Gorakhpur Health Tragedy

Why in news?

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More than 70 children have died in a span of few days at the BRD medical college in Gorakhpur, UP.

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What are the reasons?

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- **Oxygen** - Infections and possible disruption of oxygen supply in the paediatric ward are being blamed for the death.
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- **Non-payment of bills** is alleged as the reason for oxygen cylinders reportedly falling short.
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- Government **procurement** has always been a disorganized issue. Many Vendors have claimed that government agencies are bad paymasters, processes are corrupt and so on.
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- **Japanese encephalitis (JE) -** Gorkhapur is also the worst JE affected region in the state, which afflicted many of the children who died in this incident.
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- JE is correlated with expansion of irrigation and construction of dams four decades ago, resulting in an increase in disease-transmitting mosquitoes.
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- **Health System** - India’s worrisome track record on health, its spending, its delivery, lack of insurance support and the weak enforcement of rules on quality and governance are also the driving causes.
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What is to be done?

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- The immediate measure is to take up an **independent inquiry** and arrive at the reasons for the tragedy. The Indian Council of Medical Research can launch a special commission for U.P., treating it as a public health emergency.
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- There is no vaccine currently available for checking the spread of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome. Hence better **hygiene** is the only way to ward it off.
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- Addressing the issues of **hospital infrastructure**, shortfall of doctors and supporting medical staff is of prime importance.
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- The National Health Policy 2017 promises to increase **health spending** to 2.5% from the current 1 % by 2025.
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- However, experts feel it needs to be at least 5% or more because India is a country that is simultaneously home to malnutrition and lifestyle problems.
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- Health is a state subject, but it is high time the Centre set the bar high by prioritising health sector.
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Source: The Hindu

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