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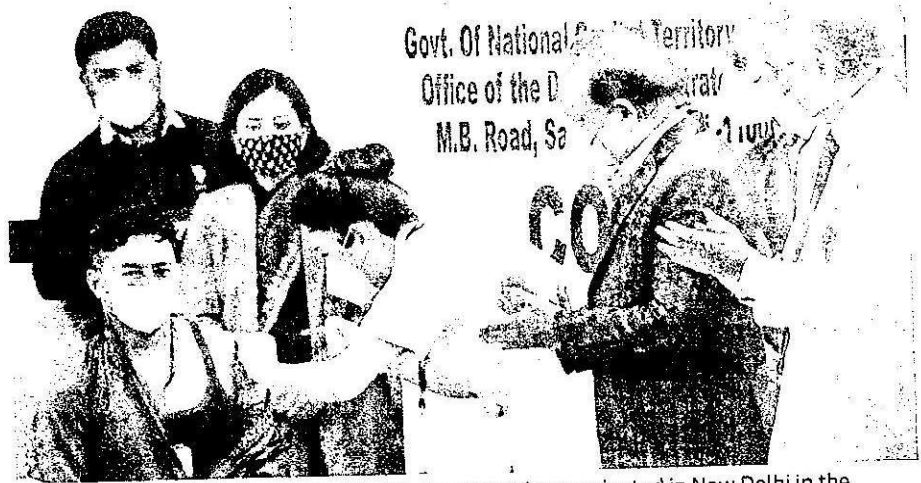
Vaccines safe, ignore rumours, says PM

AIIMS chief, NITI Aayog member and SII CEO among those vaccinated on Day 1

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched the countrywide COVID-19 vaccination drive.

He said India-made vaccines were safe and asked people not to believe rumours. He congratulated all Indians and the country's scientists. He noted that the world had not seen a vaccination drive of this scale, and India's response to the pandemic had been acknowledged globally.

"The vaccines have come about in the shortest time span and this is an achieve-



The wait is over: Sanitation worker Manish Kumar getting vaccinated in New Delhi in the presence of Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and AIIMS chief Randeep Guleria. * SANDEEP SAXENA

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ment for India and its contribution towards the battle against COVID-19. There are 100 countries which do not have a population of three crore but India in the first phase will inoculate three crore healthcare and frontline workers, and in the next step, we will take this number to 30 crore. There are only three countries in the world with more than 30 crore population: India, the U.S. and China. Hence, this is going to be the biggest vacci-

nation drive," Mr. Modi observed. On the first day, AIIMS medical director Dr. Randeep Guleria and NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr. V.K. Paul were among the first to be vaccinated, along with a sanitation worker at AIIMS. Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla also took the vaccination.

"Indian vaccines are much cheaper than foreign ones and easier and more conducive to India's conditions," Mr. Modi said.

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Vaccines are safe, ignore rumours, says PM

"There are vaccines abroad whose single dose costs up to ₹5,000 and have to be kept in freezers at minus 70 degrees temperature. India-manufactured vaccines are best suited for us," Mr. Modi said.

He said around 60% children of the world would get vaccines manufactured in India. The world put its trust on India's vaccine science and research.

Mr. Modi cautioned the beneficiaries against lowering the guard after getting the vaccine shot. People should remember that the vaccines comprised two

shots and had a gap of close to a month between them.

"The vaccine starts working 14 days after the complete round is finished. But don't lower your guard during or after vaccination. The mantra '*Dawai Bhi, Kadaai Bhi*' should be followed, and the use of mask and social distancing norms is essential," he stated.

The vaccines had been introduced after trials and dry runs. People should safeguard against rumours. India had reached this stage today only because of the sacrifice of the healthcare workers, he pointed out.