Making India TB Free

Why in news?

On World TB Day (March 24), India reaffirms its commitment to make India TB–free by 2025 by ensuring access to quality healthcare and advanced treatment.

What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

- A potentially serious infectious disease caused by bacteria (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*) that mainly affects the lungs.
- TB is spread through the air when people with lung TB cough, sneeze or spit.



What are the issues with diagnosis and treatment of TB?

- The government sector is far stretched and lacks infrastructure.
- On the other hand, the private sector has a record of overuse of diagnostics and treatment.
- Many TB-affected individuals did not visit labs for diagnosis after the pandemic started and this is likely to rise the number of affected.
- Drug resistant TB (DR-TB) is a growing burden and threatens the TB management.

How is the economies of TB?

- TB-affected individuals and families are at risk of insufficient nutrition after COVID-19.
- The Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY), a nutritional support scheme giving a monthly sum of just Rs. 500 to TB-affected individuals, barely meets the needs.
- Patient adoption scheme is announced in which the government is asking individuals and corporates to adopt TB-affected individuals.

What are the other issues around TB?

- **Social stigma** - TB-affected individuals often face isolation and discrimination within the health system, families and communities.
- Addressing stigma has to be done structurally within the health system, in a consistent way.
- **Mental Health** - A large percentage of TB-affected persons have mental health problems.
- It impacts the patients' ability to continue treatment.
- India urgently needs to integrate mental health services as an essential part of TB services.
- **Poor TB services** – The quality of TB service in India is still undignified and often

unaffordable.
- Investment in TB infrastructure for diagnosis and treatment in the public sector has to be increased.

What needs to be done to fine-tune India's strategy?

- The government needs to employ new, innovative and long-term strategies to engage and work with the private sector as a partner.
- Providing access to new adherence technologies and drugs in both the public and private sectors.
- The capacity for reliable testing for detection of both drug-sensitive and drug-resistant TB must be expanded.
- Need to increase Nikshay Poshan Yojana support and also social support.
- A long-term stigma mitigation strategy in communities and for affected individuals and families is critical.

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), the private sector provides care for over 60 % of all Indians at some point.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/india-must-fine-tune-its-strategy-to-eliminate-tuberculosis/article65945184.ece

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