

## Striking a Balance

### The Debate Over Rajasthan's Right to Health Bill

The Bill sparked conflicting views, with doctors claiming that it placed an undue burden on them to provide healthcare to the underprivileged, while experts argued that it would promote the idea of healthcare as a fundamental right. Meanwhile, the government contended that it had already addressed many of the demands made by protesters.

Approximately 20,000 doctors voiced their opposition to the Right to Health (RTH) Bill, which was approved by the Rajasthan State Assembly. This groundbreaking legislation established access to healthcare as a legal right for every resident of the state, making Rajasthan the first Indian state to do so.

Under the Bill, neither private hospitals nor government hospitals could refuse emergency treatment to any citizen of the state. According to the Bill, the cost of treatment would be borne by the government, which would reimburse the private hospitals and clinics. However, this was not well received by private hospitals and clinics.

The Bill allowed any citizen of the state to access healthcare benefits in any established clinic. People could also receive consultations, medicines, and diagnostics in public health centres, as well as free outdoor and indoor patient services without prepayment.

The government claimed that they had incorporated proper suggestions from doctors before passing the bill, but doctors denied such claims. The doctors, who sought complete withdrawal of the Bill, said that it would put bureaucratic control on private hospitals and clinics.

The doctors were also concerned about how the government planned to reimburse hospitals for the cost of providing treatment and care to patients. They also sought clarification on what constituted an "emergency."

After several rounds of discussions, the impasse between the doctors and the government was finally resolved. It was agreed that private multi-speciality hospitals with less than 50 beds would be kept out of the purview of the RTH Bill. Additionally, private hospitals established without any government aid in the form of land or building would also be excluded from the RTH Bill.

Given the controversial nature of the RTH Bill, all stakeholders need to come to the table and engage in constructive dialogue to address the issues at hand. This process should involve representatives from the government, doctors, patient advocacy groups, and other relevant stakeholders to discuss the concerns raised by all ends and identify potential solutions.

Following this, the Bill should be reviewed, incorporating feedback and suggestions from all stakeholders, and a renewed effort should be made to build consensus and support for the legislation.

By collaborating and incorporating diverse perspectives, we could create a more comprehensive and effective healthcare system that would benefit all citizens while also addressing the concerns of private healthcare providers.

*Pradeep S. Mehta*  
Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General



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### 2 sisters lifted lonely seniors' spirits

Two American sisters of Indian origin are writing letters to elderly people around the world to help end their loneliness. They have written 1.5 million letters since the start of the COVID-pandemic.

In early 2020, due to COVID, Shreya Patel and her younger sister Saffron from Massachusetts were unable to spend time with their grandparents. They would call and message their grandparents every day, but still, they felt lonely.

Shreya stated that one day a friend of her grandmother wrote a letter to her, which played an important role in the founding of the Letter Against Isolation organisation.

(sangritoday.com, 29.01.23)

### Over the Moon!

On his 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday, Buzz Aldrin, the second man to walk on the moon, announced that he had married his long-term partner. He is the last of the three Apollo 11 astronauts still alive today.

In July 1971, Aldrin retired from NASA and went on to serve as Commandant of the Aerospace Research Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base in California. (TG, 21.01.23)

### A nest of hope

Twenty-three years ago, Akbar Shaikh, the patriarch of the family, bequeathed his ancestral haveli to his eldest son Shaikh Jamal with an oath that had passed down generations — that the structure of the mansion never is altered and that the sparrows that

have lived there for centuries not be displaced. Jamal agreed.

His forefathers, too, had acquiesced to the “clause”. The 52-year-old continues to fulfil his father’s wish. According to estimates from the UP Forest Department, the mansion is currently home to over 2,000 sparrows.

(Tol, 21.03.23)

### ISRO to start space tourism by 2030

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has revealed its plans to initiate a space tourism programme for India, with ISRO Chairman S Somnath putting a timeline of 2030 on the space travel module. By then, space enthusiasts will be able to take a trip to space.



