

Centre taking up Covid vaccination in a big way: Harsh Vardhan

Chennai, Jan 4: Union health and family welfare minister Dr Harsh Vardhan on Monday said the Centre has initiated a series of actions to prevent the spread of coronavirus and that it is now taking up the vaccination drive in a big way.

Vardhan's remarks came a day after India's drug regulator approved the restricted use of Covid-19 vaccines manufactured by Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech in the country.

In his address at the 32nd convocation of city-based Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research (SRIHER) held vir-

tually, he said the pandemic showcased the contribution of the government sector towards adequate health care - both Intensive Care and otherwise.

He also called for a powerful societal commitment to overcome the barriers imposed by the pandemic.

"The Centre has initiated a series of actions to prevent the spread (of coronavirus). Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) himself interacted with the Chief Ministers of all states and union territories and all stakeholders to regularly understand issues and collaborate with them for effective Covid management," Vardhan said.

Acknowledging that COVID-19 has turned the clock back by many years, if not decades, he said the deadly virus has derailed painstaking efforts of many decades and diverted scientific attention, adding, the lockdowns raised insurmountable barriers, interrupted supply chains, diversion of manufacturing capacity and imposed many roadblocks.

This year, the Centre has already made a substantial increase in the healthcare spend and the Finance Commission has projected a massive increase in the health outlay in the next five years.

"The recent pandemic has showcased the contribution of the Government sector towards adequate health care... both intensive care and otherwise. The Central Government is taking up the vaccination drive in a big way," Vardhan said.

This period needed strategised thinking, thought leadership and disruptive social entrepreneurship besides mass mobilisation, aggressive campaigns, powerful partners and deep commitments.

"And most of all, it needs a powerful societal commitment. Doctors are the backbone of any society. If our doctors are committed, then

many things will automatically fall into place," he said.

Listing out the government initiatives, the minister said telemedicine has been promoted in a big way to ensure accessibility of quality treatment for both COVID and non-COVID health issues in far-flung areas.

He said eSanjeevani, a web-based comprehensive telemedicine solution, is being utilised in 23 states with over 11 lakh teleconsultations held on this platform till date. To improve the nation's health, the world's largest health insurance scheme Ayushman Bharat was launched to create 1.50

lakh health and wellness centres by upgrading sub health centres and rural and urban primary health centres. Around 10.74 crore poor and vulnerable families have been identified for a health cover of Rs five lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation, the minister said. The present doctor-patient ratio of 1:1700 needed to be improved to 1:1000 as per WHO norms. Similarly, the number of hospital beds available is 9 per 10,000 population and this needs to be immediately increased to 40 per 10,000. The number of people covered under Health insur-

ance has to drastically increase from the present 8-10 percent, he added.

"There is a lot of scope for medical professionals to innovate and improvise to facilitate the PM's dream of Atma Nirbhar India and Make in India concepts through Research and Development Initiatives," Vardhan said and saluted the frontline health workers and all those who supported patient care during the pandemic risking their own lives. He complimented SRIHER for providing a separate block for COVID patients and for conducting ICMR vaccine trials and serving as a testing centre

since April 2020. Chancellor V R Venkataachalam conferred the degrees and along with Pro Chancellor R V Sengutuvan and Vice Chancellor P V Vijayaraghavan presented 94 gold medals to meritorious students and distributed certificates to 1,266 students including in Ph.D., super specialities, post graduate and under graduate disciplines. Earlier in his report, the Vice Chancellor said "our hospital has been undertaking clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines with Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech International besides BCG vaccines." —PTI