

Speech At the Inaugural Ceremony of the 72nd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia

Your Excellencies

Honourable Ministers of Health from Member Countries of the WHO South East Asia Region,

Sh UPENDRA YADAV, Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Health & Population, Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

Dr. RAJITHA SENARATNE, Hon'ble Minister of Health, Nutrition & Indigenous Medicines, Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Dr. MYINT HTWE, Hon'ble Minister of Health & Sports, Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Ms. DECHEN WANGMO, Hon'ble Minister of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan

Mr. ABDULLA AMEEN, Hon'ble Minister of Health, Government of the Republic of Maldives

Ms. OH CHUN BOK, Hon'ble Minister of Public Health, Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Mr. SATHIT PITUTECHA, Hon'ble Deputy Minister of Public Health, Royal Thai Government

Dr. ANUNG SUGIHANTONO, Hon'ble Deputy Minister & Director General for Public Health, Government of Republic of Indonesia

Other dignitaries ...

Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region,

Dr Bernhard F. Schwartlander, Chef de Cabinet, WHO

Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Distinguished delegates

My colleagues

Ms Preeti Sudan, Secretary, Health & Family Welfare, Government of India,

Senior Officers from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare

Representatives from UN Agencies, WHO and Partner Organizations,

It is a matter of great honour for me to be present here today to welcome all the dignitaries ...including the Hon'ble Health Ministers of eight of the Member Countries ...who are visiting India to attend the 72nd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia.

On behalf of the people of India, my government... and especially our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji I extend warm greetings and heartiest good wishes to the visiting Excellencies and all delegates present here today.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen ...

I feel proud as I stand on this prestigious dais before all of you... to say that today India is on the brink of a healthcare sector revolution. My government...with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji at the helm of affairs...is

moving with urgency to change the health landscape of India. Our targets are ambitious and unprecedented. We want NO compromise on the health of our citizens.

Universal Health for All, a disease free India and global standards of excellence in healthcare is our aim by 2022.

The year 2014 marked a watershed moment in the Indian public healthcare system. It was the year when we kick-started our first innings with Shri Narendra Modi ji as Hon'ble Prime Minister, The Prime Minister spelt out his commitment, in no uncertain terms, that the health of our citizens was his government's topmost priority.... It was a watershed year in more than one way. My friends at the WHO will recall that on March 27, 2014 ...India was declared a polio-free nation. For a country of 1.3 billion people, that was a spectacular achievement. I am tearful even now as I recall how we had been battling this dreaded disease for decades. It had been my life's mission and we had succeeded.

Modi ji had a spectacular first innings, from 2014 to 2019. No wonder that he returned as Prime Minister in 2019 elections with a thumping majority as he became the hero of the Indian public. A statesman, a dynamic leader who elevated the status of India on the global stage, he once again set the juggernaut rolling. Health became **THE** national priority. It became our mission. He fast-tracked many policy initiatives aimed at achieving all the core tenets of Universal Health Coverage to deliver affordable and inclusive healthcare for all.

The launch of Ayushman Bharat, that is, Long Live India, in September 2018 marked a significant landmark in the history of health in India. Ayushman Bharat is India's

road to Universal Health Care. The first component of this is the creation of 1,50,000 Health and Wellness Centres for preventive care. We have already operationalized more than 20,000 Health & Wellness Centres,

The second component, Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana, is aimed at providing health protection cover to over 100 million poor and vulnerable families for secondary and tertiary care including pre- and post-hospitalization expenses. Key features include health cover of up to Rs. 500 thousand per family. A total of 17,000 hospitals have been empaneled so far under this scheme. More than 4.1 million persons have become beneficiaries under this scheme and have thus saved a total of an approximate 120 billion Indian Rupees on health expenditure.

Similarly, the National Health Mission (NHM), which is India's flagship health reform program, also provides a robust platform for implementation of a range of interventions focused on primary and secondary health care in rural and urban areas.

My government is trying to address all pain points. We have made tremendous improvements in maternal and child survival through targeted interventions under Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Strategy to improve the quality of care in Labor rooms and Maternity Operation Theatres.

Ending vaccine preventable diseases remains an important priority and we have charted out a plan to increase full immunization coverage to 90% people through intensification of campaigns under Mission Indradhanush. The range of diseases covered under Universal Immunization Program has also been increased with

inclusion of Rotavirus, Pneumococcal and Measles Rubella Vaccines.

We have also further intensified our efforts for phased elimination of Malaria, leprosy, Kala-Azar and Filariasis and improving measures for prevention of vector borne diseases.

I'm pleased to announce that we have also undertaken major reforms in the medical education sector, with the ultimate aim of increasing the availability of professional doctors in the country and improving the doctor-patient ratio. Setting up of 82 new medical colleges had already been approved and now I am happy to inform you that the government has approved setting up of another 75 colleges. In all, we have added more than 28000 MBBS seats and 17000 PG seats in the last five years.

