

India-its people and its leadership - is rising to the challenge of the moment

Article by **Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank** , The Indian Express, April 23, 2020



The country has demonstrated remarkable resolve under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In this time of crisis, the prime minister has had the unflinching support of 130-crore Indians.

The ultimate test of a person's character is not where they stand in times of comfort but how they respond to adversity. The challenge posed by COVID-19 could test the leadership qualities of people on a variety of fronts, ranging from the personal to the organisational.

In India, the entire government machinery has risen to the occasion — it stands tall in the collective fight against the virus, which has brought even global superpowers to their knees. The country has demonstrated remarkable resolve under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In this time of crisis, the prime minister has had the unflinching support of 130-crore Indians. It is a testimony to the PM's leadership skills that a country with so much diversity, and a federal structure of governance, has put up a united front against the pandemic. We have shown the world what "India first" means.

I recall the image of PM Modi – a leader who had received an overwhelming political mandate less than a year ago — appealing on national TV to the 130-crore people of India and pleading with them with folded hands to comply with social distancing norms and the proactive measures taken by the government to tackle the pandemic. This shows his strength of character, concern for the people of the country and faith in the nation's abilities. It takes a far-sighted leader to anticipate the onslaught of the pandemic and announce measures such as the "janata curfew", enforce a timely lockdown, and undertake capacity building exercises to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic.

As the prime minister of the world's largest democracy, Modi has gone an extra mile to help other nations. Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has conveyed his gratitude to PM Modi. Earlier, he had requested India for the drug, hydroxychloroquine, by invoking the Ramayana legend of Lord Hanuman bringing sanjeevani to Lakshman. The prime minister's outreach across

continents gives weight to the arguments that India has a crucial role in the changing global order.

The unequivocal compliance of the people to the prime minister's clarion call to observe the lockdown is a testament to his acceptability across the political, social and religious spectrum. His credo of "nation first" has brought a diverse range of people under one umbrella, which, in turn, has strengthened PM Modi's resolve to fight the pandemic. He has always given pre-eminence to the safety, health and welfare of the people of the country. All the states have followed the directives and advisories of the Centre in letter and spirit. Never in its history has India witnessed such a high degree of cooperative federalism. Moreover, after an appeal by Modi, people from all sections of society have made valuable contributions to the PM Cares Fund. It is indeed a humbling experience to see young and aspiring sportspersons auction their medals and trophies to contribute to this fight. Old men and women have donated their lifetime savings.

The crisis has also taught us some important lessons. The real heroes today are the corona warriors who are fighting to ensure that we stay safe, healthy and be with our families. The administrative machinery at all levels and police, health officials and social workers have been on their toes to ensure that we are safe and comfortable. Let us not forget to convey our gratitude to these heroes who work in unsafe environments.

I should also mention that as a Union minister, I closely monitored 20 districts in Rajasthan which also included Bhilwara, one of the worst-hit districts. During my daily interactions with the district administration and the other officials deployed to combat the pandemic, I found them one step ahead of the crisis in their planning and execution. The data shows that containing the outbreak was a herculean exercise. Around 3,900 survey teams were constituted, which surveyed 4.5-lakh houses, screened 23-lakh people, isolated 18,000 people and tested them in a span of just three weeks.

This could happen because everyone believed that fighting the pandemic is our national duty. There have been some ugly incidents as well. They are unfortunate and undesirable. We must take it as a challenge and support the administration and strengthen the PM in tackling this challenge. The pain and concern in his words and eyes are palpable. We must empathise with his sentiments and regard it our national duty rise to the occasion. Everything we do today will be seen from the prism of "nation first".

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