

O HERALDO

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A new weapon against HIV: Yeztugo's hope for the world

Before COVID-19 swept across the globe, HIV and cancer were the two illnesses that seemed unbeatable, striking dread into hearts worldwide. Today, a stunning scientific breakthrough offers new hope: the US has approved Yeztugo, a twice-a-year injection that prevents HIV almost perfectly.

Developed by Gilead Sciences after more than 20 years of hard work, this drug could change the fight against a virus that once threatened to wipe out millions, bringing brighter days for the entire world.

In the 1980s and 1990s, HIV was a nightmare. It spread quietly, took countless lives, and left families shattered. Globally, about 39 million people live with HIV today, with 630,000 deaths in 2022, according to the World Health Organisation. In India, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) estimates 2.5 million cases, with Goa facing challenges due to its bustling tourism industry, which can fuel HIV's spread. Unlike cancer, which hits unexpectedly, or COVID-19, which exploded suddenly, HIV's slow creep and the shame tied to it made it especially hard to fight. While COVID-19 vaccines were whipped up in months, saving millions, HIV has been a tougher foe. Medicines like AZT, introduced years ago, help people with HIV live longer, but stopping the virus before it starts has been tricky.

Yeztugo could make a huge difference for people everywhere. Many folks struggle with daily pills because life gets busy or they worry about being judged. This is true for workers in hotels, drivers, or others. The stigma around HIV stops people from getting tested or seeking help, especially in tight-knit communities. Daily pills to prevent HIV, available in India for years, only reach about one in three people who need them, says NACO

That's why Yeztugo is such a big deal. Instead of taking a pill every day to prevent HIV, you just need two shots a year. Tests proved it works amazingly: in one study with women in Africa, no one who got Yeztugo caught HIV. In another with men and diverse groups worldwide, only two out of over 2,000 people got infected. The well-known science journal Science called Yeztugo the "Breakthrough of the Year" in 2024, and it's clear why. This drug stops HIV in a way that's easy and powerful.

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But for Yeztugo to save lives, it has to reach people. In the US, Gilead is working with insurance companies and giving the drug free to those who can't pay. In India, where healthcare can be costly, the drug needs to be affordable. A 2024 Lancet report says India has a knack for making HIV medicines cheaper, so there's hope Yeztugo could be next. The Goa Medical College, with its strong health programmes, could lead the charge if the drug comes here. Gilead is also pushing to bring Yeztugo to countries like Brazil and South Africa, and India might be on the list soon.

This breakthrough feels a bit like the COVID-19 vaccine miracle, where science turned fear into hope. HIV has taken longer to tackle, but Yeztugo shows what's possible when we keep trying.

It's not a cure — people with HIV still need other medicines, and testing is a must to avoid problems — but it's a massive step toward stopping new cases. Yeztugo could protect communities, ease fears, and make the world healthier.

We all have a role to play. Community groups, schools, and health workers can spread the word about preventing HIV and break the stigma. By cheering for this discovery and pushing for Yeztugo to reach everyone, we can make sure it lives up to its promise. This isn't just about beating a virus — it's about building a future where no one lives in fear. Yeztugo is proof that even the scariest challenges can be met with hope, hard work, and a little bit of science magic.

Twitter World

Pope Leo XIV @Pontifex

The heart of the Church is torn by the cries rising from places at war, especially from Ukraine, Iran, Israel, and Gaza. We must not grow accustomed to war! Let us instead reject as a temptation the allure of weapons.

António Guterres @antonioгу-terres

Peace is not built in conference rooms. Peace is built in classrooms, in clinics, in communities. Peace is built when people have hope, opportunity & a stake in their future.

comment



SOTER D'SOUSA

The common man fails to realise that the political chaos he encounters is much more complex and not just about bad politicians and good politicians, it's about unhealthy personalities in positions of authority, and even in media and social activism



with distressed relatives of patients which often provokes and leads to violence against the medical practitioners.

The media hype given to the GMC incident hardly resonated with the public on the street. For the common man, who at some point of time suffered a humiliating experience with government health services, this 'Tu Tu Main Main' remained nothing more than a quarrel of the elite and privileged class for control, with some fishing in troubled waters to reap cheap publicity. Some dragged in the land conversions destroying Goa in a bid to demonise the minister. Ultimately, what was the outcome of all this drama? Will it change anything when it comes to respecting the dignity of patients in the services of the

Is a mental health crisis enabling Goa's filthy politics and governance?

The recent incident at Goa's premier medical institution which resulted in a flare up was probably the backfiring of a publicity stunt by the Health Minister and his PR team. This was not the first time that this minister was seen on camera rudely disciplining public servants in government hospitals, and had even managed to grab the desired publicity in social media. Perhaps emboldened by his earlier heroics paying off, the minister probably underestimated the target he chose this time. It was a higher ranked officer that was at the receiving end which possibly sparked an ego clash. It was more like a squabble for asserting their entitlement, which persons in authority, not only in politics but religion too, tend to suffer from after a period of time, particularly when they are considered to be next to God by the community. The body language, hands in the pocket and keeping on the face mask as if it was a casual interaction could irritate any boss who would read it as an attitude of defiance. It is such non-verbal body language

government institutions? Or, has it helped further insulate the elite professionals in public service from scrutiny?

