

146 districts targeted in popn control drive

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New Delhi: To achieve the country's population control target faster, the government has decided to accelerate family planning measures by identifying 146 districts where the total fertility rate (TFR, the number of children born per woman) is more than three and which add up to 28% of the population.

The health ministry is set to roll out "Mission Parivar Vikas" in these districts to improve access to family planning services, create awareness and make family planning choices available. The "high-focus" districts are in the seven states of Uttar

Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Assam.

TFR has a direct correlation with the maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate, the Centre has said. Though India's population growth rate has declined, the pace is uneven across states, leading to the policy intervention.

"These 146 districts are an obstacle in population stabilisation (sic)," Union health minister JP Nadda said. High fertility rates are also related to adverse indicators and these districts account for 25-30% of maternal deaths and 50% of infant deaths.

► **Fertility rate declines, P 19**

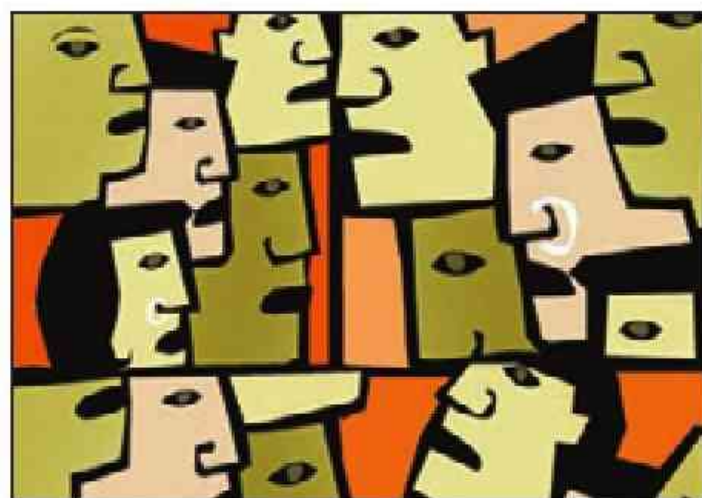
India's fertility rate declines to 2.3

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According to government data, India's total fertility rate has declined from 2.6 in 2008 to 2.3 at present. India is now just 0.2 points away from reaching the replacement level of 2.1.

So far, 24 states have already achieved replacement level fertility. Nearly 60% of the population resides in states where either replacement fertility has been reached or will soon be met. These include the southern states, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Punjab.

Apart from population stabilisation, the programme also aims to reduce maternal and infant mortality. "The greater the TFR, the more will be the MMR and



IMR. Hence, reducing TFR would lead to decrease in maternal mortality and morbidity and infant mortality and morbidity," Nadda said.

Under the mission, the government will study each district to find why fertility rates are higher and will take measures to address them.

As part of the programme, the health ministry will distribute a kit containing products of family planning and personal hygiene

Nearly 60% of the population resides in states where replacement fertility has been reached or will soon be met

among newlyweds.

The kits will be distributed by ASHA workers to encourage inter-spousal communication and consensual decision-making with regards to their reproductive and sexual health as well as delay the birth of the first child and space the second, a senior health ministry official said.

"Saas-Bahu Sammelans" will be held to facilitate improved communication between mothers-in-law and

daughters-in-law and bridge the gap in their attitudes and beliefs about reproductive and sexual health.

Besides, special buses called "Saarthi-Awareness on Wheels" will travel through these districts to generate awareness as well as sensitise the community and disseminate family planning messages.

Messages about the same will be disseminated with the help of local actors who can make an impact in the community. The government will also augment sterilisation services through enhanced HFD (high fertility district) compensation scheme, roll out injectable contraceptive at sub centre level and generate awareness about condoms and pills.