

PROUD STATESMAN

PM provides 'healing touch' during his visit to J&K

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent address in Srinagar has quietened his critics and naysayers. Attacked in the past for having an 'alliance of convenience' with Mehbooba Mufti's People's Democratic Party (PDP), and being uncaring of the sentiments of the people in the Valley, the PM removed all these apprehensions from the people's minds. Not only did he warm the hearts of the audience as he attempted to speak in Kashmiri at the beginning and the end of his speech, but the warmth between him and PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti was clear to see. In her welcome address, CM Mufti thanked PM Modi for supporting her efforts to bring about a ceasefire in the state during Ramzan and stated that she knew it was a 'difficult decision' for any Central government to make. Praising the PM for his 'magnanimity', she added that such decisions were possible if the Centre showed adequate 'will and determination'. Apart from assuring allies, the PM's visit and address to the people living in the Valley was especially important, given that in recent times, relations had reached a boiling point. Violence was especially marked during Ramzan last year in June, with over 42 people killed — of which 27 were terrorists and six were civilians. It was not just the number of people killed, but the sheer anger that left everyone alarmed, with a police officer being brutally lynched in front of Srinagar's Jamia mosque at the time. Kashmir desperately needed a 'healing touch' and the PM has provided it, that too, during one of the holiest months of Islam. By addressing Kashmiris during this time, the PM ended another misconception that he was a 'Hindu' leader. Criticised in the past for his perceived 'silence' on attacks on Muslims, the PM proved by being here that this simply was not the case. His inauguration of the 330 MW Kishanganga Hydro Power project, located close to the Line of Control (LoC), has caused much anger in Islamabad, as they feel it violates the Indus water treaty, but will gladden the hearts of the people in the Valley who will now benefit from the PM's development agenda. That is not all. The PM flagging off the construction of the 14-kilometre-long Zojila tunnel — the longest road tunnel in India and Asia's longest bidirectional tunnel, which will now connect Srinagar, Kargil and Leh, will be a boon for Kashmiris as currently connectivity within the state is poor and gets worse during adverse weather conditions. By showing such concrete plans for development, by showing Muslims in Kashmir and the rest of India that he was with them too, and by showing Kashmiris that he was prepared to take the first step towards easing violence — through the ceasefire — the PM has not only made a statesman-like gesture, but has shown keen political acumen. By announcing a ceasefire on the security forces side, he has now placed the onus (for peace) on the other side. If violence now breaks out, Kashmiris will be able to see that it has been carried out by terrorist groups. Already, the LeT and other terrorist groups based in Pakistan have shown no interest in reciprocating the call for a ceasefire. But the PM will be hoping that their refusal will send a hard message to Kashmiris. The PM will be hoping that Kashmiris will realise that these terrorists are willing to kill them in their holy month. Let's hope it's a message that sinks home.