DRUG FREE INDIA

After making India free of Naxals, and riding Kashmir of recurring violence and luring of local youth into Pakistan-based terrorist gangs, the Narendra Modi government has launched a mission to rid India of the drugs by 2029. This is a major programme given the government's mission to make India a developed nation by 2047. The youth are the most important tool for India's transformation and since rising drug usage is targeted at them, this Drug-free India is crucial for all. As Home Minister Amit Shah spoke about it, she was not indulging in rhetoric. He outlined the plan of action for achieving this goal. This is also a crucial issue for Jammu and Kashmir where the society has been battling the rising drug menace since the eruption of armed insurgency. The successive government kept battling the terrorists but did not even pay heed to the narcotics trade which was being run in J&K under its veneer. Shah said the Centre has adopted a coordinated, nationwide strategy to dismantle the entire narcotics network, from drug trafficking and financing to rehabilitation, to achieve its goal of drug-free India by 2029. It's a harsh reality that the dream of Viksit Bharat can not be realised without helping the youth to get disengaged from drugs. India's enemies know this and they would put their best efforts to paralyse India's youth power through drugs. The major shift in policy is that earlier the governments swooped on smaller fish by arresting an odd drug seller but did not take a holistic view of the problem. The drug cartels are very powerful transborder syndicates. Unless the government reach to their origins and smash their entire networks, they continue to live like amoebas. A four-tier National Coordination Committee for Countering Drug Trafficking (NCORD) mechanism is already was working upto the district levels to ensure coordinated action against the drug menace. Besides dedicated Anti-Narcotics Task Forces have been constituted in all states and UT and the police have been connected with the national grid. Besides, the government has reorganised the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and increased its capacity and manpower to exercise its powers in controlling the drugs movement. As, we have been in J&K, the Modi government has added counselling centers across the states to help the youth who have got hooked on to the drugs and substances.

Gearing up to eliminate tuberculosis

Gobardhan Das | Simarjot Kaur

For much of the developed world, Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease of the past. For India, it remains one of the country's biggest public health and economic challenges. Nearly one in every four TB patients worldwide are from India, making the disease not just a healthcare concern, but a test of the nation's scientific capability, policy execution and innovation ecosystem. As India is marching towards becoming a developed nation by 2047, eliminating TB is no longer simply about saving lives, it is about reducing healthcare costs and demonstrating India's ability to solve a global problem through indigenous innovation. OrderInfection Tests

Over the past decade, India has significantly strengthened its fight against Tuberculosis (TB) through the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP). Although the ambitious 2025 elimination target remains a work in progress, it has accelerated investments in diagnostics, treatment and patient support. The results are encouraging. According to the WHO Global TB Report 2025, India's TB incidence has declined by 21%, from 237 to 187 cases per lakh population between 2015 and 2024, almost twice the global rate of decline.

During the same period, TB mortality fell by 25%, while treatment coverage improved dramatically from 53% to 92%, reflecting stronger case detection and better access to care. Digital platforms such as Ni-kshay, nutritional support through the Ni-kshay Poshan Yojana, expanded molecular diagnostics and nationwide community campaigns under TB Mukt Bharat have together transformed India's TB response, laying a strong foundation for eventual elimination.

Despite this progress, the battle is far from over. Drug-resistant TB remains a serious threat, requiring longer treatment, higher costs and more complex clinical management. Delayed diagnosis, undernutrition, diabetes, overcrowded living conditions and social stigma continue to fuel transmission. Addressing these issues will require stronger public health systems alongside continued scientific innovation.

Scientific innovation is changing the landscape of TB treatment. New medicines such as Bedaquiline, Delamanid and Pretomanid have significantly improved outcomes for patients with drug-resistant TB by enabling shorter and more effective treatment regimens. Researchers are also working on improved vaccines, rapid diagnostics and host-directed therapies that strengthen the body's immune response against infection.

India is not merely adopting these innovations; it is actively developing them. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and its National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT) are leading research on new diagnostics, treatment strategies and disease surveillance. The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) are supporting startups and research institutions working on vaccines, diagnostics and novel therapeutics, helping build a stronger indigenous innovation ecosystem.

Indian industry is also playing a crucial role. Companies such as Macleods Pharmaceuticals, Lupin, Cipla and Cadila Pharmaceuticals manufacture affordable anti-TB medicines that are used across India and also exported to many low and middle-income countries. Meanwhile, Molbio Diagnostics has developed the portable Truenat platform, enabling rapid molecular diagnosis even in remote healthcare settings.

