

Embassy of India, Paris

Press, Information and Culture

Traduction de courtoisie :

“Covid-19: India will do all it can "for the general good of mankind"” France Culture (21/01/2021 reported by Valérie Crova)

Interview : "The pharmacy of the world" has just launched a vast vaccination campaign against Covid-19 for its 1,366 million inhabitants. An emergency, in a country that still registers more than 13,000 new cases every day. This will not prevent India from exporting its vaccine, assures its ambassador.

India, with a population of 1.3 billion, is the second country in terms of the number of Covid-19 cases, after the United States. More than 10 million people have been infected since the beginning of the global health crisis. Since peaking at nearly 90,000 new cases daily in mid-September, the contagion has declined in intensity.

But in an attempt to curb a still-active epidemic, the "pharmacy of the world" - as India is known, which produces 20% of all off-patent medicines and exports its first Covid-19 vaccines - launched a massive vaccination campaign on 16 January.

A major logistical challenge for this country-continent, 7th in the world by size, explains Jawed Ashraf, Indian ambassador to France.

Coronavirus contamination reached record levels this autumn in India. What is the situation today?

Since the peak in mid-September - we had almost 90,000 cases a day - the figures have been steadily falling. To date, we are registering 13,000 to 15,000 new cases per day. But we are, of course, still very vigilant about new strains of the virus, particularly the British variant. And we are taking all possible health measures, including wearing masks, as much as possible. What is encouraging is that we are seeing a significant reduction in the demand for hospital beds in connection with Covid-19.

The vaccination campaign started on 16 January in India. How is it being organised?

We have been preparing for this operation for a very long time. We have already vaccinated 790,000 people. But we are trying to be quicker and more flexible. During this first phase, we intend to vaccinate 13 million people. And by July, we hope to reach 300 million vaccinations.

The campaign has been conducted in 20 states and territories [out of 28]. We have an infrastructure in place to run it: a cold chain, including 29,000 relays, 45,000 refrigerators, 41,000 freezers, for basic storage.

However, there is a certain mistrust that is being expressed towards Covaxin, the Indian vaccine that was marketed before the end of Phase 3 clinical trials. What is the Indian government doing to reassure the population?

We have communicated on social media, on television, via local communities in the villages. We have called on doctors, experts, to explain the risk factors: what are the safety issues, what we can expect with this vaccine, what the vaccines will and won't do, what the government trusts. There have been a lot of awareness programs.

But there are always people who will say vaccines are dangerous - it's a global phenomenon. Look at France, where vaccines are apparently not very well received .

In addition, we use two vaccines in India. Covaxin, manufactured and developed by the Indian firm Bharat Bioetch, and Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and produced by the Serum Institute of India.

India is nicknamed "the pharmacy of the world". When do you plan to export your vaccines against the new coronavirus to the countries hit by the epidemic?

A quarter of the world's vaccine production actually takes place in India. We are the only ones to make them affordable and reliable.

“We have already started to export vaccines, even though we take care of our vast population of 1.3 billion people. We will do everything we can for the general good of humanity and to meet this health challenge.”

We sent a shipment to Brazil, which required immediate shipment. We also sent vaccines to the Maldives and Bhutan today. We will soon be supplying Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Mauritius and all our neighbours who have requested us. And we will continue to work in the same spirit with essential medicines in the early stages of the epidemic.

And beyond those who solicited you?

We will start working with other countries, of course, with Africa, with Latin America, with South-East Asia. For us, this is a natural extension of what we have been doing for years. We have supplied medicines to 150 countries in the world, some of which cannot afford to buy them.

And we will also work with our friends in Europe. We are in discussions with countries like France - one of our biggest strategic partners, a close friend - about what we can do in a multilateral context. This is part of the discussions between Prime Minister Modi and President Macron.

“There is a mutual aid and support agreement between our two countries: the French gave us fans in July. We are working together and we will continue to move forward if we need it.”