Any rational discussion on this incident ought to have focused on what deficiency in the Outpatient Department (OPD) service had caused the patient to approach the casualty ward, and how such inconvenience could be prevented in future. The actual issue which arose from the refusal to administer a B12 injection to a senior citizen in the casualty ward, on a day when the OPD was shut, got lost in discussing the disrespect for 'human dignity' of the doctor by a VIP. Such a big fuss to even administer an injection to a patient in a medical institution? But as usual, the issue got diverted into blaming the media persons who brought this problem to the notice of the authority and the public. The outcome of the controversy resulted in banning video recording in the hospital, probably to keep no traces of lapses in the delivery of medical services.

In the increased obsession with diabetes, hypertension, cancer and cardiac ailments and the need for super speciality treatment facilities in health care, what is forgotten is an even more vital aspect of health care: Mental Health. Perhaps the increased focus has to turn from Goa Medical College to the Institute of Psychiatry and Human Behaviour (IPHB) located at one corner of the Bambolim plateau and out of public glare. The health of the mind is also known to play a vital role in physical health and both aspects need to be considered in treatment of ailments. Given the dysfunctional social and political situation which citizens are confronted with every day and in every place, mental health needs as much attention as physical health, if not more. The debate needs to shift from discussing good and bad people to healthy and unhealthy thinking and behaviour patterns, whether it is those in positions of authority or the civil society. The focus has to now drastically shift on understanding the psychopathology in Goa's crisis, which manifests in all sorts of social evils like addictions, corruption, frauds, illegalities, defections, betrayals and crimes.

The arrogance and corruption

involving politicians and public servants is not merely a failure of the political system. It's also about an unhealthy personality which displays repeated and persistent behaviour that craves for adulation, lacks empathy, aggression and vindictiveness towards opponents, addiction to lying, and blatant disregard for rules and conventions, among others. Such behaviours that prioritise personal gain over the well-being of others and struggle with ethical decision making could very much spring from the "Dark Triad" which refers to a cluster of personality disorders, namely Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Sociopathy. In such an unhealthy environment toxic behaviours often go as normal, whether it is on the roads, footpaths, marketplaces or in offices, religious institutions and families. Can such toxic environment throw up healthy leaders who will provide good leadership and governance?

The common man fails to realise that the political chaos he encounters is much more complex and not just about bad politicians and good politicians, it's about unhealthy personalities in positions of authority, and even in media and social activism. The manipulative and deceptive leadership, whether in politics or social action, does not emerge and thrive in a vacuum, it needs a core base of followers and a reactionary public devoid of rational thinking and behaviour which is conducive to its rise.

If Goa is to be saved, Goans have to become informed on mental health and break free from this cycle of conflict and unhealthy interactions in the 'Drama Triangle' as described by the psychiatrist Stephen Karpman, which involves basically an interaction between three roles of Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim that keep shifting as per selfish considerations. This dis-empowering dynamics of coping with social and political problems has to consciously shift towards choosing the healthy roles of Creator, Challenger, and Coach, which are part of The Empowerment Dynamic (TED).

(The author has worked with community initiatives related to Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention, HIV/AIDS Prevention, Panchayati Raj, Anti-Corruption, Environment Protection and Social Justice.)

letterstotheeditor

For letters to the editor contact us at editor@herald-goa.com.

All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

Trump & the elusive Nobel Peace Prize

President Trump's obsession with trying to win the Nobel Peace Prize is reaching bizarre proportions leading to difficult challenges for the US government. Upon assuming the Presidency, he had called for an end to the Ukraine conflict and thereafter tried prevailing upon Israel to scale down the attacks in Gaza. None of this has worked and both conflicts are continuing on their own agendas ignoring Trump. This has made him pounce upon other opportunities like the recent India-Pakistan flare-up where he keeps reiterating that he mediated to bring an end to the fighting between the 2 nuclear power countries. Though India has stoutly refused that Trump had intervened to stop the fighting from continuing. That is why possibly clutching at straws now he even went on a limb to invite the Pakistani Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir for lunch at the White House.

The reason for this ostensibly was that Munir had recommended Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to bring an end to the fighting in the recent India-Pakistan conflict. But then now with Israel attacking Iran and with Trump publicly supporting Israel in the war by going to the extent of

asking Teheran to be evacuated and seeking Iran's surrender as also threatening Ayatollah Khamenei by saying - We know where he is hiding and can take him out any time, his aim to get the Nobel Peace Prize seems to have been put on the back burner. So much for Trump's mistaken ambitions and his antics to try and achieve them. He can still try for the Prize by pulling out the National Guard & the Marines out of Los Angeles!

Srinivas Kamat, Mysore

People come and go, garbage stays

The state of Goa, with its stunning beaches and peaceful ambience, is unfortunately responsible for producing a significant amount of plastic waste, averaging 61.2 grams per person per day, nearly eight times higher than the national average. Preserving this natural haven and protecting the environment have become pressing issues.

