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India leads in childbirth deaths

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New Delhi: More women die in India during childbirth than anywhere else in the world. Of the 5.36 lakh women who died during pregnancy or after childbirth across the world in 2005, India accounted for 1.17 lakh.

India is followed by Nigeria (59,000), Congo (32,000) and Afghanistan (26,000). India, along with ten other countries, accounted for almost 65% of global maternal deaths in 2005.

The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in India is 450 deaths per 100,000 live births. In comparison, Congo had an MMR of 740, Nigeria 1,100 and Afghanistan 1,800 per 100,000 births. India's neighbours are better off. While Bangladesh reported 21,000 deaths with an MMR of 570, Pakistan recorded 15,000 deaths with an MMR of 320, China had 7,800 deaths

with an MMR of 45 and Nepal 6,500 deaths with an MMR of 830 in 2005. Sri Lanka recorded 190 deaths with an MMR of 58.

Also, the probability that a girl will die from a complication related to pregnancy and childbirth during her lifetime is one in 70 among women in India. Poverty, hunger and disease were the three main reasons why 99% of the deaths occurred in developing countries in 2005. Together, the regions of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia accounted for 86% of the world's maternal deaths in 2005.

These shocking figures were revealed in the latest Maternal Mortality report. Compiled by the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank, the report, published in Lancet on October 12, makes another crucial finding—the world's MMR is declining too slowly to meet the Millenni-



- # 30m women become pregnant each year in India
- # 27m experience live births
- # 117 lakh died during childbirth in 2005
- # 1 in 70 women face the risk of dying during pregnancy
- # 47% of maternal deaths are due to excessive bleeding and anaemia
- # Rajasthan, MP, Jharkhand, Orissa, UP and Bihar record high maternal deaths
- # Globally, 5.36 lakh women die during childbirth
- # 10-20m suffer injuries from complications
- # Over \$6.1b needed to check trend over next seven years
- # 20m unsafe abortions are done each year globally

um Development Goal (MDG) 5, which aims at reducing by three-quarters the number of women who die during pregnancy and childbirth in the next eight years.

While an annual decline of 5.5% in MMR between 1990 and 2015 is required to achieve MDG 5, figures released show an annual decline of less than 1%.

"Having a child, the most basic of human joys, contin-

ues to be a life-threatening proposal for many women around the world. Nearly 20 million unsafe abortions, a major factor in maternal deaths and illnesses, are done annually," said Nils Daulaire, president of the Global Health Council.

According to an Indian health ministry expert, the recently released NFHS-IH findings could explain why maternal mortality was a cause of

such shame for India. "NFHS-III found that women in India lack quality care during pregnancy and childbirth. Almost one in four women (23%) who gave birth in the last eight years received no antenatal care, ranging from 1% or less in Kerala and Tamil Nadu to

66% in Bihar. At least 40% of pregnant women did not get any antenatal care in Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland," he said.

The quality of antenatal care also needs improvement in India. "Only 65% of women receiving antenatal care received iron and folic acid supplements, and only 23% took the supplements for at least 90 days. Only 4% of expectant

mothers took a deworming drug during pregnancy. Failure to take an iron supplement and deworming drugs increases the risk of anaemia, a major problem for mothers and children in India," an expert said.

Home births are still common in India, accounting for almost 60% of recent births. NFHS-III found that while 37% of deliveries were assisted by a traditional birth attendant, 16% of babies were delivered by a relative or some other untrained person. The new figures of maternal mortality rates in 171 countries come just days before more than 1,500 world leaders convene in London for 'Women Deliver', a global conference from October 18-20 that will focus on creating political will and strengthening health systems to prevent the "death of one woman every minute of every day during pregnancy or childbirth".