



Domestic Vaccines Boost Chinese Society's Confidence in Local Pharma



Indonesia has praised China for its vaccines. So far, almost all glowing praise for Chinese vaccines has come from foreign governments. China itself has been cautious in its stance, and the approval of Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccines is conditional. This serious attitude and good results recognized by foreign countries boost the reputation of China's vaccines.

India has also approved a domestic developed vaccine with Prime Minister of Narendra Modi eulogizing that the "approval to vaccines...accelerates the road to a healthier and COVID-free nation." US President Donald Trump has also previously been generous in his praise of Pfizer's vaccines. By contrast, China is a country that doesn't brag about itself but lets the real results, the data, and public praise from different countries tell the story.

In the global COVID-19 vaccine "race," several vaccines from China have performed well. The names of Sinopharm and SinoVac have quickly become well-known among ordinary Chinese. This has boosted the reputation of the whole Chinese biopharmaceutical industry.

In previous years, problems with Chinese medicine, including vaccines, have led to a public distrust of domestic pharmaceuticals and a growing superstition about imported medicines. In fact, if these problems are examined closely, people will see the vast majority of them are not the result of technical incompetence. They are the result of defaults in the management systems of the industry. Such problems can be overcome with determination of improving management.

Large-scale phase-3 clinical trials of China-made vaccines have been carried out in quite some countries. The vaccines have withstood the tests. The trials were carried out independently and the results show far higher efficacy rate than the standard proposed by the World Health Organization. In addition, none of these vaccines have resulted in serious adverse reactions, demonstrating their full reliability. In fact, according to overseas media reports, more than 10 countries have ordered China-made vaccines so far.

I have a hunch that the public's acceptance of domestic COVID-19 vaccines will have a chain reaction effect. Perhaps this will become a turning point and thus change attitudes of Chinese people toward domestically produced drugs. Of course, this will require further efforts by China's biopharmaceutical industry to consolidate the reputation earned by domestically produced COVID-19 vaccines.

In the past, when many people went to see a doctor, they were usually asked whether they wanted to use domestic medicine or imported medicine. The price of the latter is often several times as expensive as the former one. I hope that era will gradually come to an end, as well the days when some families believe only in foreign vaccines.

With such a large population, it is impossible for China to assure the health of all people with imported medicines. The biopharmaceutical industry in China has developed rapidly in recent years. The whole industry needs to speed up to mature comprehensively to serve the people of this country and also make contributions to the world. (Source: Global Times)

Coronavirus: India to Export Covid Vaccines 'Within Weeks'



The official dismissed reports that India would ban exports of vaccines it is producing to meet local demand. India makes about 60% of vaccines globally and many countries are eagerly waiting for it to begin shipping doses. It has formally approved the emergency use of two vaccines as it prepares to begin giving jabs in January. India is planning one of the world's biggest inoculation programmes, seeking to immunise about 300 million people by July. The country's drugs regulator has given the green light to two vaccines - one developed by AstraZeneca with Oxford University (Covishield) and one by local firm Bharat Biotech (Covaxin).

"Within a fortnight of the rollout of the vaccines we will allow exports to some of our South Asian neighbours. Some of these exports will be paid by us as gifts, and the others will be supplied at roughly the same price the government will be buying the vaccines at," the foreign ministry official, who preferred to remain unnamed, told me. "India is completely conscious of its commitments to neighbours and the rest of the world as the world's biggest vaccine maker."

Federal Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said India plans to roll out Covid-19 vaccines by the middle of this month. "Within 10 days from the date of Emergency Use Authorisation [3 January], there will be vaccine roll-out," he told reporters in Delhi. The CEO of the Serum Institute of India, which is manufacturing the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine in India, also sought to clarify the confusion over exports.

Adar Poonawalla had been quoted in the media as saying that India would not allow exports of his vaccine for "several months". He told the Associated Press that his company has been barred from exporting the vaccine and selling the vaccine in the private market. But on Tuesday he told the BBC's Yogita Limaye his firm was allowed to export the vaccine for government immunisation programmes abroad, and expects to deliver on agreements with Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and Morocco in the next few weeks. (Source: BBC)

India Bars Serum Institute of India From Exporting AstraZeneca Vaccine



New Delhi: Hours after two vaccines were approved under restricted use and emergency use authorisation by Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Dr Balram Bhargava, Director General of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), on Sunday said masks may never go out of regular usage.

"I think it's a great day for India, it's a great day for humanity at large. Two vaccines have been approved under restricted use and emergency use authorisation and it has been done following discussions by SEC. This is wonderful news for India and all of us," Bhargava told ANI.

