

HOW MUCH OF A HURRY is Prime Minister Narendra Modi in? It depends on your horizon. By one measure, he has 22 months, but then he has set an October 2, 2019 deadline for Swachh Bharat, and August 15, 2022 for a New India.

Mohan Bhagwat, the head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, put it another way. "To take it back to where our nation was a thousand or two thousand years ago, to raise it even above that level ... it seems Narendra-bhai and Amit-bhai (BJP president Amit Shah) have a *surakshit anuman* (safe guess) until 2024," Bhagwat said at a book launch. So we are talking two terms. "But there is a lot of work to be done; the government cannot do everything."

Very true. How much can the Prime Minister do with the shallow talent pool he commands and the skills shortage? Will his irresistible force meet the immovable object of the way we are?

Modi's early promise of 'less government' is a chimera. This government has been more in our lives than any in the past 40 years. Demonetisation, GST and the tax-inspector raj, Aadhaar and the constant social engineering — all require skilful management and efficient intervention. So do infrastructure spending, digitisation, the privatisation of failed state-owned enterprises, the bad-loan tsunami hitting our banks, and the rehabilitation of over-indebted conglomerates.

There is only so much a government can do. Modi currently has a 72-member council of ministers, split equally between Cabinet ministers and ministers of state with independent charge, and junior ministers. He has lost three Cabinet ministers in the past four months: Anil Dave (passed away in May), Manohar Parrikar (went back to Goa), and M. Venkaiah Naidu (on his way to the Vice-Presidency?).

You used to hear criticism of Manmohan Singh's 79-member team, but surely you cannot grudge Modi one minister for every 16.5 million Indians?

There is talk of a Cabinet reshuffle after Parliament's monsoon session ends on August 11. Hard-working ministers of state like Piyush Goyal and Dharmendra Pradhan

deserve promotions. Kalraj Mishra has turned 76 and is ripe for retirement. New faces have to be found.

Maybe Modi, now more secure in power, could experiment with mega-ministries, run things with fewer ministers and more administrators. After all he is looking at 'laterally' inducting outside talent.

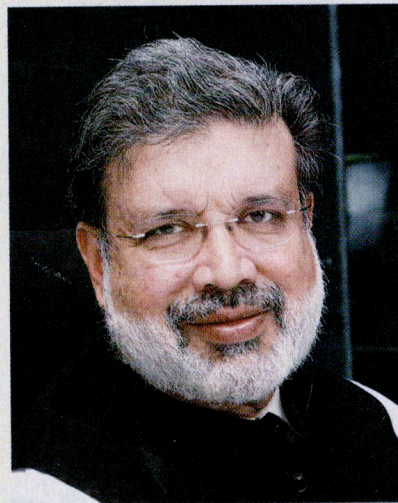
For instance, he could create an over-arching Energy ministry, combining Goyal's and Pradhan's portfolios. With the farming crisis deepening and the urgent need to reform produce marketing and how we tackle both glut and drought, Modi could merge Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution with Food Processing and Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.

Why not a Manufacturing ministry folding in Entrepreneurship, Employment, Innovation and Skill Development that would create more skilled jobs? Why not a Water ministry combining Water Resources, Drinking Water and River Development?

The official count is that 320 million Indians still do not have toilets. Yet, the flagship Swachh Bharat Mission illustrates how bureaucracy expands to fill all the crevices

of power. The heavy lifting SBM Gramin is run by Drinking Water and Sanitation; urban toilet construction by the Ministry of Urban Development; school toilets by the Department of School Education and Literacy under the Human Resources Development ministry; and toilets in *anganwadis* by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Time for ministry development. **BW**

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HOW TO MAKE MORE WITH LESS

Team leader Modi is fishing in a shallow talent pool