

## **“Vaccine Maitri”: India’s Global Vaccine Initiative sets a New Diplomatic Benchmark**

### **India’s diplomatic outreach during “Crisis of Confidence”**

The World Health Organisation proclaimed COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11th March and urged countries across the globe to take immediate action against this public health crisis. As an emerging responsible power, India not only managed the crisis domestically but also reached to people globally when there was crisis of confidence in the international arena. India firmly stick to the principle of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ (the world is one family) and emerged as a major supplier of medicines and other health equipment to different countries worldwide in the fight against COVID-19.

In order to combat COVID-19 in the Indian subcontinent, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had proposed to create a COVID-19 Emergency Fund based on voluntary contributions from all the SAARC member countries so that the fund can be used by any of the partner countries to meet the cost of immediate actions. India also contributed 10,000,000USD towards that fund. It extended help to other developing nations and significant strategic partners with supplies of hydroxychloroquine, Remdesivir and paracetamol tablets, as well as diagnostic kits, ventilators, masks, gloves and other medical supplies during the COVID19 pandemic. India had provided 5 million HCQ tablets to the countries in the neighbourhood, IOR, LAC countries and 19 African countries, Eurasia and WANA regions. India has further provided training to several neighbouring countries to enhance and strengthen their clinical capabilities, under the Partnerships for Accelerating Clinical Trials (PACT) programme. Separately, several training courses have been organized for healthcare workers and administrators of partner countries under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, sharing our experience in dealing with the pandemic.

The Indian government had also promptly responded to requests to deploy Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) comprising doctors, nurses and paramedics in USA, Russia, Spain, the UK, Brazil, Jordan, Egypt, and partner nations of SAARC, BIMSTEC (The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), GCC, Latin America and Africa.

### **Vaccine Maitri**

Traditionally, India is known as ‘Global hub of vaccines’ for its mass vaccine production and delivery capacity. Accordingly, when the COVID-19 Immunization programme began in January 2021 in a phased manner in India, the country was also ensured to supply COVID-19 vaccines to the partner nations. Under the flagship of ‘Vaccine Maitri’, India’s vaccine distribution mission to the neighbouring countries began on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.

The name of recipient countries and number of doses are explained below,

<b>Region</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Total Doses</b>
South Asia	Nepal	10 lakhs
	Bhutan	1.5 lakhs
	Bangladesh	20 lakhs
	Sri Lanka	5 lakhs
	Myanmar	17 lakhs
	Afghanistan	5 lakhs
	Maldives	2 lakh
West Asia	Bahrain	1 lakh
	Kuwait	2 lakhs
	Oman	1 lakh
CARICOM countries	Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, and Dominica.	5 lakhs
Pacific Islands	Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Vanuatu.	2 lakhs
Africa	Seychelles	50,000
	Mauritius	1 lakh
	Ghana	50,000

In launching its own vaccine diplomacy programme, ‘Vaccine Maitri’ or ‘Vaccine Friendship’, the Indian government has committed to supply 10 million doses to countries around the globe. Separately, it has also proposed to supply 200 million doses to the Covax initiative started by the United Nations Security Council. This is in parallel with its own target of vaccinating 300 million persons by July 2021.

### **India’s Neighbourhood First Policy**

India reached out to its neighbours during the current pandemic in consonance with the P.M Narendra Modi’s ‘Neighbourhood First Policy’. Not only did India support its neighbour by providing medical, logistical and financial assistance but India has also evacuated citizens of neighbouring countries stranded due to Covid-19 in different parts of the world and continues to repatriate thousands of Indians across the globe under “Operation Vande Bharat”. Recently, Bhutan and Maldives became the first two countries to receive vaccines respectively, followed by Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Seychelles, and Mauritius. The

two million doses gifted by India to Bangladesh were the single largest consignment of vaccines provided by India to any country thus far, prompting the Bangladesh Health minister to comment that India had stood by his country during the Liberation War of 1971 as well as during the pandemic. India's vaccine assistance reached Nepal within a week of a request made by Nepalese Foreign Minister during his visit to New Delhi on January 15, 2021. India's gesture to Nepal was warmly welcomed by leader including P.M Oli.

### **Reaching out to the strategic partners**

Apart from countries in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood, Brazil and Morocco, who have been close strategic partners, also got 2 million doses each on January 22. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro thanked PM Modi for sending the vaccine supplies and compared the gesture by mentioning about Lord Hanuman bringing the holy 'Sanjeevani'. The US State Department, the WHO, Bill Gates and several others have appreciated India's gesture. Consignment of Indian-made vaccines arrived in other parts of the world like Kuwait, Bahrain, Barbados, South Africa, Oman, CARICOM countries, Nicaragua, Pacific Island states as gifts. India further plans to supply one crore or ten million vaccine doses to Africa and ten lakh to United Nations health workers under GAVI's (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation) COVAX facility.

### **Conclusion**

India produces 60 per cent of all vaccines manufactured across the globe. Tedros Adhanom, the director general of the WHO was anxious about the fact that the developed countries monopolised the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for their own populations which will adversely impact the developing countries. Low-cost and easily storable Covishield vaccine is the need of the hour and India is all set to be at the forefront of supplying affordable shots against COVID-19 globally. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recently appreciated India for its effort to supply COVID-19 doses to countries around the world. As a conclusion it can be stated that in the rapidly sprouting global geo-political scenario, such a supportive diplomatic initiative by India will have a huge impact in promoting strategic peace and security and cooperation among nations in the world.