



Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

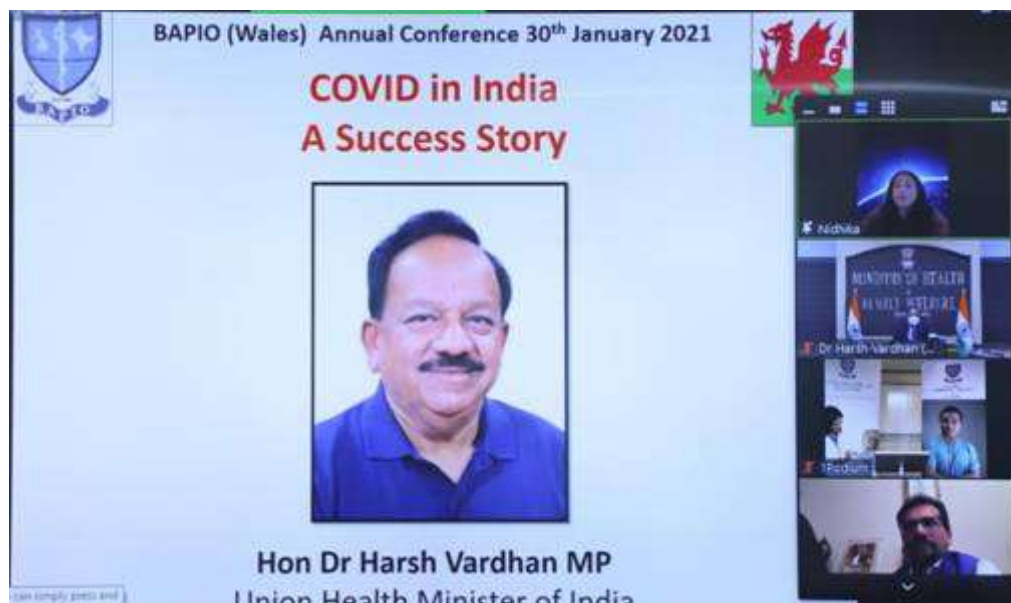
Dr. Harsh Vardhan addresses the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO) Wales Annual Conference on India's success in battling COVID-19

“Starting with the self-imposed ‘Janata Curfew’ by the People on themselves, the ‘Whole of Society’ approach has made the difference”

“India has given a befitting reply to the Prejudice of Naysayers”

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Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare addressed the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO) Wales at their Annual Conference digitally from Nirman Bhawan yesternight. His talk was titled “COVID in India- A success story”.



At the outset, Dr. Harsh Vardhan reminisced about the one-year fight undertaken by India since the beginning of COVID-19 Pandemic. He said, “COVID-19 pandemic broke out in December 2019 & spread across the world. With the ‘whole of government’ and ‘whole of society’ approach, we were able

to fight the pandemic, much better than other countries. India was the first country to respond within an hour when WHO declared it as a pandemic. Planning started on 8th of January; guidelines for whole country were drafted by 17th; Massive surveillance started on the same day with meticulous contact tracing unparalleled in the world. India was also one of the first countries to isolate the virus. With a focus on health infrastructure, we increased the lab facilities to 2,362 today from the sole lab at NIV; made provisions for more than 19 lakh beds at more than 15,000 facilities serving people at different tiers based on their severity of COVID; 12,000 quarantine centers were also built for easy isolation. The country took the bold decision to being Aatma-Nirbar with ramping up of manufacturing of PPE to 5 lakh kits per day. We also created bio-repositories while genome sequencing has also started 6 months back.”

“The 22nd of March saw people paying heed to the call of the PM for Janata curfew and self-imposed it to protect themselves, their family and the entire society from the virus. This ‘whole of society’ approach has made the crucial difference behind the highest recovery rate of the world.” He also detailed how the government eased the pain of the vulnerable sections ensuring that they manage to get food and every other basic need for next 6 to 7 months as well as the provisions that were made for sending back migrant labourers to their native place via special trains.



Emphasizing how each and every component of the government acted in sync to control the pandemic, Dr Harsh Vardhan noted, “With all the efforts, it was important to teach COVID appropriate behaviour, for which our PM personally addressed nation 8 to 9 times. Caller tune was set to inform COVID appropriate behaviour; the Aarogya Setu app gave warning of nearby affected people; around 160 million people downloaded it.”

He also brought the incessant prejudice faced by the country into limelight; Many naysayers linked to top universities predicted doom for the country with the prediction of 300 to 400 million cases and a death toll of around 6 million. India’s total cases in contrast stand at 10.7 million (with 10.4 million already recovered), the active caseload a mere 1.58% of total cases, the recovery rate touching 97% while fatality rate of 1.44% remains lowest in the world.



Dr. Harsh Vardhan shared his deep gratitude to the scientific community for their immeasurable contribution in developing and testing the Vaccine: “All our scientist rose to the occasion and engaged tirelessly in developing vaccine. The unique digital platform- Co-WIN (Winning over COVID) was developed to support the vaccination activity with real time information ensuring that the vaccine is given to the right people at the right time. Among the many vaccines under various phases of development in the country, two vaccines were granted Emergency Use Authorization by the Indian regulators in January 2021.” “India being one of the largest global suppliers of vaccines- producing nearly 60 per cent of the world’s vaccines successfully ramped up production to cover its healthcare workers and simultaneously export the vaccine globally. India will soon start vaccinating the frontline workers as well,” he added. Explaining the strategic COVID-19 Communication Strategy for vaccination and Communications and establishment of National Media Rapid Response cell, Dr. Harsh Vardhan stated, “The COVID-19 Communication Strategy for vaccination was prepared focusing on building vaccine confidence through clear, consistent and transparent messaging and emphasized on providing correct information on COVID-19 vaccines, addressing vaccine hesitancy and vaccine eagerness and promoting COVID appropriate behavior. A National Media Rapid Response cell was established at MoHFW, FAQs for general public and healthcare & frontline workers were developed & uploaded on MoHFW website; media channels, radio jockeys, producers & programming Heads, regional PIB Heads were oriented on COVID-19 vaccination. The COVID-19 vaccination drive, the world’s largest vaccination drive so far, was finally launched by the Prime Minister on 16th January 2021. The Day 1 witnessed vaccination of the highest number of beneficiaries covered anywhere in the world on the first day. 35,00,027 Health Care Workers have been vaccinated across more than 68,000 sessions.”

Dr. Harsh Vardhan also spoke about the co-ordination of this exercise; All states/UTs were provided guidance on establishing governance and monitoring mechanism through State Steering Committee, State Task Force, District Task Force, Block/Urban Task Force to this effect. Ministries/Departments, professional bodies, medical colleges, NGOs, CSOs, media houses, private sector, youth & women network were involved in the rollout as a Jan Bhagidari Andolan in tune with the ‘whole of society’ approach.

Expanding on the whole gamut of breakthroughs achieved by India during its tryst with COVID like the eSanjeevani telemedicine project and the ambitious National Digital Health Mission, Dr. Harsh Vardhan within the constraints of time explained how they fit with the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi’s vision of New India on the 75th year of independence. The call to build a New India resonated with the audience who have their roots in India. The organizers vowed to invite Dr. Harsh Vardhan physically once the pandemic is over to study these transformative policies in great detail.

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