

# Restlessness is a good thing

## Modi's message is that he's best suited to lead India in 2019

**P**rime Minister Narendra Modi spoke at a community event in London. But even as he was addressing a global audience and the Indian diaspora, his message for citizens back home in an election year was clear.

Both the government and the BJP have faced a set of political difficulties in recent weeks — bypoll losses, judicial verdicts which have agitated key social groups like the Dalits, public agitations around issues of sexual violence where the political leadership has come across as unresponsive, and a growing narrative that the government is struggling to meet the high expectations it had generated in 2014.

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But Mr Modi, in his characteristic manner, introduced a new variable to the public debate. Responding to a question on whether there was impatience in India, he said 'besabri' (restlessness) was a good thing. He used the analogy of a person owning a cycle wanting a scooter, a person owning a scooter wanting a car to suggest that India was getting aspirational. And these higher expectations were because people felt his government could deliver. By framing his answer in this manner, Mr Modi was attempting to do two things. He was acknowledging the ground feedback, but was arguing that the faith in the government was intact. People were not disappointed, he was suggesting, because the government was not working, but because they wanted it to do more. It is this message that the PM will continue to convey in the run up to an election year.

The second takeaway from Mr Modi's interaction was his comment on Pakistan. He emphasised Delhi wanted peace but would not tolerate terror and would give back 'strong answers', in the language adversaries understand. But, as evidence that India played it straight, Mr Modi said that India had always informed Pakistan when it retaliated, including after the surgical strikes. In this case, he was once again playing to his image of a strong leader back home but combined with a projection of statesmanship. And finally, the interaction focused on Mr Modi's personal qualities — particularly his humble roots and his hard work. The London event revealed the ingredients of the Modi's 2019 campaign — the message the government is doing its bit but needs more time to meet expectations; that it is tough and will defend national interests; and he is the best man to lead India.