

INDIA-US INSIGHT

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The Narendra Modi Cabinet

by Sanjay Pulipaka



Narendra Damodardas Modi assumed office as the 15th Prime Minister of India on May 26, 2014. In a departure from past practice, the Modi Cabinet was sworn in before a gathering of some 4000 invited dignitaries in the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

As the principal architect of the BJP's election victory, Modi was in a position to revive the Prime Minister's prerogative in Cabinet selection. He reached out to various political constituencies but his Cabinet bore his own personal stamp.



President Pranab Mukherjee, Vice President Hamid Ansari, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the new Council of Ministers following the swearing-in ceremony in New Delhi on May 26, 2014

The Modi Cabinet accommodates BJP leaders with experience and stature as well as a host of younger party leaders to inject dynamism. Party elders did not make the cut because of an age limit of 75 years; younger "dynasts" were also kept out of the council of ministers.

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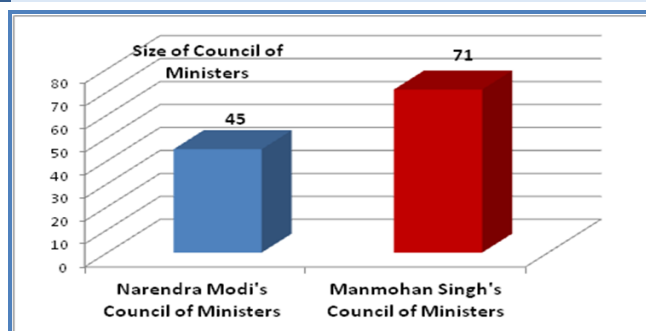
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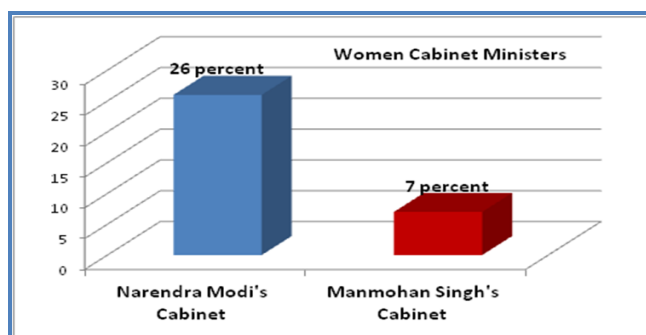
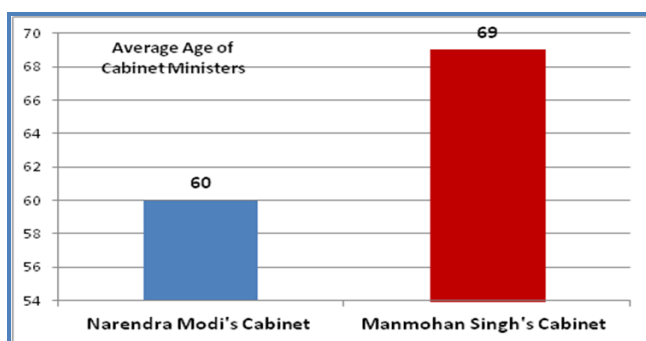
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With 45 members, of which 23 are of Cabinet rank, Modi's Council of Ministers is one of the smallest since independence and significantly leaner than the previous Cabinet headed by Dr. Manmohan Singh, which had 71 members. The average age of the Modi Cabinet is around 60,¹ as against 69 in the case of the outgoing Cabinet. Six Ministers of Cabinet rank are women (26%), as against just two in the Singh Cabinet (7%).



Along with Modi, who as Prime Minister has tasked himself with "all important policy issues",² BJP heavyweights Rajnath Singh (Home), Sushma Swaraj (External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs), Arun Jaitley (Finance, Defence and Corporate Affairs), Venkaiah Naidu (Parliamentary Affairs, Urban Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation) and Nitin Gadkari (Road Transport and Highways, Shipping) will constitute the core of the new government.

Prior to Cabinet formation, Modi had signalled his intent to combine inter-related departments and create "organic ministries", thereby improving coordination. While this is partially reflected in the portfolios assigned to some of the Cabinet members, it is clear that more remains to be done.

Cabinet Ministers

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Department of Atomic Energy, Department of Space
All important policy issues, and all other portfolios not allocated to any Minister

Rajnath Singh: Home Affairs

Sushma Swaraj: External Affairs & Overseas Indian Affairs

Arun Jaitley: Finance, Corporate Affairs & Defence

M. Venkaiah Naidu: Urban Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation & Parliamentary Affairs

Nitin Jairam Gadkari: Road Transport and Highways, Shipping

D.V. Sadananda Gowda: Railways

Uma Bharati: Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation

Dr. Najma A. Heptulla: Minority Affairs

Gopinathrao Munde: Rural Development, Panchayati Raj & Drinking Water and Sanitation

Ramvilas Paswan: Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

Kalraj Mishra: Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

Maneka Gandhi: Women and Child Development

Ananthkumar: Chemicals and Fertilizers

Ravi Shankar Prasad: Communications and Information Technology & Law and Justice

Ashok Gajapati Raju: Civil Aviation

Anant Geete: Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises

Harsimrat Kaur Badal: Food Processing Industries

Narendra Singh Tomar: Mines & Steel Labour and Employment

Jual Oram: Tribal Affairs

Radha Mohan Singh: Agriculture

Thaawar Chand Gehlot: Social Justice and Empowerment

Smriti Zubin Irani: Human Resource Development

Dr. Harsh Vardhan: Health and Family Welfare

An expansion of the Modi Cabinet is likely in the coming weeks, when important portfolios like Defence, Law and Justice and Environment and Forests may be allocated to new incumbents.

