Fear of vaccines

Why in news?

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A recent judgment in a vaccine compensation case in Europe has ruled that courts may consider vaccines to be the cause of an illness, even in the absence of scientific evidence confirming a link.

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What is the case?

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- A French man vaccinated against hepatitis B developed multiple sclerosis and ultimately died.
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- The ruling gave way for consideration of circumstantial evidence in judgements.
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- This includes prior health of the patient, absence of family history and alleged numbers of other similar cases.
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What is the impact of the judgement?

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- The EU court verdict has drawn criticisms from various experts.
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- Vaccines are among the most effective public health interventions saving millions of lives.
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- The minor risks caused by side effects of vaccines far outweigh the benefits.
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- The judgement has sown seeds of doubt about proven vaccines.
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- The resulting **hesitancy over vaccine** use could cause a **rise in vaccine-**

preventable diseases and outbreaks of deadly infections.
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What should be done?

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- Public health interventions must be guided by scientific panels.
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- All reported side effects of vaccines need to be evaluated scientifically.
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- Most countries have now established effective vaccine pharmacovigilance programmes.
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- For example India’s adverse events following immunization (AEFI) surveillance programme.
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- This surveillance programme has helped India to win similar legal battles against pentavalent vaccine use.
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- The need of the hour is to ensure effective surveillance, compensation for those affected and to promote public confidence in vaccines.
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Quick Facts

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Multiple sclerosis

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It is an autoimmune disorder in which the body’s immune system attacks its own tissues.

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Hepatitis B

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It is a potentially life-threatening liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV).

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Source: The Hindu

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