



Global leader in the post-Covid era

By virtue of extensive immunity due to oral vaccination, the last polio case was reported in India in January 2011. Subsequently, India was declared polio-free in 2014. The Government of India observes National Vaccination Day every year on March 16 to convey the importance of vaccination to its people. In the wake of the COVID-19

pandemic, the significance of this day becomes even more pertinent. The firm conviction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ensured that Aatmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) has its own COVID-19 vaccine. I also congratulate my colleague Dr Harsh Vardhan and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for their perseverance and hard work. Indians will finally become healthier than before. This will help India emerge as a global leader in the post-COVID-19 era.

Medicines are global goods

The Prime Minister realised early on that the challenges

being posed by the pandemic would require a global solution. As most developed nations ramped up their efforts to vaccinate their respective populations, the developing countries ran dangerously behind, which could have meant another year of humanitarian and economic crisis for them. While developed countries engaged in vaccine nationalism, it became imperative that a universal, equitable, and affordable supply of vaccines was ensured for developing countries. I am proud that our initiative of making vaccines widely available for other developing countries firmly established India as the 'pharmacy of the world' and sent out the message that medical products must be dealt with as global public goods. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been leading global efforts to mitigate the challenges by supplying medicines and generic drugs to other countries. This shows that while becoming *aatma nirbhar*, we are proving our mettle at the global level. As of March, we have supplied vaccines to over 70 countries while ensuring that our domestic demand is met.

I am proud that our educational institutions took the lead and transformed the challenges into opportunities. The IITs came up with incredible innovations like low-cost portable ventilators, affordable AI-powered COVID-19 test kits, drones for sanitisation, and cheap and effective PPE kits and masks. With the help of these innovations, we were able to provide healthcare facilities to our people. We even exported this equipment to different countries, which reflects our long adage philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

Research and innovation

As we now step into a post-COVID era, it becomes more imperative to strengthen research and innovation. Through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, we have already taken a step forward in this direction. The NEP aims at improving the research and innovation landscape in India. It proposes that higher education institutions (HEIs) should focus on research and innovation by establishing start-up incubation centres, technology

development centres and interdisciplinary research. The HEIs should also focus on developing mechanisms and organising competitions to promote innovation among student communities. To attain the highest global standards in education, the NEP also recommends setting up Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities, which will be on a par with IITs and IIMs.

Before the commencement of the next academic session 2021-22, the National Research Foundation (NRF) will be established under the Principal Scientific Adviser, which will transform India's research culture. I am glad that an outlay of ₹50,000 crore for the next five years has been allocated for NRF in the Budget.

The world will remember us for initiating the largest education reforms and emerging from the pandemic as a global leader. By taking the COVID-19 vaccine, the Prime Minister has given a solid boost to our vaccination drive and instilled confidence in the nation. I appeal to my dear citizens to come forward and be a part of the vaccine drive because it is only together that we can build a '*Swarnim Bharat (A Golden India)*'.

Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'
Minister of Education, Government of India