

MISUSE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

In the 21st century, digital platforms have transformed the way individuals interact, learn, work, and access information. Social media networks, messaging apps, and content-sharing sites have created a global village where knowledge and communication flow instantaneously. However, as these platforms grow in influence and reach, their misuse has emerged as a serious challenge, threatening social harmony, individual well-being, and even national security.

The very features that make digital platforms powerful— anonymity, wide reach, and rapid dissemination—also make them vulnerable to exploitation. Fake news, misinformation, and disinformation campaigns have become alarmingly common, with individuals or groups spreading false narratives to manipulate public opinion, provoke unrest, or damage reputations. The recent rise in deepfakes and AI-generated misinformation adds another layer of complexity, making it harder to differentiate between real and fake content.

Cyberbullying and online harassment are other major issues plaguing digital spaces. Many users, especially women and young people, face regular abuse on social media platforms. The anonymity offered by these platforms emboldens trolls and abusers, often leaving victims feeling helpless. Despite efforts by tech companies to moderate content and improve reporting mechanisms, online harassment continues to thrive due to insufficient enforcement and lack of accountability.

Data privacy and surveillance concerns also dominate the digital discourse. Many platforms collect extensive user data, often without clear consent, and this data is either sold to third parties or used for manipulative advertising. Additionally, malicious actors exploit security loopholes to access personal information, commit identity theft, or engage in financial fraud. The 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal, where millions of Facebook users' data was harvested for political advertising, is a stark reminder of how digital platforms can be misused to influence democratic processes.

The impact on mental health is another critical dimension. The pressure to portray perfect lives on social media, the addictive nature of constant scrolling, and the pursuit of likes and followers have been linked to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, especially among teenagers. Algorithms that promote sensational or emotionally charged content exacerbate these effects, keeping users engaged but emotionally drained.

Moreover, digital platforms are increasingly being used for radicalization and hate speech. Extremist groups leverage social media to spread propaganda, recruit members, and incite violence. Inflammatory content that once took months or years to circulate now reaches millions in seconds, often resulting in real-world consequences, including communal clashes and acts of terrorism.

Nature's Fury in Kishtwar's Chositi

■ BAIRAJ CHAWALGAMI

It is very unfortunate, sad and most disturbing that nature played havoc with the yatris of Machail Mata yatra at a Langar at Chositi village as a cloud burst occurred causing flash floods on 14th of August Thursday at about 12.25pm which caused not only the damage to the Langar but washed away hundreds of pilgrims and even two CIRF personnel. The flash flood because of the cloud burst resulted into the unfortunate death of more than 50 yatris and hundreds of the pilgrims are missing and under the debris. This natural tragedy in Kishtwar of Jammu and Kashmir is unprecedented and it seems that mother goddess is unpleasant with the yatri's and thus allowed the nature to play a cruel joke and havoc with the pilgrims unrouted the shrine of Machail Mata yatra. A pall of gloom, despair and grief descended not only Jammu and Kashmir but whole of India. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, MoS PMO Dr. Jitendra Singh, LG Manoj Shina, chief minister Omar Abdullah, NC President Dr Farooq Abdullah, G.N.Azad, and a host of other political, social and religious leaders expressed grief over the tragedy and asked the administration to undertake rescue and relief measures and lift the injured to hospitals for treatment so that their precious lives are saved. The cloud burst was massive and it caused death and devastation to everything and the pilgrims who came in its way and thus the loss to human lives was beyond to be expressed in words. The scene was very sad as the tragedy was unprecedented and there were wails, cries and weeps there as the yatri's were caught unawares and all the havoc was caused within the minutes and abruptly and allowed no chance to people to run away from the spot hit by the massive cloud burst and flash floods which washed everything and did not spare the pilgrims who were having breakfast at the Langar at village

