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1. What the killing of Yahya Sinwar means for Hamas and the war in Gaza

Introduction

The killing of Yahya Sinwar by Israel recently might well be the most significant development in the year-long war in Gaza.

Sinwar had been de facto chief of Hamas since 2017, and its man on the ground in Gaza. He was also in-charge of Hamas's military operations, and the alleged mastermind of the October 7, 2023 terrorist attacks on Israel.



First, why was Sinwar important for Hamas?

At the time of his death, Sinwar was the most powerful figure in Hamas. After Israel eliminated other power centres such as Ismail Haniyeh, the chief of Hamas's political bureau, and military commander Mohammed Deif, "Sinwar became the sole decision maker, and grew stronger and stronger as Israel killed more and more important figures".

Despite being at the top of Israel's list of targets, Sinwar had stayed in Gaza, personally coordinating military operations, and he was ultimately killed in combat overground, not in the tunnels where the Hamas leadership has typically hidden.

Sinwar had been freed from Israeli prison in 2011 after more than 22 years of incarceration, as part of a large prisoner-swap deal. He had been serving four life sentences for allegedly massacring two Israeli soldiers and 12 Palestinian collaborators in the 1980s, and was the most high-profile Hamas figure to have been released.

In 2017, he became the political chief of Hamas in Gaza. He worked to restore ties with Egypt, which was crucial to Hamas's vast smuggling network in Gaza, and improve relations with Iran, which patronised Hamas as part of its "axis of resistance" against Israel.

So, does Sinwar's death signal the end of the road for Hamas?

Yes and no.

Given Sinwar's stature, his death leaves a massive power vacuum in Hamas. Khaled Mashal, the man billed to replace him, has a strong public profile, but does not command the loyalty that Sinwar did on the ground. Hamas is in disarray, possibly the weakest and most demoralised it has ever been, and any attempt at rebuilding will face massive challenges.

That said, Hamas is yet to be wiped "off the face of the Earth", as Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has promised to do.

Does Sinwar's death mean victory for Israel?

Killing Sinwar was among the foremost objectives of Israel's campaign, and is a very significant milestone achieved, even if Hamas manages to fight on.

Sinwar's killing could potentially pave the way for a ceasefire deal, and the return of the Israeli hostages who are still alive. He was seen as the biggest obstacle to negotiations on the Hamas side — he was Israel's top target, and had little personal incentive to negotiate.

Bringing back the hostages is crucial for Netanyahu politically. He has faced constant protests and demonstrations in the Israeli street from supporters of the families of the hostages. Most experts believe that Israel will use the window offered by Sinwar's death to negotiate the release of hostages.

Does this mean that the conflict will likely be over soon?

Netanyahu declared that "the war, my dear ones, is not yet over". Many believe that even if Hamas were to agree to a hostage deal, he would like to continue fighting only to ensure his own political survival. He may use the vague goal of "total victory" to press on, and his far right allies will support this policy.

What the US does is important. President Joe Biden recently said he hoped Sinwar's death would present "an opportunity to seek a path to peace — a better future in Gaza without Hamas". But the presidential election is now less than three weeks away, and Netanyahu may well decide to stay the course at least until then.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

2. Vijaya Kishore Rahatkar to be new NCW chairperson

Vijaya Kishore Rahatkar



Vijaya Kishore Rahatkar has been appointed the ninth Chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW), succeeding Rekha Sharma, an official order said.

Appointment process

The appointment made under Section 3 of the National Commission for Women Act, 1990, will be for a period of three years or until she reaches the age of 65, whichever comes first, as per the government notification issued.

The announcement will also be published in the Gazette of India.

About NCW

The NCW, a statutory body, is empowered to work towards the advancement of women's rights. Its mandate includes reviewing the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: The Hindu

3. India to seek certification from WHO for eliminating Kala-azar

Introduction

India could be at the threshold of eliminating Kala-azar as a public health problem with the country having managed to keep the number of cases under one in 10,000 people for two consecutive years now as required by World Health Organization (WHO) parameters for elimination certification.

Declining Cases

Kala-azar, also known as visceral leishmaniasis, is the second deadliest parasitic disease after malaria in India. Figures released by the Health Ministry show that India registered 595 cases and four deaths in 2023 and this year, it has recorded 339 cases and one death so far.

