Leprosy Eradication

Why in News?

Recently , Supreme Court has set aside an NGT verdict directing the removal of a centre for leprosy patients running since 1960 in Pune.

What is leprosy?

- **Leprosy** - It is a chronic infectious disease (Hansen's disease) caused by a type of bacteria, ***Mycobacterium leprae***.
- **Infection** - The disease affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosa of the upper respiratory tract, and the eyes.
- **Transmission** - The bacteria are transmitted via droplets from the nose and mouth during close and frequent contact with untreated cases.
- **Treatment** - Leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT) and treatment in the early stages can prevent disability.
- **Spread** - Leprosy is a neglected tropical disease (NTD) which still occurs in more than 120 countries, with more than 200 000 new cases reported every year.
- The majority of annual new case detections are from South-East Asia.
- **Global elimination status** - Elimination of leprosy as a public health problem globally was achieved in 2000.

Elimination means prevalence of less than 1 per 10 000 population.

- **Status of leprosy in India** -Leprosy, although largely eradicated in many parts of the world, still remains a public health concern in India.
- **India caseload** - India accounts for 52% of the world's new leprosy patients despite being declared "Leprosy Eliminated" in 2005.

In 2022-23, more than 1,00,000 people were detected with leprosy in the country.

What are the challenges in eradicating leprosy?

- **Public perceptions -** The fear surrounding leprosy is compounded by its visible effects, making it harder to overcome.
- **Stigma -** Deep-rooted stigma associated with the disease discourages individuals from seeking treatment.
- **Social isolation -** Misunderstanding of the disease often leads to social ostracisation and the denial of basic human rights.

- **Discrimination** - In rural areas many individuals affected by leprosy hesitate to seek medical attention due to the fear of being ostracised which contributes to a delay in treatment.
- **Marginalization** - Individuals suffering from leprosy are denied access to basic human rights including education, healthcare and employment.
- **Inadequate capacity** - Limited laboratory services and diagnostic tool.

What are the roles of NGOs in combating leprosy?

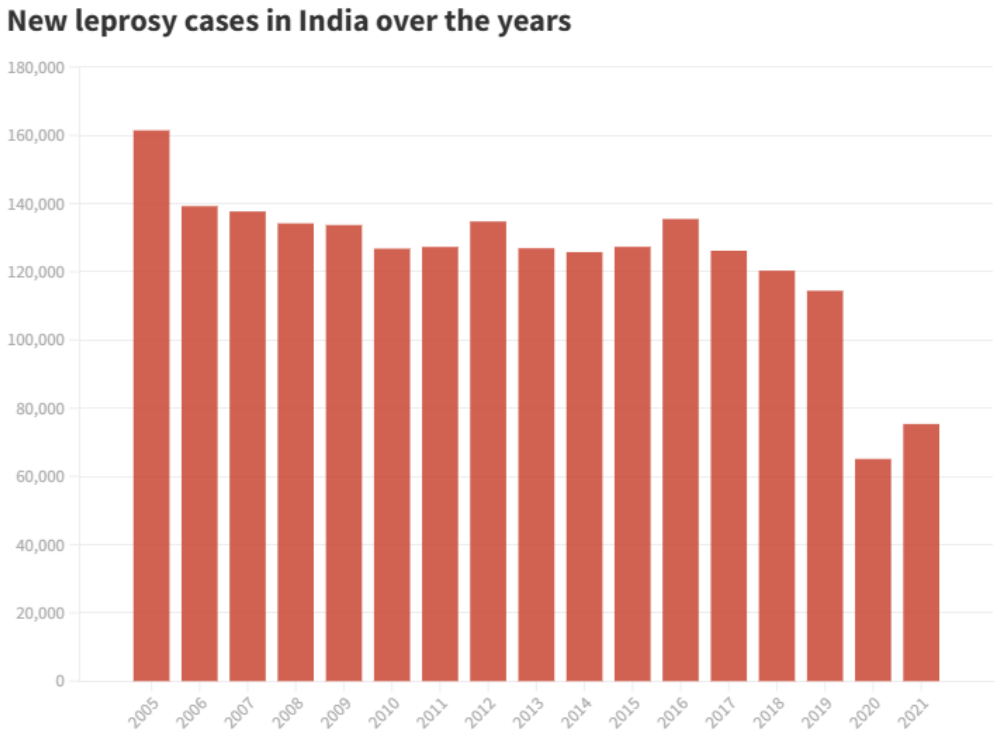
- **Combating the disease** – Many NGOs like NLR-India provide medicines for free through donations
- **Supporting NLEP** - NGOs support India's National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) in it's implementation.
- **Capacity building** - Training doctors and other healthcare workers for identification, diagnosis, treatment, management and prevention the disease effectively.

  ASHAs play a vital role in identifying cases during home visits and referring them for diagnosis.

