> "To my mind, there is no doubt that this Gandhi age is the dark age of India. It is an age in which people, instead of looking for their ideals in the future, are returning to antiquity.
> -B R Ambedkar

EDITORIAL

CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Land grabbing has emerged as one of the most pervasive and damaging forms of corruption in recent times, posing a grave threat to public resources, environmental sustainability, and social equity. Across India, and particularly in vulnerable regions with weak administrative enforcement, encroachments on government, forest, and community lands are becoming alarmingly common. What makes this trend deeply concerning is not only its scale, but the collusion it often reveals between land mafia, bureaucratic elements, and even sections of political leadership.

In many instances, land meant for public welfare-schools, parks, hospitals, roads, and common grazing land-is illegally occupied, depriving communities of essential amenities and disrupting planned development. In other cases, forest land is encroached upon, damaging fragile ecosystems and violating conservation laws. Often, the victims are the poor, the landless, and tribal communities who find themselves displaced or denied access to land that is legally theirs.

The role of digital land records and cadastral mapping has been a game-changer in recent years, bringing transparency to land ownership. However, poor implementation, outdated records, and lack of inter-departmental coordination continue to enable fraud. The need of the hour is stringent enforcement of anti-encroachment laws, time-bound investigations, and legal mechanisms to reclaim and protect public land. Authorities must adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards illegal occupation, irrespective of the encroacher's status or influence.

Public accountability is key. Citizens must be encouraged to report encroachments, and state authorities must act swiftly and decisively. Whistleblower protections, fast-track courts for land disputes, and empowered local bodies can collectively stem this rot. Importantly, elected representatives and government officers must lead by example and ensure that no land-grabbing incident is overlooked or legitimized.

Furthermore, transparency in land allocation and regular audits of land use are crucial to prevent future encroachments. Awareness campaigns can also play a pivotal role in educating citizens about their rights and the legal status of land holdings in their locality.

Land is a precious and finite resource. Protecting it from illegal occupation is not merely a governance issue-it is a question of justice, sustainability, and national interest. The fight against land grabbing must be relentless, and it must begin with accountability at the highest levels.

The article titled "The Wangchuk Family and the 1989 Ladakh Agitation: An Analytical Perspective", published on September 27, 2025, was inadvertently attributed to Brig Anil Gupta, Member Administration, JKCA. The author of this article is Girdhari Lal Raina, Ex-MLC. The error is regretted.

WORLD RABIES DAY 2025
A Call for Collective Action

■ R.K. BHARDWAJ & DIVYANSH PANDEY

Every year on September 28, the world observes World Rabies Day to raise awareness and promote prevention and control measures against rabies. World Rabies Day is a United Nations observance and has been endorsed by key UN agencies and other international health organizations. The day honors the death anniversary of Louis Pasteur, who developed the first effective anti-rabies vaccine. The 2025 theme, "Act Now: You, Me & Community," is a call to action, emphasizing that rabies elimination is a shared responsibility that requires the collaboration of individuals, communities, and health sectors.

Rabies is a deadly yet entirely preventable viral disease caused by the Lyssa virus. It affects all warm-blooded animals and is primarily transmitted through the saliva of an infected animal, most often via a bite or scratch. The incubation period can range from days to years. Early symptoms may include fever and tingling at the bite site, followed by more severe signs like violent movements, hydrophobia (fear of water), paralysis, and eventually, death. Once clinical symptoms appear, the disease is almost always fatal.
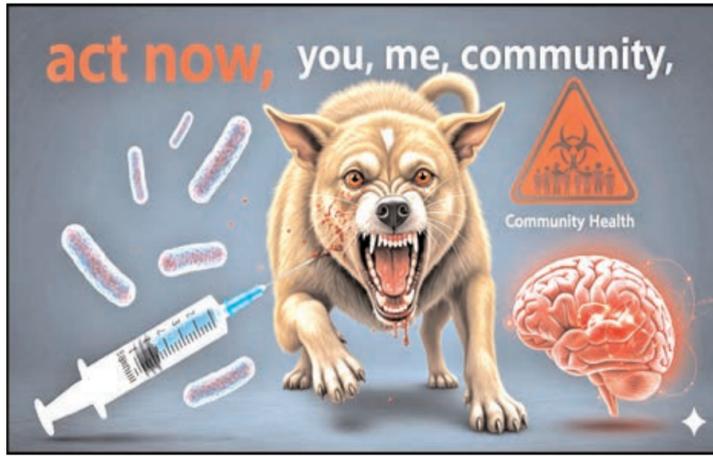
The Burden of Rabies in India