Chositi which was the base camp of the Machail Mata Yatra. The death toll in Kishtwar flash floods caused by the massive and unprecedented cloud burst rose to 60 and there is every possibility that some more Yatris may have died as the debris, big stones and rocks are scattered here and there. The flash floods washed everything such as trees, rocks, boulders, earth, men, women and the sight was very shocking and the mud, stones, trees are everywhere seen and it becomes difficult for the rescuers to rescue and find any survivors. The tragedy of the cloud burst and consequent flash floods was very shocking, sad and hair-raising and it led to cries, weeps, wails and frightening noises and calls for help, but there was no help immediately available as the base camp lacked any security bund-bust. Multi-agency search operations continue in Chositi village, 167 injured were rescued, two CISF personnel were among the dead.

CM Omar Abdullah has said that he will examine if there was any lapse on the part of the administration. Braving, intermittent rain, rescuers intensified their search for survivors in the cloudburst-hit village even as the chief minister put the death toll in the tragic incident at 60, with an unspecified number of people still trapped. Disaster struck Chositi, the last motorable village on the way to the Machail Mata Temple, around 12.25 pm on Thursday -14th August 2025, leaving a trail of death and destruction. Rescuers pulled out 46 bodies. Besides, 167 have been rescued in an injured condition, while 69 others were reported missing. The cloudburst set off flash floods in Chositi at a time when large number of yatris had gathered in the village for the annual pilgrimage to Machail Mata temple. The yatra began on July 25 and was scheduled to end on September 5. The 8.5 km trek to the 9,500-foot shrine begins from Chositi which is located about 90 km from Kishtwar town. The Yatra remained suspended for the third day on Saturday -August

16,2025. Videos showed torrents of muddy water, silt and rubble tearing through steep slopes, destroying everything on the way. Houses folded over like a pack of cards, rocks came tumbling down, blocking roads and rescue paths. The deluge flattened a makeshift market, a Langar -community kitchen site for the pilgrims and a security post, besides damaging 16 residential houses and government buildings, three temples, four water mills, a 30-metre span bridge and more than a dozen vehicles. The rescue and relief operation was suspended late Thursday night. It resumed with the first light of the day despite rain, with rescuers comprising personnel from NDRF, SDRF, Police, the Army, and local volunteers, sifting through the rubble to find the survivors. Prime minister Narendra Modi spoke with Mr Abdullah and Jammu and Kashmir LG Manoj Shina on Friday -August 14, 2025 and assured them of all help. Addressing an Independence Day function at Srinagar's Bakshi Stadium, Abdullah said at least 60 people were killed and more than 100 injured in the tragic incident. The chief minister also said that in the coming days, "we will have to figure out why this happened. Was there any lapse on the part of administration, because we already had a weather forecast [about the possibility of heavy rains and flash floods]." "Could we have taken more steps from the government and the administration to save those precious lives? We have to make ourselves accountable," he added. Kishtwar DC Pankaj Kumar Sharma, who is supervising the search operation, said choppers could not be operated due to bad weather, so NDRF team came by road from Udhampur. The flash floods due to cloud burst resulted into destructions of the mountainous terrain and it has pointed towards the fact that Himalayan mountain is fragile and prone to destruction due to flash floods especially during monsoons that is in the months of July, August. The fragile Himalayan slopes faced the disaster just nine days after flash floods wreaked havoc in Dharali village

of Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi district. Though only one person is confirmed dead in that incident, 68 people are still reported missing. Poor planning and inadequate infrastructure seems to have turned religious pilgrimage into tragedy for devotees. According to eyewitnesses and volunteers active on the ground, at least 55 bodies have been recovered from the calamity struck site. A majority of those killed in the latest calamity are said to be pilgrims. Medical records revealed that most victims belonged to Jammu city, Samba, Akhnoor and Udhampur area of Jammu province. Sunil Sharma, BJP legislator said that damage caused is massive and many more casualties are feared. He said that at the time of tragedy at least 1000 people mostly pilgrims were present at the village. Shivers go down once spine on hearing about this tragedy. The havoc and calamity was so massive and intense that the memory in the minds of survivors will remain etched for a considerable time. God seems to have been cruel as the innocent pilgrims were the victims of the tragedy. But reality is that it is the man who has exploited the nature and destroyed the ecology and natural environment. Trees have been cut, the course of rivers has been changed and structures have been constructed on the banks of rivers. The nature on its part has played havoc with the people. Men, should be nature and environment conscious and never try to destroy the natural balance. The catastrophic results are before our eyes. The Kishtwar tragedy will continue to remind us that men have played with the natural balance and so Kishtwar type incidents cannot be avoided. Still it should be found out if lack of proper planning, infrastructure and lack of forecasting has played the havoc and those responsible for the lapse leading to the tragedy should be identified and punished so that in future administration will be alive to such tragedies and they will play their positive and pivotal role so that loss of lives and properties will be minimum.

Naya Bharat-Challenges and prospects

■ PROF. K.S CHANDRASEKAR



During the Independence Day speech spanning 105 minutes, the PM has emphasised the need for moving towards Naya Bharat which is in fact the theme of this year's Independence Day. According to IBEF, India's economic progress over the past few years has been marked by remarkable growth and a steady rise in its position on the international stage. After overtaking the United Kingdom (UK) to become the fifth largest economy in 2023, India has continued this upward trajectory to overcome Japan in June 2025 to become the fourth largest economy in the world. With a nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Rs. 3,31,03,000 crore (US\$ 3.78 trillion), India's growth reflects a combination of strong domestic demand and well-planned policy reforms enabling the country to be a key destination for global capital. India is expected to reach a GDP of Rs. 4,26,45,000 crore (US\$ 5 trillion) by 2027 and is well on course to overtake Germany by 2028. Rising employment and increasing private consumption, supported by rising consumer sentiment, reduced poverty will support GDP growth to create the Naya Bharat.

This Naya Bharat requires investments in infrastructure, social and physical assets creation and over all ensuring people above poverty lines. The World Bank defines extreme poverty



as living on less than \$3.65 per day (2017 PPP). If we follow this, India's poverty rate fell from 61.8% in 2011-12 to 28.1% in 2022-23, lifting 378 million people out of poverty. India has also made excellent progress in reducing multidimensional poverty, which considers factors beyond income, such as health, education, and standard of living. The urban poverty rate has come down drastically but there is a need to give attention to the rural poverty rate. As nearly two thirds living in rural areas, there is a need to address the same through PM Naya Bharat Schemes to ensure they are out of poverty. Grass root level government mechanisms are now almost digital. This should be harnessed with the rural development activities planned for the period.

Currently India's literacy rate is about 74%. Both central and state govern-

ments can initiate programs aimed at those who are not literate without affecting their avocation. Schools and colleges can be provided seed money to bring people out of illiteracy with targeted population. In remote areas where the illiteracy is seen, government can use the mode of TV/Digital to get across. Those unemployed people in such areas can be given contractual employment on this count. By next five years, it should reach 80%. Then cumulative effects can take the numbers to 100% before 2040. By ensuring full literacy, the rights of people will be known, and the breed of corruption can be brought down.

The unemployment rate in India for individuals aged 15 and above was 5.6% in June 2025 as compared to 5.1% in earlier months. Unemployment rates differed significantly between rural and urban areas. In June, rural

unemployment was at 4.9%, while urban unemployment stood at 7.1%. The agricultural sector, which absorbs a large portion of India's labour force, undergoes periodic shifts due to sowing and harvesting patterns. In early summer months like May, employment often dips due to reduced rural workforce demand. Urban areas have also witnessed a reduction in job creation across manufacturing and services amid global uncertainties, weak exports, and cautious capital expenditure by firms. There is a need to bolster employment through private sector as the employment has come down in public sectors. As most of the citizens considered only government jobs as employment, there is a need to refocus them in order to ensure that all sectors can contribute to employment. In Engineering colleges, most of the placements are now done for startups. This

is a positive start to entrepreneurship ventures. The support of the government can actually ensure that the startups are encouraged and provided adequate support to move further.