Non-political policy experts did not find a place in the Modi Cabinet, but are likely to be deployed as advisers.

Appointments to key positions in a powerful Prime Minister's Office were also made. Nripendra Misra, an experienced IAS officer of the 1969 batch with a solid reputation, was appointed as the new Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister. Ajit Kumar Doval, a former Chief of the Intelligence Bureau, was given the charge of National Security Adviser.

Framework for Governance

Even as he worked to finalise the Cabinet, Prime Minister Modi also outlined his priorities. Modi stressed the necessity of ensuring "smart governance", a faster pace of work and better coordination between Ministers, in order to operationalise his concept of "minimum government and maximum governance."

In a statement issued just prior to assuming office, Modi listed the components of this concept in the following terms:

- Transforming "assembled" ministries into "Organic Ministries"; bringing in more coordination between different departments.
- Focus on convergence in the activities of various Ministries where one Cabinet Minister will be heading a cluster of Ministries which are working in complementary sectors.
- Smart Governance, downsizing the top layers of Government and expanding at the grass root level.
- Focus on the integrated and inter-connected nature of governance to deliver positive change.

Media Outreach

Within minutes of PM Modi's swearing in, a revamped website of the Indian Prime Minister was launched. In his opening message, Modi defined his electoral mandate as one for development, good governance and stability. He also underlined his intention to proactively reach out to the public and explain his policies by utilising communications media, saying "I envision this website as a very important medium of direct communication between us." Creation of new avenues of continuously engaging the public will stand the Modi government in good stead.

Ministers of State

General V.K. Singh: Development of North Eastern Region (Independent Charge) & External Affairs Overseas Indian Affairs

Inderjit Singh Rao: Planning (Independent Charge), Statistics and Programme Implementation (Independent Charge) & Defence

Santosh Kumar Gangwar: Textiles (Independent Charge), Parliamentary Affairs Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation

Shripad Yesso Naik: Culture (Independent Charge) & Tourism (Independent Charge)

Dharmendra Pradhan: Petroleum and Natural Gas (Independent Charge)

Sarbananda Sonowal: Skill Development, Entrepreneurship, Youth Affairs and Sports (Independent Charge)

Prakash Javadekar: Information and Broadcasting (Independent Charge), Environment, Forest and Climate Change (Independent Charge) & Parliamentary Affairs

Piyush Goyal: Power (Independent Charge), Coal (Independent Charge) & New and Renewable Energy (Independent Charge)

Dr. Jitendra Singh: Science and Technology (Independent Charge), Earth Sciences (Independent Charge), Prime Minister Office Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions Department of Atomic Energy Department of Space

Nirmala Sitharaman: Commerce and Industry (Independent Charge), Finance Corporate Affairs

G.M. Siddeshwara: Civil Aviation

Manoj Sinha: Railways

Nihalchand: Chemicals and Fertilizers

Upendra Kushwaha: Rural Development, Panchayati Raj & Drinking Water and Sanitation

Radhakrishnan P: Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises

Kiren Rijiju: Home Affairs

Krishan Pal: Road Transport and Highways Shipping

Dr. Sanjeev Kumar Balyan: Agriculture & Food Processing Industries

Mansukhbhai Dhanjibhai Vasava: Tribal Affairs

Raosaheb Dadarao Danve: Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

Vishnu Deo Sai: Mines, Steel & Labour and Employment

Sudarshan Bhagat: Social Justice and Empowerment

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President Pranab Mukherjee, Vice President Hamid Ansari and Prime Minister Narendra Modi with seven regional Heads of State/Government from South Asia plus the leader of Mauritius following the swearing-in ceremony in New Delhi on May 26, 2014

"Inaugural" Diplomacy

Prime Minister Modi lived up to his promise of thinking out-of-the-box by inviting seven regional Heads of State/Government from South Asia plus the leader of Mauritius to his inauguration. This unprecedented gesture was well received across the region as India celebrated the affirmation of its democratic traditions and the prospect of strong leadership and stable government.

Prime Minister Modi held bilateral meetings with all eight visiting leaders to kick-start his regional diplomacy. Much attention was focused on his meeting with Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, which was cordial and constructive. PM Sharif stressed his desire to turn a new page in India-Pakistan relations in order to bring major benefits to both nations. While there were no breakthroughs – and none had been expected – the two leaders instructed their respective Foreign Secretaries to engage with each other and explore prospects of a renewed dialogue.

Even though the nuances of PM Modi's broader foreign policy agenda are only likely to unfold in the days ahead, he handled his diplomatic debut with considerable aplomb.

References:

- ¹ "Narendra Modi takes oath as India's 15th PM; Cabinet has no big surprises," *Indian Express*, May 26, 2014, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/narendra-modi-takes-oath-as-indias-15th-pm-cabinet-has-no-big-surprises/99/>
- ² Pranab Dhal Samanta, "Narendra Modi goes for Gujarat experiment at Centre, empowers PMO on 'all important policy issues'," *Indian Express*, May 28, 2014, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/a-first-pmo-empowers-itself-on-all-important-policy-issues/>