Rabies continues to be a significant public health problem in India, which accounts for 36% of global rabies deaths. In 2022, 307 people died from rabies in India, with the highest number of cases reported in Delhi (48 deaths), followed by West Bengal (38), Maharashtra (29), Karnataka (29), and Andhra Pradesh (29). The actual number of deaths may be even higher due to underreporting.

The country's large stray dog population is the primary reason for this high incidence, with dog bites accounting for up to 96% of rabies infections and deaths in India. The annual number of dog bites is estimated to be 1.7 crore, and in 2024, there were over 2.2 million dog bite cases reported. The stray dog population in India is estimated to be between 30 and 40 million, and they are responsible for 97% of human rabies cases. A recent trend shows a 70% increase in animal bite

cases from 2022 to 2024, with Noida and Ludhiana experiencing significant jumps. Children are particularly vulnerable, making up 40% of people exposed to dog bites in endemic areas.

The One Health Approach: A Path to Elimination

The 2025 theme "Act Now: You, Me & Community" is deeply rooted in the "One Health" principle, which recognizes the interdependence of human, animal, and environmental health. This approach is crucial for controlling rabies and other diseases like COVID-19 and antimicrobial resistance.

The National Action Plan for Dog-Mediated Rabies Elimination from India by 2030 (NAPRE) is a multi-pronged strategy based on this "One Health" approach. The plan has a clear vision: to achieve zero human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030. The program has two core components: a human health component and an animal health component.

▶ **Human Health Component:** This focuses on preventing human deaths by ensuring timely access to post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for all animal bite victims.

▶ **Animal Health Component:** This includes mass dog vaccination, aiming to achieve at least 70% vaccination coverage among dogs in a defined area for three consecutive years.

The success of a data-driven rabies elimination program in Goa between 2013 and 2019 serves as a powerful model. It resulted in the elimination of human rabies and a 92% reduction in canine rabies cases. This was achieved through systematic vaccination of over 95,000 dogs and educating 150,000 children annually, demonstrating that human rabies elimination is achievable at the state level in India.

The Role of Technology and Community

To "Act Now" as a community, effective data collection is essential. The success of NAPRE depends on having quality data on both canine and human rabies cases, which is currently sparse and collected by different entities with incomplete methods. A user-friendly, cross-platform smart data collection system is needed to help healthcare workers accurately and swiftly enter data.

In a positive development, the Delhi government has announced a plan to microchip 10 lakh street dogs over two years to strengthen rabies control and dog population management. This initiative, along

with a new dog census, aims to provide accurate data and digitize vaccination records. Ghaziabad is also rolling out a similar plan, becoming the first city in Uttar Pradesh to adopt large-scale microchipping of strays to track vaccination and sterilization records. These efforts are in line with the Supreme Court's directive for states to create policies on street dogs that prioritize sterilization and immunization over confinement.

Mass vaccination of dogs is the most effective solution, as vaccinating 70% of the dog population in endemic areas creates an immune barrier that prevents the disease from spreading. This is also a highly cost-effective measure, as the cost of vaccinating dogs is minimal compared to the expense of emergency post-exposure treatments for bitten individuals. According to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), just 10% of the cost of these treatments would be enough to significantly reduce or even eliminate canine rabies.

What We Can Do

The theme "You, Me & Community" underscores the role of every individual.

▶ Vaccinate your pets on a regular basis.

▶ Support animal birth control programs (spaying and neutering) to control the stray dog population.

▶ Educate people in your community about rabies prevention and what to do in case of an animal bite.

▶ In case of a bite or scratch, immediately wash the wound with soap and water for 10-15 minutes and clean it with a 70% alcohol solution or povidone iodine.

▶ Seek immediate medical attention and begin post-bite anti-rabies vaccination as soon as possible.