These achievements reinforce India's position as not only the "Pharmacy of the world" but also an emerging hub for affordable healthcare innovation. Beyond conventional medicines, Indian scientists are exploring natural and host-directed therapies that could improve TB treatment. Researchers at the CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (IIIM) and the CSIR-Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI) are studying bioactive compounds from medicinal plants such as Ashwagandha, Turmeric, Giloy and Black Pepper for their immune-modulating properties. While these therapies are still under investigation and cannot replace standard treatment, they may eventually complement existing medicines by improving patient recovery.

Unlike many Western countries, where TB has become relatively uncommon, India continues to face unique demographic and socio-economic conditions that sustain transmission. High population density, nutritional deficiencies and unequal access to healthcare mean that solutions developed elsewhere may not fully address India's needs. This makes indigenous innovation essential. Affordable diagnostics, vaccines and medicines designed and manufactured in India will not only strengthen national health security but can also serve other high-burden countries facing similar challenges. The next phase of India's TB strategy must move beyond disease management to innovation leadership. Greater investment in biotechnology, vaccine development, genomic surveillance and public-private partnerships will be essential to develop affordable, scalable solutions. Equally important will be improving nutrition, sanitation, early diagnosis and awareness, since eliminating TB requires both scientific breakthroughs and stronger community health systems.

India now has an opportunity to redefine its role in the global fight against TB. The country possesses world-class scientific institutions, a robust pharmaceutical industry, and a rapidly growing biotechnology ecosystem.

By combining strong public policy with indigenous research and private-sector innovation, India can move beyond managing the world's largest TB burden to developing solutions for the world. The fight against TB is no longer only about eliminating a disease, it is about demonstrating India's ability to lead through science, innovation and affordable healthcare. India's sustained commitment and investment is likely to become a model for TB elimination across the world.

WHEN ORGANISATIONS LOSE THE HUMAN TOUCH

Sanjay Chandra

I became a member of Club Mahindra in 2010. Whenever I needed something beyond my normal entitlement-an additional room, for instance-I would write to them. Someone would call to understand my requirement. If I missed the call, they would call again. I would be placed on a waitlist and, sometimes, the additional room became available. At other times, it did not. Even then, there was an apology and an explanation. Whether I eventually got the room was not what stayed with me. Someone had listened. Someone had tried. I felt valued.

Over the past few years, I sensed a change. A missed call is sometimes followed by an email saying that I could not be contacted, bringing the conversation to an end. Recently, dissatisfied with the response to a request, I gave a poor rating on their app. An executive called but explained that he was helpless. He could not even place me on a waitlist. When I asked for the escalation matrix, he promised to send it by email, which he never sent.

It would be easy to blame technology or the increasing scale of organisations. Yet my experiences elsewhere make me hesitate. Whenever I stay at Taj or ITC properties, I encounter employees who appear instinctively inclined to help. They cannot always fulfil a request, nor should one expect them to. But there is usually an attempt to understand whether something can be done. The difference is subtle but important. Good service is not about always saying yes. It is about making the customer feel that the request has been heard and someone has genuinely tried.

My father still narrates an incident from more than four decades ago. While browsing at Harrods in London, he inadvertently left his camera behind. He realised it only after boarding his flight back to India. This was before mobile phones and emails, when international calls were prohibitively expensive. On returning home, he wrote to the store. Sometime later, he was surprised to receive the camera. Accompanying it was a letter from Harrods apologising for the inconvenience. The customer had forgotten his camera. The store apologised.

Perhaps technology, therefore, is not the real issue. Harrods could demonstrate concern without apps, customer relationship management software or automated tracking systems.

Taj and ITC demonstrate that modern organisations can retain the human touch. And my experience with Club Mahindra suggests that an organisation can possess that quality and gradually lose it. Why does this happen?

As organisations grow, processes become necessary. Standardisation improves efficiency and technology allows businesses to serve customers at a scale otherwise impossible. But processes also define what employees may or may not do. Somewhere along the way, an employee can stop asking, "How can I help?" and begin asking, "What does the system allow me to do?" Management

Perhaps this is where leadership and organisational culture matter. Employees work within the systems, authority and expectations created for them. It is leadership that determines whether procedures become rigid boundaries or allow room for empathy when circumstances demand it. Technology and growth need not make organisations impersonal; much depends on the culture created at the top. When employees know that helping customers matters as much as following a process, that understanding shapes every interaction.

Systems may become smarter and processes more efficient. But an organisation retains its beating heart only as long as its leadership remains willing to care-and creates a culture in which caring is possible.

India's next fiscal challenge is climate risk

Anuradha PS

Climate change in India has been looked upon more as an environmental issue for decades. This then turned into a development challenge and now to a fiscal risk. Transport networks and supply chains can be paralysed during a flood. Heatwaves may decrease productivity from work and increase electricity consumption. During drought, the real purchasing power gets affected and farm incomes. Cyclones can cause damage to public infrastructure, disrupt activities of businesses and affect the provision of essential services. TrackAtmospheric Data The expenses continue after these uncertainties. Governments need to fund relief, reconstruction, social protection and the restoration of public assets, which may occur at a time when economies are already strained, and public revenues are already limited. Beyond the standard budget debates, a critical question remains unaddressed: what is the true fiscal cost of climate change for India?"

