



## India's Vaccine Diplomacy

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### Why in News

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India has decided to ship out doses of the **novel coronavirus vaccine to 'neighbouring and key partner countries'**.

The first batches of vaccine have been **already delivered to Bhutan and Maldives** by special planes as a **grant or gift**.

### India's Coronavirus Vaccines

- Recently, the **Drug Controller General of India (DCGI)** granted the approval for two vaccines - **COVISHIELD** by Serum Institute of India and **COVAXIN** by Bharat Biotech.
  - **COVISHIELD**: It is the name given to an **Oxford-AstraZeneca** Covid-19 vaccine which is technically referred to as **AZD1222** or **ChAdOx 1 nCoV-19**.
  - **COVAXIN**: It is **India's only indigenous Covid-19 vaccine**. This vaccine has been found to be safe and no major side effects are expected.
- Of the two vaccines, **COVAXIN** is an **inactivated vaccine** whereas **COVISHIELD** is a **live vaccine**.

### Key Points

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- **Vaccine Diplomacy:**

- **Meaning:** Vaccine diplomacy is the **branch of global health diplomacy** in which a nation uses the development or delivery of vaccines to strengthen ties with other nations.
- **Collaborative Effort:** It also includes the joint development of life-saving vaccines and related technologies, with the major actors typically **scientists coming together to work irrespective of the kind of diplomatic relationship** between the participating countries.
- **Benefit for India:** It could provide innovative opportunities to promote India's foreign policy and diplomatic relations between nations in its neighbourhood and across the globe.
  - India had **earlier supplied** hydroxychloroquine, Remdesivir and paracetamol tablets, as well as diagnostic kits, ventilators, masks, gloves and other medical supplies to a large number of countries to help them deal with the pandemic.
  - India has also **carried out capacity building and training workshops** for neighbouring countries.

- **India's Vaccine Diplomacy Plan:**

- Shipments have begun arriving in the **Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Myanmar and the Seychelles** are next in line to get consignments.
- In cases of **Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius**, India is awaiting their confirmation of necessary regulatory clearances.
- The **only exception to India's regional vaccine diplomacy would be Pakistan**, which has cleared the AstraZeneca vaccine for use, but has neither requested nor discussed any doses from India yet.

- **Importance of India's Vaccine Diplomacy:**

- **Strategic:**

- **Earning long term goodwill:** By financing shipments from India's assistance programmes for cash-strapped neighbouring countries desperately needing such assistance, India shall earn the long-term goodwill of its immediate neighbours and across Indian ocean countries

It is in line with **India's neighborhood first initiative**.

- **Advantage over Chinese:** China recently offered its vaccines to Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as it held a **multilateral dialogue** with the four countries and Pakistan on anti-epidemic prevention.

Early shipment from India in these countries could help counter China's vaccine and mask diplomacy in its neighbourhood.

- **Leverage over western countries:** While the affluent western world, notably the US and Europe, are focused almost exclusively on their own problems, India is being appreciated for helping its neighbours and developing countries, who could not afford US and European vaccines.

- **Economic:**

- **Make India global supply centre:** Beyond India's immediate neighbours, South Korea, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and South Africa have all shown inclinations to purchase vaccines from India which is estimated to be 60% of the global supply of inoculants.

- **Boost Pharma Manufacturing in India:** India can become the pharmacy of the world. If Indian vaccines help developing countries to meet their urgent needs, they can become the future long term destination for market expansion of Indian pharmas.

- **Help in reviving the economy:** If India becomes the manufacturing hub to corona vaccines across the world, it shall give a boost to the GDP of India.

- **Rescue from cold war over vaccine:**

The **US-China cold war** has been accused of making distribution of vaccines "political football", which caused the inordinate delay in commencing the inoculation programmes by **WHO**. Thus, early shipment of vaccines by India is seen as a rescue from this bipolar tussle.

- **Earning moral right:**

India's vaccine distribution comes at a time when WHO director-General has criticised moral corruption of drug manufacturers from rich countries for delaying distribution of vaccines and targeting shipments to rich countries only. This could help India have a moral right to have **greater say in international forums**.

- **Disrupts vaccine nationalism:**
  - Vaccine Nationalism is the mechanism through which a country manages to secure doses of vaccines for its own citizens or residents and prioritises its own domestic markets before they are made available in other countries through **pre-purchase agreements** with a vaccine manufacturer.
  - The major drawback of vaccine nationalism is that it puts countries with fewer resources and bargaining power at a disadvantage. India's intervention by making vaccines available to needy countries disrupted the vaccine nationalism.
- **Facilitating global collaboration:**

India vaccines supply could cater greatly to the global collaboration which is being done through the **WHO-backed COVAX Facility mechanism**.

## Way Forward

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**India needs to balance its domestic needs with diplomatic commitments. The vaccination drive in India commenced in January, 2021 is going to be the **World's Largest Vaccination Program**. India has the challenge that while it distributes the vaccine to the world, it should ensure the much needed vaccine supply to those in India who cannot afford it.**

**Source:TH**