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Concern over Covaxin

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But a day before the vaccination, the officials completely changed their stand. "Nova vaccine is a back-up to the other - both vaccines are equally important, both vaccines are hugely immunogenic. They excite immunity against the virus. There is no choice for the individual at this point of time," Vinod Paul, member, Niti Aayog said in an interview.

Paul, Bhargava and Guleria are the three doctors and medical researchers advising the Centre on various aspects of the Covid-19 from the beginning. This newspaper reached out to top officials as well as Bhargava and Guleria seeking to know the reasons behind the turn-around, but did not receive any response.

"The fact that we are going ahead with both the vaccines at the same time when efficacy data is not yet available for one does raise concerns," Anant Bhan, past president, International Association of Bioethics and an adjunct professor at the Yenep-

oya University, Mangaluru, told DH.

After reviewing the preparations for the Saturday launch, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan reiterated that both indigenously manufactured vaccine had proven safety and immunogenicity records and were the most important tools to contain the pandemic. There is no mention of Covaxin's "restricted use in emergency situations in public interest as an abundant precaution, in clinical trial mode", as stated by the regulator.

"I can only think that this is a political decision. Any decisions regarding Covaxin could easily have been taken some weeks later, if supported by the efficacy data for which trials are ongoing," said a senior biologist. "The love and promotion of the swadeshi vaccine, even if that is not something that has finished phase-3 trial, was pretty obvious right from the beginning," added a public health professional.