The costs of activities aimed at addressing climate change and its impacts are already significant in India. But the difficulty is that this is distributed across ministries, sectors and programmes and the fiscal exposure is not clear.

The National Institute of Public Finance and Policy did a study in 2020 that estimated the expenditure related to climate programmes accounts for about 5–6 per cent of all national budgetary expenditure, of which a significant portion is specifically targeted.

A threat to the financial stability

A study of climate change and fiscal deficits in India in 2026 finds that compared to the overall government expenditure the coefficient of variation of the climate-related expenditure is very high, at 26.4 per cent. It also detects higher budget differences in sectors vulnerable to climate change. The figures must be taken with a pinch of salt as they are based on how climate-related spending is categorized.

The relevance is not just on the side of increased spending by governments due to climate change. It could increase the uncertainty of public expenditure. In India, IAC projects total adaptation needs of `56.68 trillion up to 2030 in a business-as-usual (BAU) scenario. Further, NITI Aayog has also pointed out that the potential climate-damage cost to India by 2030 will be `15.5 trillion. These are scenario-based estimates, rather than obligations which have to show up in government accounts.

The establishment of another independent Indian climate fund is not necessarily required in India. It requires a Union Budget's Climate Fiscal Risk Statement. The statement needs to stipulate five areas: What are the most flood, drought, heatwave, cyclone and water-stress-exposed sectors, states and public assets? What contingencies might be the risks that governments would be exposed to following a severe climate event? There are models from other countries to be learned: The UK's Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) looks at the impact of physical climate impact, adaptation and transition to a low-carbon economy on borrowing and public debt. The Treasury has also added climate change and adverse weather response considerations to its long-term economic and fiscal analysis of New Zealand. In the Philippines, the Climate Change Expenditure Tagging (CCET) method is employed to identify, monitor and report on climate-related expenditure in the budget process. India requires both aspects: knowing the amount of spending it is doing on climate action, and what climate change could do to the public finances.

Fiscal reviews typically focus on lower growth, higher interest rates, and lower revenues. Climate shocks should be incorporated into the same exercise. If a big flood does the damage, what will happen to a state's finances? What occurs following successive droughts to agricultural and rural-support expenditure?

The IMF's Quantitative Climate Change Risk Assessment Fiscal Tool (Q-CRAFT) is a tool that can be used by governments to analyse the implications of climate scenarios for a country's macroeconomic and fiscal indicators, including government debt. These should be adopted systematically throughout India, starting at the Union level and gradually moving on to make climate-fiscal assessments at the state level. States have to be included.

They carry the brunt of the initial expense of wrecked roads, drainage, water systems, agriculture, health services and disaster response. But they have different financial means. The fiscal federalism aspect of climate risk is therefore also a question. Efforts of the 16th Finance Commission provide a useful context for understanding how intergovernmental transfers can help address variations in climate exposure, climate resilience requirements and fiscal capacity.

Fiscal insurance as resilience

Often, a resilient drainage system or heat-resistant public infrastructure and drought-resilient agriculture are regarded as extra costs. It should instead be seen as some future expenditure that is not incurred. The value of an investment can't just be based on its initial cost if it lowers reconstruction expenses the next day. Public investment appraisal should also take into account losses and liabilities that resilience can avoid. The same principle goes for insurance. If a loss is not covered by insurance, then governments fill the gap as insurers of last resort. By using appropriate catastrophe insurance, parametric insurance and other risk-transfer mechanisms, a more manageable share of losses for governments can be reduced following disasters. The transition to the lower-carbon economy is also a part of climate-risk accounting. The fuel-tax revenues and subsidies could be impacted by changes in the consumption of fossil fuels, and the transition to renewable energy, electricity grids, storage, green mobility and worker adjustment will involve investments.

Progress has been made in India with regard to monitoring climate investment and bolstering disaster management. It is now time to reflect climate risk in fiscal policy. The impacts of climate change can build up over time – from repeated floods, crop failures, "heat-stressed" cities, damaged infrastructure, increased reconstruction costs, and the increased need for public support. These pressures, when clearly apparent in government accounts, come on the back of fiscal space having been restricted. India is facing a new hurdle of budget administration: not only is there a question of how much it spends, but also of how well India's public finances will withstand a changing climate. Rather than being reshaped by climate change, its budgets have to anticipate the risks of climate change. StreamHistory Documentaries

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