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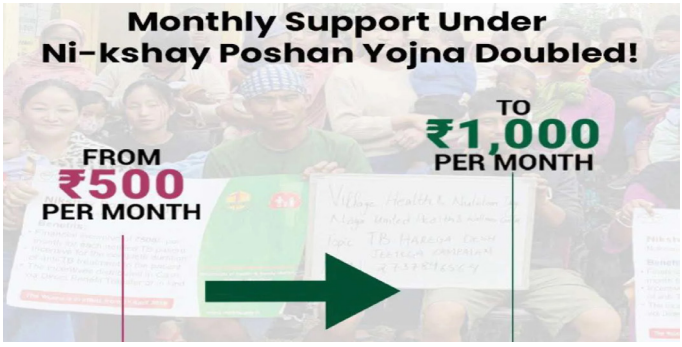
09 October 2024

Key Initiatives to Boost Nutrition Support for TB Patients and Their Families

Context: In a landmark effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at tuberculosis (TB) elimination, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, J P Nadda, has recently announced several pivotal initiatives designed to enhance nutritional support for TB patients and their families.

Key Announcements:

- **Increased Financial Assistance:** The financial assistance provided under the Ni-Kshay Poshan Yojana (NPY) has been raised from 500 to 1,000 per patient. This increase applies for the entire duration of treatment, reinforcing the government's dedication to bolstering the health and recovery of TB patients.
- **Energy Dense Nutritional Supplementation (EDNS):** The introduction of Energy Dense Nutritional Supplementation is a pivotal initiative targeting patients with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of less than 18.5. This nutritional support aims to address the dietary deficiencies often faced by TB patients, thereby promoting better health outcomes and recovery.



- **Expanded Eligibility for Assistance:** All household contacts of TB patients will now be eligible for assistance under the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan (PMTBMBA). This extension includes food baskets distributed by Ni-Kshay Mitras, which are designed to enhance the immunity of family members. This initiative aims to significantly reduce the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by TB patients and their families, providing a more supportive environment for recovery.

About Tuberculosis

- Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease primarily affecting the lungs, caused by the bacillus Mycobacterium tuberculosis.The Bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine provides immunity against TB.

What is Drug-Resistant TB?

- Drug-resistant TB occurs when the Mycobacterium tuberculosis bacteria become resistant to one or more anti-TB drugs, complicating treatment efforts.

Strategic Vision for TB Elimination in India:

- **National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP):** Launched in March 2018, this programme sets an ambitious goal of eliminating TB in India by 2025. This program focuses on integrating various aspects of TB control, including early diagnosis, treatment, and prevention strategies, to significantly reduce the incidence of TB in the country.
- **Pradhan Mantri TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan (PMTBMBA):** Initiated on September 9, 2022, this initiative aims to promote collective action towards TB elimination. It emphasizes community engagement and the involvement of various stakeholders, including local governments, NGOs, and health professionals, to create a united front against TB.
- **Ni-kshay Mitra Program:** The Program provides essential services such as diagnostics, nutrition, and vocational assistance. This program is designed to address the multifaceted needs of TB patients, ensuring they receive comprehensive care that aids in their recovery and rehabilitation.
- **Ni-kshay 2.0 Portal:** It facilitates community involvement in TB control efforts and leverages Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives to support patients. This digital platform aims to create a network of support for TB patients, fostering collaboration between various stakeholders to improve health outcomes.
- **Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP):** Launched in 1997, introduced the internationally recommended Directly Observed Treatment Short-course (DOTS) strategy. This systematic and cost-effective approach has revitalized TB control efforts in India, emphasizing adherence to treatment and regular monitoring of patients.

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Wild Ass Population in Gujarat Sees a Significant Rise

Context: The population of wild asses in Gujarat has witnessed a remarkable increase, as revealed by the 10th Wild Ass Population Estimation (WAPE) conducted by the Gujarat government earlier in 2024.

- The latest census estimates the wild ass population at 7,672, reflecting a 26.14% rise from the last WAPE in 2020, which recorded 6,082 individuals. This upward trend is a testament to the state's ongoing efforts in wildlife conservation and habitat preservation.

Key highlights of the Report:

- The WAPE was conducted over a 15,510 square kilometer area using the Direct Count Method. Modern technologies, including drone cameras and camera traps, were utilized for accurate enumeration.
- **Population Increase:** The wild ass population in Gujarat has risen to 7,672 as per the 10th Wild Ass Population Estimation (WAPE) conducted in 2024, marking a 26.14% increase from the previous estimate of 6,082 in 2020.
- **Current Habitat:** The wild ass population is now confined to the Little Rann of Kutch and Great Rann of Kutch, having lost its historical range in North-West India, Pakistan, and Central Asia.

- **Population Demographics:** In forest and sanctuary areas, the population included 2,569 females, 1,114 males, 584 babies, and 2,206 unclassified individuals. Meanwhile, in revenue areas, the population consisted of 558 females, 190 males, 168 babies, and 283 unclassified individuals.
- In addition to wild asses, the 2024 WAPE also enumerated several other wildlife species in Gujarat. The survey recorded the highest populations of 2,734 Asian antelopes, 915 wild boars, 222 Indian hares, 214 Indian gazelles, and 153 Indian jackals.

Conservation status of Wild Asses:

- Historically, wild asses were found in North-West India, Pakistan, and Central Asia, but their current habitat is restricted to the Little Rann of Kutch and Great Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, making conservation efforts in this region crucial.
- Wild asses are protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- Additionally, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classified them as "Endangered" in 2008 due to their limited population.

