

# Mutual Nirbhartata to Max the Vax



**Tarun Das**

The world is slamming India for the devastation caused in the country from the second wave of Covid-19, a much stronger variant of the virus that struck in 2020. But there is a bigger story that has already begun — the vaccination story.

India is one of very few countries with capabilities to manufacture vaccines needed to deal with the novel coronavirus. It is adding to the number of manufacturers and types of vaccines as rapidly as

possible, keeping in view safety and quality standards.

India's own need for vaccines is huge. Vaccine manufacturing capacity must be raised to above 500 million doses a year, to be supplemented by imports. There will be no shortage of demand going forward since the entire population has to be vaccinated. And there has to be repeat vaccinations each year, at least over the next few years. The challenge is to ramp up capacity and production.

Today, it is Covishield and Covaxin. Sputnik V is around the corner. Some other manufacturers are also going through the required processes. Top priority is to multiply the numbers of vaccine manufacturers. Major companies not in the pharma sector so far, such as the Tata Group, Godrej, Mahindra &



**All hands on the deck**

Mahindra and Reliance Industries, need to come in quickly to add to the capacity rapidly. The more manufacturers with credible reputations the better. 500 million doses a year is the first target, one billion the ultimate one. And volume will lower the cost per unit.

In this interdependent world, the research on a vaccine, its ingredients and its manufacturers are in different countries. India must never do anything to return to isolationism. It can be a powerhouse of vaccine manufacturing if other

countries cooperate. It cannot do it alone, and cooperation must come through a two-way street.

Talk of compulsory licensing is unfortunate. In an interdependent world, India must never revert to past practices that hurt it, compulsory licensing included. This is a different world and Covid has brought collaboration to the fore. The only way forward is partnerships, so that everybody wins. Likewise, India mustn't forget its neighbours and other developing economies that have no capacity to make vaccines. India must help them and their people.

A Vaccine Authority of India must be set up. It should be empowered to make all this happen.

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*The writer is former director general, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)*