



Q&amp;A

The Centre has been hindering the state's development, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan tells SHASHIKANT TRIVEDI

## 'MADHYA PRADESH WILL BE AMONG TOP FEW STATES'

**Madhya Pradesh now has a swollen food kitty. It produces nine million tonnes of wheat annually. Then why is your government facing difficulties in ensuring that the poor get food?**

We are not facing any difficulty. In fact, we are trying to tailor our programmes, schemes and plans to deliver what we had promised to the state. We have procured 12 lakh tonnes of wheat at Rs 100 per quintal higher than the minimum support price. But the Centre is not cooperating. I want the Centre to re-supply the wheat we have procured for our

poor. We don't want them to import some red wheat at higher prices and supply it through the public distribution system (PDS). Had the Centre ensured us home-grown wheat, we would have been in a better position.

**But you have made allegations against the Centre for discriminating against the state on the PDS issue?**

The Centre has lost sight of the original aim of developing the nation through meeting the basic needs of the common people. I do not believe in blame games or making scurrilous

attacks but facts support what I say. A report of a parliamentary committee reveals that the Centre has failed on various parameters of the PDS. I have facts to prove the Centre's dogmatic approach, which has jeopardised our plans. This year, we demanded 1.36 lakh tonnes of wheat for families above the poverty line. The Centre supplied only 11,000 tonnes.

We say there are 6.5 million poor people in the state while the Centre's data is stagnant at 4 million. Why does the Centre shirk its responsibilities? Why does it vindictively cut supply of foodgrain to states... because of political rivalry? It must be objective and democratic.

**But the central government says you do not lift quotas under the PDS?**

Facts are deliberately obscured. This used to happen but not any longer. I talk of the present. I still stick to my stand that the Centre should give up its bias and political prejudice against Madhya Pradesh and be democratic in ensuring adequate food to the poor.

**But if the Centre is not supportive of your efforts, don't you think a chief minister should ensure what he is supposed to deliver?**

I am personally monitoring the PDS, something that has never happened in the state. I am conducting surprise inspections at mandis and procurement centres to purge these of middlemen and hoarders. I have devised a model under which all public distribution shops will have a four-day week. Another step to check misuse of the PDS is introduction of a coupon system.

**Is this because you see elections are close and you want to hold the Centre responsible?**

Only the UPA-led central government is responsible for the ballooning inflation. The issue now boils down to a clash among Cabinet ministers. Elections are not the issue but when the central government fails to deliver, as state chief minister, I cannot overlook my responsibility to give relief to the common people.

I have taken some bold steps, I have pared interest rates for farmers and I will cut them further if there is the slightest possibility of doing so. I also offered Rs 100 bonus on the minimum support price of wheat. I waived power dues of farmers, arranged for procurement of more than 12 lakh tonnes of wheat so far, introduced a slew of social schemes. I need not keep recounting these.

**But you are facing corruption charges in this exercise?**

Our ideologically-bankrupt opposition members have made levelling charges and allegations a business. Their arguments are based on non-existent facts and fudged figures. When Digvijay Singh was chief minister, how the state was governed is common knowledge. The Opposition is cornered on all fronts and is worried about our developmental activities and the popularity of our government.

I am the only chief minister in the history of Madhya Pradesh who has admitted his shortcomings publicly. I have never said my government is perfect. I admit there are lacunae and loopholes in the system. But I cannot escape my responsibilities. If I get the slightest chance to plug leakages or smoke out the corrupt, I do it.

**Your party came to power on the development agenda. What is the current status?**

We had three major issues: *Bijli, sadak and pani* (power, road and irrigation). I need not sing praises of my government but anyone can go across the state and ask the public about roads. They will vouch for me. We have added thousands of kilometres of roads and improved the quality as well. And the number is still rising. Against all odds, our government has added 3000 Mw capacity. Again, the Centre has deliberately made us lose 750 Mw power as Bhel has not completed within time Birsinghpur and Amarkantak units, which we had offered to execute on a turn-key basis. The state would have been in a better position had the Centre cooperated with us on these two projects. We could not fill the reservoir of Omkareshwar and Indira Sagar projects up to the crest level following a court order... but my state is better off than other states. We also added five lakh hectares under irrigation and another two lakh hectares will be covered shortly. To meet the water shortage, I introduced Jalabhishek Abhiyan, Nadi Talab Yojana, which has fetched better results for the poor farmers of my state.

**Your party is in the poll mode now. How will you script your speeches?**

We have a single-point agenda - development. Besides providing roads, power and other infrastructure, I have made farming a profitable business in the state. It was a challenge in a globally competitive environment, where farm subsidies have been pruned and you have very few options. Our government has made efforts to create an industry-friendly ambience as a result of which the state received more than Rs 200,000 crore worth investment proposals. Rs 80,000 crore has already translated as investment on the ground.

**What are your plans if you are voted to power again?**

I am confident we will get the mandate to extend ongoing projects, plans and schemes so that the poorest of the poor can get more. I still want to utilise the human resources available in the state. Our young energetic manpower needs to be employed in generating income for the state since in a strong democratic environment we cannot be dependent only on taxes. I want them to be skilled enough to meet global challenges. To make our rural human resources more productive, we need to train them and upgrade their skills.

**Where do you see backward Madhya Pradesh in five years from now?**

Among the top few developed states.