However, he said that it is unknown how long vaccine is going to be effective. "We don't know how much of the population we'll have to vaccinate to break the virus transmission. What we know is that we've been able to control the pandemic in the country by following Covid-19 appropriate behaviour... I am of the opinion that masks will probably be the last to go and probably may never even go."

Talking about the new variant of Coronavirus creating 'havoc' in the UK, the ICMR chief informed that scientists of the National Institute of Virology (NIV) have successfully isolated the new virus strain and it will be tested against different vaccines soon.

"New virus variant which is now more than 60 per cent infective and creating havoc in the UK, is worrisome. There are 29 patients in India with the same variant for which we should be cautious. We were able to isolate the new virus very early," he stated.

"NIV scientists have successfully isolated the new virus strain and this will be tested against different vaccines," he said and added that he hopes "potentially Bharat Biotech vaccine will have some advantages over other vaccines on this new strain because it is a whole virus."

ICMR on Saturday said India has successfully isolated and cultured the UK-variant of Sars-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19 disease. It is to mention that no other country has yet reported successful isolation and culture of the UK-variant of SARS-CoV-2 and added that vero cell lines of the virus were used by the scientists of ICMR-NIV to culture the UK-variant of the virus.

Covid-19 vaccines of Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech have been granted permission for restricted use in an emergency situation, said Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) on Sunday.

Notably, COVAXIN is an indigenously developed coronavirus vaccine manufactured by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the ICMR. (Source: ET HealthWorld)

People's Lives Must Matter More than Pharma Companies' Profit



The history of human beings is one driven by collective interest, not by personal interest. Economists made us believe that we are driven only by personal interest, and act accordingly through profit maximisation. It is time to restore our core identity by making businesses serve society's needs first and foremost; profit cannot come at the expense of human well-being, and life.

Nowhere should that be more true than in case of our health, which was enshrined by our leaders as a fundamental right when I was merely six years old, in the 1946 constitution of the World Health Organization. It is tragic today that the pharmaceutical industry, which has been appropriately lauded for producing safe and effective Covid-

19 vaccines in record time, has been pursuing secretive monopolistic deals with the fruits of taxpayer-funded innovation, rather than volunteering to hand over IP rights and know-how for the next great task facing humanity: getting those vaccines to everyone, everywhere, at the lowest cost possible, at the fastest possible time.

Make no mistake, unless we collectively take on this task with single-minded determination, the consequences will be dire and long-lasting. Richer countries in Europe and America have locked up most of the global supply of vaccines for their own population pushing lower income nations to the back of the queue. As we emerge into 2021, rather than having a sense of possibility of a vaccine-led ending of the pandemic, many in the global south are gripped with a sense of dread and anger at the big new social chasm that's about to open: between the vaccine haves and have-nots.

The longer the pandemic goes on anywhere, the more people will continue to die and the more the virus will have a chance to mutate and become vaccine resistant, threatening new waves everywhere. Meanwhile, under current mechanisms such as COVAX, which are commendable, there simply will not be enough vaccine doses to go around by the end of 2021. Global North is hardly in a mood to listen to Dr Tedros' solemn warning - "No one is safe until everyone is safe."

To face this long year ahead, countries urgently need to ramp up diagnostics tools, get access to potentially effective treatments at the lowest cost, and vaccinate their most at-risk as rapidly as possible—such as healthcare providers and the elderly. That's why nearly a hundred countries are supporting a proposal at the World Trade Organization this month to issue a broad-based general waiver on patents to all Covid-19 vaccines and medical technologies. With South Africa, a country where the tragic history of needless lives lost to the HIV pandemic looms large, as a leading co-sponsor of the proposal.

A simple declaration to allow the vaccine to be patent-free, will transform the situation dramatically. Instead we see a clear emergence of North-South divide on this very issue of saving human lives in countries where most of the global population live. Rich countries, such as the US, Canada, Australia, and Japan, have so far remained together to oppose the resolution which will allow lower-income countries the ability to focus on getting life-saving Covid-19 medical technologies to their people at the lowest cost, without the fear of being sued for infringing intellectual property rights getting in the way. What's perhaps sadder is that Brazil has abandoned its long-held positions and joined the group of countries which oppose patent free production of these vaccines.

It is the right time for G20 leaders to show that they mean every word when they declare their policy of "sparing no effort" to leave no one behind. They have to rise up to show that their actions speak louder than their own words. European leaders have a choice before them as they head into the EU Council meetings led by Chancellor Merkel—whether to look only within their own borders and put the financial interests of their pharmaceutical companies first, or renounce vaccine capitalism forcefully and stand in solidarity with the world's most vulnerable people.

