India in Global Health Diplomacy

Why in news?

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Soumya Swaminathan, an Indian Clinical Scientist, has recently been appointed the Deputy Director-General for Programmes at the WHO.

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What is the significance?

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- She has turned out to be the first Indian to be elevated to the post.
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- More importantly, it gives representation to India in the WHO, the highest decision-making body in public health.
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- It also signifies the growing importance of India in global health diplomacy.
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- The Indian representation and the DG being from Ethiopia together is seen to give a place for developing countries in WHO.
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What should be done to improve Public Health Care?

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- **People's participation** - Involving community and civil society for ensuring public health gains is important.
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- e.g Dengue, where eliminating breeding sources of mosquitoes was essential beyond the government's efforts.
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- **Innovations** - It is essential to bring various innovations that are happening

mostly in the private sector into public health.
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- Beyond a new drug or a vaccine, the innovations in devices, diagnostics, sensors, and drug delivery systems can also aid in public health delivery.
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- **Intellectual property** - There should be balance between the needs and demands of intellectual property protection as against access and equity in health.
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- WHO should invoke its pivotal role in this regard.
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- There have been successes like the Medicines Patent Pool, but a lot more needs to be done.
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- **Emerging epidemics** – There is a rising concern with vector-borne diseases like chikungunya, zika, dengue, etc.
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- The potential of science and public health management in addressing the rise of ever-adapting vectors should be exploited.
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- **India** - More attention should be diverted to the lesser known tropical diseases like kala-azar, filariasis, measles, etc.
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- Snake bite causes an estimated 50,000 deaths in India.
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- There is a need for regulations on snake venom manufacturing to ensure access to the right venom at the right time.
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- Also, soil-transmitted helminths, or intestinal worms, have an impact on morbidity-causing anaemia and nutritional deficiencies.
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- Government should consider expanding the deworming programmes to the entire population and not just to children.
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- **Role of WHO** - Not all agreements under WHO are binding; but countries that take them seriously and implement are seeing good results.
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- E.g. Successes in tobacco control, HIV treatment, etc.
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- So on similar lines followings regulations should be implemented
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i. labelling of food for high salt, sugar, and fat content.

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ii. higher taxes on these products.
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iii. package labelling to indicate whether it is a healthy choice or not.
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iv. micronutrient fortification.
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Quick Fact

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Medicines Patent Pool (MPP)

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- MPP is a United Nations backed organisation founded in 2010, and based in Geneva.
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- It offers a public health-driven business model that aims to lower the prices of HIV, tuberculosis and hepatitis C medicines.
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- It also facilitates the development of better treatments through voluntary licensing and patent pooling.
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Source: The Hindu

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