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Vaccine may be ready in a few weeks: Modi

Vaccination will begin after nod from scientists, he says

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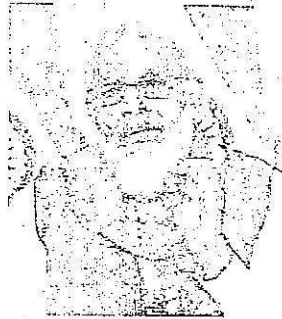
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday told floor leaders of 19 political parties represented in Parliament that a vaccine against COVID-19 could be available for roll-out in the next few weeks. He said this during his closing remarks at an all-party meeting, where nearly 30 leaders of various parties were present.

"Experts have assessed that it won't be too long before a vaccine against corona is available and that it could be a matter of weeks for that to happen," Mr. Modi said. "As soon as scientists green light a vaccine, the distribution will start," he said.

Inputs from States

The government, he said, had set up a national experts' group of scientists, Central and State government officials for mapping the vaccination programme, which would likely take advantage of India's large and experienced vaccination network from its universal immunisation programme. "Cold chain and other logistics will be boosted, taking inputs from State governments," he said. Frontline health workers and those with co-morbidities would be first in line for the vaccine, Mr. Modi said.

The pricing of the vaccine would be "according to the imperatives of public health" and in consultation with the State governments, he added.



Exchanging views: Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the virtual all-party meeting on COVID-19 on Friday. (ANI)

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NARENDRA MODI
PRIME MINISTER

Financial aid sought for States

The all-party meeting saw Opposition party leaders re-emphasising the need for the government to take urgent measures to bring the economy back on track, and demanding additional financial help. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP T.R. Baalu was the lone

speaker to raise the ongoing farmers' agitation. Several parties flagged the need to pay the GST dues that the Central government owes to the States, and additional financial help to meet the revenue shortfall that many States are facing due to the pandemic. (PAGE 12)

He said his visits to vaccine development and manufacturing facilities in Pune, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad and his talks with company officials showed that there was a high level of confidence in the possibility of a vaccine being out for use soon.

Due to the world's requirements for an effective and inexpensive vaccine, India was very much in the spotlight, the Prime Minister said, adding that eight vaccine candidates were being

manufactured in India and three were being developed indigenously.

"As we are on the cusp of getting a vaccine, we should not now relapse into behaviour that may see another spurt in the disease. India's experience in dealing with the coronavirus, despite not having the health infrastructure of developed countries, is a sign of the country's determination and adoption of a scientific approach to dealing with the disease. This must continue," he said.