By working together, we can save lives and move closer to the global strategic goal of eliminating human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030.

(The Authors R.K Bhardwaj is Professor (Veterinary Medicine and B.V.Sc & A.H) and Divyansh Pandey is student of F.V.SC & A.H R S Pura of SKUAST-Jammu)

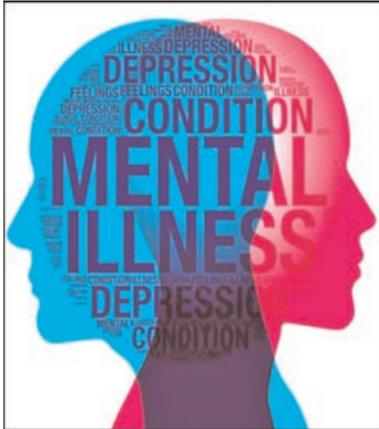# Mental Health: The silent foundation of a healthy society

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF

In the fast-changing world of the 21st century, health debates often revolve around physical fitness, nutrition, and medical treatment. Yet, there exists an equally vital pillar of human well-being that has for long remained in the shadows-mental health. It is the invisible foundation on which lives, relationships, and societies are built. Without it, physical health and social progress lose meaning.

Today, as stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness rise at unprecedented levels, the importance of mental health can no longer be ignored. It is not merely an individual concern but a collective responsibility for families, institutions, and nations alike.

Mental health is not just the absence of mental illness. It is a state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being that enables people to cope with daily stresses, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to society. A mentally healthy person can balance emotions, think clearly, maintain fulfilling relationships, and recover from setbacks.

Unfortunately, mental health is still surrounded by stigma. In many communities, psychological struggles are brushed aside as weakness or lack of faith. This misunderstanding prevents millions from seeking help until conditions worsen. Recognizing mental health as an essential part of overall health is therefore the first step toward building healthier societies.

Doctors and researchers agree: there is no health without mental health. Stress and prolonged anxiety can trigger physical illnesses

such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, and digestive disorders. Similarly, chronic diseases often result in depression and emotional fatigue, creating a cycle that affects both body and mind.

Workplaces today are facing a silent crisis. Stress, burnout, and mental fatigue are costing billions in lost productivity worldwide. An employee struggling with mental health cannot deliver their best. In contrast, workplaces that prioritize mental well-being benefit from higher creativity, loyalty, and efficiency.

Relationships thrive on empathy, communication, and emotional balance. When mental health deteriorates, conflicts, isolation, and breakdowns in family life become common. On the other hand, mentally healthy individuals nurture stronger families and create compassionate communities.

For children and young adults, mental health determines not only academic performance but also personality development. Bullying, exam stress, family conflicts, and peer pressure often leave lasting scars if not addressed early. Ignoring these issues can lead to dropouts, substance abuse, and in extreme cases, suicidal tendencies. Schools and colleges must therefore place mental health at the core of their educational mission.

Every year, millions of lives are lost to suicide-most preventable if mental health care had been timely and accessible. Behind each statistic is a life cut short, a family shattered, and a society burdened with irreversible loss. Suicide prevention begins with breaking the silence around mental health and ensuring that those in despair know help is available.

Despite rising awareness, mental health care faces serious obstacles. The first is stigma. Fear of being judged often silences those who need help most. Many cultures still treat mental illness as taboo, discouraging open discussion.

The second is accessibility. In developing nations especially, the shortage of psychiatrists, psychologists, and trained counsellors is alarming. Even where services exist, affordability remains a challenge, and health insurance rarely covers psychological treatment.

The third is awareness. People often fail to recognize the signs of mental distress until the condition worsens. Families sometimes dismiss symptoms as laziness, immaturity, or "just stress," delaying much-needed intervention.

Building a mentally healthy society requires joint action by individuals, families, institutions, and governments.Community campaigns, school workshops, and workplace seminars can normalize discussions about mental health. When people learn to recognize symptoms of stress, depression, or anxiety, they are more likely to seek timely help.

Like any physical disease, mental health problems respond best to early treatment. Counselling, therapy, and stress-management techniques can prevent minor struggles from becoming lifelong conditions.