Looking forward, India has set an ambitious goal of achieving Net-Zero Carbon Emissions by 2047, as part of its celebration of 100 years of independence. While the initial target was 2070, the proactive approach of various organisations and industries toward a sustainable future sends a positive signal to citizens to do their part in minimizing envi-

ronmental impact. By working together and making conscious choices, we can contribute to a cleaner, healthier environment for future generations.

In Goa, approximately 766 tons of waste is generated every single day. Two centralized waste management plants in Salgao and Cacora have been established to address this issue. Moreover, each panchayat and municipality has been equipped with a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) to sort and segregate the generated waste. With 186 panchayats, 11 municipal councils and the CCP involved in managing solid waste segregation, the infrastructure is in place to tackle the problem.

However, despite these measures, the environment is suffering due to widespread irresponsible behaviour. Instances of roadside plastic waste dumping, cans, and beer bottles littering beaches and creeks, and being haphazardly discarded near roadside trees have become a major concern. This disregard for the environment is causing significant harm and poses long-term consequences.

Citizens must recognise the far-reaching impacts of this pollution on the environment, which will ultimately lead to resource depletion. Taking individual and collective responsibility for proper waste disposal and investing in more sustain-

people'sedit

CLUELESS ABOUT NON-VEG

CHANDER GUPTA

I was born into a middle-class vegetarian family in a small town of Haryana in the year 1959. Our food consisted of chapatis (bread made of wheat flour), vegetables, fruits, pulses, milk, and dairy products etc. Till I finished my schooling, I hardly had any exposure to wider world outside my hometown Kaithal. My visits were confined to Sonapat, Panipat, Jind, Jagadhari - all within Haryana - where our relatives used to live. All our relatives were also strictly vegetarian.

Till the end of my schooling, I had not even heard of the word 'vegetarian'. I was under the delusion that the kind of cuisine we ate was the universal food. I completed my schooling with passing of Matriculation (10th class). I could have continued in school for Higher Secondary (11th class), but I preferred to join a college for Pre-University course (equivalent to Higher Secondary). The present system of 10+2 was introduced much later.

At the time of enrolment in college at a tender age of just 15 after finishing 10th class, I had not visited a place outside of Haryana. My visits in Haryana were just confined to spending time at relatives' places where I had many cousins of same age group. I had no idea of a cuisine other than what we ate in family ecosystem. I had never been to a restaurant till that time. Ours was a traditional family where womenfolk cooked all the meals. Kids and adults were pampered with Kheer and Halwa and mithai on special occasions. Even mithai was made at home. The only goodies, that I remember, brought from Halwai's shop were Samosa and Jalebi.

Going to college spelled freedom of sorts at that time. I did not have to carry a loaded Basta (school bag) to college. I was given a bicycle to go to college. Our college used to take the interested students on tours during the vacations. During my very first year in college, when I was merely 15 years old in Pre-University class, my parents allowed me to join a college tour to Bombay (later renamed Mumbai) and Goa. That was my first exposure to outside world. I was on my own in the company of fellow students (mostly senior to me in class and age) and a couple of lecturers. It has been 50 years since I undertook my first trip outside of home state and more importantly family environment.

In Bombay, we went to some film studios also and got a chance to get photos clicked with thespian Dilip Kumar and comedian Mukri. I was struck by the short dresses that the females wore partially exposing their legs, falling short of their knees. For a 15-year-old lad venturing out of family environments for the first time, Bombay was out of this world.

After travelling up to Bombay by railway, we sailed to Goa in a steamer which was an overnight journey. It was in Goa that I had the most impactful experience. At a restaurant we went to for dinner, the waiter asked whether we wanted 'vegetarian' or 'non-vegetarian' meal. That was the first time that I heard of this binary - 'vegetarian' and 'non-vegetarian'. At first, I did not understand what 'non-vegetarian' was. My seniors explained the difference between 'vegetarian' and 'non-vegetarian'. From my entire Bombay-Goa trip, the discovery of 'non-vegetarian' food was the most interesting takeaway.

able practices will be crucial in safeguarding the future of our environment.

Lynn Rodrigues, Mercers

Cruelty caught on camera

A disturbing incident has sparked widespread outrage in Goa after a video surfaced on social media, showing a 20-year-old boy shooting a pet dog four times with an airgun. The dog had reportedly wandered into the accused's property by accident. What followed was not defence, but deliberate cruelty.

While the boy's family claimed the dog was attacking and hence the defence, CCTV footage tells a different story — one where the boy is seen chasing the dog before opening fire. Shockingly, the weapon submitted to police differed from the one seen in the video, alleged one of the protesters, raising questions about a possible cover-up.

The dog's family filed a complaint, and animal lovers across the state have rallied in support, calling for strict action.

Serious questions remain: Did the boy have permission to own the gun? And even if he did, was it meant to be used on a defenceless animal?

With cases of animal cruelty rising in Goa, this incident underscores the urgent need for stronger, enforceable animal protection laws. Until such laws carry real consequences, the voiceless will continue to suffer — and justice will remain a distant dream.

Stesha Pereira, by email