If it can maintain the declining trend for another year, India will become eligible to seek the elimination certificate from the WHO, making it the second country in the world after Bangladesh which in October became the only country to have eliminated Kala-azar as a public health problem. The WHO validated this status after Bangladesh reported fewer than one case per 10,000 people in each of its subdistricts for three consecutive years.

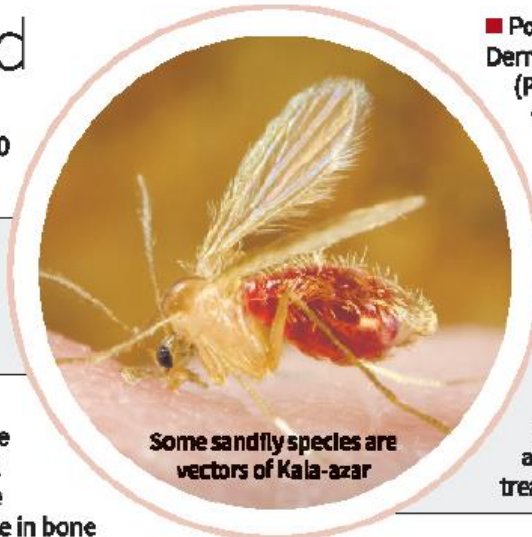
At the threshold

India has managed to keep the number of cases under one in 10,000 for two consecutive years now

■ Kala-azar is a slow progressing indigenous disease caused by a protozoan parasite of genus *Leishmania*

■ In India, *Leishmania donovani* is the only parasite causing this disease

■ The parasite primarily infects the reticuloendothelial system and may be found in abundance in bone marrow, spleen and liver



Some sandfly species are vectors of Kala-azar

■ Post Kala-azar Dermal Leishmaniasis (PKDL) is a condition when *Leishmania donovani* invades skin cells, resides and develops there and manifests as dermal lesions

■ Some of the Kala-azar cases manifests PKDL after a few years of treatment

Source: Health Ministry, National Centre for Vector-Borne Diseases Control

About Kala azar

Kala-azar is a disease caused by a protozoa parasite that is transmitted by the bite of an infected female sandfly.

Symptoms of the disease include irregular fevers, weight loss, enlarged spleen and liver, and anaemia. Kala-azar is fatal if left untreated in more than 95% of cases.

Target

India's National Health Policy (2002) initially set a target of eliminating Kala-azar by 2010, but this was later revised to 2015, 2017, and then 2020. The WHO's Neglected Tropical Disease road map set a goal of eliminating Kala-azar by 2020, but the target was not achieved.

The WHO is now accelerating work to achieve the target by 2030.

A disease is certified as eliminated as a public health issue when a country can prove that local transmission has been interrupted for a set period, and that there is a system to prevent the disease from re-emerging. The WHO assesses countries' submissions to determine if they meet the criteria for elimination.

K. Madan Gopal, adviser at the public health administration, National Health Systems Resource Centre, Health Ministry, said India's Kala-azar programme focuses on active case detection, effective vector control, and raising community awareness. Achieving a low case of Kala-azar to less than one case per 10,000 population at the sub-district (block PHCs) for two straight years puts India on track to earn WHO certification for eliminating Kala-azar as a public health problem. This will mark a significant milestone.

Vulnerable States

Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and parts of Uttar Pradesh have seen the highest number of Kala-azar cases, with Bihar alone accounting for over 70% of India's cases. These areas offer ideal sandfly breeding conditions due to poor sanitation and climate factors.

Despite this, these regions have made huge progress in recent years by increasing awareness, controlling vectors, and ensuring quick diagnosis and treatment. "India is moving closer to Kala-azar elimination. It's also important to address the root causes, like poverty and inadequate sanitation, that allow diseases like Kala-azar to spread," Dr. Gopal said while cautioning that India must keep improving surveillance, expanding access to rapid diagnostic tools, and making treatments readily available to sustain these gains.

He added that for a long-term solution, India should focus on better vector control, address social and economic conditions, and invest in research for vaccines and new treatments.

The Health Ministry had adopted strategies such as early diagnosis and complete case management, integrated vector management and vector surveillance, supervision, monitoring, surveillance, evaluation, and advocacy, communication and social mobilisation for behavioural impact and inter-sectoral convergence.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express