The per-ticket price is likely to be around ₹6 crores. Those who take the trip will also be able to call themselves astronauts. Senior officials of the ISRO said that work related to the government’s space tourism module is gaining momentum. (HT, 16.03.23)

### Bengaluru prof gets his PhD at 79

To quote Einstein, “Knowledge is limited, but imagination encircles the world.” Bengaluru resident and professor of four decades, Prabhakar



Kupphalli, imagined big in his pursuit of knowledge and received his PhD in material science at 79 years of age.

In 2017, he joined the PhD programme at Dayananda Sagar College of Engineering in Bengaluru, where he is now a visiting teacher. The college is affiliated with Mangalore University. Five years later, he has “finally fulfilled my dream.” (BT, 25.03.23)

### Tribal girl seeks more ‘dowry’

A wedding organised on the outskirts of the city was cancelled by the bride at the last minute, ostensibly because of a low dowry. She demanded more than ₹2 lakhs, which was paid by the groom’s family in accordance with the tribe’s custom of a “reverse dowry” paid to prospective brides.



The wedding was scheduled to take place in Ghatkesar, and the bride, who was traveling from her native Aswaraopet village in Bhadradi Kothagudem, refused to take the nuptial vows. The decked-up wedding hall was abuzz with invitees waiting for the ‘muhurat’, when they were jolted by the bride’s decision. (Tol, 11.03.23)

## Media tycoon engaged for 5<sup>th</sup> time

Conservative media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, aged 92, will tie the knot for the fifth time. He is engaged to Ann Lesley Smith, a 66-year-old former police chaplain in San Francisco and the widow of American country singer and media executive Chester Smith.



After six years of marriage, Murdoch divorced his fourth wife, model Jerry Hall. The Australian media mogul, whose empire includes the Wall Street Journal, Fox News, and other influential outlets, is worth more than US\$20bn. (Tol, 21.03.23)

## Bill Gates 'dating' Paula Hurd

It looks like Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates has found love again. He is dating Paula Hurd —the widow of Mark Hurd. Mark Hurd was the CEO of software company Oracle and the one-time boss of Hewlett-Packard. He passed away in 2019.

Gates and Hurd were photographed seated side by side during the Men's Singles Final at the Australian Open in January 2023. The news comes nearly two years after Gates and his ex-wife Melinda French Gates announced their divorce after 27 years of marriage. In August 2021, their divorce was formalised. (HT, 09.02.23)

## 'Pushpa' fires up drive to save jungles

Inspired by the movie 'Pushpa', Solapur Forest Department staffers have put up posters with a 'filmy' warning to curb jungle fire incidences that occur occasionally during this time of the year.

Such posters have come up at some 25 places in six forest ranges spread across 11 tehsils of the district. The posters display a photo of filmstar Allu Arjun, who plays the central character in the south Indian blockbuster and spouts the tagline translated into Hindi:



'Jungle mein fire nahin, flower hone chahiye' (not fires, but flowers should bloom in the forest).

The posters put up by forest guards also carry a cautionary note, saying that if anyone is found lighting a fire in the jungle, they face a fine of ₹5,000 and a jail term of two years upon conviction. (Tol, 09.03.23)

## Missing woman found after 30 years

A Pennsylvania woman who went missing over 30 years ago and whose family believed she was dead has been found alive in Puerto Rico.

Patricia Kopta, now 83, was found on the island after she shared tidbits about her past with nursing home employees who had been caring for her

for years, chief Brian Kohlhepp of the Ross Township police department said at a news meeting.

The nursing home contacted the department, telling investigators that they had perhaps been taking care of a woman with dementia who might have disappeared from a Pennsylvania township near Pittsburgh in 1992.

(NDTV, 06.03.23)



## Youngest to complete Oceans Seven

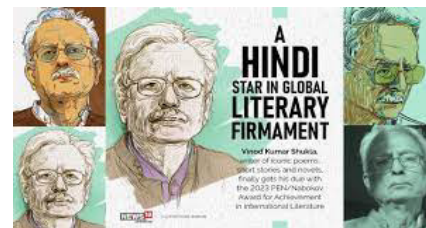
The country's most prolific open water long-distance swimmer, Prabhat Koli (23), has emerged as the youngest athlete in the world to accomplish the rare feat of completing the Oceans Seven challenge. He swam across Cook Strait in New Zealand, clocking 8 hours & 41 minutes to cross 28km amid bad weather.

