EDITORIAL

VACCINE
DEBATE IS NOT
OVER YET

AS THE country on Saturday marked 730 days, or two years, since the
government imposed the first Covid-19 lockdown, and amid concerns
over a fifth wave of infections, the
issue of mandatory vaccinations
has once again entered the public
discourse.

The aim of the lockdown was
to flatten the curve and allow the
country’s health-care system to
prepare itself to deal with the rapidly
rising cases. Initially, front-line
workers and the health-care system
were overwhelmed by the number of
cases.

This was a global phenomenon
as Covid-19 had thrown up many
firsts in terms of response, medical
infrastructure and the capability
of front-line workers to deal with
the psychological impact of the
pandemic. Almost 100 000 people in
the country have succumbed to the
virus, and to date almost 3.7 million
infections have been recorded.

As the government prepares to lift
the national State of Disaster amid
mounting legal challenges to the act
that enabled the lockdown, there
are concerns that not enough people
have been vaccinated and that herd
immunity has not been achieved.

World-renowned epidemiologist and
former chairperson of the Covid-19
Ministerial Advisory Committee,
Professor Salim Abdool Karim, has
again called for vaccines to become
mandatory.

Karim and other experts cannot
put a timeline on when the virus will
end, but they all agree that it will
not be any time soon.

Karim believes that the country
should look at countries such as
France and the US, where people
are required to show their Covid-19
certificates at indoor environments,
including supermarkets and malls.

“That is how many countries
reached the position where they
were able to get high vaccination
coverage but, importantly, they
protected their indoor environments
by restricting them to vaccinated
people.

“It all comes down to individual
choice.”

And it remains individual choice
that will determine the extent to
which the virus remains a real threat
to all South Africans.