

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE
Member of Parliament
Leader of Opposition
(Rajya Sabha)



43, Parliament House,
New Delhi-110 001
Tel.: (011) 23016707, 23034883
Fax : 23793433

9th May 2021.

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the people of India, I write to convey deep concern and sense of anguish regarding the unprecedented crisis the nation faces today. It is heartbreaking to witness millions of ordinary Indians scrambling to access basic healthcare, oxygen, medicines, ventilators, hospital beds and even crematoriums and cemeteries. Ordinary Indians are selling their land, jewellery and expending their savings to ensure treatment for their loved ones. And despite all this, people are dying in hospitals, on roads and in the safety of their own homes. Crematoriums and cemeteries are choked while parks are being repurposed as cremation grounds.

Amidst this national crisis, it is truly heartening to see that we have come together as a people, irrespective of creed, caste or region. Many state governments, opposition parties, doctors/nurses/allied health care organisations, civil society and citizen groups have taken up the mantle and are working collectively on the front-lines in this extraordinary national battle against COVID-19. Unlike those sunshine patriots who are ignoring the situation or obfuscating the truth or apportioning blame or communalising the situation, all these conscientious organisations and people are working collectively in the national interest. One of the reasons they are compelled to do so is because the union government seems to have abdicated its duties towards the people.

Sir, because the situation we face today requires a collective and consensual effort, I write to humbly submit the following suggestions for you to urgently consider:

1. I request you to convene an all party meeting to collectively forge a holistic blueprint to tackle the pandemic. This would be a good opportunity for us to meaningfully reflect on, and implement the recommendations of experts and activists, whose advice has unfortunately been ignored so far. It would also be expedient to pay heed to the constructive suggestions made by former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Congress President Smt. Sonia Gandhi, Shri Rahul Gandhi, and opposition parties. Sir, it is critical that the union government shed its antipathy to expertise and experience, and seek help.

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE

Member of Parliament
Leader of Opposition
(Rajya Sabha)



43, Parliament House,
New Delhi-110 001
Tel.: (011) 23016707, 23034883
Fax : 23793433

2. Parliament had allocated Rs. 35,000 crores in the union budget to ensure free vaccines for all. Despite this, the union government has allowed private companies to set exorbitant and differential prices for vaccines, and outsourced the procurement of vaccines to already stretched state governments. This will adversely impact millions of Indians. Sir, corporate profit cannot triumph saving lives. I therefore urge you to not relinquish the State's moral duty in immunising citizens. This is completely doable because India has a history of successful, large-scale immunisation programmes.
3. Our priority must also be to boost vaccine production so we can successfully inoculate the 595 million Indians between 18-44 who became eligible on May 01, 2021. To do this, the union government must leverage the compulsory licensing provision and task India's seven world-class public sector health institutes and other firms in the private sector to aid in vaccine manufacturing.
4. On humanitarian grounds, it is imperative that the union government also waive taxes on life saving products. Towards this end, I urge you to waive GST on vaccines (set at 5%), on purchase of ambulances (set at 28%), on Protective Personal Equipment (set at 05% if below Rs. 1000, and 12% if above Rs. 1000), on sanitisers (set at 18%), on ventilators (set at 12%) and oxygen (set at 12%). The union government must not be earning monies from the plight of our people.
5. Dozens of nations and the Indian diaspora have sent ventilators, oxygen and medicines to India during this difficult time. However, tedious red-tape, lack of transparency and partisan allocations have muddied these efforts. While a Standard Operating Procedure has been belatedly created, the union government must proactively disburse relief material, allocate it fairly to all states (irrespective of which party is in office) and proactively disclose when, and where relief material is shipped.
6. A number of Indians who had come to cities for opportunities have now migrated back to villages. It is therefore essential for the union government to enhance the number of work days under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MG-NREGA) to a minimum of 200 days (which it had earlier reduced to 100 days), raise the wage rate, and shoulder the bigger burden of this enhanced allocation. It is incumbent on the union government to do so as states are severely stretched since they have to shoulder the financial, and functional responsibility of combating the Covid-19 pandemic.

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE

**Member of Parliament
Leader of Opposition
(Rajya Sabha)**



43, Parliament House,
New Delhi-110 001
Tel.: (011) 23016707, 23034883
Fax : 23793433

- 3 -

7. Finally, over the past 70 years, India has built up a robust healthcare system consisting of hospitals, Community Health Care Centres, Primary Healthcare Centres, clinics, pharmaceutical companies, laboratories, and testing facilities. India also boasts of some of the world's best scientists, doctors, nurses, allied healthcare staff and has a vast network of community health workers. India undoubtedly has the bandwidth and the resources to effectively combat the pandemic. However, to do so, the union government must leverage our collective strengths by governing consensually and inclusively. It is impossible to tackle a crisis of this magnitude through the Prime Minister's Office alone.

Sir, most nations planned in advance, prioritised their respective people and put in place contingencies for the anticipated second and third waves of the COVID-pandemic. Experts have warned us that although the situation is dire, it can become far worse if leadership is not immediately exercised. So, for the well being of our people and in the national interest, I urge you to consider the suggestions outlined in this letter sensitively and urgently.

With Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



(Mallikarjun Kharge)

Shri Narendra Modi ji,
Hon'ble Prime Minister of India,
New Delhi.