Bharat Mala Pariyojana is progressing well to ensure development of 34,800 km of National Highways. Additionally, the government targets building 22 new greenfield expressways, signalling significant advancements in India's transportation infrastructure. The expressways across the country and adequate road infrastructure which started with golden quadrilateral is now coming to a reality. With the government now relaxing the toll by coming with annual pass, more people will travel using them and will be able to give fillip to the local economies. Airports are increasing in number but many of them are in red. There is a need for more airports connecting tier 2 cities. UDAN ensured that Aam admi could fly. Mexico has a vast aviation network, with 1,527 registered airfields and 80 officially recognized airports as of 2025, ranking 4th globally after the U.S., Brazil, and Australia. India is approximately 3,287,263 sq. km, while Mexico is approximately 1,964,375 sq. km, making Mexico 59.76% the size of India. However, India has a total of 487 airports and airstrips. Hence there is a need for upgradation and the Central government with the support of state governments are pushing the same across to make it at least 700 by 2030. Advent of bullet train, Vande Bharat express can only help the medium net worth and above passengers but the need for the lower end passengers, all sleeper class trains are needed more.

With the introduction of Vande Bharat, trains like Jan Shatabdi are not being given importance. More of Jan Shatabdi and local MEMUs can only make the lives easy for common passengers.

Considering the tariffs being imposed by USA, its time for Indian companies to focus on other nations and use Rupee as a mode for exchange. This will be able to ensure Rupee on a stronger platform and at the same time more consumption of "Made in India" can be undertaken on a global basis. Buy Indian needs to be promoted by the government and follow what the British do they only focus on British products and will not bother about other countries products. Its time that we are able to increase Indian multinationals presence across the World which will entice the next generation consumers more. Online platforms need to have more Indian presence with quality and that will ensure more Indians buying from them. "Drawing inspiration from Lord Shri Krishna, we have chosen the path of the Sudarsana Chakra. By 2035, I want to expand, strengthen, and modernise this national security shield" said the Hon'ble PM. Drawing strength from this, every citizen needs to embark on a journey for economic, social and cultural Naya Bharat by 2035. As Bhagavat Gita clearly gave a direction, "Karmanyeva Adhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadaचना" as the country is poised for great push, let every one of us also contribute and not look for the fruits. That will be reaped by the next generation. They will be thankful to us.

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'National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission'

■ JAGAT PRAKASH NADDA

India's tribal communities represent the soul of the nation's cultural tapestry, constituting 8.6% of the population. Yet, many within these communities have been silently battling the debilitating genetic disorder known as Sickle Cell Disease (SCD). For decades, this condition has taken a toll on their health and socioeconomic development, exacerbated further by geographic isolation and limited access to healthcare. Recognizing this dire need, Government of India, launched the National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission (NSCAEM) in July 2023 under the visionary leadership of the Hon'ble Prime Minister. This groundbreaking initiative seeks to not only eliminate sickle cell genetic transmission but also restore dignity and health to millions affected by this condition.

Sickle cell disease alters the shape of red blood cells, impairing their oxygen-carrying capacity and leading to severe health complications over time. Among tribal populations, the impact is profound, as they are disproportionately affected by this genetic disorder.

According to "Global Burden of Disease estimates (2021)", an esti-

mated 82,500 births, with SCD occur in India.

The National Health Policy 2017 laid the groundwork for addressing this crisis, emphasizing its unique health needs. Building on this, the Union Budget 2023 announced the NSCAEM, setting a target to screen 7 crore individuals under 40 years by FY 2025-2026, in a mission mode. The activity was implemented under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), making it one of the largest population-based genetic screening programs globally. The mission also aims to eliminate genetic transmission of SCD by 2047 while providing comprehensive care to those already afflicted. In its first two years, this mission, has yielded remarkable results, with joint efforts of Ministry of Health and states. As on 31st July 2025, over 6.07 crore individuals have been screened across more than 300 districts in 17 high-prevalence states. Among those screened, 2.16 lakh individuals were found to be diseased, while 16.92 lakh were identified as carriers.

