

AtmaNirbhar Bharat has become one of the focal areas of our government

By : Editor Published On : 14 Jan, 2021 10:40 PM IST



INVC NEWS

New Delhi,

The Union Minister of Science & Technology, Earth Sciences and Health & family Welfare, Dr Harsh Vardhan addressed a webinar on the theme of AtmaNirbhar Bharat organized by a media organization Swarajya in collaboration with Vedanta. Addressing the webinar, Dr Harsh Vardhan said, "AtmaNirbhar Bharat has become one of the focal areas of our government, around which all economic policies are being drawn up. Our government is focused on bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots and on providing equal opportunity to all Bhartiya citizens which is the real meaning of Antyodaya".

The Minister further elaborated, "AtmaNirbhar Bharat is a plan to free India from the clutches of poverty, to ensure that all Indians have equal access to not just kapda, roti aur makaan .. but to make a qualitative change in their living by giving them access to bank accounts, 24 by 7 power, potable drinking water, housing, social security and most of all ..employment and good food leading to good and healthy living".

The Minister outlined, "As a step in the direction of AtmaNirbhar Bharat, we launched the Make in India initiative to drive India as a hub for manufacturing, cutting edge research and innovation. We fully understand that with industry will come greater employment for our youth, which will ignite prosperity in their lives".

Dr. Harsh Vardhan pointed out, "We have eased norms for doing business; we are working to make our tax structures competitive, simplifying procedures and removing unnecessary regulations and placing enormous focus on technology as well". He expressed his confidence, " these efforts will directly benefit the poor of India and provide them the windows of opportunity they deserve".

Recounting the challenging circumstances of Covid pandemic, the Minister said "The Department of Biotechnology did extraordinary work in supporting the advancement of vaccine candidates and related technologies. Under "Mission COVID Suraksha - The Indian COVID-19 Vaccine Development Mission", we focused on accelerated vaccine development through end-to-end solutions from pre-clinical development, clinical trials, manufacturing and regulatory facilitation for deployment".

"A National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID19, NEGVAC was constituted under the guidance of Hon'ble Prime Minister to monitor and decide on prioritization of population groups for vaccination, the delivery mechanism of the vaccine including tracking of the vaccination process and selection of delivery platforms. An indigenously developed Co-WIN: Digital Platform for COVID 19 vaccination delivery has also been developed", he added.

The Minister highlighted, "COVID-19 vaccination drive is also driven by 'Make in India' and both the vaccines that have received emergency authorization in India have been manufactured indigenously. We have also carried out Cold Chain Storage Assessment across the country and Cold Chain Equipment is being supplied continuously to augment the capacity at the last mile cold chain points".

Dr. Harsh Vardhan said, "I am sure that our efforts aimed at mitigation of the pandemic have parallelly strengthened our health systems upto the last mile and the same will act as a foundation for further strengthening the same to provide affordable, equitable and quality healthcare to all".

Stating that the COVID Pandemic has been an unfortunate event that has affected our lives and economies in an unprecedented manner, Dr Harsh Vardhan said, "However, we have utilized this adversity as an opportunity to strengthen our health care delivery system across the country".

"The COVID-19 pandemic also provided a compelling opportunity for R&D institutions, academia and industry to work in unison for sharing of purpose, synergy, collaboration and cooperation", he said.

The Department of Science & Technology and its various Autonomous Institutions made significant efforts to address R&D and innovation related challenges arising out of the pandemic. "Among other measures has been the formation of a National Task Force with over 20 leading scientists for formulating a National Super Model for predicting the spread of any pandemic in the future", Dr. Harsh Vardhan emphasized.

Giving further details , he said "DBT and BIRAC have been working relentlessly over the past ten months to develop effective interventions for combating the pandemic by supporting nearly 120 projects in the thematic areas of vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics".

"More than 200 Indian Manufacturers have registered under National Biomedical Resource Indigenization Consortium, N-BRIC, a Make in India initiative, for facilitating indigenous manufacturing of 15 major molecular biology components and reagents", the Minister disclosed.

"Also, DBT is supporting development of nearly 15 vaccine candidates. Of these 3 vaccine candidates are in clinical trial stage and about 2 candidates are in advanced pre-clinical developmental stage", he explained.

Outlining all above efforts, Dr. Harsh Vardhan said, "Amongst many other achievements, the immunoassay laboratory of Translational Health Science and Technology Institute, THSTI has been recognized by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, CEPI as one of the seven laboratories globally, for centralized assessment of COVID- 19 Vaccines".

"Five COVID-19 Biorepositories have been set up and have archived more than 40,000 samples, which are available for biomedical researchers", he said.

"On the Genomics and Therapeutics frontPAN-India, 1000 SARS-CoV-2 genome sequencing was successfully completed and data is being analyzed to understand the virus", the Minister said that the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortium INSACOG has been launched, to ascertain the status of new variants of SARS-CoV-2 in the country.

He pointed out, "CSIR has galvanized its considerable strength and expertise and has been contributing to the fight against COVID-19 by developing new and improved diagnostics, drugs & vaccines and devices including ventilators", the Minister said, "CSIR has also made strides in understanding the molecular

epidemiology and tracing of the viral strains in the country. It recognized early on the challenges of the disruption in the supply chain and has taken steps to circumvent the hurdles”.

“We have developed FELUDA, the novel paper-based diagnostic kit for COVID-19 detection. Tata Sons, who took transfer of this unique technology, may soon start exporting these” he highlighted. “The quick and easy to use RT-LAMP diagnostic kit developed in partnership with Reliance Industries, is being reviewed by ICMR”. “CSIR labs have contributed significantly in understanding the prevalent viral strains, their mutational spectrum, spread and distribution across India by sequencing and analyzing about 2000 SARS-CoV-2 viral genomes”.

He praised, “CSIR has also prioritized development of repurposed drugs for treatment of COVID-19 given the lack of specific drugs. CSIR developed the process technology for repurposed drugs such as Remdesivir and Favipiravir and transferred the technology to industries. Based on the licensed technology of CSIR, Cipla launched the affordable Favipiravir, which... all of you will recollect ... drove market competition leading to affordable pricing”. “There is no end to what all has been done in just the last ten months’, the Minister said. He recounted many other achievement by CSIR and other S & T labs in fighting COVID.

The Union Minister placed it before all audience “During the pandemic, with modesty, I can claim that the world has applauded India for the manner in which we held fort and kept mortality rates at the lowest... even today we are at a mortality rate of 1.44 per cent”.

He concluded by saying, “There is an immense need to further educate the public to become self-reliant. Once they know that they have got to stand on their own legs, it will electrify the atmosphere. This webinar series is a step in the right direction”.

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