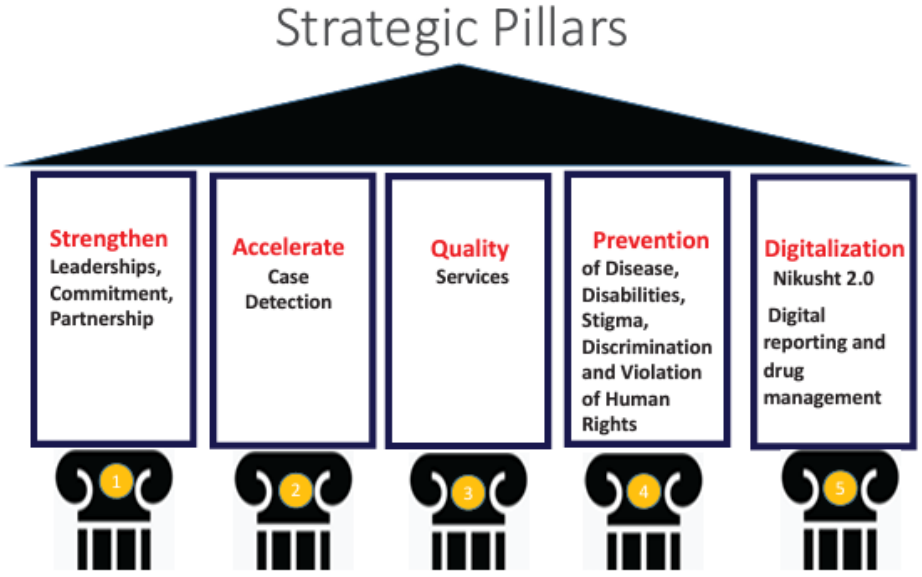
- **Offering rehabilitation services** – Programmes such as empowering the youth through vocational training, and healthcare camps.
- **Reintegration** - Ensuring that people affected by leprosy receive the help they need to reintegrate into the society
- **Raising awareness** - Educating the public, working on grassroot campaigns to raise awareness about the curable nature of the disease.
- **Fighting social stigma** – Educating the society about the disease to remove the prejudice about the disease and the patients.

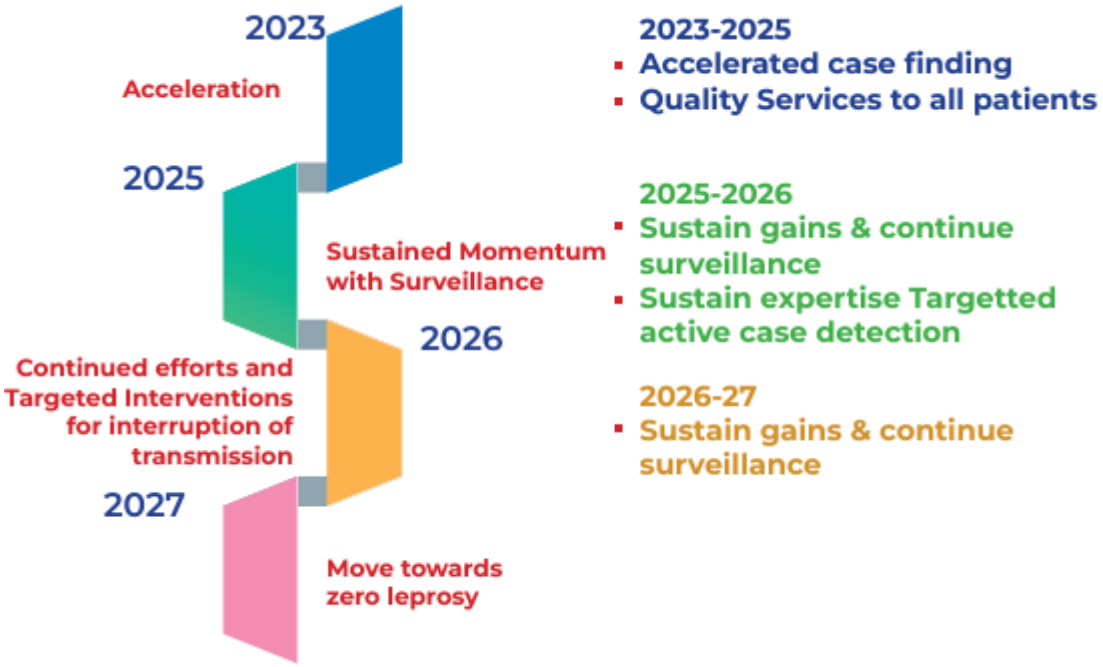
What is the progress of India in leprosy elimination?

- **NLEP** - National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) was launched in 1983 to eradicate leprosy through early detection and treatment.
- **Public health concern elimination** - India achieved the milestone of elimination of leprosy as a public health problem at country level in 2005.
- The same is yet to be achieved in a number of states and districts.
- **Decrease in prevalence** - The prevalence rate of leprosy in India has decreased from 57.8 per 10,000 population in 1983 to 0.40 per 10,000 population in 2022.
- **Decrease in new cases** - The number of new leprosy cases detected was dropped from 1,25,785 in 2014-15 to 75,394 in 2021-22.
- Alongside, the incidence of disabilities due to leprosy has also steadily decreased.



- **Target** - The government in 2023 set a goal to reduce the number of new cases of leprosy by 50% over five years.
- **New treatment regime** - The Central government has approved a new treatment regimen for leprosy, aiming to stop its transmission at the sub-national level by 2027.
- **SPARSH Campaign** - Leprosy prevention awareness campaign is held from Jan 30 to Feb 13 while observing World Leprosy Day on January 30.
- **NSP 2023-27** - National Strategic Plan and Roadmap of Leprosy 2023-2027 (NSP), aims to achieve zero transmission of leprosy in India by 2027





What lies ahead?

- Involvement of the private sector in detecting and reporting cases is very important, as many cases come directly to the private practitioners.
- To interrupt the disease transmission, it is important to understand the disease dynamics, strengthen the host immune response of those who are proven to be more prone in contacting the disease.

Reference

The Hindu | The leprosy story

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