Oceans Seven is touted as a decisive open-water-swimming challenge. Only a handful of swimmers have completed all seven swims. Koli's exploits as the youngest to complete the challenge have been recognised by the World Open Water Swimming Association and the Marathon Swimmers Federation.

(ET, 06.03.23)

## Hindi writer bags US Literary Award

Vinod Kumar Shukla, among the most distinctive and distinguished



contemporary Hindi writers, will receive the 2023 PEN/Nabokov Award for achievement in international literature.

The award is conferred annually to a living author whose body of work is of enduring originality and consummate craftsmanship. Born in Rajnandgaon in what's now west Chhattisgarh, Shukla's most acclaimed works include Naukar Ki Kameez (The Servant's shirt) which was adopted by auteur Mani Kaul into a feature film in 1999. (Tol, 01.03.23)

## Brits ditch tea and biscuit for samosas

Enjoying a cup of tea with plain or flavoured biscuits has been part of the Indian way of life for generations. But it is more popular in Britain, which has always been known to be a nation of tea lovers.

But you'd be surprised to know that the age-old British tradition of dunking a custard cream or bourbon biscuit into a cup of tea is slowly becoming losing steam and might become a thing of the past.

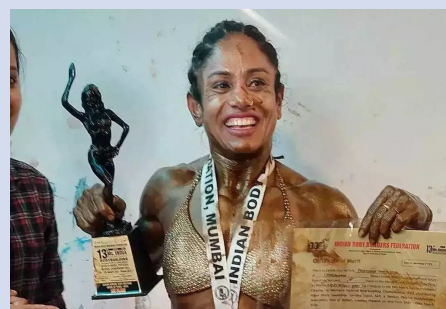
A new survey has revealed that youngsters in Britain are now ditching biscuits and eating samosas with their tea. (<https://www.timesnownews.com/>, 07.02.23)

## Mom is now a national champ

Pratibha Thapliyal, a 41-year-old homemaker from Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand, has won gold at the 13<sup>th</sup> National Senior Women's Bodybuilding Championship, held by the Indian Body Building Federation in Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh. A mother of two teens, Pratibha achieved the feat in only her second event and just a couple of years after taking up the sport.

Five years ago, however, she was struggling. "My thyroid levels had risen to 50 against the level of five. The doctor advised me to work out. I joined a gym with my husband Bhupesh and lost 30kg in a few months."

(Tol, 11.03.23)



## Mughal Gardens renamed Amrit Udyan

The Rashtrapati Bhavan Gardens — popularly known as the Mughal Gardens was renamed Amrit Udyan on January 28, 2023.

The gardens are thrown open to the public for a limited period during spring each year. Designed by Edwin Lutyens — the iconic garden is spread across 15 acres and it incorporates both Mughal and English landscaping styles.

There are six lotus-shaped fountains at the crossings of these channels rising to a height of 12 feet. The gardens house nearly 2500 varieties of Dahlias and 120 varieties of roses. (TH, 28.01.23)

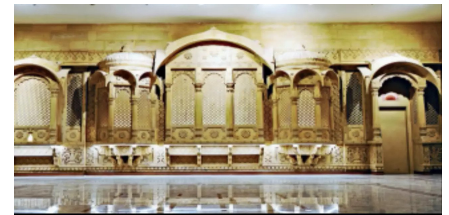


2.5km in a day to 65 km-long treks lasting a week. In six such routes, trekkers can avail of homestays and stay in nature camps. (Tol, 20.03.23)

## RIC's 'square' design based on Navagraha

The majestic structure of the Rajasthan International Centre (RIC) inaugurated by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has been designed on a square module based on the Hindu mythology of Navagraha.

What's more, around 10 years back, a Jaipur-based architect designed it sitting around 10,000 kms away in the Australian harbour city of Sydney.



At the centre of this square, you would find the skylight just like the chowks (courtyard) in traditional Rajasthani havelis. This skylight channels represents the power of Brahma. (Tol, 17.02.23)

## Celebrate weddings among boys

It is said that if you want to see the beauty of Holi, then go to the villages. In one of the strangest Holi traditions, held in Banswara's Barodiya village, a customary wedding between two boys is organised in which the bridegroom and the bride both are young boys. This marriage is only a custom.



