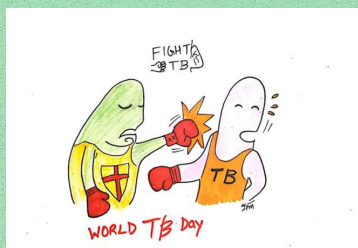
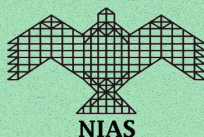


WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY

INVEST TO END TB AND SAVE LIVES



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Respiratory infections have been haunting humanity for a long time, and Tuberculosis is one such primary infection. The world woke up to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic indicating how deadly respiratory illness can be. It is a grave reminder that health threats can travel faster across the continents. Tuberculosis has been present in humans since ancient times. Skeletal remains show that some prehistoric humans had TB. Researchers have found tubercular decay in the spines of Egyptian mummies dating from 3000 to 2400 BC [1]. World Tuberculosis Day is commemorated on March 24. The date marks the day in 1882 when Dr Robert Koch announced the discovery of identification of the bacterium that causes TB, which opened the way towards diagnosing and curing this disease. In 1982, on the one-hundredth anniversary of Robert Koch's presentation, the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (IUATLD) proposed to declare March 24 as an official World TB Day [2]. Almost a decade has passed to pronounce March 24 as World TB Day by the United Nations. Observation of the day is to raise awareness about the devastating health, social and economic consequences of TB and step-up efforts to end the global TB epidemic. Tuberculosis is an infectious disease usually caused by the bacteria, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (MTB). TB generally affects the lungs but can also affect other body parts. Most infections show no symptoms (latent TB), and ~10% progress to active disease. It was historically called consumption due to weight loss. Infection of other organs can cause a wide range of symptoms.

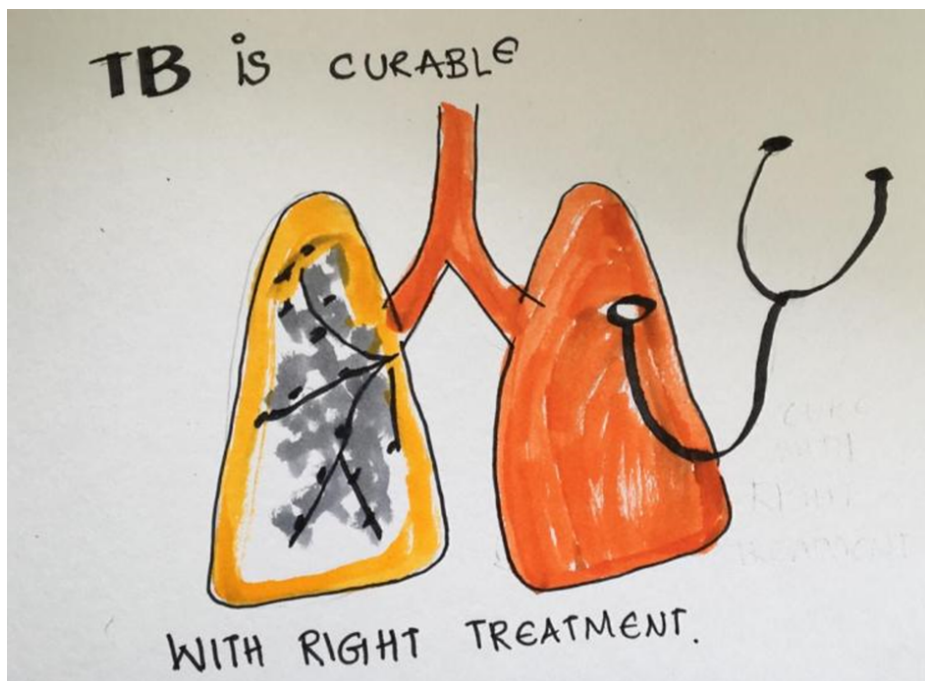
TB is a global disease found in every country in the world. TB remains one of the world's deadliest infectious killers. Each day, nearly 4000 lose their lives to TB, and close to 28,000 people fall ill with this preventable and curable disease [3].

It is estimated that one-quarter of the world's population has a latent infection with TB. New infections occur in about 1% of the population each year. Most TB cases occur in South-East Asia, Africa, and the Western Pacific. More than 50% of patients are diagnosed in eight countries: India, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Bangladesh. Indicating hope, the number of new cases each year has decreased since 2000. However, it is estimated that about 40% of the Indian population is infected with TB bacteria, most of whom have latent TB rather than TB disease. WHO assessment puts the TB incidence figure of 2.64 million cases in India, about 193 per 100,000 population [4]. Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem leading to increased multiple drug-resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and extensively drug-resistant Tuberculosis (XDR-TB). Prevention of TB involves screening those at considerable risk, early detection and treatment of cases, and BCG vaccination. Treatment requires the use of multiple antibiotics over a prolonged period. WHO-recommended Directly Observed Therapy, Short-Course (DOTS) treatment to patients [5]. Deprivation of nutritious food due to poverty and lack of adequate health infrastructure resulted in the prevalence of TB [6].

The incidence of TB in wealthier nations is reducing, and so is the focus of the research. Sadly, most research relating to curing diseases and drug discovery is western-driven. The governments of developing nations need to wake up to the reality, enhance funding, and support research in finding cures for diseases affecting their people. Another worrying aspect of TB is the fear of not being able to or afford to cure it. Stigma is attached to TB. Earlier methods of dealing with TB isolate people, and several cities have Sanitoriums where infected people are isolated and given treatment. Many vivid accounts are shared on social media about the problems and situations dealing with Depression or Alcoholism. It is rarely seen any such social media activity about TB.

A WHO estimate puts that since 2000, an estimated 66 million lives have been saved due to global efforts to combat TB [7].

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact led to the reversal of the years of progress made. An increase in deaths due to TB is seen. The Clock is Ticking. The world is running out of time to act on the commitments to end TB made by global leaders. Invest in ending TB and saving lives.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MS REEMA JAISWAL AND MS ANUSHA THATI

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