

# PM Modi's Invitation to a Conversation

## Step up to give Gol 'constructive criticism'

Communication, as the best of communicators know, is a two-way street. This is something that PM Narendra Modi underlined on Sunday through the medium of his radio address. His invitation to receive 'constructive criticism' of his government's performance over the last three years may seem rhetorical. With a political mandate that can be misconstrued as successful governance in itself, the PM reminded the commentariat that the two are different beasts: the former being a means to the latter's end.

True, Modi's welcoming of 'constructive criticism' comes from a position of luxury that the soft cushion of power brings. But what he is seeking — especially in the relative absence of any real political opposition at the Centre — is feedback. Along with the formidable, and comforting, image of the prime minister addressing the nation from a pulpit (or from a Franklin D Roosevelt-style radio fireside chat), a coexisting image of a more democratic conversation is being sought by him. It is exactly because



of the political surety that this government possesses that it isn't oversensitive to critique. This is what Modi seemed to highlight — an invitation to be frank, with the corollary: 'Don't worry, we can take flak'.

'Constructive' is the operative word in 'constructive criticism', knee-jerk castigation having had its share of play in the past. But governance itself is a process. This requires issue-based feedback, policy-specific judgements. It is in this context that commentators, more objective than dogmatists on either side of the 'ideological divide', can engage in a conversation that, as Modi emphasised, is good for democracy and, indeed, for government. There are enough reasons to pat this government on its back as it completes three years since it took on its project. The reasons for such applause, like the applause itself, are all too visible. But there are issues that Modi and his team wish to hear honest feedback about and may not have had the opportunity to yet. Some may not be even 'music to the ears'. But it is exactly this plainspeak that the prime minister is asking for. Even as he walks his talk, he also wants to listen.