ka saudagar and sometimes Surat municipality. In my experience of the last three elections in Gujarat,they have been unable to find the cause. In Delhi,they are probably going through the same phase. There is the prospect of them trying to duck a leadership referendum,but then,even before parties announce candidates,media decides who they are and that impacts the public mind. In the public mind,it is already happening whether they declare him or not. MUZAMIL JALEEL: Did your party consider Modi being different as the PM and not the Gujarat CM? There is a fundamental difference between running a country and running a state. When you run the Centre,senior leaders are with you in a government,which could be a coalition government. Therefore,you share power with political parties. In states,it is one-party government,so the very nature is different. All issues are discussed. All of us learn every day and grow out of situations. I think he (Modi) has grown out of the 2002 framework. I only hope his critics also get out of that because things have changed in Gujarat after 2002. RAJ KAMAL JHA: Is there a need,in the next four to six months,for him to speak to Muslims to tell them Dont judge me by 2002 but look at the larger picture? The language you say this in,the style you say this in,will be different from person to person. This has been done in one sense. It will depend on the state and there are many states which are simpler to tackle. For instance,in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan,it is simpler to bring about a social cohesiveness. There are states where it will be a challenge,but we would not like any community or caste to be kept out of the power structure within the party or the government. RAVISH TIWARI: Is Modi the BJP leader for the 2014 elections or is he the generational leader for the BJP? It is a decision you (the media) have made. History cant be written before it even takes off. It is an important decision. KAUNAIN SHERIFF (EXIMS): Despite the understanding between the BJP,KJP and JD(S),the Congress won in the Karnataka by-elections. Do you see the KJP and JD(S) coming together with the BJP? Karnataka was substantially a self-inflicted defeat. Even before the Assembly election,some of us could see it happening. And I cant say something may happen with the JD(S),but I see Karnataka situation as remediable. Third front has been repeatedly experimented with. It is a failed idea,it cant take off. If we make significant gains,those who occupy the non-Congress space in the states will have to decide which way to go. It may be suicidal for them to not go with the non-Congress combination. In this regard,if we improve our own vote percentage,it will not be so easy to ignore us. And what can be fatal for a political party or challenging for a party is to lose its distinct identity. For instance,in the last Parliament session,one party I thought which completely lost its identity was the JD(U). On Modi kind of issues,they can take a stand. In Parliament debate on issues,the complete dilution of identity is the worst thing that can happen to a party. Apurva: CM Akhilesh Yadav has blamed the BJP for the Muzaffarnagar riots. I think the administration completely collapsed. It completely collapsed because when those incidents took place initially,and from inputs through intelligence and the administrative network,it was clear the tension was building up. He (Akhilesh) is now trying to get back his own political support base in the minority by saying the BJP was the cause. D K SINGH: Where do you stand on the Supreme Court order on post-retirement benefits for judges? It is the view I have and I have repeatedly said it. It wont cost much if Supreme Court judges get pensions equal to their last drawn pay. But what appears to be happening is that most people want jobs after retirement. And in order to get those jobs after retirement,the pre-retirement conduct is affected. This desire is adversely affecting the independence of judiciary. So secure their post-retirement,increase age,give them pension but stop these businesses. MANEESH CHHIBBER: What about when the CBI director retires? The same principle will apply. I will go further and say,in case of directors of investigative agencies,they are different from normal bureaucrats. A normal civil servant is supposed to follow the policy of State. The head of the investigating agency may have to investigate the government. Now,this tendency has caught on that retired directors of investigating agencies must be given jobs after retirement. I believe that the credibility of our agencies has been seriously compromised.