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Mansukh Mandaviya launches i-Drone, ICMR's drone-based vaccine delivery model

Our Bureau, Mumbai

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In a landmark event that epitomises the government's commitment to 'Antyodaya' in health; making healthcare accessible to the last citizen of the country, Mansukh Mandaviya, Union minister for health and family welfare launched ICMR's drone response and outreach in North East (i-Drone). This is a delivery model to make sure that life-saving vaccines reach everyone.

Thanking the visionary leadership of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, the Union health minister said, "Under his leadership, the Nation is progressing at a great pace. Today is a historic day, which showed us how technology is making life easier and bringing social change."

Mansukh Mandaviya said, "This is for the first time that a 'Make in India' drone has been used in South Asia to transport Covid vaccine over an aerial distance of 15 kms in 12-15 mins from the Bishnupur district hospital to Loktak lake, Karang island in Manipur for administration at the PHC. The actual road distance between these locations is 26 k.m. Today, 10 beneficiaries will receive the first dose and 8 will receive the second dose at the PHC."

He further added, "India is a home to geographical diversities and drones can be used to deliver essentials to the last mile. We can use drones in delivering important life-saving medicines, collecting blood samples. This technology can also be used in critical situations. This technology may prove a game changer in addressing the challenges in health care delivery, particularly health supplies in difficult areas."

Despite the effective and safe vaccine administration in the States and Union Territories, the vaccine delivery among tough and hard-to-reach terrains of India is still challenging. This i-Drone has been designed to overcome these challenges by deploying unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV)/drones to remote areas and hard to reach terrains. Currently, the drone based delivery project has been granted permission for implementation in Manipur and Nagaland, as well as union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Island.

ICMR conducted an initial study in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur to test the capacity of drones to carry and transfer vaccines safely. The study was conducted in Manipur, Nagaland and Andaman and Nicobar. These studies provided promising results on the basis of which the ministry of civil aviation (MoCA), Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and other regulatory authorities have granted permission to fly drones beyond the Visual Line Of Sight.

Mandaviya expressed his confidence in the initiative and noted that this initiative can be helpful in delivering not only the vaccines but also other medical supplies. This will help in overcoming the gaps in current vaccine delivery mechanisms. He thanked the ministry of civil aviation, DGCA and Airport Authority of India for their support towards this endeavour and congratulated ICMR, health workers and all associated with this landmark initiative.

Rajesh Bhushan, secretary, ministry of health and family welfare, Dr. Balram Bhargava, director general, ICMR and other senior officers of the ministry, state governments, ICMR etc were also present.


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