



The Sangai Express

Today's Thought

In the end, that's what this election is about. Do we participate in a politics of cynicism or a politics of hope? Barack Obama

How will voters in the 13 vacant ACs vote? Countdown to by polls

The interesting question is how voters in the 13 vacant seats of the State Assembly will vote when by elections are held. A certain sense of urgency has been given to the by elections as the Election Commission of India has already made it clear that by elections to 65 Assembly/Parliamentary seats spread across the country will be held along with the Bihar elections. And significantly the Assembly elections in Bihar are required to wind up before November 29 and this is what has given a sense of urgency here, with 13 Assembly seats vacant, either after the incumbent MLAs resigned or were disqualified. Early days yet, but it is more than indicative that to many the by elections to the 13 Assembly seats will somewhat be like a semi-final before the big final in the 2022 Assembly elections. As in the earlier round, that is the 2017 Assembly elections, the fight will be seen mostly as one between the ruling BJP here and the Congress which did rather well in the 2017 Assembly elections winning 28 seats. That many of its MLAs deserted the Congress ship is another matter, but it is significant to note that of the 13 MLAs who are no longer in the Assembly, at least ten of them had earlier been elected in 2017 as Congress candidates. Will Manipur see a repeat of the 2017 Assembly elections and send back the 13 MLAs to the House or will there be new faces, is the question doing the round. In a way this will also be the litmus test for the ruling BJP, in that the scheduled by elections will be the first test of at least 10 MLAs who had jumped ship to the saffron party. Much will depend on how well the ruling dispensation is able to take the people along and that will only be known when D day comes.

In many ways the scheduled by elections will also be a test of some sort for the electorate. Will they demonstrate that they will continue to support their men, never mind which party's hat they wear? Or will the by election be seen as the opportune moment for them to show that their verdict cannot be taken for granted by those elected. Another important question would be whether those who resigned consulted their people/supporters before they put in their papers or whether it was an individual choice. There will be no easy answer here, for in politics, as in life, not everything will come in black and white and there will be many shades of grey. The Congress on the other hand will see the coming by elections as the opportune moment to turn the tide and once again portray itself as a party which has not lost its moorings. This will be a tough line to call, for remember their MLAs resigned to sup with the saffron party and this is a decision which would not have been taken at the spur of the moment, but must have been a well thought out strategy with an eye on the future. Early days yet but one can certainly see the two principal political parties gearing up to put their best foot forward and certainly election fever during the time of COVID-19 can only make the coming days more interesting.

Important notice

Contributors are requested to submit their articles within 1000-1500 words. Any article exceeding the word limit will not be entertained.

Editor

Science Facts

- * Rats laugh when being tickled:** These creatures are more dynamic than we think. Rats have the ability to "laugh" when tickled. A National Geographic video demonstrated that rats respond positively to tickling. And they even chase after the researcher's hand in a playful manner.
- * Only two letters don't appear in the periodic table**
The letters J and Q don't appear anywhere on the periodic table.
- * Hot water freezes faster than cold water**
This fact seems counterintuitive, but it's called the Mpemba effect, after a Tanzanian student named Erasto Mpemba who told his teacher that a hot mixture of ice cream froze faster than a cold one. Scientists now believe this is because the velocities of water particles have a specific disposition while they're hot that allows them to freeze more readily. If proven correct, this finding could also have implications in daily life, like cooling down electronic devices.
- * Cold water heats up faster than hot water**
The researchers who investigated the cause of the Mpemba effect made this discovery as well. They unsurprisingly named the phenomenon the inverse Mpemba effect.
- * It can rain diamonds on other planets**
Diamonds are definitely the Milky Way galaxy's best friends. Studies have examined the potential that Neptune, Uranus, Jupiter, and Saturn have to produce diamonds. The atmospheres in all four planets have such extreme pressure that they can crystallize carbon atoms and turn them into diamonds. Scientists were able to create the correct conditions in a lab to prove this occurs on Neptune and Uranus. Separately, a different group of researchers speculates that it may rain as much as 2.2 million pounds of diamonds on parts of Saturn every year!
- * Only one type of mammal has wings**
Those mammals would be bats. While flying squirrels can jump from trees and glide, they can't truly fly like bats can.
- * It's impossible to burp in space:** When you burp on Earth, gravity keeps down the solids and liquid from the food you just ate, so only the gas escapes from your mouth. In the absence of gravity, the gas cannot separate from the liquids and solids, so burping essentially turns into puking.