To bring on regulatory reforms, we have taken a big step in enacting a new legislation - a National Medical Commission - which will replace the old Medical Council of India and will bring about progressive reforms in ensuring better standards of medical education and availability of adequate and qualified medical professionals.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana, a total of 21 new state of the art hospitals - AIIMS - are being established across the country to provide required super-specialty tertiary care facilities and to bridge regional disparities.

We have also set a target to End TB in India by 2025, five years ahead of the global SDG target. To address the burgeoning epidemic of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), we have undertaken screening, prevention, management and control of common NCDs.

Excellencies

Unsafe food and poor diet create a vicious cycle of disease and malnutrition, particularly affecting infants, young children, elderly and sick. India is passing through an epidemiological shift from communicable to non-communicable diseases, and the burden of diet-related diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity is rising rapidly.

I am happy to share with you that the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has adopted a “food systems approach” to ensure our citizens have access to safe and healthy food. This approach judiciously combines the regulatory and capacity building measures with consumer empowerment initiatives. Citizens are being sensitized through a people’s movement called ‘Eat Right India’.

Its tagline,

Sahi Bhojan. Behtar Jeevan’ – ‘Right diet leads to better quality life’depicts India’s commitment to preventive and promotive healthcare as an important pillar of our health policy.

I must take this opportunity to thank our Youth Icon, the cricket superstar Virat Kohli .. who has helped us to launch a massive campaign

“Eat Right, Stay Fit, Tabhi India Super Fit”...

I have myself initiated the Eat Right India campaign on social media and I regularly address my Twitter followers on healthy eating and healthy living each morning.

Currently, the government is observing the entire month of September as “Poshan Maah” which means sensitizing the public towards healthy eating and intensifying the campaign towards a ‘Malnutrition-Free India’.

Distinguished delegates,

India has now also begun to leverage technological innovations in the Health arena. We have prepared a National Digital Health Blueprint that will create longitudinal Electronic Health Records (EHR) of 1.3 billion citizens of the country, making health services more transparent and accessible.

India took world stage when it moved the “Digital Health Resolution” in the 71st World Health Assembly in Geneva and the same was unanimously adopted. India has further taken up this agenda in February 2019 as the ‘Chair’ through the Global Digital Health Partnership. I would like to request all of you to join the GDHP as member states and support SEAR to stay at the forefront of international policy developments on digital health.

Our focus is also on Artificial Intelligence interventions in the Indian healthcare ecosystem. In a country like India where the doctor-patient ratio is skewed, Artificial Intelligence based solutions can go a long way in bridging the demand-supply gap.

Excellencies

Three days ago, our Hon’ble PM launched the 'Fit India Movement' ...coinciding with the National Sports day celebrations. This campaign aims at encouraging people to include physical activity and sports as a routine in their

everyday life. This, along with Eat Right India campaign, will help us to fight lifestyle diseases like Hypertension, Obesity and Diabetes effectively.

Also, recognizing the importance of traditional medicines in healthcare delivery, India has launched the National AYUSH Mission. Similarly, Yoga is an integral component of the preventive healthcare initiative by India. Highlighting the importance of Yoga, Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi ji has described yoga as a 'free life insurance', which everyone can avail of.

My dear friends,

Last month, the Indian Council for Medical Research in Delhi hosted the first meeting of the Regional Research Platform for Emerging Infectious Diseases of Public Health Importance in the WHO South-East Asia Region. It was decided to establish the Regional Enabler for South-East Asia Research Collaboration for Health (RESEARCH) Platform on emerging and re-emerging Infectious diseases.

The RESEARCH platform will address evolving research priorities as per local and common needs of the Member States of the Region, and enable the sharing of resources (human, financial and infrastructural), corpus of learning, information and products for the member countries in the south east Asian Region.

Distinguished delegates,

I have witnessed the personal commitment and energy devoted by WHO SE Asia Regional Director, Dr Singh .. whose constant engagement with all stakeholders has contributed massively to positive reforms in the Region.

Home to over one-fourth of the global population, WHO South-East Asia Region has made remarkable progress in several priority programs in the last five years. I really look forward to a strong and continued collaboration with all the respected Member States as we move forward on attaining Sustainable Development Goals through Universal Health Coverage. In this regard, I implore WHO South East Asian Regional Office to undertake a 'mission mode approach' in not only disseminating policy and technical guidelines but also creating public health success stories from the region by aiding better implementation of policies and programs in member states. WHO has always provided **THOUGHT LEADERSHIP** in the field of healthcare. I had myself, as a doctor by profession, got the chance to work with this prestigious organization as an Advisor for a couple of years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude now by invoking a Mantra from the ancient Indian scriptures that remains the Guiding Light for us Indians

Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, Sarve santu niramayah.

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामया

It means: "May all be happy forever, May all remain healthy forever".

Once again, greetings from the people of India...

I Thank You All for being with us here today !

Jai Hind !