

With PM Modi leading from front, India's response to coronavirus crisis has been exceptional

PM Modi has used scientific and modern means to deal with the 21st-century crisis, yet he has connected with the masses and also the "corona warriors" by invoking India's great past and the ancient arts like yoga and dhyaan to boost their well-being.

To those who proclaim that the prime minister revels in self-glorification, here is what he said when a series of tweets called for a standing ovation to the PM for five minutes on April 12 at 5 pm. (Illustration by C R Sasikumar)

As India continues its relentless battle with the coronavirus pandemic, the response from all quarters has been exceptional. While the general public has shown remarkable restraint by not venturing out of their homes and religiously following the lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi three weeks ago, the Centre and state governments, doctors, paramedics, civic and emergency staff, police personnel, civil society, et al have worked in tandem to deal with this unprecedented crisis.

The collective fight against the deadly disease gives hope that we will come out of these hard times soon. But what is more heartening is how PM Modi has led from the front. While the world looks towards India for drugs and other supplies, the Modi government has been effective and firm in dealing with the pandemic, which has left even developed countries like the US, the UK, Italy, Spain, Germany and France helpless.

Modi has shown exceptional skills in dealing with the crisis. He has used scientific and modern means to deal with the 21st-century crisis, yet he has connected with the masses and also the "corona warriors" by invoking India's great past and the ancient arts like yoga and dhyaan to boost their well-being. Working round-the-clock, he is monitoring the situation across the country, interacting with his team and the chief ministers, health experts, global leaders, among others. But he hasn't forgotten to connect with the masses, ensuring them that this too shall pass.

Within 48 hours of announcing the lockdown, the Modi government came up with a Rs 1.7 lakh crore package to give succour to those who are most affected by the corona crisis. The economic relief package primarily focuses

on migrant labourers, daily wagers and the urban and rural poor. The package is a mix of food security and direct cash benefits to help poor families during the lockdown.

Another focus area has been the ramping up of emergency medical paraphernalia. The Centre and state governments, along with medical experts, worked at a fast pace to put in place one of the world's largest medical setups, spread across India, to deal with coronavirus patients. The Modi government also went on to announce a comprehensive insurance cover for doctors, paramedics and other hospital support staff.

With the medical and administrative machinery in place to take on the corona challenge, it was time for Modi to connect with the masses. Though his passionate appeals, first for the “janata curfew” and then for the national lockdown, worked wonders with the general public, who wholeheartedly supported the government's efforts, it was time for the PM to go a step forward and connect with 130 crore Indians — locked in their homes, fighting the pandemic on a regular basis — to boost their morale.

Modi motivates the people to utilise their time in mastering yoga and “dhyaan”, which is a gift to us from our ancestors. He tells them about “yogic kriyas” and their importance. He exhorts people to use this opportunity to focus on their health and well-being.

The prime minister uses social media as a powerful medium to talk to the people. His posts assure Indians that the government is working overtime to deal with the crisis and they motivate people to be positive. He regularly interacts with corona warriors — the safaiwalas, helping staff in hospitals, doctors, nurses, civic staff, and other common people — who are working tirelessly for their country.

To those who proclaim that the prime minister revels in self-glorification, here is what he said when a series of tweets called for a standing ovation to the PM for five minutes on April 12 at 5 pm. He said that if it is out of goodwill and love for him, he would rather have the people take up responsibility for one poor family as long as the pandemic exists. Is this a man who glorifies himself?

Modi has emerged a man ahead of his times. All the fundamental changes which the Modi government has been making in our system — digital

payments, direct benefit transfers, micro loans, gas cylinders to the poor — have come as a major boon during the crisis. Swami Vivekananda said, “each work has to pass through three stages — ridicule, opposition and then acceptance. Those who think ahead of their times are sure to be misunderstood”.

The passionate appeal by Modi to help the poor and needy people has resulted in people coming out in large numbers and taking care of the poor by feeding them and providing them with all other necessary help. They have also contributed generously to the PM Cares Fund, despite some Opposition parties and habitual critics shamelessly casting unnecessary aspersions.

If you compare, you would see that the pressure of a teeming population is not there in Europe and the US, and yet things with us are surely under control. China is indeed the most populated country, but it is ruled by military might. The fact that our vibrant democracy agreed to the national lockdown is indeed a reflection of the citizens’ trust in their leader, for whom their lives and well-being are of utmost importance.

Modi’s *bêtes noires* will never understand how small gestures like the clapping of hands, ringing of bells and the lighting of lamps by all Indians together is necessary to create a bond among the masses and communities. These give hope to our fellow countrymen who are under complete lockdown. All these symbolic exercises help in getting the minds of the public together to fight the pandemic, following the Rig Vedic dictum *Sangachadwam* (May we walk together).

We Shall Overcome. This phase too shall pass. For the time being, stay home, stay put, stay safe. A great future awaits us. *Bharat Mata Ki Jai*.

Written by **Sri M**, The Indian Express, April 16, 2020