

## Afghanistan begins its vaccination drive receiving first CoviShield shipments from India

New Delhi has shipped 500,000 doses of its COVID-19 vaccine to Kabul becoming the first country to provide Afghanistan with the coronavirus vaccine. Tahir Qadiry, Minister-Counsellor for Afghanistan (Charge d’Affaires) in India Arab talking to Arab News told that this was part of their joint efforts to tackle the pandemic. The vaccines will enable them to be well prepared to move towards normalcy. Qadiry’s Indian counterparts have assured him of more vaccines in the future. This was a great gesture of humanity and Afghanistan feels deeply grateful.

(1/2) President Ghani launched today the Covid vaccination program in the country with the COVISHIELD vaccine gifted by India, thanking PM Modi & people of India. [#vaccinemaitri](#) [#pharmacyoftheworld](#) [@PMOIndia](#) [@MEAIndia](#) [pic.twitter.com/R3w2o2JbKD](https://pic.twitter.com/R3w2o2JbKD)

— India in Afghanistan (@IndianEmbKabul) [February 23, 2021](#)

A government source of Arab News noted that China too has promised to “supply vaccines to Taliban insurgents for use in areas under their control.” Torek Farhadi, an adviser for the former Afghani government, said: “It is much appreciated by the Afghans. China has promised vaccines to Taliban as well, but India scores points with Kabul by being the first country to send vaccines to Afghanistan”. “China has also promised vaccines to Taliban but India scores points with Kabul by being the first country to send vaccines to Afghanistan,” he added.

Earlier this month, in summit-level talks with Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani via video conferencing, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed concerns over the rising violence in Afghanistan and termed targeted violence on the civilians, journalists and workers by the terrorists a “cowardice act” and has asserted that both India and Afghanistan wish to see the region free of terrorism. Stressing the friendship between the two countries, the Indian Prime Minister has said that India has always backed Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-supported initiatives. Unified Afghanistan can fight any calamities. The success of Afghanistan is the all-around success of India.

Thanking Prime Minister Modi for the gift of water through the signing of an agreement on Shahtoot dam, and for shipping 5,00,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine with exceptional generosity, Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani said that India’s attention to Afghanistan

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and its offers of the gift of life to Kabul and the people of Afghanistan symbolises the value of decency, democracy, humanity, mutual interest, mutual respect, mutual trust and interdependent world.

I welcome the delivery of 5,00,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to AFG by India. I express my gratitude to the Gov. & people of [#India](#) for their generous & much needed support. India always has stood by the people of Afghanistan, & offered their help. [@DrSJaishankar@IndianEmbKabul](#) <https://t.co/rZQnuawyzy>  
[pic.twitter.com/K0E6HGGceV](https://t.co/rZQnuawyzy)

— Dr. Abdullah Abdullah (@DrabdullahCE) [February 8, 2021](#)

These statements have come after an agreement on the Shehtoot dam in India-Afghanistan summit-level talks were signed by the two sides recently. It is important to note that Kabul and other urban centers across the country have been rocked by violence in recent weeks amid fraught peace talks between the government and the Taliban. Taliban militants fighting the foreign-backed Afghan government, however, have announced their backing for the vaccination campaign.

For vaccine, Kabul was heavily reliant on foreign aid in the fight against the pandemic. There have been several complaints of resources being embezzled during the distribution program past year and further concerns about the mismanagement of funds in the country grappling with poverty, poor health infrastructure and daily violence.

Afghanistan is believed to have been hit hard by the pandemic over the past year, but limited testing and a weak healthcare sector have limited its ability for tracking the virus. Amidst this, with Kabul's first stage of the COVID-19 Vaccination drive Amid Rising Violence with the doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine from the Serum Institute of India (SII), which is producing the vaccine for mid-and low-income countries, New Delhi has certainly widened its 'Vaccine Maitri' seeking to steal a march over rival Asian giant China.

New Delhi has used COVID-19 vaccines as part of its soft power diplomacy by shipping some to friendly countries and other parts of the world. India has also shown its capacity and strength as the world's biggest manufacturer of vaccines for various diseases to improve regional ties and push back against China's political and economic dominance.

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