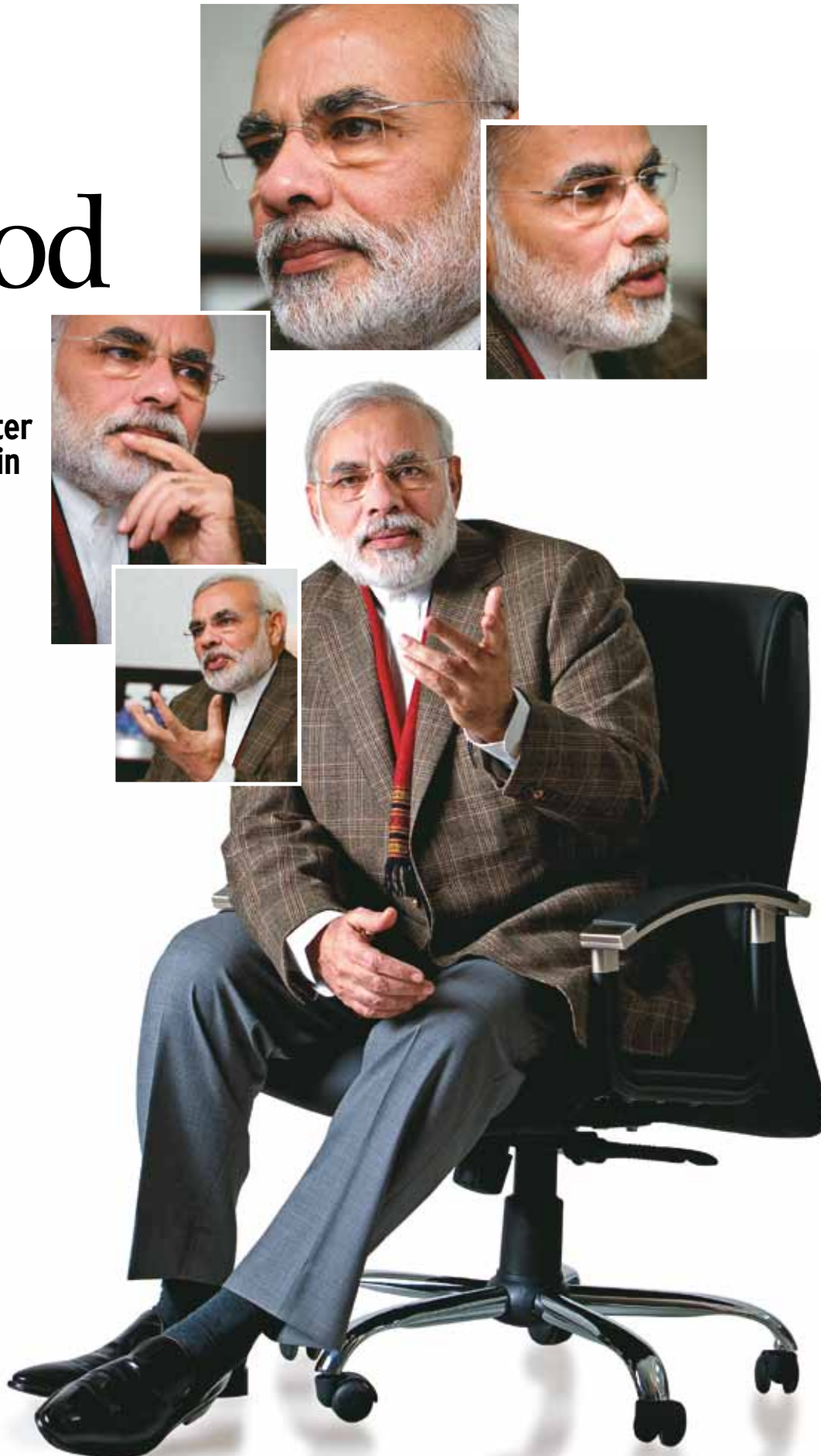


The Method Man

Gujarat's Chief Minister tells CHAITANYA KALBAG in a wide-ranging interview that policy and process make a heady development cocktail

Narendra Modi is not a tall man, but he exudes self-assurance and authority. There is something of the High Priest of Mohenjo-Daro about him, presiding at the altar of Capitalist Gujarat under the gaze of an adoring laity. Modi has been chief minister of Gujarat for just over nine years, in itself an enviable stretch. The billboards in Ahmedabad trumpet the January 12-13 Vibrant Gujarat Summit. There is more of Modi the man in view than of his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party. "This government is absolutely apolitical," says Modi. "When I make a decision there is no political consideration."

Indeed, Modi runs Gujarat like a benignly tyrannical CEO. "My government is P2G2," he says. "Pro-people, proactive good governance." The firm's top and bottom lines are satisfyingly in the black. This month's investment jamboree,



organised every two years, is the fifth since 2003, and it promises to bring in a fresh torrent of industries and jobs. The last one in 2009 swept aside meltdown gloom with \$240 billion in commitments. "After four successful Summits the investments are in autopilot mode," Modi says.

These money-fests exemplify Modi's single-minded focus on policy and implementation. "I spent a month or a month-and-a-half supervising micro-details for the first two Summits," he says. "This one is a couple of weeks away and I don't even know who is attending." That is a bit disingenuous, though. Modi has personally led a series of roadshows heralding this Summit, complete with panels of business leaders, video presentations, and slick promotional bumph.

