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NEWS / BLOGS / INDIA / Promoting Brand Rahul

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Promoting Brand Rahul

April 26, 2021, 10:09 PM IST / Jagdish Batra in Cultural Inputs, India, TOI

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Jagdish Batra
 Dr Jagdish Batra is a senior academic, currently working as Professor of English at O.P. Jindal Global University, India. He has nearly four decades of teaching and research e
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The present lacunae in the management of Covid in the country has rightly brought brickbats from the opposition parties. A section in the Congress believes it as the vindication of their leader and finds chances bright enough to promote brand Rahul Gandhi. It is said that the lack of oxygen in the country has provided oxygen to an ailing

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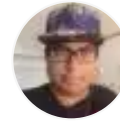
Congress party. There is no doubt that the Prime Minister and several members of the Cabinet were active in the elections underway in West Bengal and elsewhere. So were a number of opposition leaders holding large rallies spreading further the dreaded pandemic. The proper way would have been to postpone elections or hold them in one go as Mamta Banerjee suggested. But it seems not all parties were ready for it. In an emergency situation like this, the public would have welcomed either of these two steps and it would have done the nation a lot of good.

This is not to exonerate the BJP government for whom governance should have been as much important as fighting elections. Whether this over-involvement of the Prime Minister was responsible

1

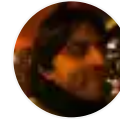
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for the slackening of efforts in marshalling men and material to check the march of the pandemic in its tracks would require deeper scrutiny. Health is a state subject and the plight of the government hospitals is the responsibility of the concerned state government. But a national emergency like the present Covid pandemic calls for collective measures by both the centre and the states. However, now PM Modi is back in action; several meetings with the chief ministers have been held. Oxygen supplies from indigenous suppliers have been ramped up and aid from other countries in the form of oxygen-making machines and medicines are being procured on war footing. These shortages might prove to be a temporary affair.

Meanwhile, the Congress party managers have



seized the opportunity to market Rahul Gandhi. A narrative is being built up which glorifies the observations of the leader with regard to the spread of Corona. His warnings about the menacing character of the pandemic have been brought to the surface. There was never any doubt about the ferocity of the second wave; one had got enough hint of it from other countries. But if the central government was not seen worrying about it, what came to pass in different states also showed the complacency of state governments some of which are ruled by the Congress party. What it suggests is that the cautionary advice in general coming from the Congress leader was not taken seriously by the Congress-ruled states also.

The narrative also states that the renowned



economist Amartya Sen found in Rahul Gandhi a visionary with left-of-centre economic approach and that he was not interested in making money the way Sen suggested to him (as if he is in need of

money!). Sen, as is well known, is a die-hard leftist and a staunch Modi basher. Anyone who conforms to that kind of thinking will get his ready support. Had such an assessment come from an unbiased authority, it would have been more appealing. What it boils down to is that this narrative is not sufficient to raise Rahul's stock when one juxtaposes it with his past record of mouthing wild statements which do not fit in with this trumped up image of a visionary. At times, he has been over-quick to make a point, as for example, asking the government when the Chinese would



vacate the area even as the talks with the Chinese side had only started. At the same time, he added at an election rally in Sept., 2020 in Haryana that he would have thrown the Chinese out within fifteen minutes! The habit of putting questions has gone on so recklessly that quite recently, he even asked the former US Secretary of State, Nicholas Burns why the US was not speaking about India's internal affairs.

Rahul also needs to shun the kind of undignified language that he had been indulging in even before the present state elections got going. Tags like 'chor', 'liar' 'coward', etc. used by him without any circumlocution for the PM were indeed indecent and irreverent. The Congress party strategists guiding Gandhi scion might have seen such stuff as



indicative of youthful indignation fit for postmodern times, but then Indian society has not yet come to appreciate such western styles, nor is India a postmodern country for that matter. One wishes Rahul Gandhi and Congress well. Let us hope that Rahul is able to improve his style of utterances and don the mantle of a dignified and responsible opposition leader. That will do him and the Congress a lot of good and help in providing a serious opposition to the ruling party which is the fulcrum on which a vibrant democracy rests.

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At present at the national level only Rahul is fighting the tragedy of the country. We want him to continue.

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