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News: India has eliminated trachoma, says WHO

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has now recognised that India has successfully eliminated trachoma, a bacterial infection that affects the eyes, as a public health problem.

Trachoma

- Trachoma is a disease of the eye caused by infection with the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*.
- It is a public health problem in 42 countries, and is responsible for the blindness or visual impairment of about 1.9 million people.
- Based on June 2022 data, 125 million people live in trachoma endemic areas and are at risk of trachoma blindness.
- Blindness from trachoma is irreversible.
- It is a neglected tropical disease and the world's leading infectious cause of blindness.

Distribution

- Trachoma is hyperendemic in many of the poorest and most rural areas of Africa, Central and South America, Asia, Australia and the Middle East.
- It is responsible for the blindness or visual impairment of about 1.9 million people. It causes about 1.4% of all blindness worldwide.
- Overall, Africa remains the most affected continent and the one with the most intensive control efforts.

Transmission

- Infection spreads through personal contact (via hands, clothes, bedding or hard surfaces) and by flies that have been in contact with discharge from the eyes or nose of an infected person.
- With repeated episodes of infection over many years, the eyelashes may be drawn in so that they rub on the surface of the eye.
- This causes pain and may permanently damage the cornea.
- To eliminate trachoma as a public health problem, WHO recommends the SAFE strategy.
- The SAFE strategy includes: Surgery to treat the blinding stage (trichomatous trichiasis); Antibiotics to clear the infection, particularly the antibiotic

azithromycin; Facial cleanliness and Environmental improvement, particularly improving access to water and sanitation.

- The antibiotic treatment for active trachoma disease is a one-time use of (Zithromax) azithromycin pills. However, reinfection is common if a person doesn't make improvements in hygiene and access to clean water.
- The 19 countries that have eliminated trachoma are: Benin, Cambodia, China, Gambia, Ghana, India, Iraq, Islamic Republic of Iran, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Togo and Vanuatu.