Ensuring women have a rights-based access to emergency contraceptives is vital

Many women and girls around the world have experienced contraception failure, missed taking oral contraceptive pills, or been forced to have sex against their will. For these women, emergency contraception is a safe and effective method that reduces the risk of pregnancy. Expanding the range of choices for girls and women to prevent unintended pregnancies, depending upon their specific realities and unique contexts, is critical if we are to deliver on sexual and reproductive health related goals and targets.

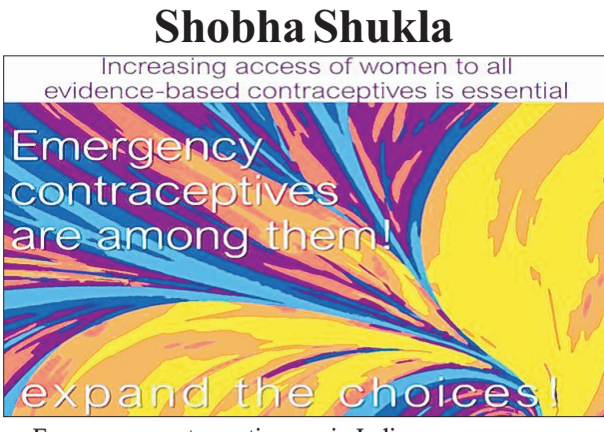
However, many women remain unaware of emergency contraception, and in many countries in Asia and the Pacific region access to it is still limited and it largely remains a neglected contraception method, said Prof Angela Dawson, Professor of Public Health at the Australian Centre for Public and Population Health Research, while launching the Asia Pacific Consortium for Emergency Contraception (APCEC) at the ongoing 10th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights (APCRSHR10) Virtual.

What is emergency contraception? Emergency contraception is an effective reproductive health intervention, which could protect millions of women from unintended pregnancy. It is a group of contraception methods that can be used to prevent up to over 95% of unintended pregnancies, when taken within 5 days after sexual intercourse. But they are more effective the sooner they are used.

Emergency contraception can be used in a number of situations- like unprotected intercourse, concerns about possible contraceptive failure, incorrect/improper use of contraceptives, and in cases of sexual assault when a woman has not been protected by any effective contraception. It offers a woman the last chance to prevent an unintended pregnancy.

What are the emergency contraception methods? Methods of emergency contraception are the copper-bearing intrauterine devices (IUDs) and the emergency contraceptive pills. Levonorgestrel pill is the most commonly used emergency contraceptive pill and is effective if taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex. A combined oral contraceptive pill regime consisting of ethinyl estradiol plus levonorgestrel is also used. However, a copper-bearing IUD should not be inserted for emergency contraception following sexual assault as the woman may be at high risk of a sexually transmitted infection such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea, warns Prof Dawson. It is only after treatment for sexual assault, and only if the woman wishes to, can a copper IUD be inserted for long acting reversible contraception.

What is the mode of action of emergency contraceptives? Emergency contraceptive pills prevent pregnancy by preventing or delaying ovulation. They do not induce abortion nor are they teratogenic, that is, they do not cause any abnormal foetal development. The copper IUD prevents fertilisation by causing a chemical change in sperm and egg before they meet. Emergency contraceptives do not cause an abortion if the woman is already pregnant nor do they harm a developing embryo.



Emergency contraceptive use in India In India, emergency contraceptive pills were introduced in 2002 by the government's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and were made available over the counter drug in 2005. Demographic surveys have revealed a large unmet need of contraception in India. According to one study, there were an estimated 48.1 million pregnancies in India in 2015, nearly half of which were unintended. At 15.6 million, abortions accounted for one-third of all these pregnancies. 0.8 million or 5% of these abortions were done through unsafe methods. In spite of abortions being legalized since 1971, 8% of maternal deaths in the country are due to unsafe abortions. Offering emergency contraception is an effective reproductive health intervention for reducing unintended pregnancies and unnecessary abortion related deaths in certain cases.

However, one should not forget that, as the name suggests, emergency contraceptive pills are to be used in an emergency for a contraceptive accident, and not as an ongoing family planning method, following every act of sexual intercourse. They are not a quick-fix solution to unintended pregnancies and their frequent usage can change hormonal patterns and be dangerous for the user's health. Moreover, they leave women vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases.

There is lot of misinformation surrounding emergency contraceptives. They are often referred to as the 'morning after pill' which is not correct because women do not have to wait till the morning to use emergency contraceptives. There is also the myth that they promote promiscuity and are an abortifacient. In one survey only 15% of the Indian respondents knew that these emergency contraceptive pills should not be used regularly as a contraceptive. Unsurprisingly, this lack of knowledge, coupled with the conservative attitude towards sex, has resulted in a growing popularity of these emergency contraceptive pills in India. In fact, after USA and China, India is the third-largest market for these 'morning after pills'.

