

Elation and unease greet Modi landslide

Re-election has affirmed PM's position as the most powerful politician since the 1970s

STEPHANIE FINDLAY, AMY KAZMIN AND JYOTSNA SINGH — NEW DELHI

Shortly after India prime minister Narendra Modi was re-elected by a landslide on Thursday, his supporters flocked to the New Delhi headquarters of his Bharatiya Janata party to celebrate their leader's triumph.

Brass bands played alongside frenetic traditional drummers as BJP workers, volunteers and loyalists broke into impromptu dancing and chanted Mr Modi's name. Among the elated was Versha Chaudhary, an insurance professional, who had taken a day off work to join the celebrations for her hero.

"I am very happy," she said. "Modi deserves this position and India deserves Modi. Since I was a child in school, I only read that India was a developing country. I want to see that India is a developed country and only Modi can deliver that."

When the premier finally took the stage to thank his supporters, hundreds of phones were held in the air to record the moment. "We just believe he's like a god," Deepak Singh Bhandari, a 32-year-old hotel worker, said afterwards. "He's a great leader for India, just like Trump and Putin, all people follow him."

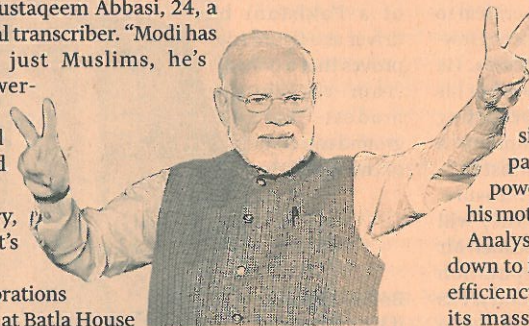
But at Batla House, a Muslim enclave in South Delhi, the mood was of subdued resignation at the prospect of another five years of rule by Mr Modi and his Hindu nationalist BJP. In a narrow alley lined with small shops selling fresh meat, kitchen utensils and clothing, people said they had cast their votes for the opposition or abstained.

"Half of India is in mourning," said Mohammed Mustaqeem Abbasi, 24, a hospital medical transcriber. "Modi has damaged not just Muslims, he's destroyed lower-class minorities. Privileged Hindus and Muslims wouldn't worry, but for others it's a huge loss."

The BJP celebrations and the unease at Batla House



Women queue to vote in Delhi, where the mood among Muslims is of subdued resignation after the victory of Narendra Modi, below — Harish Tyagi/EPA-EFE/Rex/Shutterstock



highlight the deep divisions over Mr Modi's re-election, in a victory that has affirmed his position as the most powerful Indian politician since the 1970s, when Indira Gandhi ruled with an iron fist. Defying predictions that his popularity would wane after five years in power, and despite his mixed economic record, Mr Modi improved on his already impressive 2014 performance, leading a BJP sweep of 303 of India's 543 elected parliamentary seats.

Such a magnitude of victory has not been seen in India since 1984, when the Congress party's Rajiv Gandhi came into power on a wave of sympathy after his mother Indira's assassination.

Analysts say Mr Modi's triumph was down to formidable political skills, the efficiency of the party machinery and its massive voter outreach, and the

disarray, disunity and poverty of ideas among the prime minister's rivals.

"Mr Modi has genuine political instincts and attributes that are remarkable for his generation in terms of his ability to connect with voters, his own personal life story, his oratory and his charisma on the campaign trail," said Milan Vaishnav, author of several books on Indian politics.

"But you can't view Modi in a vacuum," he added. "You have to view him against a set of other political alternatives. The opposition struggled to mount an affirmative agenda as opposed to just an anti-Modi agenda."

However, his resounding victory cannot obscure the fact that Mr Modi remains a highly polarising figure, whose disruptive policies and shrewd self-promotion in the past five years have aroused strong passions in both his supporters and his detractors.

"It's not the sort of namby-pamby leadership we've gotten accustomed to before," said Swapan Dasgupta, a member of parliament. "He's taken difficult decisions and managed them politically. You can either like it or dislike it."

To his admirers, Mr Modi is an incorruptible, hardworking, strong-willed leader who offers India its best chance of eradicating poverty, developing the economy, generating jobs and emerging as a respected international power.

His detractors — including intellectuals and religious minorities — fear the prime minister's strong mandate will presage a further squeeze on dissent and a shift to more explicit privileging of Hindus over religious minorities.

One thing is clear: Mr Modi, who often depicted himself as a political outsider fighting a powerful liberal elite, can no longer easily claim to be an insurgent.

