

Growth with change

After four years it can be said that Modi's leadership has been truly transformational

For most elected Governments, anti-incumbency usually sets in by the time the regime crosses the half-way mark. But at the end of four years in office, it is to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's credit that his personal popularity remains phenomenally high and despite occasional hiccups, the NDA Government is widely seen as an effective instrument of development as well as change. Most importantly, Modi has given India a largely corruption-free administration, a remarkable feat compared to the record of his predecessor regime. Further, by ridding BJP of the tag of being pro-rich and friendly only to corporate houses — what Rahul Gandhi once derisively called "Suit-boot *ki sarkar*" — Modi has earned the goodwill and trust of millions of the poor and underprivileged. This will hold the Government in good stead as it embarks on an election year. Thus it seems poised to receive a renewed mandate.

Arguably, the picture has not been entirely rosy. Demonetisation dealt a severe blow to the economy from which it has barely recovered. But the canny politician in Modi turned adversity to advantage by deftly portraying demonetisation as a



crippling blow to the idle rich and promoters of black money. This helped him consolidate the BJP's hold over the electorate by sweeping the UP Assembly elections of 2017. The somewhat haphazard implementation of the Goods and Services Tax also led to a temporary erosion of BJP's support among its core constituency of traders. With sluggish demand, the economy on the whole has struggled to survive over the last four years and sectors like housing are still stuttering to regain their past momentum. Job creation has been a victim of slow economic growth and many critics feel this may well be the BJP's nemesis taken together with farmers' disaffection over low prices for their produce.

But on the flip side, inflation has been kept firmly under check. Even the

current spurt in global oil prices has not dented the Government's record too adversely — at least not yet. A slew of schemes aimed at poverty alleviation and improving living standards of the poor, particularly in rural areas, also appear to be delivering results. May be not enough people have been able to take advantage of the revolutionary Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, aimed at assisting the poor to construct their own *pucca* houses, but as awareness spreads, Modi's promise to ensure that no Indian is without a roof above his/her head will become a reality soon. The Ujjwala scheme for providing free LPG connections to BPL households has been a huge boon for rural women. Similarly, technology has been harnessed to deliver Government subsidies to people's doorsteps through direct benefit transfer via nationalised banks.

In other words, the NDA Government's record in implementing socially beneficial schemes is perhaps unparalleled in contemporary India. But the regime's ledger has not been entirely unblemished. Over-zealous hardliners of various saffron outfits have periodically taken the law into their own hands to intimidate their ideological opponents and even those who do not agree with their cuisine-related taboos. With his fabulous communication skills and command over the national discourse, it is expected that the Prime Minister shall henceforth reach out more purposefully to those sections that may be suffering anxieties, real or imagined.