The boy found first is declared the groom and the latter one is declared as the bride. All the rituals of marriage are performed in the mandap by a pandit. The Geras sing wedding songs. Village elders said people of the Kheduwa caste living in the village believed such a wedding would enable peace among all the families in the village. (Tol, 06.04.23)

## Rare red phalaropes at Sambhar Lake

Red phalaropes, a vagrant to the Indian subcontinent, were recorded at the Sambhar Lake in the district. The red phalarope or grey phalarope (Phalaropus fulicarius) is a small wader, which breeds in the Arctic regions of North America and Eurasia.

Experts opine that adult birds are about 20 cm long and weigh 37–75 g. The female is slightly larger and more brightly coloured than the male. The male is paler and dull in colour and has brown and black striations on the crown and chin. (Tol, 14.02.23)

## Sikh brothers reunited

75 years after they separated during the partition in 1947, the families of two Sikh brothers met at the Kartarpur Corridor, singing songs and showering flowers on each other in a reunion made possible through social media.

The families of Gurdev Singh and Daya Singh arrived at the Kartarpur Corridor for a reunion. Emotional scenes of the family reunion were witnessed at Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur Sahib, where they sang songs to express their joy and showered flowers on each other. (DB, 05.03.23)

## Pak Temple waits for Holi colours

Pakistan is related to the festival of Holi through the Hindu Prahaldpuri Temple which is situated in Multan. It is believed that the start of Holi was marked at this temple in erstwhile India, which is now in Pakistan.

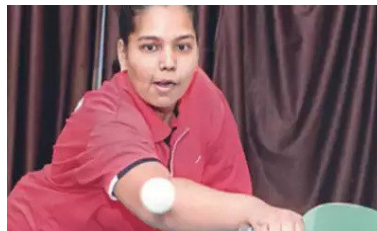
It is said that it was here that Lord Vishnu had appeared in his Narsingh form, and had killed Hiranya Kashyapa for the protection of Prahalad. After which Prahalad had made a temple for the Lord here. This place has been called

Mulsthana in the Vedas, and the beginning of Holi took place in this temple. (DB, 06.03.23)

## Dhwani wants to be the Dhoni of TT

She could barely stand, yet refused to use a wheelchair. Her legs would shake, but Dhwani Shah's confidence stayed firm as she went on to win battles in life and across the table-tennis table.

This 26-year-old Rajkot paddler has mastered the art of not ducking the curveballs that health complications keep throwing at her, instead smashing them back.



Dhwani, who has been suffering from a brain tumour since the age of 7 years, has already undergone four open brain surgeries, of which three were performed before she turned 11. (Tol, 31.03.23)

## Uttarakhand to open trek trails

From some never-seen-before trek trails in the dense coniferous forests of Chakrata to stargazing in Molta and geological excursion at 1,000ft in Kharamba, the highest point of Doon valley, the Uttarakhand Forest Department is gearing up to offer unique trekking experiences to travellers this summer.

15 different sites have been identified in the forests of the state where people can trek. They can choose the trails depending on their vacation duration, opting for routes that involve trekking

## Greening the Rails

Moving towards environment-friendly operations the electrification of entire broad-gauge lines in Rajasthan would get complete by March 2024. The Railway Ministry has allocated a fund of ₹1217 crores for electrification in the recent railway budget.



Rajasthan is divided into six railway divisions of which four – Jaipur, Ajmer, Bikaner and Jodhpur – fall under the North Western Railway. The rest two – Kota and Bharatpur divisions – fall under West Central Railway and North Central Railway. (Tol, 10.02.23)

## Streamlining Vehicle Registration

The Transport Department will issue e-licence and e-registration of vehicles to owners and smart card-based documents will be issued only on a specific request.

Applicants will have the option of choosing whether they want a smart card or not while filling out the form, both when they apply for a licence or registration certificate of the vehicle. Officials said that till now, customers were paying Rs 200, as charges for the smart card, which they can now save with the online option.

