G20 India Presidency: 3rd HWG Meeting

Why in News?

The recent **3rd Health Working Group** meeting at Hyderabad, Telangana under the G20 India Presidency highlighted the **ongoing threat of pandemics** and the **urgent need for** global collaboration in the health sector.

- Several key proposals were put forth by India, emphasising the importance of **integrated surveillance systems, medical countermeasures,** digital health **initiatives, and** vaccine **research and development at global level.**

What are India's Major Proposals for Global Collaboration in the Health sector?

- India proposed a **Global initiative on Digital Health, a WHO-managed network** to converge ongoing initiatives in use of technology in the global health arena.
  - This initiative can **enable bridging the digital divide amongst nations** and ensure that the fruits of technology are made available to every citizen of the world.
- Building consensus for an **end-to-end Global Medical Countermeasure (MCM) ecosystem.**
  - Creation of an interim platform guided by the **Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) process for the Global Medical Countermeasure (MCM) ecosystem.**
  - Advocating against **intellectual property rights** barriers that hinder access to medical countermeasures in times of crisis.
- Accelerating **vaccine research and development (R&D)** for emerging pathogens and strengthening pandemic preparedness efforts.
  - Establishing a **Global Vaccine Research Collaborative** to address gaps in vaccine development, enhance coordination, and foster an enabling environment for vaccine R&D.
  - Emphasising **equity in access to diagnostics, drugs, and vaccines during health emergencies.**
- Mapping and integrating global initiatives for quick decision making and planning during crises. Addressing the **challenges of** zoonotic spillover **of diseases transferring from animals to humans.**

What are India's Priorities for G20 Presidency on Health?

- **About:**
  - India is recognized as the **"Pharmacy of the World,"** contributing a significant portion of the global vaccine production.

- **Genome Valley in Hyderabad** alone contributes close to 33% of the world's vaccine production. Also, **India's Ayurveda and Yoga** are significant practices that develop a holistic well-being.
    - **Priorities:**
        - **Digital Public Infrastructure:** India aims to leverage its experience in developing digital platforms such as **Aadhaar, CoWIN,** and Aarogya Setu to enhance access, affordability, and quality of health services for all.
            - India also intends to share its best practices and learnings with other G20 countries and support them in building their own digital public infrastructure for health.'
        - **Health Security:** India plans to work with other G20 countries to strengthen the **global health security architecture and ensure preparedness for future pandemics.**
            - India will also support the reform of the **World Health Organization (WHO)** and other multilateral institutions to make them more responsive, transparent, and accountable.
        - **Universal Health Coverage:** India will promote the **goal of achieving universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030,** as envisaged by the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
            - India will also showcase its achievements in expanding health coverage through schemes such as **Ayushman Bharat Yojna** and will encourage other G20 countries to adopt similar policies that can **improve health outcomes and reduce poverty.**

What are the Challenges Posing Risk to the Health Sector Globally?

- **Inadequate Infrastructure and Practitioners:** Many countries, particularly in low-income regions, lack sufficient healthcare infrastructure, including **doctors, hospitals, and diagnostic facilities.**
    - This limits their capacity to deliver timely and quality healthcare services to the population.
    - India's rural healthcare system continues to be plagued by shortfall on two critical fronts — doctors and infrastructure. There is a **shortage of 83.2% of the surgeons, 74.2% of obstetricians and gynaecologists, 79.1% of physicians and 81.6% of paediatricians**, according to the Rural Health Statistics 2021-2022.
- **Infectious Disease Outbreaks:** The emergence and reemergence of infectious diseases pose a significant risk to global health.
    - Recent examples include the **Covid-19 pandemic and Ebola outbreaks.**
- **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR):** Antimicrobial Resistance **is reducing the effectiveness of medicines,** making infections and diseases difficult or impossible to treat.
    - WHO has declared that **AMR is one of the top 10 global public health threats facing humanity.**

Note: AMR occurs when microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi evolve and develop resistance to the drugs used to treat them, rendering them resistance. This can happen naturally over time, but it is accelerated by the overuse and misuse of antimicrobial drugs.

- **Climate Change Hazard:** Climate change threatens the essential ingredients of good health - **clean air, safe drinking water, nutritious food supply and safe shelter.**
    - Climate change exacerbates extreme weather events like **drought and floods, which increase food insecurity, malnutrition rates, and help spread infectious diseases.**
- **Rising Commercialisation:** Though commercialization of healthcare promises better infrastructure, medical facilities, and technological advancement, **but due to high charges, poor and middle-class people cannot afford it. This contradicts the very purpose of having a better healthcare system.**
    - Further, **doctors collaborate with pharmaceutical companies with a profit motive to prescribe branded medicines** that are more expensive than generic versions despite the same formula, which **hampers access to timely healthcare.**

Way Forward

- **Global Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** There is a need to encourage international collaboration and knowledge sharing among **healthcare professionals, researchers, and institutions.**
  - This can facilitate the **dissemination of best practices, encourages innovation, and accelerates the development of new treatments and therapies.**
- **Genetic Surveillance:** Genetic surveillance can be a way forward to understand the **evolution of different disease carriers across the globe, specially viruses.**
  - Genetic surveillance of pathogens provides **insights by following a molecular approach for contact tracing and understanding the transmission of the pathogen across the globe.**
- **Patient Empowerment and Engagement:** There is a need to **prioritise patient-centric care** by empowering individuals to take an active role in managing their health.
  - Provide tools and resources that promote health literacy, enable self-monitoring, and facilitate **patient-provider communication for better treatment adherence and outcomes.**
- **Towards Global Pandemic Treaty:** In recognition of the need to further strengthen international cooperation in health sector, WHO has now commenced the process for the development and adoption of a new international treaty with an **aim to ensure better preparedness and equitable response for future pandemics**, and to advance the principles of equity, solidarity and health for all.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q.1 Consider the following statements about G-20: (2023)

1. The G20 group was originally established as a platform for finance ministers and central bank governors to discuss international economic and financial issues.
2. Digital public infrastructure is one of India's G-20 priorities

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: C

Q.2 'Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières)', often in the news, is (2016)

(a) a division of World Health Organisation
(b) a non-governmental international organisation
(c) an inter-governmental agency sponsored by European Union
(d) a specialised agency of the United Nations

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q.1 Appropriate local community level healthcare intervention is a prerequisite to achieve 'Health for All' in India. Explain **(2018)**

Q.2 Public health system has limitations in providing universal health coverage. Do you think that the private sector could help in bridging the gap? What other viable alternatives would you suggest? **(2015)**

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