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STRONGMAN

Sex strike draws attention to abuse of power

Robert Shrimsley's column "Sex strike? Not sure I'm pro that choice" (May 18) completely misses the point of Alyssa Milano's proposed response to restrictive abortion bills. The idea is as old as Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, produced in 411BC, and the point is to draw attention to abuse of power.

Aristophanes's main character is an Athenian woman named Lysistrata (her name means "disbander of armies"), and like all other women in Athens she had no right to vote. How to make her voice and the voices of other women heard in a world the men are

ruining? Lysistrata's idea is that if the women of Greece unite in the sex strike, men will listen. And so it happens. As women gather on Athens's Acropolis, the men of Greece are brought to heel. In the play's climactic scene, Lysistrata points out that she has a brain, something men often fail to appreciate, and that the warring sides once had a history of helping each other. As men remember those days, they can now come together to end the strife that has wrecked Greece.

Sadly *Lysistrata* remained a fantasy. When the play was produced, Athens

was reeling from the destruction of the large army it had sent to Sicily, an expedition driven by the fatal combination of bad intelligence and political ambition.

Seven years later, Athens, its last fleet sunk, would surrender to Sparta. Aristophanes's point was that the powerful should listen to the powerless, who just might be smarter than they are.

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President's rule became a bad and fatal habit

In his excellent review of Gyan Prakesh's book *Emergency Chronicles* (Life & Arts, May 11), Rana Mitter is absolutely correct saying that the imposition of a dictatorship on a free India was a family affair. But the genesis was from an earlier event involving the paterfamilias.

In the 1957 elections, Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru had won a resounding victory except in Kerala, where the Communist Party of India had secured about half the seats. Local Congress challenged the reforms proposed by the CPI but the courts rejected the challenge and respected the ballot box. It was Indira Gandhi that egged her father on to exercise President's rule under Article 356 of the Constitution. Nehru was reluctant — President's rule had already been exercised four times in the life of the young republic. However, in a terrible indulgence of father for daughter, he relented. In her time, Indira went on to invoke President's rule more than 40 times.

It was a bad and fatal habit. In the summer of 1984, when Punjab was under President's rule, she ordered the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. By the autumn of that year, she was dead, killed by the hand of one of her Sikh bodyguards.

"In medio tutissimus ibis" — you will go most safely by the middle course — are words from Ovid that the Old Harrovian Nehru may well have counselled Indira. Like Phaethon driving the fiery chariot of his father Phoebus across the sky, Indira also ignored her father, with the same consequence. It was indeed a family affair.

Seung Chong
Hong Kong

Happy plant-based eating experience may require salt, sugar and flavourings

Your report "Big Food joins battle for plant-based protein" (May 18) summarises a food world filled with large and small emerging companies working at full speed to replace meat with, presumably more healthy, protein derived from plant sources.

Such a programme existed at the DuPont company when I started working there in 1958. The project manager gave me a quick rundown on the programme's progress and showed me the soy-based items being made. I asked if I could taste a piece, which I then did. I always remember my comment: "Jim, this stuff looks like balsa wood and tastes like it."

Jim then gave me a lecture on how sellers and customers would add flavourings, extenders and other foods to make eating the soy a desirable experience. Unfortunately for Jim and the company, the business didn't turn out to be profitable and was dropped.

such foods will be in a "healthy" category.

In an advanced population such as America, where plenty of people are overweight and used to eating food driven by taste, my guess is the amount of sugar, salt and other additives will reach levels that will end up compromising their health and long-term well being.

Arnold Holtzman
Glen Mills, PA, US

I heartily recommend university open days

Harvey Clark Greisman (Letters, May 11) finds prospective students' college visits uniform, useless and unappealing. A few years ago I went round some uni open days with my daughter — on the train — and the experiences could not have been more different.

Dundee appeared not to be expecting us; Aberdeen went to extraordinary lengths to provide us with information, entertainment and food, compensating for the grey

another complete, Harry Potteresque, contrast.

I would heartily recommend such a tour to both students and parents. It's a marvellous opportunity to look around and get a feeling for places before choosing. And fun for the old folks, stirring up the memories. Seek ye further, perhaps?

Kenny Bell
Managua, Nicaragua

Your reader's audacious mother raised a feminist

Patrick Dransfield (Letters, May 11) applauds his inspirational mother for her "audacity to work" and the "value to herself that work granted" in 1970s England. But his letter reveals her other great achievement: namely, as a mother to have brought up a "feminist" son, who recognises her value to society as well as to the home.

Measures to promote "equal pay for work of equal value" and end sex discrimination must go beyond legislation and newspaper articles so that we create fundamental changes in

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