Organizations must treat employee well-being as a priority. Flexible hours, stress-relief programs, and counselling facilities can make workplaces healthier. Similarly, schools should train teachers to identify signs of distress and create safe spaces where children can share their feelings without fear.

On a personal level, good habits strengthen the mind. Balanced diets, regular exercise, adequate sleep, meditation, and engaging hobbies reduce stress and boost emotional resilience. Social connections-family, friends, and supportive networks-act as emotional anchors in times of crisis.

Governments need to integrate mental health into public healthcare systems. Increasing the number of trained professionals, setting up community counsellingcenters, and ensuring affordable therapy are crucial steps. Policies must also recognize that mental health is not a luxury but a basic right.

With the digital revolution, online counselling and tele-therapy have made mental health services more accessible. Mental health apps and support groups on social platforms are offering new avenues of help. However, excessive screen time and the pressures of social media remain challenges that must be balanced carefully.

Mental health is not just an individual issue. It is a collective responsibility that requires compassion at every level. Families must create supportive environments, communities must break stigma, employers must value employee well-being, and policymakers must invest in mental health infrastructure.

The pandemic years taught humanity an important lesson: when the mind suffers, everything else suffers. Conversely, when mental health is prioritized, individuals flourish, families strengthen, workplaces thrive, and societies progress.

The importance of mental health is no longer a subject for quiet discussions-it is a global concern that demands urgent attention. It is the invisible backbone of physical health, education, productivity, relationships, and even national development.

Ignoring mental health leads to suffering and loss. Embracing it leads to hope and healing. A society that invests in mental well-being invests in its future.It is time to move beyond stigma, recognize the silent battles people fight every day, and treat mental health with the same seriousness as physical health. Only then can we build a world where individuals are not merely surviving, but truly living.

(The author is a senior analyst)

H1B visa hike and the fate of Indian Engineering Higher Education

■ PROF. K.S. CHANDRASEKAR

The H-1B is a temporary and non-immigrant visa category that allows employers to seek for highly educated foreign professionals to work in "specialty occupations" that require at least a bachelor's degree or the equivalent. Jobs in fields such as mathematics, engineering, technology, and medical sciences (STEM specifically) often qualify. Typically, the initial duration of an H-1B visa classification is three years, which may be extended for a maximum of six years. Before an employer can file a petition with USCIS, the employer must take steps to ensure that hiring the foreign worker will not harm U.S. workers. Employers first must attest, on a labour certification application (LCA) certified by the Department of Labor (DOL), that employment of the H-1B worker will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers. Employers must also provide existing workers with notice of their intention to hire an H-1B worker. This is where President Trump in his quest for making America great again and protecting citizens on the job opportunities, recently came out with H1B visa restrictions which have caused more discussions and deliberations in India. Since the category was created in 1990, limited the number of H-1Bs were made available each year. The current annual statutory cap is 65,000 visas, with 20,000 additional visas for foreign professionals who graduate with a master's degree or doctorate from a U.S. institution of higher learning.

According to many economists, the presence of immigrant workers in the United States creates new job opportunities for native-born workers. Immigrant workers and native-born workers often have different skill sets, meaning that they fill different types of jobs. As a result, they complement each other in the labour market rather than competing for the exact same jobs. Immigrant workers spend and invest their wages in the U.S. economy, which increases consumer demand and creates new jobs. Immigrants themselves frequently create new businesses, thereby expanding the U.S. labour market. It is reported that more than 46 percent of Fortune 500 companies in 2025 (231 out of 500) were founded by immigrants or their children, including109 companies founded by immigrants, 122 companies founded by children of immigrants.Among the 14 companies that appeared on the Fortune 500 list for the first time this year, 10 were founded by immigrants or their children.In the year 2024, these 231 Fortune 500 companies generated $8.6 trillion in revenue-an amount that, if compared with national GDPs, would rank as the third-largest economy globally.These 231 Fortune 500 companies employed over 15.4 million people worldwide, a number that's comparable to the population of the fifth-largest U.S. state.Immigrants and their children founded 80 percent of the Fortune 500 companies in professional and other services, 65.6 percent in manufacturing, and 57.5 percent in information. This growth in USA is largely due to the immigrants primarily from India and China specifically in tech companies and tech innovations.

