

High hopes set on PM's vision of 'New India'

Earlier, Prime Minister-aspirant Narendra Modi sought to beguile Indians with the slogan of "Aache Din", and followed this up in his addresses to the nation from the Red Fort with details of policies like Swachh Bharat, Stand Up India, Skill India, Make in India, a longish list of aims which have produced little on the outcomes side. On Tuesday, speaking on the 70th anniversary of Independence, Mr Modi pushed a new slogan — "New India", intended to induce hope, which he may seek to turn to his advantage at the hustings in 2019.

The question is: Can hope be injected in the absence of a platform of proven performance? The PM obviously thinks it can be — given his communication skills, his vigorous personal style and the radical vision of a Hindu India sought to be sold to a Hindu-majority notion. Of course, the people will be required to judge for themselves, and ask if their conditions of life are now better. "New India" is to be achieved rather quickly — by 2022 — in the underlying expectation that Mr Modi will return in 2019. The definition of the concept is set out only rhetorically. Even so, there was no mention in the PM's hour-long peroration at Red Fort of education and health, although Mr Modi did refer in passing to the "hospital tragedy" in UP.

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It appears that President Ram Nath Kovind can read the PM's mind. He spoke of "New India" in his address to the nation on the eve of Independence Day — equating it with "compassion" and "equality", placing these in the framework of the idea of so-called "integral humanism" of the RSS-Jan Sangh leader Deen Dayal Upadhyay. Breaking protocol for the occasion, the President also applauded government policies — GST and withdrawal of cooking gas subsidy for the rich. Last month, in his acceptance speech too, he had endorsed Swachh Bharat. Let's hope South Block is not wagging Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Mr Modi knows it is stock-taking time for voters and the failed promise of creating two crore jobs per year may mock him. Thus, from the Red Fort the PM spoke in an exalting way of the young Indian turning "job creator" instead of being a "job seeker", and left it there. An unprecedented feature of the PM's I-Day speech this year was lack of any mention of foreign policy. He chose not to mention even Pakistan and China, with whom friction is high.

There was a new slogan on Kashmir — to suggest that the solution lies in embracing Kashmiris, and not through bullets. It's to be seen where this goes in practical terms. On the whole, a flaccid speech relying on doleful recounting.