The National Education Policy 2020- An overview-IV

Contd from previous issue

4) Technology Use and Integration
An autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) will be created to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, administration, and so on, both for school and higher education. It will have the following functions:

- a) provide independent evidence-based advice to Central and State Government agencies on technology-based interventions;
- b) build intellectual and institutional capacities in educational technology;
- c) envision strategic thrust areas in this domain; and
- d) articulate new directions for research and innovation.

* Teaching-learning e-content will continue to be developed by all States in all regional languages, as well as by the NCERT, CIET, CBSE, NIOS, and other bodies/institutions, and will be uploaded onto the DIKSHA platform. This platform may also be utilized for Teacher's Professional Development through e-content. CIET will be strengthened to promote and expand DIKSHA as well as other education technology initiatives.

* Technology-based education platforms, such as DIKSHA/SWAYAM, will be better integrated across school and higher education, and will include ratings/reviews by users, so as to enable content developers create user friendly and qualitative content.

* The National Research Foundation will initiate or expand research efforts in the technology. In the context of AI, NRF may consider a three-pronged approach:

- a) advancing core AI research,
- b) developing and deploying application-based research, and
- c) advancing international research efforts to address global challenges in areas such as healthcare, agriculture, and climate change using AI.

5) Online and Digital Education: Ensuring Equitable Use of Technology

This Policy recommends key initiatives such as pilot studies for online education, digital infrastructure, online teaching platform and tools, content creation, digital repository, and dissemination, addressing the digital divide, virtual labs, training and incentives for teachers, online assessment and examinations, blended models of learning and laying down standards.

6) Creating a Dedicated Unit for Building of World Class, Digital Infrastructure, Educational Digital Content and Capacity

A dedicated unit for the purpose of orchestrating the building of digital infrastructure, digital content and capacity building is recommended to be created in the Ministry to look after the e-education needs of both school and higher education. This centre will consist of experts drawn from the field of administration, education, educational technology, digital pedagogy and assessment, e-governance, etc.

Making it Happen

The most crucial part of any policy will be financing and implementation. The NEP 2020 targets to increase public investment in education to 6% of GDP at the earliest. Active promotion and support for private philanthropic activity in the education sector is highlighted and coherence in planning and synergy across by all stakeholders is suggested.

- 1) Strengthening the Central Advisory Board of Education

* The Policy recommends strengthening and empowering the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) which will

involved in education.

* It will be guided by the following principles:

- a) First, implementation of the spirit and intent of the Policy will be the most critical matter.
- b) Second, it is important to implement the policy initiatives in a phased manner, as each policy point has several steps, each of which requires the previous step to be implemented successfully.
- c) Third, prioritization will be important in ensuring optimal sequencing of policy points, and that the most critical and urgent actions are taken up first, thereby enabling a strong base.
- d) Fourth, comprehensiveness in implementation will be key; as this Policy is interconnected and holistic, only a full fledged implementation, and not a piecemeal one, will ensure that the desired objectives are achieved.
- e) Fifth, since education is a concurrent subject, it will need careful planning, joint monitoring, and collaborative implementation between the Centre and States.
- f) Sixth, timely infusion of requisite resources - human, infrastructural, and financial - at the Central and State levels will be crucial for the satisfactory execution of the Policy.
- g) Finally, careful analysis and review of the linkages between multiple parallel implementation steps will be necessary in order to ensure effective dovetailing of all initiatives. This will also include early investment in some of the specific actions (such as the setting up of early childhood care and education infrastructure) that will be imperative to ensuring a strong base and a smooth progression for all subsequent programmes and actions.

* Subject-wise implementation committees of experts in cooperation and consultation with other relevant Ministries will be set up at both the Central and State levels to develop detailed implementation plans for each aspect of this Policy in accordance with the above principles to achieve the goals of the Policy in a clear and phased manner.

* Yearly joint reviews of the progress of implementation of the policy, in accordance with the targets set for each action, will be conducted by designated teams constituted by MHRD and the States, and reviews will be shared with CABE. In the decade of 2030-40, the entire policy will be in an operational mode, following which another comprehensive review will be undertaken.

Conclusion

Successful implementation of the NEP 2020 demands a long-term vision, availability of expertise on a sustained basis and concerted action from all concerned encompassing national, state, institutional and individual levels. Increasing of public investment in education sector to 6% of GDP needs to be implemented in the right spirit. The implementation process will require multiple initiatives and actions by multiple bodies in a synchronised and systematic manner.