The interview takes place in the chief minister's enclave in Gandhinagar, guarded by gimlet-eyed security. The surroundings are quiet and sylvan. There are no crowds of hangers-on, no fawning supplicants. There are large paper roses in the ante-room, but the air is redolent with the smell of rosewater. To critics who say he runs Gujarat like a one-man show, Modi is quick to emphasise 'Team Gujarat'. "In a democratic system a leader's biggest contribution should be to institutionalise every idea," he says. "Gujarat's success is because we have institutionalised everything." After we have done talking, Modi, ever the media-savvy politician, spends close to half an hour posing obligingly for the photographer. It is a Thursday afternoon, but affairs of

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state seem to wait beyond the walls of the sunlit compound.

"In a globalised world with no borders, two or three things count," Modi says. "First, stability. Second, a policy-driven state. Third, what outcome are you delivering? If you have all three, becoming a global destination [for investment] is not difficult." He says every Gujarat policy is published online for public comment and debate. "*Doodh ka doodh aur pani ka pani ho jata hai*," says Modi — the whey and the curds get separated. "Then people feel it is their policy. Policy itself becomes a major driver of speed. My experience is that if you take decisions case by case, you lay the ground for corruption. But if you take decisions on the basis of policy, then you minimise the grey areas." Technology, too, helps minimise and even eliminate corruption, he says.

Every year, Modi organises a

Chintan Shibir, an "introspection camp". Along with his entire cabinet, all his party legislators, and every bureaucrat and senior police official, he spends three days discussing, debating — and learning. "I don't believe for a moment that Gujarat has all the answers," he says. "We learn from others and borrow best practices." One year he invited an official from Kerala who had run an interesting project. Another year, "we invited the Chief Secretary of Nagaland because they had done things we wanted to hear about". To criticism that he brooks no dissent, Modi says even a very junior official "can stand up and criticise his superiors...I sit at the back, in the audience. I'm just a participant. I learn a lot."

But is Gujarat truly a meritocracy? Can a bright young administrator rise quickly to the top? "You can't operate outside the rules," Modi says, "but neither do you need a huge, extraordinary talent to run the government. You need sweat, you need commitment. You need youthful thinking, out of the box thinking."

Towards that end, in 2009 Modi launched the "CM Fellowship" programme (www.gujaratcmfellowship.org). Young people from all over India are encouraged to apply. There is no age limit, or an educational minimum, or even the need to be a Gujarati speaker. The CM Fellows are selected after a six-month shortlisting and interview process, and have to commit to spending a year working in a government department or a district. They get stipends and accommodation. The first batch kicked

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off in July 2010. "We have about 20 such boys," says Modi. "They are all technologically sound."

Modi's aides say he leads a spartan lifestyle, although he willingly turned himself out in different clothes for *BT*'s pictures, with a valet cradling an armload of mufflers in different colours. He only occasionally meets his mother, who also lives in Gandhinagar with his younger brother. "I come from an ordinary background," Modi says. "We did not know anything about elections or politics. I never thought I would sit in this chair. I have never dreamt of becoming something. I have dreamt about doing a lot of things."

Modi, who turned 60 last September, describes two other processes he has set in stone. Every Tuesday "is for MLAs and MPs", he says. He and all his ministers do not stir out of their offices all day. Any legislator, state or central, can walk in alone or with a delegation for a conversation. "No meetings are set by my entire team. Often I am in my office until close to midnight and meet upwards of fifty people for detailed chats on Tuesdays."

Every Wednesday is Cabinet day. At 10 a.m. the Gujarat Cabinet meets minus Modi for a "zero hour". Problems and issues are thrashed out, and when Modi joins the meeting an hour later he is presented with points and recommendations. Does he do performance appraisals for his ministers? "There is no need," he says a trifle indignantly. "We are together. My Cabinet is the smallest in India, only 15 people. I meet them every day, I know what they are up to. We are a team." ♦

"Rural development has kept pace with urban growth"

In addition to the interview at his Gandhinagar office, Narendra Modi answered additional questions in writing. Edited excerpts:

What do you think differentiates Gujarat from other states?

Gujarat represents uniformity of development as well as unanimity on the issues of development. Infrastructure development has kept pace with economic growth, rural development has kept pace with urban growth, satisfaction of workers has kept pace with industrial growth. Not only have multinationals and big companies done well, but a large number of medium, small, rural and domestic ventures have also prospered. Not only have industry and agriculture grown fast; but education and health services have also expanded equally fast.

Every state dreams of infrastructure that compares with the developed world but Gujarat is perhaps the only state that delivered. What are the best practices that help you deliver this?

Yes, we have been very keen and committed on developing infrastructure. I personally believe that infrastructure is the enabler of development. Some things that have helped us. For one, we have vision documents for 20 to 30 years. Two, while we plan for big and robust infrastructure, we also see that the remotest part of the state benefits. Three, we are aiming to build the best of infrastructure from a global perspective. Four, Gujarat is a pioneer in public private partnership.

Gujarat's rate of growth in agriculture is running at a record level –

how has this been made possible?

At 9.6 per cent for the last six years, the growth rate in agriculture is more than three times the national average. Gujarat has been a perennially water-scarce state marked by recurrent droughts, and was never known



for its agriculture. We have implemented macro projects, and on water harvesting and conservation. Through soil health cards, my farmer knows which crop to sow and which nutrient to use. We are working hard for introducing drip and sprinkler irrigation. Today there are villages in Gujarat where all farms are micro irrigated. We are also bringing more wastelands under cultivation.

What are your mantras for quality governance?

If you set up proper systems of governance, if you have policy-driven governance, if you inculcate transparency in governance, speed is a natural outcome and corruption goes. Use of technology is another key factor. We have introduced a number of initiatives in e-governance. Our one-day governance centers are live examples of speedy and efficient delivery of services. More importantly, I gave stability of tenure to my senior officials, which made a big difference.

Longer version of interview at www.businesstoday.in/modi