**Vaccine nationalism at its worst**

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April 21, 2021

As the end of April approaches, cracks in the global effort to fight the Covid-19 pandemic have begun to emerge. Similar to other policy areas, the coronavirus pandemic has become a case of the capitalist/elitist agenda. Rich nations are actively engaging in “vaccine nationalism” or simply, the ‘me first’ rule. Without diving into statistics and elaborate charts, one only needs to look at the fact that a total of 732 million doses of coronavirus vaccines have been administered according to WHO, and over 50 percent of these have been administered in the UK and US alone.

As the pandemic and the dynamics of the vaccines unfold, it appears that rich governments are pressurising private pharmaceutical companies to get exclusive manufacturing orders and are paying high prices to secure distribution channels. It must be kept in mind that this is being done while around 3 million people have died across the globe due to coronavirus and billions of others have been affected economically by the devastation of lockdowns and reduced market activities. Pharmaceutical companies are collaborating with governments where the company is originally based. Pfizer, as an American firm, is actively supplying vaccines to all states of the US and is delaying all other requirements coming from the UN and WHO for poorer countries. Similarly, in the case of the UK, Oxford-based Astrazeneca and Moderna are being exclusively supplied to the EU and UK. In the UK, with a population of only 66 million, more than 50 percent of the population has already been vaccinated. Meanwhile, poorer countries in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and South East Asia are awaiting their turns for charity. Basic humanity has been ignored altogether.

[Govt to increase restrictions if Covid-19 SOPs not followed: Asad Umar](https://nation.com.pk/21-Apr-2021/govt-to-increase-restrictions-if-covid-19-sops-not-followed-asad-umar)

At this alarming juncture of vaccine protectionism, the UN and the WHO launched a public-private initiative called COVAX. The aim of this programme is to collect funds from governments, corporations, businesses, sponsors and NGOs to build a common forum with vaccine producers as members, supplying free-of-cost vaccines to countries that cannot afford it. The COVAX project set a target to deliver 100 million vaccine doses to poorer nations across the globe but by mid-April, only 35 million were distributed. The situation is worsening every day. Even worse is the fact that the USA, EU and UK are blocking moves in the UN to eliminate copyrights and manufacturing licenses on vaccines so that they can be produced in poorer nations of the world. The firms making the vaccines are also secretly co-operating with governments of rich countries to keep the supply lines intact for populations who can afford the vaccine.

In all this scenario of vaccine nationalism, China has managed to maintain a different narrative. The virus originated in Wuhan, China. Needless to say, China got a head-start. After the initial shock, not only did China win over the virus and the pandemic surge, it was able to post 18 percent growth in the FY 2020-2021 despite the global pandemic chaos. Chinese firms, both state-owned and private, initiated their drive to make their own vaccines instead of relying on western nations for assistance. Sinovac, Cansino and Sinopharm were three different vaccine names that were in development. As a gesture of goodwill, China included Pakistan in vaccine trials for all three vaccines which were tested in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad. On successful completion, China donated 1.5 million doses to Pakistan free of cost and then another 500,000 doses were received in April. Minister Asad Umar and Dr Faisal Sultan were quick to acknowledge this vital assistance from China. It is a favour not to be forgotten. On the other hand, the Russian government took the lead as well and developed their own vaccine based on vector technology called Sputnik. The first shipment of Sputnik was cleared by DRAP, and private firms and hospitals have begun vaccinating people who can afford to pay. In any case, the availability has been offered not by rich western nations but through Asian countries engaging in regional diplomatic ties. India initially planned to unroll their own vaccine but without reaching the required quality standards, it was never cleared by WHO and one of the key facilities caught fire.

[China’s Xi to attend Biden’s climate change summit](https://nation.com.pk/21-Apr-2021/china-s-xi-to-attend-biden-s-climate-change-summit)

Finally, Pakistan is also on its way to the road to independence in vaccines. Pakistan firm Searle has entered into a joint collaboration with a Chinese firm Livzon Mapharm to produce the Covid vaccine locally. In ideal conditions, poorer nations should be able to enter into joint ventures funded by public-private partnerships, where countries can manufacture their own vaccines and deliver them at the doorstep of poorer and illiterate populations.

Nations engaging in vaccine nationalism don’t realise that if poorer nations don’t get the vaccine, there is a dangerous possibility of the virus mutating into forms that is unaffected by existing vaccines. We are all connected, all sons and daughters of the same tribe on a small little boat called Earth. When the dust settles and the veil is lifted, only the good of all is what matters. Global supply chains, labour, trade and stock markets are intricately connected and without uplifting rich and poorer nations alike, there is no hope. If poorer countries in Asia and Africa are not vaccinated, demand and supply disruptions combined with political instability and economic shocks will bring the world to its knees.