Infrastructural development and capacity building of teacher both for the school and higher education for fulfilling the NEP 2020 objectives will be a challenging task for the stakeholders concerned. There is ample opportunity for employment of IT experts as the policy focuses on extensive use of technology. A threadbare extensive discussions and understanding of the concepts and the implementation along with desired outcome should be given utmost importance by all concerned stakeholders in the central as well as state governments.

It is hopeful that the implementation of NEP 2020 will be a smooth journey towards achieving its goal 'Making India a Global Knowledge Superpower'.
(The writer is former Director Programme, NCCT, New Delhi and former Director, ICM Imphal)

India 2nd worst-hit by COVID; Air pollution could be double whammy

Chetan Bhattacharji

The number of cases in India has rapidly overtaken Brazil. The weekly average today is tens of thousands of cases more than it was on the first of August. Some expect it to cross 6 million cases by the end of this month. But that's not the only way it's going to get worse. Scientists fear a double whammy once air pollution starts spiraling.

September 7th, the first international day for blue skies day coincidentally saw clean air in Delhi and much of north India, clear enough to see the warning signs. This monsoon has been exceptionally kind to lungs here with the rain and wind removing pollutants. But peak air pollution season is just weeks away.

Research has shown that air pollution could be an important factor that turns a mild Covid-infection into one that requires acute medical care. In a paper out this month, Professor Michael Brauer of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation summarises the linkages. Short-term increases in air pollution reduces the immune response to respiratory infections. "Emerging research also suggests the air pollution may alter lung cells to increase the

sold under the brand names of i-Pill and Unwanted-72. In India, where sex before marriage remains a taboo subject, women are more likely to opt for an emergency contraceptive as it saves them from awkward visits to gynaecologists, many of whom are known for asking their patients whether they are married instead of asking whether they are sexually active.

Then again, as per a newspaper report, we have a state like Tamil Nadu that seems to have put a shadow ban on iPills which suddenly started disappearing off the shelves of pharmacies, and by 2016, they were almost impossible to find. Medical stores seem to feel uncomfortable stocking them, particularly for adolescents and unmarried women, perhaps due to cultural and social barriers.

According to Prof Dawson, Asia Pacific Consortium for Emergency Contraception (APCEC) aims to address these challenges through advocacy efforts, knowledge dissemination and networking to improve evidence-based policy and practice and access to emergency contraception. It will serve as an authoritative source of information for not only researchers but also for policy makers, health providers, and the users.

In these times of COVID-19, there is a need for emergency contraception more than ever. Lockdowns necessitated by the global pandemic have resulted in a dramatic upsurge of intimate partner sexual violence; women are less likely to approach services or pharmacies for fear of contracting the virus; and sexual and reproductive health services have either closed in some places or have restricted hours of work. There are issues with supply, procurement and distribution of contraceptives also. All this has drastically reduced the access to regular contraception, as well as to emergency contraception, and increased the likelihood of unintended pregnancies and possible contraceptive failures. Modelling studies in 14 Asia Pacific countries show that around 32% women of reproductive age will not be able to meet their family planning needs in 2020.

Rights-based access to emergency contraception is a human rights issue and it should be included routinely in all family planning programmes, integrated into all health services and made available for all women and girls in dire need of it. Expanding the range of contraception choices, and ensuring a rights-based access for all women and girls to them, remains vital. At the same time, messaging around emergency contraception must also reinforce that emergency contraception cannot replace regular long acting reversible contraception methods.

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coronavirus patients.

Indian officials have so far not put out any advisories on the Covid-air pollution link. Although notably, the Health Ministry has put out a warning that smokers are more susceptible to Covid-19. Oddly, it says nothing about the internal damage smoking does to a person and any connection that may have to Covid infections; air pollution in places like Delhi is like smoking a pack of cigarettes a day.

It's hard to forecast how bad the air pollution will be in the coming months. But anyone tracking this is likely to expect high levels of pollution just as in the past few years. How that will affect the coronavirus infections is not fully known (not to mention how millions who've survived Covid will be affected by rising pollution now). Air pollution is estimated to reduce life-spans by nine years in Delhi and 10 in Lucknow, and across India by a little of 5 years on an average. Now, the pandemic makes controlling air pollution far more pressing.

(Chetan Bhattacharji is Managing Editor at NDTV. Views expressed are personal opinions of the author)
Courtesy NDTV