

Saudi Arabia will receive Covishield vaccine supply: Harsh Vardhan

By TIOL News Service

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Minister Mr Harsh Vardhan on Wednesday said that Saudi Arabia will receive the Serum Institute of India (SII)-produced Covishield vaccines that were developed by Oxford AstraZeneca.

Talking about the country's vaccination drive at the online Future Investment Initiative, Mr Vardhan said there are more vaccines on their way to being introduced in India.

The purpose of the forum, hosted by Saudi Arabia, was to find solutions on how business and government can expand access to healthcare, train healthcare workers, remove regulatory barriers and encourage investment in advanced health technologies.

"Mankind will only remember one thing from the year 2020 that is the deadly virus that created devastation across the world. But at the same time, it will also be remembered how science and healthcare sectors came to the rescue in a record time," the Health Minister said, lauding the world's welfare system.

He highlighted the five big trends that emerged during the pandemic and influenced global business, namely the impact of technology and innovation, importance of infrastructure, changes in human resource and future of work, compassion for the environment, and business-friendly governance.

"The lesson to humankind is very clear that health is more important than anything else. We never earlier realised how global cooperation is important for all of us. So, we must realise that the rewards must be distributed everywhere, regardless of when it is developed," he said, talking about how amid heightened nationalism, global cooperation was also at the forefront.

On India's indigenous innovations and contributions in digital health tools to monitor COVID management, Mr Vardhan noted the **'Aarogya Setu'** application for smartphones which uses bluetooth tracing technology to analyse and find infection hotspots and alert the local administration in advance under the **ITIHAS** +AS patch.

Another impact of the pandemic has been the rapid expansion of innovation in healthcare through telemedicine and health start-ups.

"We have also tried at many levels to strengthen this culture through start-up challenges or hackathons for the youth, where they experience innovation themselves. Today, a comprehensive eco-system from research and development to tech-entrepreneurship is being prepared in India," he said.

Summing up India's efforts in strengthening of infrastructure for global growth, the Health Minister stated, that India rolled out a special economic and comprehensive package of Rs. 2 million crore which is equivalent to 10 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) under the **Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan** and in the health sector.

The fund is targeted towards increased investments in public health and health reforms to prepare India for future obstacles.

Expanding on the scope of this economic package on public health, he said,

"Duly monitoring the evolving situation, India will roll out a sustained and planned investment in public healthcare delivery system to develop and strengthen health systems across a continuum of care to meet challenges of current and future pandemics."

Mr Vardhan also elaborated on India's roll out the world's largest vaccination campaign on January 16 with two 'Made in India' vaccines and informed that SII will supply Covishield to Saudi Arabia.

He assured the forum of India's faster progress in improving not only ease of doing business but also ease of living, as it continues its upward trajectory.