If Europe joins the global south to put people above patents and enable countries to waive IP rights, then it will decisively tip the scale to pass the resolution with three-fourth of the votes at the WTO. Climate crisis has already made human beings the most endangered species in the planet. Now pandemic is set to escalate it by leaving the South with no vaccine, and worse yet, with a flood of fake vaccines, unless we care to protect them with one simple decision to cancel IP rights on vaccine production, the way it was done in the case of polio vaccine.

Joining hands to reach a safe and effective Covid-19 vaccine to all corners of the world, as fast as possible, at the least cost possible—could launch humanity into this new decade with a foundation of renewed trust in our ability to survive together, and a renewed confidence that we can change the status of human being from being the 'most endangered species' to the status of the 'saviour species'. I hope European leaders do not miss this historic chance. (Source: The Daily Star)

World's biggest Covid-19 Vaccination Programme Set to Begin in India: PM



Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday that the world's biggest inoculation drive against coronavirus is set to begin in the country, a day after the drugs regulator approved two vaccines for restricted emergency use. Lauding the scientists and technicians for the 'Made in India' vaccines, he said the country is proud of them.

"World's biggest Covid-19 vaccination programme set to begin in India. For this, the country is proud of the contributions of its scientists and technicians," Modi said.

Addressing scientists at the National Metrology Conclave, Modi said it must be ensured that 'Made in India' products not only have global demand but also global acceptance. "Quality is as much important as quantity, our standards should rise with our scale in our quest for Aatmanirbhar Bharat," he said.

India's drugs regulator on Sunday approved Oxford Covid-19 vaccine Covishield, manufactured by the Serum Institute, and indigenously developed Covaxin of Bharat Biotech for restricted emergency use in the country, paving the way for a massive inoculation drive. (Source: ET HealthWorld)

Mutant Virus May Be Present In Many Nations: WHO Chief Scientist to NDTV



New Delhi: A mutant strain of the novel coronavirus - first identified in the UK in September and which is rapidly replacing other variations of the virus - may already be present in several countries, Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist at the World Health Organisation, told NDTV. However, she also said it is still too early to draw conclusions about the new strain - which initial data suggests is up to 70 per cent more transmissible - and that it is "unlikely a couple of mutations" could affect the immune system's response to one of the existing Covid vaccines.

"The UK is one of those countries that is doing a lot of whole genome sequencing and is therefore able to track this very closely in real time. I suspect that as more countries look at their data, they might find this variant, or a related variant, might already be there," Dr Swaminathan told NDTV. On Sunday the UK said Italy had reported a person infected with the new strain, which has around 17 potentially significant changes in its viral genetic code. Cases have been reported from Australia, Denmark and the Netherlands as well, with another aggressive strain in South Africa.

"There have been mutations (of other viruses) in the past that become the dominant variant going forward. This may just be another such variant," she said, adding, "It is unlikely that a couple of mutations in the spike protein could change the response of the immune system to the vaccine." Dr Swaminathan said experiments to better understand the new UK strain - labelled B.1.1.7 - were taking place, but said: "These are going to take a couple of weeks to get results."

"For now, we encourage countries to do more sequencing. India has huge capacity to do whole genome sequencing (one of the keys to developing an effective vaccine). In fact, India is already contributing quite a lot to a global database that has close to 300,000 sequences," she said.

Dr Swaminathan also stressed that measures to contain the virus were the same. "It is really important that all countries put in place measures to control the virus and bring down transmission. We know what these measures are - testing, and contact-tracing and isolation of positive cases," Dr Swaminathan said.

The mutated version of the coronavirus that was detected in southeast England in September, has quickly become the dominant strain in London and other parts of the UK, leading to surging infection rates and toughest levels, yet, of restrictions on some 18 million people. On Monday, India, along with nearly 30 other nations, issued a temporary ban on incoming flights from the UK. The ban will start Wednesday and all passengers from the UK before then will be tested on arrival. Maharashtra has also acted, imposing a night curfew till January 5. News of the mutation has also led to worries that the first lot of Covid vaccines could prove ineffective. However, medical experts, including Mike Ryan, the Executive Director of the WHO's Health Emergencies Programme, say there is no evidence, at this stage, of this. On Monday, the head of the EU's medicines regulator said the Pfizer vaccine, which has been rolled out to the public in the UK and is one of three being considered for emergency use in India, would protect against the new strain (Source: NDTV)