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A Shot at Life, Mandsaur's Model for HPV Vaccination

Context

- India bears nearly a quarter of the global **cervical cancer** burden, recording over 2 lakh new cases and 80,000 deaths annually.
- As almost 95% of cases are caused by high-risk HPV, vaccination offers one of the most effective forms of **preventive healthcare**.
- To address this challenge, the Government of India launched a nationwide HPV vaccination campaign targeting girls aged **14-15 years**.
- The experience of **Mandsaur district** demonstrates how data-driven governance, behavioural insights, and community participation can transform a public health programme into a successful mass movement.

Initial Challenges and Strengths of the Mandsaur District HPV Vaccination Campaign

- **Vaccine Hesitancy**

- Despite the availability of an effective vaccine, **vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, social stigma**, and gender-related taboos remained major obstacles.
- The experience of Savita from the **Banchhada community** highlights how cultural beliefs and economic realities often shape health decisions.
- Concerns about the vaccine affecting future livelihoods reflected a lack of awareness rather than outright opposition, underlining the importance of culturally sensitive communication.

- **Inclusive Identification of Beneficiaries**

- A major strength of the campaign was its **inclusive** and **data-driven**
- Instead of relying solely on school enrolment records, the administration integrated databases such as **RBSK, SAMAGRA MP**, and **Ladli Laxmi Yojana**, along with **door-to-door surveys**, to identify eligible girls.
- **Village-level Master Line Lists** ensured that girls from nomadic tribes, urban slums, school dropouts, and other vulnerable groups were included, reducing data invisibility and improving last-mile delivery.

- **Behavioural Interventions**

- The campaign effectively applied the **Nudge Approach**, making vaccination the default option rather than an active choice.
- Families were informed that their daughters were due for vaccination, repeated counselling addressed concerns, transportation support reduced logistical barriers, and **digital reminders** improved monitoring.
- Public recognition of vaccinated families and peer champions further encouraged participation through positive social influence.

- **Communication and Community Engagement**

- To counter myths regarding infertility and vaccine safety, the administration launched **targeted awareness campaigns** involving doctors, students, athletes, religious leaders, youth influencers, and media personalities.
- Counselling sessions and the experiences of cervical cancer survivors strengthened **public trust** by replacing fear with informed dialogue.

- **Integration with Existing Healthcare Services**

- The HPV campaign was integrated with **routine immunisation, antenatal care**, and the **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan**.
- This convergence improved outreach, optimised existing healthcare infrastructure, reduced implementation costs, and encouraged greater acceptance of vaccination among families already accessing healthcare services.

Outcomes and Impact

- The campaign achieved **100% vaccination coverage** within **40 days**, conducting hundreds of vaccination sessions across rural and urban areas.
- Beyond numerical success, it demonstrated the value of inclusive governance, behavioural innovation, community trust, and evidence-based planning.
- The initiative successfully bridged the gap between policy formulation and grassroots implementation, ensuring that vulnerable populations were not left behind.

Conclusion

- The Mandsaur HPV vaccination campaign offers a replicable model for strengthening public health governance in India.
- Its success illustrates that effective healthcare delivery requires **accurate data, behavioural change, cultural sensitivity**, and active community participation alongside sound policy design.
- By combining technology, grassroots engagement, and administrative innovation, the district transformed a vaccination programme into a movement for **social inclusion, equitable healthcare**, and long-term disease prevention.
- The campaign demonstrates that when implementation is both evidence-based and people-centred, a simple vaccine can become a powerful instrument for improving public health and ensuring every child receives a fair opportunity for a healthier future.

A Shot at Life, Mandsaur's Model for HPV Vaccination FAQs

Q1. Why is HPV vaccination important in India?

Ans. HPV vaccination prevents cervical cancer, which is a major cause of cancer-related deaths among Indian women.

Q2. What was the key strategy adopted by the Mandsaur administration?

Ans. The administration used a data-driven and inclusive approach to identify and vaccinate all eligible girls.

Q3. How did the campaign address vaccine hesitancy?

Ans. The campaign reduced vaccine hesitancy through counselling, awareness campaigns, and behavioural nudges.

Q4. Why were multiple government databases integrated?

Ans. Multiple databases were integrated to ensure that vulnerable and hard-to-reach girls were not left out of the vaccination programme.

Q5. What was the major outcome of the Mandsaur HPV vaccination campaign?

