World Braille Day: 4 January

Every year, **4 January** is observed, at the instance of World Blind Union, as **World Braille Day** the world over in remembrance of the birthday of Louis Braille, who is credited with inventing the Braille system of language that facilitates blind people to read and write. The World Braille Day acknowledges the efforts of Louis Braille, which brought sea change in the lives of visually impaired. The World Braille Day is an opportunity for various philanthropic organizations and to help the blind.

The Braille language is not confined to alphabets, it helps understanding of music as well. While developing the language for music, Louis Braille made it flexible enough to be adapted to most of the musical instrument all over the world. However, it was two years after Louis's death in 1854 that the system was adopted by his school and gained wide popularity in entire France, and gradually in other countries.

Born in France, Louis Braille became blind at the tender age of 3; at 15 he was able to develop a set of symbols by making raised dots on paper that could be easily sensed by hand, thus enabling the blind to read and write. In 1829, he published, "Method of Writing Words, Music and Plain Songs by Means of Dots, for Use by the Blind and Arranged for Them".

World Leprosy Day: 30 January

World Leprosy Day is celebrated worldwide on **30 January** or the Sunday closest to this to increase public awareness about Leprosy (or Hansen's disease). The day was chosen to commemorate the death of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian leader, who contributed tremendously to alleviate those living with this disease.

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by "mycobacterium leprae" that mainly affects the skin, peripheral nerves, eyes and the mucous membrane of the windpipe. It is completely curable using multi-drug therapy available free in public hospitals and treatment in early stages prevents disability. In the past, leprosy patients often became social outcasts.

Leprosy is the ages-old recorded disease that targets the nervous system, especially the nerves of the feet, hands and face. The central idea of World Leprosy Day is spreading the word that leprosy is curable. A myth doing rounds about leprosy is its being bracketing with HIV/AIDS. World Leprosy Day seeks to educate public at large to the disease and attempt to debunk the stigma associated with it.

India Tops New Leprosy Cases Globally

According to World Health Organisation (WHO), India accounts for 60 percent of the world's new leprosy cases. India registered over 127,000 confirmed cases of leprosy in 2015, as revealed by the Fourth WHO Report on Neglected Tropical Diseases.

Four states viz. Delhi, Lakshadweep, Chandigarh and Odisha reported increased prevalence over the past year, though they had earlier achieved elimination. The worst affected are Chhattisgarh and Dadar and Nagar Haveli.

The status of annual new case detection and prevalence rates, indicators of the eradication programme's success, have not improved since 2005, mainly because India stopped active surveillance after reaching elimination levels. One reason for relapse is the country's dependence on voluntary reporting, which may lead to many cases being detected late or people getting treated after disability has already set in.

New cases have gone down marginally over the past decade: from 139,000 in 2006 to 127,000 in 2015. However, 118 districts of the country still have to reach the elimination level.

Grade 2 disability: The number of new cases affecting the eyes, hands and feet has gone up from 3,015 in 2005-2006 to 5,851 in 2005-2016, as shown by Union health ministry data.