A History of Conservation Success:

- The wild ass population in Gujarat has been on a consistent upward trend since 1976, when there were only 720 wild asses in the state.
- The continuous efforts by the Gujarat government, including habitat protection, anti-poaching measures, and community awareness programs, have played a pivotal role in the species' recovery.
- As India celebrated Wildlife Week (October 2-8), this increase in the wild ass population is a significant achievement for Gujarat's wildlife conservation.

Hereditary Cancers: Genetic Insights and Implications for Public Health

Context: The International Agency for Research on Cancer has estimated that one in five individuals is at risk of developing cancer in their lifetime.

- In 2022 alone, 20 million new cancer cases and 9.74 million cancer-related deaths were reported globally. By 2045, these figures are projected to rise to 32 million cases and 16 million deaths, with Asia accounting for nearly half of the global cancer burden.

Hereditary Cancer and Genetic Mutations:

- The discovery of BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes in the 1990s revolutionized the understanding of hereditary cancers, particularly hereditary breast-ovarian cancer syndrome.

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Mutations in these genes significantly increase the risk of breast, ovarian, and prostate cancers, and in some cases, pancreatic and colorectal cancers.

- Most cancers develop due to genetic mutations in the body's genome. A subset of these is inherited mutations, passed down from one generation to the next.
- Research indicates that 10% of all cancer cases may be linked to inherited mutations, with the percentage rising to 20% in ovarian cancer cases. Other common cancers, such as breast, colorectal, lung, and prostate cancers, show a 10% prevalence of inherited mutations.

Role of Genetic Testing and Targeted Therapies:

- Genetic testing for BRCA mutations is essential in identifying individuals at higher risk for hereditary cancers, enabling personalized prevention strategies like enhanced surveillance, preventive surgeries, and targeted therapies.
- PARP inhibitors, a promising class of chemotherapy drugs, have shown effectiveness in treating BRCA-associated cancers. Clinical trials highlight their success, especially when combined with platinum-based chemotherapy. However, resistance to PARP inhibitors varies, and researchers are studying the response of BRCA and other DNA-repair gene mutations to these therapies.
- Advances in CRISPR-Cas9 technology have also improved our understanding of cancer genes, helping researchers study BRCA mutations and identify other gene mutations that influence treatment efficacy.

Initiatives for Cancer Treatment and Prevention in India:

- **CAR-T Cell Therapy:** India's first CAR-T cell therapy, launched at IIT Bombay, marks a significant advancement in cancer treatment. This gene therapy, which modifies a patient's own immune cells to fight cancer, is considered the most affordable CAR-T cell therapy worldwide, making advanced cancer treatment accessible to a larger population.
- **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY):** Under the PMJAY, families can avail health insurance coverage of up to INR 5 lakhs per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation, which includes a wide range of cancer treatments. This scheme aims to provide financial protection to millions of low-income families.
- **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases & Stroke (NPCDCS):** The NPCDCS focuses on preventing and controlling major non-communicable diseases, including cancer. The programme integrates screening, early detection, and treatment services for chronic conditions to reduce the burden of these diseases across the country.
- **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY):** PMSSY plays a critical role in upgrading and establishing government medical institutions to improve cancer care facilities. The scheme also strengthens the National Cancer Grid (NCG), enhancing coordination and resource sharing among cancer treatment centers in India.

Power Packed News

National Anubhav Awards Scheme, 2025

- The Government of India has launched the National Anubhav Awards Scheme, 2025, extending eligibility to employees of Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs), including Public Sector Banks, for the first time.
- This initiative aims to collect and showcase the experiences of retiring and retired government employees. The deadline for submitting write-ups on the Anubhav Portal is March 31, 2025.
- Since its inception in 2015, the Anubhav platform has published 10,886 write-ups and awarded 59 Anubhav Awards and 19 Jury Certificates to outstanding submissions.
- The scheme now allows pensioners to submit their experiences within

three years of retirement, an extension from the previous one-year limit. Additionally, a new marking system based on various pay levels has been introduced to streamline the assessment process.

- National Anubhav Puraskar Scheme is a scheme launched to honour retired government employees for their experiences. Under this scheme, retired government employees are encouraged to share their experiences. Under this scheme, an award ceremony is organized every year.

Indian Institute of Foreign Trade to Establish First Overseas Campus in Dubai

- The Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) will launch its first overseas campus at the India Pavilion in Expo City, Dubai, following a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Expected to begin operations in early 2025, the campus will initially offer short- and medium-term training programs, followed by the MBA (International Business) program.
- This initiative aims to benefit the 3.5 million-strong Indian community in the UAE and enhance the IIFT brand's global recognition.
- The MoU strengthens existing bilateral agreements between India and the UAE, including trade mechanisms and the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

About IIFT:

- Established in 1963 as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Commerce, the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) has achieved Deemed University status and is recognized as one of India's premier business institutions.
- It focuses on foreign trade and is esteemed as an academic center of excellence in international business research, training, and education.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA) 2024

- The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA) will be held from October 14 to 24, 2024, in New Delhi. This is the first time that this major technical conference of the ITU is taking place in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The event will be attended by more than 3,000 delegates from over 150 countries, including over 1,000 foreign representatives and more than 50 global ministers. The aim of the conference is to establish global standards in areas such as 6G, Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, cybersecurity, and quantum technologies.
- WTSA 2024 is considered a significant step towards the development of 5G and 6G networks. The event highlights India's growing global technological importance and provides an opportunity to elevate the country's digital leadership to new heights.
- The ITU is part of the United Nations system and plays a crucial role in setting global telecommunication standards. WTSA serves as the governing conference of ITU-T, which establishes standards for telecommunications and ICT (Information and Communication Technology).