

As India passes 41 million official COVID-19 cases, Modi boasts of his “great success”

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Citing the highly undercounted official COVID-19 infection and death figures, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government is playing down the threat posed by an Omicron-led third wave of the pandemic. Modi claims the “vaccination of 75 percent of the adult population” shows his “success,” though countless reports have revealed the ineffectiveness of vaccine-only policies to check highly infectious variants like Omicron.

Resorting to his regular practice of self-congratulation, Modi boasted on January 30, the day India passed the 41 million mark for COVID-19 infections, that “India is fighting with great success with the new wave of corona,” calling it is a “matter of pride.” Modi’s “success” story is exposed as a sinister farce: the first month of 2022 alone saw over 6 million cases of COVID-19 in India.

Modi’s criminal profits-over-lives policy has already created a massive humanitarian crisis in the world’s second most populous country. With 497,975 COVID fatalities as of February 2, according to vastly undercounted official figures, India is about to pass half a million official COVID-19 deaths. Last year, however, the US-based Center for Global Development showed that India’s actual coronavirus death figure was four million, eight times higher than the official toll.

These deaths include thousands of children, as pointed out by leading health experts. In *The Hindu*, Dr. Dhanya Dharmapalan, a pediatric infectious diseases specialist in Navi Mumbai, and Dr. T. Jacob John, a retired Professor of Virology at Christian Medical College in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, showed that 0.4 percent (or 1,944) of India’s official 486,000 COVID deaths (as of January 12) are children. Referring to analyses estimating “a six to seven-fold

higher number of deaths,” the experts wrote that this is “suggesting a far higher number of child deaths” in India.

Some data given by experts highlight the disastrous prospects as millions of unprotected children are exposed to an Omicron-led surge that is spreading like wildfire. There are vast numbers of children living with diabetes, chronic heart/lung/kidney/neurological disease, obesity, or in immune-compromised states due to immunodeficiency syndromes or immunosuppressant therapies. They are at high risk of severe cases of COVID-19.

This includes:

- An estimated 200,000 children born with congenital heart defects every year in India;
- About 50,000 new cases of cancer in children per year;
- About 14.4 million obese children, the second-highest number in the world;
- About 140,000 children annually suffer from childhood nephritic syndrome;
- Over 1 million children have primary immune deficiency disease.

The danger faced by millions of children is surging as States and Union Territories reopen schools, and the Union Health Ministry works on its “national plan to reopen schools.” Reopened schools will be breeding grounds for COVID-19, infecting more and children, leading to rising hospitalizations, and dangerously threatening children with co-morbidities.

Neither Modi nor his right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have ever expressed regret over the shocking figures on COVID fatalities. Nor do they intend to correct false COVID death tolls that criminally forget millions of victims.

Yesterday, according to the Health Ministry’s

figures, India reported 1,733 deaths within 24 hours on February 2, and India's 7-day average of daily deaths stood at 979. This is a sharp increase from the beginning of the year, when the 7-day average of COVID fatalities was 281. About 13,564 people were confirmed to have died of COVID-19 in January.

The Indian government and media have begun to fraudulently boast of falling infection numbers to justify abandoning whatever remaining COVID restrictions are in place in India. In doing so, they are silent on the falling numbers of tests to make a rosy picture on the situation. On January 23, there were 2.18 million daily tests and 333,533 daily infections, but this fell to 1.74 million tests, finding 161,386 cases on February 2. This strongly suggests that the fall in the number of daily tests is driving the fall in the number of cases that are detected.

On February 1, the *Times of India* pointed to a number of elements that may be giving "misleading picture of the extent of the pandemic's spread during the third wave." It noted that there is no proper mechanism to systematically collect data on COVID patients asked to "self-isolate" at their residence. People who "may have tested positive using self-test kits used at home, may not have reported themselves to the civic authorities which do not have the means to track buyers of such (test) kits," the *TOI* wrote.

The Modi government and various state governments controlled by the ruling BJP and other political parties, including the Congress and the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), all exploit these distorted figures to call to fully open schools and work places. Like many other capitalist regimes across the world, particularly the US and UK, the Indian ruling elite is pursuing a murderous herd immunity policy, allowing the coronavirus to rip through the population.

Modi's rhetoric about "fighting with great success" against COVID-19 was thoroughly exposed when the Union Budget 2022-23 presented on February 1 cut the allocation for health. According to Dr. Anant Phadke on February 3, "[A]llocation to health and related programmes reduced in real term in the budget 2022-23 by 7 percent compared to Revised Estimate of 2021-22," the *Indian Express* wrote on February 3.

The doctors showed that the health budget "completely overlooked the lessons of the COVID-19 epidemic and fails to allocate much-needed increases in

public health system strengthening, the National Health Mission Programme, COVID-related provisions which remain a continuing requirement, protection and remuneration for health workers..." They added that "to cover up these multifaceted failures, the presentation of data in the current health budget has been made deliberately opaque and difficult to compare with earlier years."

The Economic Survey 2021-22 was tabled in the Parliament on January 31. An article in *The Print* noted that the government's survey "leaves no scope of any inquiry of under-reporting of COVID-19 deaths in India"; and "does not say anything about lack of primary health centres, community health centres and sub-centres, on which the majority of the population depends."

The 2018-19 Economic Survey said that as many as 60 percent of primary health centres of India were manned by only one doctor. *The Print* notes that the government "skipped the fact that India's out-of-pocket expenditure on health still continues to remain one of the highest in the world," since "out of the total expenditure on health happening in the country, as much as 50 percent is spent by the people themselves."

This underscores the criminal indifference of Modi and Indian ruling elite as a whole to the fate of India's multi-million working class and rural toilers.



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