Ans. The campaign achieved 100% vaccination coverage within forty days through effective planning and community participation.

Source: **The Hindu**

Preparing India for China's Missile Challenge

Context

- Modern warfare is increasingly shaped by **advanced missiles**, enabling states to achieve strategic objectives with greater speed, precision, and lower costs.
- Conventional missiles have become instruments of **political coercion**, capable of disrupting **critical infrastructure**, military assets, and decision-making without immediately escalating into nuclear conflict.
- China's expanding missile arsenal poses a significant challenge to India's security, making it necessary to strengthen **conventional deterrence** through doctrinal, organisational, and technological reforms.

China's Missile Capabilities

- China possesses a substantial **missile advantage** through systems such as DF-15B, DF-16, DF-21C, DF-26, and DF-100.
- While short- and medium-range missiles can strike military installations along the border, the **DF-26** and **hypersonic missiles** can target strategic assets deep inside India with minimal warning.
- This capability reduces the strategic protection traditionally offered by the Himalayas and allows China to combine border operations with long-range missile strikes.
- Since the DF-26 is a **dual-role missile**, it also increases the risk of conflict escalation.

India's Strategic Vulnerabilities

- India's missile capability is still evolving. Systems such as **Agni**, **BrahMos**, **Nirbhay**, and the **Long-Range Land Attack Cruise Missile (LR-LACM)** have not yet been fully integrated into a unified strike architecture.
- Additional weaknesses include limited **real-time targeting**, finite missile stockpiles, and the absence of an operational **Rocket Force**.
- Without a dedicated missile command, India may be forced to absorb a large-scale missile attack before responding effectively, weakening deterrence and increasing strategic vulnerability.

The Way Forward

- **Need for a Dedicated Rocket Force**
 - A unified **Rocket Force** should function under the **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** and operate through a single command structure.
 - It must achieve three objectives: hold the **Western Theatre Command** and key military facilities in **Tibet** and **Xinjiang** at risk, degrade enemy logistics such as roads, railways, and airbases, and support battlefield commanders by targeting troop concentrations, artillery positions, and ammunition depots.

- Such a force would establish **mutual vulnerability**, raising the costs of any conventional missile campaign against India.

• **Doctrinal and Technological Reform**

- India's military doctrine should incorporate **counter-value strikes** alongside **counter-force** operations to strengthen conventional deterrence.
- A unified target list, pre-designated strike plans, and delegated launch authority would enable rapid responses during the opening phase of a conflict.
- Technological modernisation is equally important. Greater participation by the private sector, alongside DRDO, can accelerate missile production and innovation.
- Increased investment in **research and development, hypersonic technology, semiconductors, advanced propulsion systems**, and indigenous manufacturing would reduce dependence on foreign suppliers while enhancing strategic self-reliance.

• **Interim Defence Measures**

- Since establishing a Rocket Force will require time, immediate measures are essential.
- India should disperse **Indian Air Force** assets, harden airbases, strengthen **air defence**, improve **satellite surveillance**, and expand long-range conventional strike capabilities.
- These measures would reduce vulnerability, complicate enemy targeting, and improve the ability to detect and neutralize mobile missile launchers.

Conclusion

- The growing importance of conventional missiles has transformed the character of modern warfare.
- China's expanding missile capabilities challenge India's existing defence posture and demand a comprehensive response.
- Building a credible **conventional rocket force**, modernising military doctrine, strengthening indigenous defence production, and implementing immediate defensive measures would enhance India's ability to deter coercion, maintain strategic stability, and respond effectively to future missile conflicts below the nuclear threshold.

Preparing India for China's Missile Challenge FAQs

Q1. Why have conventional missiles become important in modern warfare?

Ans. Conventional missiles enable rapid, precise strikes that can disrupt critical infrastructure and strengthen political coercion.

Q2. Why does China's missile capability pose a challenge to India?

Ans. China's advanced missile arsenal can target both border positions and strategic assets deep inside India.

Q3. Why does India need a dedicated Rocket Force?

Ans. A dedicated Rocket Force would strengthen conventional deterrence and enable coordinated missile operations.

Q4. What doctrinal reforms are necessary for India's missile strategy?

Ans. India should adopt a unified missile doctrine with integrated targeting and rapid response capabilities.

Q5. What immediate measures can India take before establishing a Rocket Force?

Ans. India should strengthen air defence, harden airbases, improve satellite surveillance, and expand long-range strike capabilities.

Source: **The Hindu**

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