



ONE YEAR SINCE THE BATTLE AGAINST COVID-19 BEGAN



President Gotabaya Rajapaksa accepting the free 500,000 doses of the Oxford AstraZeneca Covishield vaccine that arrived in the country on January 28, 2021 from Indian High Commissioner Gopal Baglay. Minister Prasanna Ranatunga, State Ministers Dr. Sudharshani Fernandopulle, Prof. Channa Jayasumana and President's Principal Advisor Lalith Weeratunga were present.



The first consignment of China's Sinopharm (BBIBP-CorV) vaccine being received by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's vision about the vaccination against COVID-19 was "free vaccine up to the last citizen and nationwide vaccination at the fastest possible rate". Sri Lanka's approach to COVID-19 vaccination focuses on securing vaccines, administration of vaccines and monitoring the progress and continuous planning.

On January 12, 2021, the President appointed a COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force to spearhead national deployment and vaccination against COVID-19. The Health Ministry, National Operation Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak and Vaccine Task Force focused on identifying hotspots, specific groups, approval for vaccines, developing vaccination roadmap and allocation of vaccines to fulfil national vaccination objectives.

The health and defence staff worked hard round the clock and dedicated during the past year, to take care of incredibly ill people despite high numbers during the pandemic and to deliver these vaccines.

The process to secure vaccines through procurement, donations or COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access commenced in early 2021. The personal involvement of the President himself to speak to Presidents and Heads of States in friendly countries, contributed tremendously to realise the early arrival of vaccines to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka began vaccinating its frontline workers on January 29 last year after receiving 50,000 free Oxford-AstraZeneca-Covishield vaccines from India.

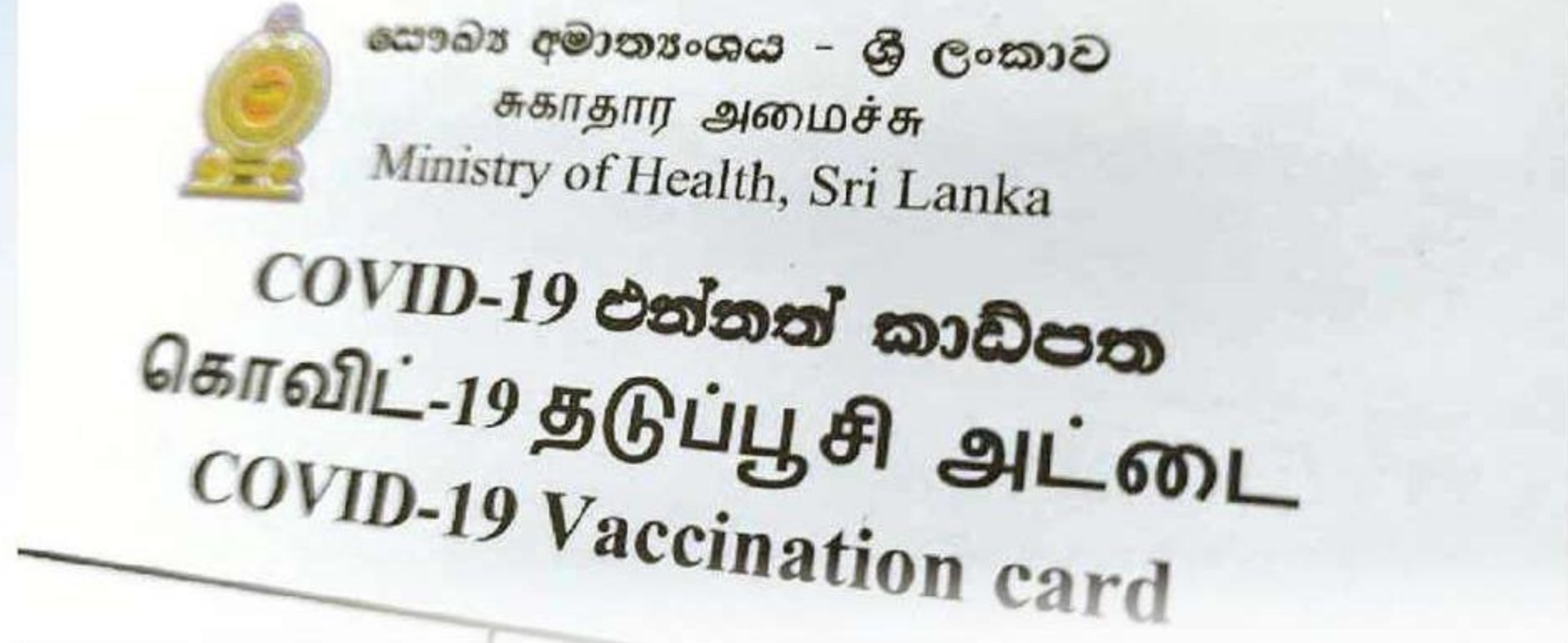
Sri Lanka's health officials kicked off the country's first COVID-19 vaccination programme by inoculating a senior consultant physician at the National Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) who has been in the frontline of the pandemic. Dr. Ananda Wijewickrama was the first medical officer to receive the job. A senior nurse at the IDH was the second to receive the job while three military officers also received the job at the Army Hospital in Colombo.

Sri Lanka was one of the first countries to initiate vaccine roll out and the vaccinations in Sri Lanka were a sign of hope since the country needed something to calm COVID-19 down.

