

Battling TB

What is the issue?

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- In 2015 alone, 4.8 lakh Indians died of the airborne disease.
- India's leading chest physician called it "**Ebola with wings**" on World Tuberculosis Day (March 24).

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How well is the access to TB medicines?

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- Two new TB drugs, **Bedaquiline** and **Delamanid**, being used in Europe and the United States for several years, are **yet to be made available in India's** national health-care system.

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- The drug is available only in six sites across the country.

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- **According to Health Ministry's annual TB report released, only 207 patients have access to the drug needed by at least 79,000 patients.**

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- Herein lies the crux of the matter, making India's bureaucratic inertia the world's problem.

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- TB does not respect geographical boundaries and patients continue to transmit drug-resistant forms of the disease due to the poor access to medicines.

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- Not only does India shoulder the highest TB burden in the world, it also accounts for the **most drug-resistant patients.**

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What does the TB report clarify?

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- In a major embarrassment for the government, WHO had to revise global TB estimates last year after India informed that it had been **under-reporting TB cases** from 2000 to 2015.

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- The global estimates were revised upwards to 10.4 million people infected with TB — a jump of 5,00,000 from 2014.

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- This apparent increase in the disease burden reflects the incorporation of more accurate data.

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- With backward calculations, both TB incidence and mortality rates are decreasing from 2000 to 2015.

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Is the allotted budget is enough?

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- The budget estimates in the annual TB report are in fact lower than that of 2014-15. As against Rs 1,358 crore requested, the government approved Rs 710 crore in 2014-15.

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- In 2016, however, in the face of sharp criticism, the budget requested actually went down to Rs 1,000 crore and the approved budget was a measly Rs 640 crore.

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What is the way ahead?

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- Transmission of drug-resistant TB will continue unabated unless patients get early diagnosis and the right treatment.

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- **India has to invest extensively** and urgently if it has to expand the testing facilities and get the drugs to the patients.

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- The government will soon be launching a new strategy, and Union Health Minister has announced that his Ministry will aim to **“eliminate TB”** by

2025.

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- Ensuring affordable and quality health care to the population must be the priority for the government and we should committed to achieving zero TB deaths and therefore we need to **re-strategise, think afresh** and have to be aggressive in our approach to end TB by 2025.

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Source: The Hindu

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