

## ***Braving a Viral Storm* tells the tale of India's COVID vaccine journey**

**India was the first to announce a Public Private Partnership to develop vaccines, with ICMR and Bharat Biotech joining efforts on May 9, 2020, followed by the U.S. and U.K. announcements over the next week**

Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare Mansukh Mandaviya addresses at an event to release the book 'Braving A Viral Storm: India's Covid-19 Vaccine Story' by Aashish Chandorkar and Suraj Sudhir, at Constitution Club of India in New Delhi on January 11, 2023. | Photo Credit: PTI

India's development and production of its own vaccines against COVID-19 was an important part of dealing with the pandemic, pushed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's view that the "entrepreneurial state" of government would bear the front-loaded risks of the effort, cushioning the private sector, according to a new book.

The authors of *Braving a Viral Storm: India's Covid-19 Vaccine Story*, Ashish Chandorkar and Suraj Sudhir, have put together the story of how India got two Indian-made vaccines — one fully developed in India as well — to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

As early as February and March 2020, the Central government set up a task force to develop an Indian vaccine. On May 5 that year, the Prime Minister gave clear directives that there had to be a huge intervention, and governmental funding of efforts by private manufacturers in this effort. On May 9, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) announced a partnership with Bharat Biotech (manufacturers of Covaxin). India was the first country to announce a clear Public Private Partnership to develop vaccines, followed by the United States on May 15 with its Operation Warp Speed and then the United Kingdom's government announcing its support for the University of Oxford's research efforts on May 17.

₹100 crore funding

"The Department of Biotechnology supported nearly 15 vaccine candidates through the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC). Fifteen firms received more than ₹100 crore in funding for financial and technical support. The activities covered stages ranging from pre-clinical to clinical trials. The beneficiaries included the DNA-based vaccine of Zydus Cadilla, the mRNA-based vaccine from Gennova Pharmaceuticals, Pune, the protein subunit-based vaccine of Biological E and the nasal vaccine of Bharat Biotech," states the book.

Right at the outset, Mr. Modi made the reasons for this move clear to the government agencies and private institutions involved. "Potential vaccine candidates emerging from the U.S. and Europe were not necessarily going to be helpful for the Indian market. The potential vaccines were not going to be trialled in India, were likely to be costly and there would be no control over their supply, with multiple governments competing to corner their share of the vaccines. It was also clear that 'moral obligations' of the producer would mean that inhabitants of the country where the vaccine maker was based would get prioritized in terms of vaccine supplies," states the book, discussing the government's reasons for going the *swadeshi* way on vaccines.

The book puts together not just the story of how India's vaccine response was calibrated, but also documents the controversies that raged at the time — such as the demands for procurement by State governments, or to allow foreign-made vaccines into the country — and why the government

took the decisions that it did. Much of the material is publicly available, but the book puts it together for a quick read on India's vaccine race.