

# Modi's new normal

DELHI

## How will India's new coalition government work?

**O**BSERVING THE string of familiar faces taking the ministerial oath at the president's residence in Delhi on June 9th, it was easy to forget that Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had just suffered the loss of its majority in a general election. For all the talk of compromise needed to run a coalition government, Mr Modi appeared keen to demonstrate that there would be no change in who called the shots. Yet the picture obscures several new challenges for India's prime minister. His immediate task is to satisfy a set of demanding coalition partners in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). He will also have to grapple with a revived opposition and a disappointed base.

The new Modi government looks a lot like the old one. The key postings are unchanged. Amit Shah, Mr Modi's feared right-hand man, continues as home minister. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar keeps the Ministry of External Affairs, Rajnath Singh stays on as defence minister and Nirmala Sitharaman returns as finance minister.

The first decision taken by the new cabinet on June 10th was to extend one of Mr Modi's flagship projects, a housebuilding programme for poor Indians, signalling a continued commitment to the welfarist portion of his political agenda. The newly appointed ministers were quick to emphasise policy continuity in other areas, too.

Yet Mr Modi will soon face more serious tests. Most parties in the NDA want an immediate review of the Agnipath scheme. This programme was introduced in 2022, in an attempt to cut costs in the armed forces by recruiting most new members for a fixed four-year term rather than granting them lifetime appointments. It is seen as emblematic of the previous Modi government's disregard for voters' economic anxiety over a lack of jobs, particularly for young people. Demands from the BJP's most important allies, the Janata Dal (United) from the eastern state of Bihar and the Telugu Desam Party from Andhra Pradesh in the south, for more money for their states may further curtail Mr Modi's fiscal