

# India's Vaccine Diplomacy

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The concept of global health diplomacy—including vaccine diplomacy—has become a major foreign-policy talking point everywhere from China to the United States. Vaccines are the single most powerful health interventions developed by modern medicine. India's "vaccine diplomacy" aims to raise New Delhi's global profile and push back against China. As the world's largest vaccine producer, India is at the forefront of supplying affordable shots against COVID-19 to low- and middle-income countries.

**In news:** India's Vaccine Diplomacy Wins Friends

**Placing it in syllabus:** Foreign Affairs

**Dimensions**

- Vaccine Maitri
- Importance
- Disadvantages and Hurdles

## Content:

### Vaccine Maitri:

- India's vaccine diplomacy is centered around the **Vaccine Maitri** (Vaccine Friendship) initiative.
- India has been supplying vaccines to countries free of cost under the 'Vaccine Maitri' initiative.
- Through this India continues to help small and poor countries overcome the Covid-19 pandemic challenges.
- India's Foreign Ministry says it plans to supply vaccines – mostly free of charge – to 49 countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa.
- Some poor countries are being supplied the **vaccine on a grant basis** while some nations wanted it on par with the price that the Indian Government pays to the vaccine

makers.

- India has so far successfully supplied COVID-19 vaccine to more than 17 countries and more nations are in the queue at different levels
- Till date, India has supplied 56 lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccines as part of an international grant while another 1 crore doses have been flown out of the country commercially.

### **Extent of Reach**

- In accordance with the 'Neighbourhood First' policy, India has donated millions of doses to neighbouring countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Myanmar, Seychelles and Mauritius.
- Countries that received vaccine **supplies as gifts (free of cost)**:
  - Bangladesh (20 lakh), Myanmar (17 lakh), Nepal (10 lakh), Bhutan (1.5 lakh), the Maldives (1 lakh), Mauritius (1 lakh), Seychelles (50,000),
  - Sri Lanka (5 lakh), Bahrain (1 lakh), Oman (1 lakh), Afghanistan (5 Lakhs), Barbados (1 Lakh) and Dominica (70,000).
- Countries that received vaccines on a **commercial basis** are:
  - Brazil (20 lakh), Morocco (60 lakh), Bangladesh (50 lakh), Myanmar (20 lakh), Egypt (50,000), Algeria (50,000), South Africa (10 lakh), Kuwait (2 lakh) and UAE (2 lakh).

### **Some Interesting Facts**

- India is the largest producer of generic medicines, accounting for 20 percent of their global production.
- India produces 60 per cent of all vaccines manufactured in the world.
- India's Serum Institute of India, the world's largest producer of vaccines, is producing millions of doses of

the shot developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca.

- The head of the WHO recently complained that the developed countries monopolised the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for their own populations and were not making them available to developing countries.

### **Other measures taken by India for Vaccine Diplomacy**

- India consistently supported measures to **temporarily suspend COVID-19 vaccine intellectual property rights**—which would mean it could produce generic versions at lightning speed whenever a vaccine was created
- Many of the recipient countries have signed so-called vaccine pacts with India on a government-to-government basis to finalize the number of doses and determine whether they will be provided under grant assistance or under commercial terms.
- As part of the **GAVI-COVAX alliance**, India would further supply 1 crore (10 million) doses to Africa and 10 lakh (1 million) to UN health workers.

## **Importance**

### ***Humanitarian Aid***

- Poorer countries have been unable to compete for vaccines with wealthier nations which quickly sealed deals with drug makers, and many parts of the Caribbean and Central America are still weeks away from starting their campaigns.
- Leaders of poor countries have accused rich countries of “hoarding” vaccines.
- India’s pledge will help small and poor countries overcome the Covid-19 pandemic challenges

### ***Countering Chinese Influence***

- The Indian-made vaccine offers poorer countries an

alternative to Chinese vaccines, which Beijing has been pushing across the world.

- India's 'Vaccine Maitri' Mission appears to have taken China by surprise and put it on the back foot

### ***Builds International Confidence***

- India has not sought to extract any conditions for its generosity to countries that have no vaccines to fight pandemic
- While the world is witnessing the aggressive and threatening demeanor of China, the vaccine diplomacy shows a humane and caring attitude of India towards the international community.

### ***Strengthening India's Image as a Soft power***

- It has further strengthened its image as the first responder in emergency situations.
- India has scored in generating goodwill not just among governments
- Supportive actions by India through supply of Covishield and Covaxin vaccines will have a huge impact in promoting peace, security, cooperation and prosperity in the region and the world.

### **Disadvantages ad Hurdles:**

- Transportation of vaccines at low temperatures poses a logistical challenge. Vaccine doses have to be transported in specialised containers and kept in ultra-low freezers. Without the cold chain in the receiving countries immunisation may be unfruitful.
- The funding of the massive aid programme may be unsustainable for a developing country like India. The Indian economy is still battling the effects of pandemic.
- It could create vaccine shortages in India and could delay the protection of life in India. It will need more

than a billion doses to protect its own population. Distributing the vaccines in India's first mass adult vaccination drive might prove to be a daunting task.

**Mould your thought:** India's 'Vaccine Diplomacy' has further strengthened its image as the first responder in emergency situations. Evaluate. ***Approach to the answer:***

- Introduction
- Write about Vaccine Maitri
- Discuss its importance
- Mention the challenges of Vaccine Diplomacy
- Conclusion