‘COMMENTARAO’ in “Telegraph”

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# “Looking forward

- The future looks good for the BJP governmen” by

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Many analysts (unlike the Opposition parties) Have rated the performance of the Modi-led BJP government after around 30 months in office at 70% or higher. Modi was a great campaigner, and his policy ideas are in his catchy slogans. He has demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of governance, administaive skills, a comprehensive idea ofwhat he wants to achieve and review the performance.

The early interference by the RSS and Hindu extremists has mostly toned down but one suspects is available on tap for the leashed rabble rousers. The anti cow slaughter and anti Muslim brigades are less active after a period of serous violence. We cannot say that is tactical stoppage or signifies a change in the BJP philosophy.

A Committee was to be set up to abrogate Article 370 on Kashmir in the Constitution and thankfully with no action. Drafting a Uniform Civil Code has made no progress. Cleaning up the Ganga seems slow if happening at all. Rationalisation and convergence among the Ministries has made some progress (Power combined with renewable energy and coal).

social and environment audits were promised but there is little visible. Education and health services have received little attention and Education is in decline.

Some slogans and their achievement:

BJP and Mr Modi gave little indication of

Interear in foreign policy except for hostility to Pakistan. But Modi took off at the outset and extended a warm hand to Pakistan. He also , made overtures to Japan and China, made close connection with the USA Presidency, and targeted the Middle East (UAE and Saudi Arabia), apart from almost every other country. UAE and Saudi Arabia have promsed more investment, gas supplies and cooperation against terror. Relations with South Asia including Afghanisthan have made positive progress (except Pakistan). But Nepal and Sri Lanka continue to be close to China. The reaching out to NRI’s in North America, UK and Middle East, as well as ethnic Inndians in Fiji, Africa, etc have brought in investments and visitors. With Pakistan the warm hand turned into a fist when Pakistan intensified terrorist activities. BJP seems clear that it can do without Pakistani friendhip. The warmth to China has led to no forward movement in relations, China’s encouragement to Pakistan terror groups, much increase in FDI, nor reducing the huge trade deficit. With Japan there is great warmth, and forward movement in investment, and security cooperation.

The states with opposition parties in power show poor Centre state relations though Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh show far less hostility. The North East states are getting more attention as promised, in infrastructure and the possible opening of the river route via Bangladesh. The battle against Maoists in Chattisgarh and elsewhere, continues. Demonetisation might help in turning off their money taps.

Promises to fight black money and corruption have made progress. No major corruption has yet been found. The agreements to revise the double taxation treaties with Mauriitus among other small nations, and the revision in terms for investment inflows from Singapore have closed money laundries for black money. Amnesty for a while to black money, and demonetisation appear to have brought in substantial extra tax revenues. Polls suggest that the masses welcome demonetisation. While there is no report on dealing with Indian account holders as disclosed from the Panama and other papers, these are complicated matters and must be under action. But there is little indication of transforming our administrative services whose mindsets, and litany of rules, stimulate corruption. Local manufacture for defence, and penalties for infrastructure mis-spending have yet to happen.

Economic growth might slow by 0.5% this year because of the loss of black money in the system but will recover. Inflation is down as are interest rates. Improvement in bank credit, more investment inflows and infrastructure spending, should stimulate manufacturing output. These will stimulate both growth of economy and jobs.

No majority in the Rajya Sabha prevents important legislation ( land, goods and services tax, etc). If BJP wins elections in U.P., it could change after Rajya Sabha elections in 2018.

Other slogans: less government, more governance: digitisation of government records, simplification of procedures, more freedom to spend on programmes by state governments. Action has been initiated on these.

Start-up India, stand up India; There is a continuing boom in start-ups.

No more “tax terrorism"; The jury is out on whether this has been achieved especially after the demonetisation. Make in India; This has led to a sharp rise in FDI. But the promise to create jobs for our youth is still a dream, with relatively jobless growth. Skilling India seems to have little results to show. But the promise that Indian businesses will thrive seems to be happening though it is a continuation of earlier trends.

BJP promised to build India through more irrigation, roads than UPA, is only partially achieved. Pace of road construction has improved. The Mihir Shah report on a national water policy is under study and could revolutionize our approach to rivers and ground water.

Jan Suraksh was to push for social security for the weak and vulnerable. Results have yet to be seen.

Jan Dhan Yojana led to coverage of over 80% of the population adding in a short time with bank accounts. Most accounts have zero balances, many were misused to legitimize demonetized currencies. However banking is to enable benefits to be transferred directly to the beneficiaries. This is a complex task and will take much time. It has begun and will over time save vast sums of social spending now being leaked and also more will reach those for whom they are intended.

Sab Ka Saath, Sab Ka Vikas meant that the benefits of development would reach each person. It is yet to happen visibly.

The swatch Bharat programme has attracted much csr money from corporate. There is a big surge in building toilets.

The slogan that more coal will be produced and coal auctios will make money for government has been achieved by a sharp rise in production though few auctions have taken place.

Opposition parties are very negative about this government’s functioning, perhaps because they have so little influence on it. They say the economy is in recession; farmers in dire straits; rising joblessness; corruption continues; a financial Emergency is in place; instead of a political Emergency the government is said to be using its powers to torment, humiliate and silence Opposition parties; federal structure is thwarted by frequent central interference in governance of states; grandiose schemes like the Skills programme, “swach Bharat”, “Jan Dhan”, “smart cities”, infrastructure (road, rail, power), etc, are announced with fanfare, with poor implemntatin or funds misuse. These are highly exaggerated charges and perhaps reflect the humbling of Opposition parties. Many demands like the one from Bengal to roll back demonetisation are impractical and foolish. Fiscal federalism has made progress in the 2016 Budget. Corrupt politicians from TMC, Congress and others, stimulate their parties into charging government with vendetta politics. However, this government has failed to expand the judiciary and improve its facilities, and is engaged in confrontation wioth it on such matters.

There is little hostile public outcry. Except for the Congress and Trinamul Congress, other parties seem to want closer ties with BJP. They have succeeded only in halting legislation in Parliament. The TMC is procrastinating on the most important reform that will unify markets through the goods and services tax.

BJP has great domestic public support. The world is moving rightwards (USA, Europe). The Trump Presidency’s [olicies will make India more central to their Asian strategy. BREXIT, declining European economy, and USA’s closer ties with Russia, will replace NATO in significanc. Chinese dumping will be fought. This will help Indian conomy. Present Chinese economic decline will continue. ISIS and terrorism will help reduce American fundaing to Pakistan.

Future prospects look good for the BJP.

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