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**A deadly wave**

A virulent second wave of the coronavirus continues to play havoc with the lives of Indians, ravaging cities after cities and towns after towns. More than 15000 people perished in a matter of a week. The second most populous country on the earth also witnessed the largest number of coronavirus cases in a single day since the pandemic hit it last year.

India's health system seems to have been overwhelmed. We are witnessing heart-wrenching scenes of people lying on footpaths, main roads and corridors of the hospitals with their loved ones, desperately calling for help. Indian Prime Minister Modi has described the wave as the storm of the contagion but it seems that he did not make enough preparations to deal with the impending calamity.

The Indian prime minister has been accused of allocating a colossal amount for the construction of the parliament building and a jet for himself amidst the ravages of pandemic that has not only affected millions of Indians but has also deprived a significant population of the South Asian country of livelihood. Modi's election campaign in West Bengal also came under fire; it is believed to have contributed to the worsening situation as well. Many have accused him of being negligent and indifferent to the plight of the people. His critics have lambasted him for sacrificing the interests of the people to appease the corporate sector and Big Business.

A number of Modi’s detractors believe that the poor of the country were killed twice – first economically and then physically. When the contagion hit the country last year, millions of daily wagers and poor workers were left at the mercy of the given circumstances. The government announced an unplanned lockdown leaving such workers stranded, forcing them to walk hundreds of kilometres, in some cases even thousands of kilometres.

The botched attempts of the government to deal with the situation created immense hardships for the people living on the bottom layer of social stratification – but instead of mitigating their mysteries the government came up with a bailout package that largely benefited big companies and large businesses.

Even the impending spectre of death and destruction could not deter the Indian ruling elite from picking fights with Pakistan and China, spending billions of dollars on the non-productive sector of the economy. When the leaders of right-wing Hindu parties were busy hurling threats against their sworn enemies Pakistan and China, the biggest foe of the Indian people was rearing its monstrous head but India's nationalist leaders were not interested in addressing the issue by taking drastic steps to improve the faltering health system. Instead they were making efforts to hobnob with giant armament companies in a bid to secure more lethal weapons and military hardware which could hardly help save the lives of tens of thousands of people who perished during the pandemic, and there seems to be no respite from this existential threat.

The situation in India has also exposed the hypocrisy of the advanced capitalist countries that had been importing vaccines from the South Asian country but did not come up with the required help that could have gone some way in preventing the disastrous situation that has emerged over the past month or so. It is also surprising as to why the Indian ruling did not store enough vaccines for its own population despite being the hub of vaccine production in the world.

Indian leaders could have used the logic of the Western political elite that secured orders for its own population, forcing companies to prefer the states where the production was taking place. India is the world’s largest producer of the vaccine and it should have had at least enough vaccines that could have prevented deaths on a large scale. But since the Indian ruling elite was more interested in serving international corporate interests than making efforts to mitigate the hardships of its own population, it did not set any such condition in an effective way. Though it is now trying to secure a substantial number of vaccines, such belated actions cannot undo the harm that has already affected millions of people.

In this situation, a lot of Pakistanis have demonstrated magnanimity of character. Despite the anti-Indian feelings that have been fanned here by clerics and right-wing organizations, we saw many Pakistanis express sympathy with their Indian brothers. The Edhi Foundation offered its services to India. The government also sent a good gesture by offering help and succour. Even the religious leaders of Pakistan showed solidarity with the people of India praying for their health and welfare. This augurs well amidst the storm of hatred and war-mongering.

The pandemic made it very clear that it is not political hostilities that pose an existential threat to humankind but disease, natural calamities, environmental degradation and our indifference to human development indicators. In recent years, India left the UK behind in military spending, emerging as the fourth largest country that heavily invested in this non-productive sector of economy that rarely benefits the common people of any country.

The South Asian country is also one of the biggest powers in conventional warfare but, while the UK has vaccinated a large number of its population, India's percentage in terms of its population is insignificant. The ruling elite sitting in the power corridors of New Delhi first demonstrated indifference towards the plight of the people and later turned to complacency to appease large businesses.

Superstitious Hindu leaders also complicated the situation. Instead of asking the government to take prompt actions to deal with the impending threat, they came up with bizarre solutions to battle the pandemic. The decision of the government to allow religious gatherings also proved to be catastrophic but unfortunately it is the common Indian who is facing the brunt of such government decisions.

The way the Indian state of Kerala dealt with the coronavirus indicates that India's people have the capacity to defeat this natural catastrophe but it has been very unfortunate that those who try to invest in human development are challenged by the corporate elite of the Southeast Asian country.

Kerala is believed to have one of the best human development indicators in India. Some estimates suggest that it is the most literate state of the largest democracy. Its health system is far better than that in other parts of the country. The Indian ruling elite and its subservient corporate media are rabidly anti-China. So they would never try to learn anything from that country. They do not have any positive opinion about communist Cuba which has also defeated the pandemic. So there is no question of learning anything from the tiny Island country that enjoys one of the best human development indicators in Latin America.

But Kerala is part of India. Modi and his tedious acolytes may have political differences with the people that are running the government in the southern Indian state but they could still learn from them the policies that helped the communist government tide over the crisis. The state is also ready to offer a helping hand. It is time India's political elite accepted this and also agreed to take assistance from every country that could help the Indian people during these testing times. Recalcitrance on the part of India's ultra-nationalist Hindu leaders will only add to the woes of the Indian people who are groaning under the mighty tentacles of coronavirus.

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