BBC quotes that Indian get 72% of H-1B visas, followed by 12% for Chinese citizens. The majority of H-1B visa holders worked in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, with 65% in computer-related jobs, in 2023. Their median annual salary was $118,000 (£94,000).A Pew Research report shows that US immigration rose by 1.6 million in 2023, the largest increase in more than 20 years. Immigrants now comprise over 14% of the population - the highest since 1910. Indians are the second-largest immigrant group - after Mexicans - in the US. Many Americans fear this surge in immigration could harm job prospects or hinder assimilation.India has also surpassed China as the leading source of international students, with a record 331,602 Indian students in the US in 2023-2024. The authors of 'The other one percent' quotes that H-1B visa is the reason for the rise of Indian Americans into the highest educated and highest earning group, immigrant or native in the USA. On the contrary, the reasons why Trump administration issued the hike is due to the fact that for more than a decade, Americans working in the tech industry have been systematically laid off and replaced by cheaper H-1B visa holder. For an Indian immigrant, the salary levels offered initially are very high as compared to the salary in India which prompts the very best talent to move out. It needs to be noted that Indian tech giants like TCS, Wipro, Infosys etc., have hired and supported nearly 600,000 American workers and spent over a billion dollars on upskilling nearly three million students across 130 US colleges. This hike in visa fees can stop the sponsorships partially as a retort since the H1B is actually the blood line of these companies.

From 1991, there has been steady increase in the number of engineering colleges across the country, and it mushroomed after the 2000. As on 2021, India produces on an estimate of about one million engineering graduates annually. There are approximately 8,800-8,900 engineering colleges in India, with around 2,200-2,300 government-run institutions and about 6,600 private colleges.The brain drain often is associated with IITs. If a student gets admission in IIT or BITS, VIT or SRM, it is construed that it's a ticket to American dreams. During the time between year 2000 and 2010, the engineering studies gained huge popularity in India. Engineering graduates were receiving good jobs and pay. Due to this, a large number of engineering colleges (both private and public) were opened. Even students who were not qualified to join the colleges were permitted to study.With around 16,000 IIT graduates emerging annually, the nation possesses an unparalleled pool of technically skilled and innovative professionals. Retaining even a fraction of this talent could dramatically strengthen domestic research institutions, expand the startup ecosystem, and position India as a global solutions hub in sectors ranging from digital infrastructure to renewable energy.However, considering the enormous number of engineering colleges which are 'fly by night', AICTE has to now ensure quality and seek the faculty input quality, their continuity and research. Students and parents are now very clear and hence there is huge rush for admissions in BITS, VIT etc., nearly 30% of the colleges in Maharashtra is lying vacant. The same is the case with Andhra, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. These were the states which started the engineering colleges revolution. As India's Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, highlighted at the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum, the country already provides "a huge pool of skilled engineers and graduates who are internationally recognized for their talent and innovation." The question now is how effectively India can channel this pool into building enterprises, research capacity, and technological solutions on a global scale.IIT Kanpur revealed that around 8,000 IIT graduates across 23 campuses remained jobless. However, this potential will only be realized if India builds the infrastructure, capital availability, and institutional flexibility necessary to empower its engineers to innovate at scale.For India, the challenge and the opportunity lie in ensuring that its brightest minds no longer leave home to light the lamps of foreign enterprises but instead illuminate the path to its own technological and entrepreneurial future. In another two to three years, there will be level playing ground for all these engineering institutions as only the fittest will survive. Market dynamics will ensure that many will have to move out. Now the scenario is that many of the engineering colleges have asked AICTE to close them and allow them to move to be a arts and science college. Amitabh Kant, former CEO of Niti Ayog mentioned that by slamming the door on global talent, America pushes the next wave of labs, patents, innovation and startups to Bangalore and Hyderabad, Pune and Gurgaon. India's finest doctors, engineers, scientists, innovators have an opportunity to contribute to India's growth & progress towards ViksitBharat. Its time we empower India to its glory through the changing dynamics and make Bharat great again.

(The author is Vice Chancellor, Cluster University of Jammu)