The electronic version of the document can be downloaded from the mParivahan application and will be considered valid by transport authorities. (Tol, 17.03.23)

## 75 Years of Excellence in Education

The Department of Posts released a stamp to commemorate SMS Medical College's platinum jubilee. It was a nostalgic moment for doctors who passed out from medical college years ago. They were invited and felicitated at the same institute where they had studied.

The alumni that had gathered at the auditorium looked nostalgic and were seen sharing experiences from when they were students at the medical college decades ago.



The organisers of the event, through a video, showed how the SMS Medical College was conceptualised 75 years ago. (Tol, 05.03.23)

## Driving Towards a Sustainable Future

Tata Motors launched its first registered vehicle scrapping facility (RVSF) in the country in Jaipur.

The National Vehicle Scrappage Policy was introduced to promote the circular economy by creating an ecosystem for phasing out unfit and polluting vehicles and achieving a lower carbon footprint in the country by replacing them with greener and more fuel-efficient vehicles.

Developed and operated by Tata Motors' partner Ganganagar Vaahan Udyog Pvt Ltd, the facility will scrap end-of-life passenger and commercial vehicles of all brands. (ET, 21.02.23)

## Recognising Excellence in Fertility Care

16 clinics providing treatment to childless couples through assisted reproductive technique (ART) and by surrogacy have faced rejections when they applied for certification for registration under the Surrogacy (regulation) Act, 2021 and under the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021.

However, 56 such clinics have been approved by the Health Department and were provided with certificates of registration.



It is for the first time that such clinics are being provided with registration certification for their regulation and supervision and prevention of misuse of the ART. (Tol, 01.02.23)

## Shaping the Future of Jaipur

The Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) of have proposed to prepare the fourth master plan for Jaipur city, this time for over 15 years.

The current master plan being followed by the JDA and other civic authorities and agencies is for 2025 and as per the new proposal, the next master plan will be applicable till 2040.

This will be the fourth master plan to be implemented for Pink City. The first master plan was prepared in 1971 and it was for the next 20 years.

(Tol, 31.01.23)

## Transforming Waste Management

After Malviya Nagar and Murlipura zones, JMCbGreater will start a regular waste collection in the rest of its zones.

The civic body has issued work orders for waste collection vehicles for Jhotwara and Sanganer zones and the work order for Vidhyadhar Nagar and Jagatpura zones will be issued within one month. The waste collection vehicles will have a capacity of 1,200 kgs increased from 800 kgs, along with the facility of a helper.

The civic body has ensured that the company in charge of waste collection will ensure that all the vehicles have a live tracking system and also install RFID tags outside houses which will be scanned when waste is collected. This will send automatic real-time updates to the monitoring system. (Tol, 31.03.23)

## Vande Bharat to Connect Cities

Vande Bharat Express trains are all set to roll out in Rajasthan soon as the Indian Railways has allocated ₹30 crore for these premium services. The railway board had already allocated five Vande Bharat chair car rakes for the state of which two are for Jaipur and one each for Madar, Udaipur and Sri Ganganagar.



According to recent reports of Indian Railways, the first Vande Bharat Express service in Rajasthan may connect New Delhi and Jaipur. The travel time between the two cities is likely to be reduced to less than two hours from the current time of four hours.

At present, a total of eight Vande Bharat Express trains are operating on various routes in the country.

(Tol, 04.02.23)

### Progress in Addressing POCSO Cases

Out of 6,801 pending cases registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in the fast-track courts in Rajasthan, 4,015 (59 percent) have been disposed of in 2022.

The amended law increased the minimum punishment for rape to 10 years of imprisonment, extendable to life imprisonment. In cases of rape of girls under 12 years of age, the provision of the death penalty was introduced.

A time limit of two months each for investigation and trial was prescribed vide Sections 173(1A) and Section 309 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

(Tol, 28.02.23)

### Revolutionising Surgical Procedures

Keeping pace with technological advances, Sawai Man Singh Hospital has brought two robotic systems worth ₹25 crore each to perform Robotic-Assisted Surgery. These machines have been



installed at the general surgery and urology departments for providing free surgeries to beneficiaries of the Chiranjeevi Health Insurance Scheme.

The robotic arms will be controlled by a surgeon while sitting at a computer console. According to doctors, the

surgeries by robotic technology will be quite useful for cancer and hernia patients. The machines will be used only after the surgeons get trained.

