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Dr Harsh Vardhan steps in as WHO Executive Board Chairman

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Dr Harsh Vardhan would be officially elected at the Executive Board meeting of the WHO on May 22



Dr Harsh Vardhan, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, India, has been elected the Chair of World Health Organization's Executive Board.

"I feel deeply honored to have the trust and faith of all of you. India, and my countrymen, too, feel privileged that this honor has been bestowed upon us. I will work to realize the collective vision of our organization, to build the collective capacity of all our Member nations and to build a heroic collective leadership," Dr Harsh Vardhan said addressing the 147th WHO Executive Board session as its Chair. The session was held virtually.

WHO is already providing leadership to the entire world in the sphere of public health, engaging with partners for joint actions, shaping the research agenda and stimulating the dissemination of valuable knowledge. The need is to catalyze further change, he said.

Health is central to enhancing human capabilities. Protecting health of those without wealth should be the core philosophy of our close alliance at the WHO, Dr Harsh Vardhan said.

"I have known few greater honors than this one ! With this personal honour, I also feel a deep sense of personal responsibility. I may not get there, but I can surely try. And, I promise to try my best," he said.

Congratulating him, Regional Director for WHO South-East Asia Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh said, "Dr Harsh Vardhan has assumed this post at a very challenging time. I wish him all the best in steering the Executive Board as it addresses this defining pandemic and other public health issues."

"Dr Harsh Vardhan has a rich experience in public health. He is the pioneer of India's successful pulse polio program and has been in the forefront in the fight against tobacco and many other issues. The world can now gain from his expertise and experience," the Regional Director said.

WHO's Executive Board comprises of 34 members elected for three-year terms. The Chair of the Executive Board is elected by its members on being nominated by the Regional Committees of the six WHO Regions, by rotation.

At the 72nd Regional Committee Session of WHO South-East Asia in September 2019, Member States had nominated India to be member of the WHO Executive Board from the Region to replace Sri Lanka whose term expired in May 2020 and also to lead 147th and 148th Sessions of the Executive Board as Chairperson.

The other countries from WHO South-East Asia Region in the Executive Board are Bangladesh (2019-2022) and Indonesia

(2018-2021).

The main functions of the Board are to implement the decisions and policies of the Health Assembly and advise and facilitate its work.

The annual Board meeting is held in January when the members agree upon the agenda for the World Health Assembly and the resolutions to be considered by the Health Assembly. A second shorter meeting takes place in May, as a follow-up to the Health Assembly.

Dr Harsh Vardhan, who took over from Dr Hiroki Nakatani of Japan, would chair the 148th session of the Executive Board in January 2021. At the Executive Board meeting in May 2021, he will hand over to the next Chair from another WHO Region. However, he will continue to be a member of the Executive Board till 2023.