Analysis reveals that 95% of cases are concentrated in five states i.e. Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra.

The story of Meena, a young tribal

girl from Nawapara Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh, is emblematic of the mission's impact. Diagnosed during the screening drive, Meena was enrolled in a nearby Sub-health Centre. The trained Community Health Officer (CHO), ANM and ASHA at the SHC ensured that she had access to free hydroxyurea drug which significantly alleviated the symptoms of SCD. Today, Meena leads a healthier life and is an advocate for genetic counselling in her community. To accelerate screening efforts, Point-of-Care (PoC) diagnostic devices approved by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) have been deployed. Initially limited to three, the number of approved kits has now expanded to over 30, reducing costs dramatically from Rs 100 to Rs 28 per kit.

This initiative has ensured cost-effective and efficient diagnostic capabilities, for SCD.

Implementation of this mission, under the Ministry of Health, is not solely focused on screening; it prioritizes holistic care for individuals diagnosed with SCD. Management interventions under the mission include free healthcare services, with access to essential medicines and diagnostics Hydroxyurea, a key drug for managing SCD, is added to

the National Essential Drug list (EDL) and is now available till Sub-health Centres Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (SHC-AAM), ensuring accessibility till last mile.

The mission also emphasizes genetic counselling and public awareness as pivotal strategies for eliminating SCD. Over 2.62 crore genetic status cards have been distributed, empowering individuals with critical health information. SCD cards have become a vital tool for counselling and informed decision-making, enabling families to make choices that reduce the risk of genetic transmission.

Fifteen Health care institutions/medical colleges have been selected to establish Centres of Excellence (CoEs), as per guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), and funding support from Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA). These institutions focus on prenatal diagnosis and management of severe SCD complications, ensuring specialized care for at-risk families. Additionally, a National Level Training of Trainers (ToT) program organized in October 2024 has equipped healthcare professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to address the complexities of SCD

management effectively.

The success of NSCAEM is underpinned by the "Whole-of-Government & approach, by which Ministry of Health is involving the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Women and Child Development. This inter-ministerial coordination ensures holistic implementation, addressing the socio-cultural and geographic dimensions of tribal health. Research-backed interventions, supported by the Department of Health Research, under the MoHFW, has further enhanced cost-effectiveness and patient outcomes.

While the achievements, are commendable, the Ministry of Health, has now shifted focus on future priorities for the mission. The immediate focus will be on expanding genetic counselling, public awareness campaigns, and distribution of genetic status cards.

Leveraging community-level platforms will be crucial in ensuring that every carrier and diseased individual receives the care and support they need. Enhanced research efforts will provide actionable insights to refine interventions further.

The true spirit of this mission lies in its motto: "Supporting our fight-

ers, strengthening our survivors, and standing by our warriors." By combining political will, scientific innovation, and grassroots implementation, India is poised to eliminate sickle cell anaemia and transform the lives of millions.

As India strides confidently towards its 2047 goal of eliminating SCD, the NSCAEM stands as a beacon of hope. It exemplifies what can be achieved when government, healthcare professionals, and communities unite for a common cause. Together, we will ensure that no individual, has to endure the pain and suffering caused by this condition.

India's fight against sickle cell anaemia is not just about combating a genetic disorder—it is a commitment to equity, dignity, and the health of our nation's most marginalized groups. With the experience of individuals like Meena guiding the way, the mission serves as a testament to the transformative power of targeted healthcare initiatives, marking a historic leap in addressing tribal health challenges.

Let us celebrate this groundbreaking effort and reaffirm our resolve to build a healthier, more inclusive India.

(The writer is Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare)