

Future perfect?

The PM looks beyond his term to a developed, corruption-free India. But is there a road map?

In talking of a New India free of casteism, terrorism, corruption and nepotism by 2022, in his Independence Day address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was seeking to sell a longer term vision to Indians, a vision that goes beyond the limit of his current term in office. While he did dwell on the achievements of his government in the last three years, Mr. Modi was largely focussed on his vision for the future, one in which farmer income would double and where youth and women would have many more opportunities. The road map was not clear, but Mr. Modi is convinced that his achievements are steps toward a happier, more secure future for the country. Demonetisation, the Goods and Services Tax, the movement toward a digital economy, all these were spoken of as part of a movement inexorably leading to a corruption-free, transparent India. Unlike last year, when he was silent on the violence in Kashmir, this Independence Day he went so far as to ask terrorists to join the mainstream, insisting that the Kashmir problem cannot be solved by bullets, but only by embracing fellow Kashmiris. But more important, he went on to speak against violence in the name of faith, saying it is unacceptable in India. Mr. Modi has spoken about communalism and casteism as twin evils before, but the specific reference to violence in the name of faith appeared intended as a word of caution meant for the overzealous in his own political constituency, especially lynch mobs that have targeted Muslim and other traders in the name of cow protection. In this, he seemed to echo President Ram Nath Kovind, who called for a compassionate society that does not discriminate on the basis of gender or religious background. And like Mr. Kovind, who called for a partnership between the citizen and the government to ensure that the benefits of government policy reach all sections of the people, Mr. Modi invoked Team India to run for a New India.

Although he spoke about the support India has received from several countries in its fight against terrorism, Mr. Modi made no mention of Pakistan other than in relation to the surgical strikes, which, he said, had forced the world to accept India's capability and strength. Last year, he had made specific references to Balochistan, speaking about the attacks on Balochs in Pakistan, and how people there had commended him for his support for them. There was no mention of China or the Doklam stand-off either. The speech seemed directed entirely at the domestic audience, with the focus largely on development and a reliance on technology-enabled solutions to transform the country over the next five years. That is a period that goes beyond the next general election and quite clearly Mr. Modi sees himself as serving a second term.