

STATEMENT OF DR. HARSH VARDHAN, HON'BLE HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE MINISTER, REPUBLIC OF INDIA ON THE OPENING ADDRESS OF DR. TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS, DIRECTOR GENERAL, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION DURING 73RD WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY (DE MINIMIS) ON 18TH MAY, 2020

Her Excellency Ms. Keva Bain, President of the World Health Assembly, Dr. Tedros, Director General of WHO & Excellencies,

At the very outset, I wish to express my deepest condolences at the loss of lives across the world due to COVID 19. I also take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude for the efforts of those who are in the frontline of this battle.

We, in India, undertook the COVID 19 challenge with the highest level of political commitment. Our Hon'ble Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, personally monitored the situation and ensured a pre-emptive, pro-active and graded response leaving no stones unturned to contain the deadly virus from spreading.

India took all necessary steps well in time, including surveillance at points of entry, evacuation of nationals stranded overseas, massive community surveillance through robust disease surveillance network, strengthening of health infrastructure, capacity building of over two million frontline Human Resources, risk communication and community involvement. I think we did our best and we did well. We are learning and we are confident of doing better in the months to come.

Excellencies, today there are compelling circumstances that have forced us all to meet virtually. The 73rd WHA is the first ever virtual health assembly. It is unprecedented but it's also perhaps the most important one ever. Because as we sit

and discuss here the pandemic continues to kill thousands of people and also causing a deep global recession.

This is the time when humankind must come together. Today, I urge upon all Governments, industry and philanthropy to prioritise the long term and pool their resources, to ensure everyone benefits.

On our part, India is playing a key role in fostering bilateral and regional partnerships. Under our Prime Minister's able leadership, India has supplied essential medicines to 123 nations as an expression of solidarity.

Therapeutics, diagnostics and vaccines for the whole world is the only way out of this pandemic. Global collaboration is paramount. Governments, industry and philanthropy must pool resources to pay for the risk, the research, manufacturing and distribution, but with the condition that the rewards should be available to everyone, regardless of where they have been developed.

Today, in the two-day deliberations, we should share our learnings from how each one of us has tackled this catastrophe since January ... how we can support the financial or technical gaps that some of our member states may have ... and agree to continue R&D in an aggressive and collaborative way.

In congratulating all those who are striving to save humanity, we welcome efforts to make all International Institutions more reflective of 21st Century realities. India will always stand with such efforts to foster meaningful and broad-based change.

I close my speech today with a loud applause for all those across the world who are in the forefront of this battle against a deadly virus.

I stand here to honour the doctors, the nurses, the paramedics, the scientists, the journalists, the delivery boys and the sanitation staff the forgotten roles who are today playing 'superhumans'. They are our real heroes.

Many thanks for the opportunity to speak before this august gathering.