

## Dr Harsh Vardhan virtually addresses World Bank- IMF annual meeting 2020

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"The pandemic has taught us that preparedness costs only a fraction of its impact, but returns on the investment are exponential"

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Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare virtually addressed the World Bank- IMF annual meeting, here today. The theme of the meeting was “*Unleashing the South Asian Century through Human Capital for All*” and “*Investing in Covid-19 Vaccines and Primary Healthcare Delivery System*”.

Emphasizing India’s role during the pandemic, Dr Harsh Vardhan said, “The inclusiveness of India’s response has led us to manage the pandemic currently. The COVID pandemic has created disruption in the normal life but has also provided a steep learning curve for all of us to be more resilient and prepared for the future. These efforts have been a result of commitment from all stakeholders.” India has been following a pre-emptive, proactive, and graded response characterised by a “*Whole of Society, Whole of Government*” approach to manage the challenges posed by the global pandemic, he added.

Lauding the support of private sector in India’s COVID-19 management, he stated, "Innovation, ability and agility of the private sector has supported the efforts to fight COVID in a big way. PPEs, N95 masks, Oxygen, ventilators and diagnostic tests kits were developed at a jet pace to ensure self-sufficiency. Medical infrastructure saw an exponential growth, from having one lab in March, 2020 to around 2000 laboratories as on date with nearly half of the labs from the private sector. The same is true for dedicated ICU facilities and isolation centers".

Dr Harsh Vardhan stated that due to the unprecedented challenges faced by the world on account of the pandemic, India is making use of Information Technology in virtually every aspect of COVID management- AarogyaSetu app and ITIHAS, a cellular based tracking technology has been used for surveillance and identification of potential clusters, RT-PCR app for testing, facility app for managing information on admitted patients, all integrated with a single COVID portal.

He further added, “AarogyaSetu App is presently being used by more than 170 million Indians making it one of the most downloaded app in the world. A web-based tele-consultation service is initiated to enable non-COVID19 healthcare services. So far, more than 0.60 million tele-consultations have been conducted and more people are getting on-boarded.”

The Union Health Minister spoke at length about India’s preparedness to deal with pandemics and commitment to ensure affordable healthcare delivery to all. He said, “We rolled out a special economic and

comprehensive package of 272 US Billion Dollars - equivalent to 10% of India's GDP under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan (Self Reliance India Programme) which includes a component of increasing investments in public health and health reforms to prepare India for future pandemics."

The Union Health Minister pointed out that the present research agenda for COVID19 has been to provide an affordable vaccine as well as to ensure its equitable distribution. Currently, three Indian pharma companies in partnership with foreign/domestic research institutes are expediting the trials of vaccine.

He further added, "The biggest benefit that India has is the fact that we already have a robust immunization program in place. We are currently implementing the largest immunization program of the world, with nearly 27 million new-borns targeted for immunization annually. We have an established infrastructure for supply, storage and delivery of vaccines to the last mile, under our Universal Immunization Program, where we are administering around 600 million doses to children every year. We have the successful experience of having eliminated Poliomyelitis, and recently conducted the World's largest Measles-Rubella Campaign covering 330 million children." "The strength of these experiences in the vaccination landscape, our best practices and the robustness of our Health delivery System will be leveraged and augmented using a strong IT backbone, to ensure that this humongous national mission of vaccinating the identified priority groups with COVID-19 vaccine is achieved in a timely manner. The Indian government will leverage an integrated IT platform e-Vin (electronic Vaccine Intelligent Network) for managing vaccine distribution".

Dr Harsh Vardhan re-affirmed the commitment of the Indian Government and assured that the government has accorded top most priority to the research and manufacturing to ensure that the vaccine reaches to the last person. He said, "Under the leadership of our Hon'ble Prime Minister, we have constituted a National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration which is working on all aspects, as well as designing innovative approaches to distribute vaccines in rural and remote regions. The India story has always been very inspiring as we have made huge strides in improving the health of our people in the last two decades. And now, India's will be critical to fighting COVID-19 especially when it comes to making vaccines at large scale for the whole world."

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