(Tol, 23.02.23)

### Solar Parks to Boost Renewable Energy

As many as nine solar parks have been identified in Rajasthan with an aggregate capacity of 7,036 MW under



the scheme for 'Development of Solar Parks and Ultra Mega Solar Power Projects'.

The solar parks approved in Rajasthan include Bhadlall Solar Park (680 MW), Bhadla-III Solar Park (1000 MW), Phalodi-Pokhran Solar Park (750 MW), Fatehgarh Phase-1B Solar Park (421 MW), Nokh Solar Park (925 MW), Pugal Solar Park Ph-I (1000 MW), Pugal Solar Park Ph-II (450 MW) and RVUN Solar Park (1310 MW).

(Tol, 19.02.23)

### Cloth Bag Vending Machines

To reduce the use of single-use plastic bags, JMC Heritage has now decided to install cloth bag vending machines at markets and mandis in the city. As a trial five such machines are being installed in areas under the jurisdiction of JMC Heritage, said officials. Customers will be able to get a cloth bag by putting in a coin of ₹5 in the machine.

Similar machines will also be installed at marketplaces in areas under JMC Greater. A total of 10 such machines are likely to be installed in the JMC Greater area. The municipal corporation has been taking regular action against the use of single-use plastic in markets and seizing plastic daily.

(Tol, 16.02.23)

### Streamline your Energy Costs

As many as 88 percent of electricity consumers in Rajasthan used to receive irregular bills before smart meters were installed, and the number of such consumers fell to 19 percent after the transition to smart meters, according to a study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW).

More than 90 percent of the consumers surveyed in Rajasthan said the transition to smart meters has been smooth, and 58 percent said bill



payments have been easier with smart meters.

The CEEW study is based on a survey of nearly 2,700 urban households, covering 1,200 prepaid and 1,500 postpaid consumers, across six states, including Rajasthan. These six states account for 80 percent of all smart meters installed in India.

(Tol, 23.03.23)

## Boosting Rural Employment

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot approved the proposal to provide additional 25 days of employment to those families who have completed 100 days of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). For this, the CM made a budget provision of ₹675 crore.

Along with this, 200 days of employment will be available for people belonging to Kathaudi and Sahariya communities and specially-abled persons.

The Government of India has made it mandatory for the state government to link the Aadhaar details of MGNREGA labourers with their bank accounts for the release of their payments/wages.

(Tol, 05.03.23)



## Towards a Happy, Healthy State

### Rajasthan's Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana

*Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana has proven to be a big boon for Rajasthan's underprivileged people.*



In India, medical costs are a curse for every family. The expense not only depletes a family's financial resources but also breaks the spirits of the majority of breadwinners. However, the Government of Rajasthan's main health insurance programme, which has been in place since May 01, 2021, has now proven to be a big boon for the state's underprivileged people. Before the introduction of the Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana, free medical and surgical care was exclusively offered to all state residents at government hospitals. Now, all residents can receive free care even in the state's private hospitals.

The programme offers a registered family an annual health insurance benefit of ₹10 lakh. The programme not only provides free medical care in government and linked private hospitals, but it also pays for expenses up to 15 days after a patient is discharged and up to five days before that. Since every ailment is covered by this insurance, the majority of citizens are content to pay a little annual payment of ₹850 to use the services, which is 50 per cent of the total premium of ₹1,700,

with the remaining 50 per cent being covered by the state exchequer.

For households who qualify under the Socio-Economic Census of 2011, the Rajasthan government also pays the entire premium for small and marginal farmers, contract labourers, and food security beneficiary families. In a further significant milestone, starting on April 01, 2022, the state government has agreed to cover the cost of any organ transplant, in addition to increasing insurance coverage to ₹10 lakh per family and providing ₹5 lakh in accident insurance.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot recently said that the state has 90 percent health insurance coverage, compared to the national average of 41 percent, and that providing free medical procedures like knee and kidney replacements at its hospitals has been a huge relief to the population.