Since the first detection of the COVID-19 case in December 2019, the world has now spent nearly two years with this pandemic. The arrival of the first batch of COVID-19 vaccines on March 7, 2021 from the COVAX Facility in Sri Lanka marked another step of its vaccination drive. COVAX is a global vaccine initiative co-led by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), funded by donations from governments, multilateral institutions and foundations; with UNICEF leading on procurement, logistics, and storage globally in what will be the largest vaccine procurement and supply operation in history. COVAX is working in partnership with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), member countries, civil society organisations, manufacturers, and others to fulfil its mission to help end the acute phase of the pandemic as quickly as possible by enabling global equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

The first batch of COVID-19 vaccines from the COVAX Facility arrived in Sri Lanka was the Astra Zeneca/Oxford vaccine from the Serum Institute of India (SII). This was a part of COVAX's commitment to providing 8.4 million vaccine doses to cover 20 percent of Sri Lanka's population. COVAX Facility vaccines played a vital role in the Government's commitment to vaccinate eligible Sri Lankans, starting with vulnerable groups like those over 60 years.

The first consignment of China's Sinopharm (BBIBP-CorV) vaccine arrived on March 30, 2021. Accordingly, the country received 600,000 doses of



January 29, 2022 marks the one year anniversary of the commencement of the vaccination programme in the country and in line with this, the Health Ministry has taken steps to implement a series of special programmes in all hospitals/regional medical officers' offices in the country.

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Today marks one year since the first COVID-19 vaccine was given in Sri Lanka. Since then, a total of 35,374,713 COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered as the first, second and third dose in Sri Lanka.

Since the first detection of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Wuhan Province in China in December 2019, the world has now spent nearly two years amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccines intended to provide immunity against COVID-19 provided a major hope for the world and Sri Lanka planned for the vaccination of its population parallel to other countries.

Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said that the necessary measures will be taken to make COVID-19 vaccination cards mandatory for people who enter public places after the completion of legal studies. The relevant gazette notification is being prepared and a comprehensive study is being carried out on other matters, the Minister said.

the vaccine as a donation from China. The vaccines were initially administered to Chinese nationals in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, the first consignment of 1.5 million doses of US-developed Moderna COVID-19 vaccine arrived on July 15, 2021 and it was donated by the United States through the COVAX facility of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Half of the country's population was fully vaccinated with the receipt of the Sputnik V vaccine stocks on several occasions. The Advisory Board of the National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA) approved the emergency use of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in May last year and the first consignment of 26,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine arrived in Sri Lanka on July 5.

As per the statistics of the Epidemiology Unit of the Health Ministry, a total of 13,749,897 people have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 16,550,296 people have received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and 13,891,828 individuals have received the second dose.

Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella recently announced that the third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is needed to qualify a person as fully vaccinated.

Waning vaccine immunity and rising infections due to the Omicron variant have prompted Sri Lanka to reconsider the definition of "fully vaccinated" - which usually means two COVID-19 jabs. Accordingly, the total number of fully vaccinated people in Sri Lanka remained at 5,018,241 by Thursday (28) morning.

Minister Rambukwella said that the boosters were vital to prevent pandemic restrictions from being reintroduced. "It is clear that getting three jabs will become an important fact and it will make life easier for people in all sorts of ways," he said.

He further said that January 29, 2022 marks the one year anniversary of the commencement of the vaccination programme in the country and in line with this, the Health Ministry has taken steps to implement a series of special programmes in all hospitals/regional medical officers' offices in the coun-

try. Under this, the booster vaccination programme will be implemented as a special programme in those hospitals and Medical Officers' of Health offices and steps will be taken to provide all three doses of the vaccine to all vaccine eligible persons throughout the island.

In parallel, this vaccination programme will be implemented as a special programme in about 1,500 health centres islandwide including hospitals and regional health officer offices and the year-round vaccination programme will be implemented in those locations. The programme is being implemented in all health centres with a focus on religious activities and is also planned to further promote the booster vaccination programme.

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The Minister also pointed out that the code number and application processing will be done by the Digital Technology Ministry and the vaccination card will be made mandatory when entering public places as soon as possible.

He said Sri Lanka was among the top five countries in the world where vaccination was proven successful within a year and it was the responsibility of the people to obtain the booster vaccine to further protect and advance it. There was no preparation for another.

At present, the vaccination programme for schoolchildren is being implemented successfully and the second vaccination programme is being implemented for children between the ages of 15 and 19 who have completed three months since the first vaccination.

The Minister said that the number of daily infections in some of the richest countries in the world is on the rise and that a number of measures have been taken under the guidance of the President to ensure successful control of the pandemic. Accordingly, more than 51 million doses of the required vaccine have been imported for the three doses, he said.

The Minister said that some people were spreading false information and baseless allegations regarding the booster vaccine and that there was no truth in these posts.

The Minister said that the strong contribution made by the health sector in Sri Lanka, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, made it more effective in governing the country and he appreciated the strong commitment made by the frontline activists in the field including the Security Forces and government officials.

Sri Lanka has been commended by the World Health Organization for its vaccination progress and was also placed once at first place by "Our World in Data" for the highest rollout of vaccination in a seven-day average per 100 people in the total population. There is no doubt that Sri Lanka, as a developing nation, has done remarkably well in COVID-19 vaccination unparalleled to any other country in the world.

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People in a long queue to get their jab.