



Himachal CM Jai Ram Thakur remembered the late former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Back from the national capital after paying his tributes to former Prime Minister [Atal Bihari Vajpayee](#), Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur spoke to ASHWANI SHARMA about the upcoming session of the state assembly and the former PM's contribution to the state.

Former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee always called Himachal Pradesh his second home. How will the state remember him and his contribution?

Vajpayee ji had a great love for Himachal Pradesh and its people. He had an emotional and personal connect with most BJP leaders. Atal ji spent lot of time in the state, not only at Prini – where he owned a house, but he also travelled to other areas. He understood Himachal Pradesh's problems. As Prime Minister his benevolence was like a 'father figure'. Rohtang Tunnel, which is nearly completion, is his biggest gift. We are

thinking of naming the tunnel after him. There are few other plans being worked out to keep his memories alive .

Any interesting memories associated with Vajpayee ji that you can recall?

It was in 2006 that he visited Prini last. He had ceased to be Prime Minister. We all had lined-up to see him off to Delhi. He shook hands with then CM Virbhadra Singh. There was Dhumal ji (former CM Prem Kumar Dhumal) and next to him, I was also in the queue . He said, “Look we have incumbent (CM), past (CM) and there is the future (CM) before us”, and he hugged me .

To what extent do you think you have you delivered on your promises in the past eight months as CM?

My first priority was to restore people’s faith in the governance and win their trust. In a short time of seven months, I have been able to tour 52 of 68 assembly constituencies to establish direct connect with the masses. Eighty per cent of the new schemes, which the government announced, have already been launched and started showing results. Our ‘Jan Manch’ programme to redress citizens problems on the spot by holding a function at district level in the first week of every month is the biggest outreach programme any government has undertaken.

Opposition Congress says you have been frequently flying to Delhi but have not got any financial package for the state

Frankly, the Congress has lost touch with the people. Till now, I have been able to get projects worth Rs 6,000 crore sanctioned by the Centre for infrastructure, tourism, environment and climate change mitigation, social sectors and irrigation. All this was due to the personal interventions of Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and NDA government’s liberal attitude towards Himachal Pradesh. Never before this, such huge funding had come to the state within six or seven months. Now, we have got a full-fledged NDRF battalion sanctioned. The place where it will be located is being worked out. This was an issue hanging fire for past 15 years and was important for the state in view of natural disasters and climatic changes.

What is the next focus area of your government?

I am going to focus on governance in a big way. Also monitoring project implementation and overseeing that benefits reach to the people within shortest time, and ensuring there are no cost overruns. I have put a system in place in the CM’s office to monitor each scheme.

Opposition says you don't have a grip on administration and RSS is calling the shots.

There is no truth in it. Monsoon Session of the state assembly will begin on August 23, we will address all their issues. The RSS has no role in governance. They only give us ideological inputs.

How is your working equation with the PM?

(PM Narendra) Modi ji knows the state very well and its problems too. Whenever I meet him, he asks me: "Tell me Jai Ram ji what more can we do for Himachal Pradesh". He is planning a visit to the state soon, especially to oversee completion of the prestigious Rohtang Tunnel project, set to be completed next year. After Atal ji, PM Modi is an outstanding friend and well wisher of Himachal Pradesh.