Speaking at the All India Presiding Officers' Conference's closing session, Gehlot said the Chiranjeevi Health Insurance Scheme was an amazing achievement and should be adopted nationwide. Gehlot asserted that Rajasthan has evolved into a national model state for the health sector and

predicted that "one day all other states and the Centre would also have to implement (similar schemes)" and that he had "also asked the Prime Minister to implement the Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana throughout the entire country."

A few stories across the state demonstrate how the health insurance scheme is improving people's lives. Despite being one of the most underdeveloped districts in the state, Jhalawar district leads the way in enrolling families in the scheme. In the last eight months, the National Child Health Programme in the district of Jhalawar checked over 2.5 lakh children.

One such instance involved Ritika, a 3-year-old who had a hole in her heart. The Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr G M Syed sent the girl to a private hospital in Kota for surgery under the Chiranjeevi plan, even though her impoverished family from the district's Chhoti Raipur hamlet was unable to spend the estimated ₹3 lakh to cure the child. Along with giving Ritika a chance at life, 16 children were also treated without any charges.

*The news item appeared in the Indian Express on January 22, 2023*

# World Health Day 2023

## Aware Consumers Key to Universal Healthcare

Simi TB\*

The planet is choking in pollution, and human health is compromised by unsustainable consumption and production at a time when the pandemic refusing to subside. World Health Day 2023 with the theme, Health for All, underlines the importance of raising awareness on healthcare issues. It becomes all the more relevant as countries are committed to achieving universal healthcare by 2030 which is fundamental to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 – Good Health and Well Being.



Universal health coverage is central to a functioning healthcare system. In India, the government has launched several initiatives to improve access to healthcare and increase the quality of healthcare services. The Ayushman Bharat scheme looks to provide health coverage to over 100 million vulnerable families across the country.

### World Health Day and healthy lifestyle choices

Access to a healthy, nutritious, and sustainable diet is a fundamental component of universal health coverage. However, many individuals and communities, not just those living in poverty, lack access to nutritious food, leading to malnutrition and other health problems.

As per the recent Global Hunger Index 2022, India still suffers from child malnutrition and the country is ranked 107 out of 121 countries, based on various parameters such as child stunting and wasting.

### A multipronged approach is crucial

To achieve health for all, it is crucial to address both the inequalities in access to healthy food and the replacement of nourishing domestic foods with ultra-processed food, sugary beverages, and fast food with poor nutritional quality. This can be achieved through a multifaceted approach, including:

**Consumer education and awareness:** Consumers need to be educated about deceptive food marketing practices to help them make informed decisions about the food they purchase and consume.

**Self-initiatives by the food industries:** The food industry can play a vital role in promoting healthier eating habits by reformulating food products and offering healthier options. By reformulating food products and reducing added sugars, salt, and unhealthy fats, industries can help consumers make healthier food choices.

**Policy interventions:** The government and policymakers can support healthier eating habits by implementing policies such as food labelling regulations, taxes on sugary drinks and junk foods, and restrictions on marketing unhealthy foods to children.

**Advocacy and research:** Civil society and health experts should advocate for policies and actions that promote healthier eating habits such as strong food labelling laws, and regulations on the marketing of unhealthy foods.

### Food warning labels and public health

Clear and easy-to-understand food warning labels can easily help individuals make informed decisions about the food they consume and promote healthier food choices. Front-of-pack labelling (FoPL) can be particularly helpful for rural consumers who may have limited access to information about the nutritional content of the food they consume.

In India where a significant part of the population lives in rural areas, FoPL labelling can play a critical role in improving public health outcomes. Also, such labelling can be particularly effective in promoting healthy eating habits among vulnerable populations, including children, low-income households, and those with limited access to healthcare services.

By addressing such challenges in access to healthy food, we can promote universal health coverage and ensure that everyone has access to the food they need to maintain good health. World Health Day 2023 provides an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of healthy food choices and advocate for policies and programmes that promote access to healthy, nutritious, and sustainable food for all.

\*Policy Analyst, CUTS International.

This article can also be viewed in Policy Circle, April 07, 2023

Sources: BT: Bharat Times; DB: Dainik Bhaskar; ET: Economic Times; HT: Hindustan Times; NDTV: New Delhi Television Ltd.; TG: The Guardian; TH: The Hindu; Tol: Times of India

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