

for electricity generation in a civilian environment. Also, the question may be asked as to whether select universities in India would be helped now to start UG or PG courses in nuclear reactor physics and technology or nuclear engineering, as the case may be, by agencies here and abroad, in view of anticipated demand at various levels for operation, if not design, of new nuclear power plants in the coming years.

A word of caution is also necessary. There is still some uncertainty about the true extent of global warming in the next hundred years, if only because our unified climate models are not quite

perfect, and also because not enough studies have been made to-date. Nor are our present-day satellite measurements of temperature, etc. sufficiently free from doubt³. Moreover, can one rush to revive global interest in nuclear power generation when the cost of solar energy, through the use of photovoltaic techniques, will one day soon become competitive, even if one goes along with Ritch in saying, as has been said repeatedly before, that nuclear reactors are being designed and built today to be 'safer than safe', and that the problem of nuclear wastes has been solved to everyone's general satisfaction?

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M. HABEEBUL HAQUE ANSARI

*Atmospheric Physics Section,
Department of Physics,
Aligarh Muslim University,
Aligarh 202 002, India
e-mail: mhha@ndc.vsnl.net.in*

AIDS may become India's next scourge

The article on HIV infection (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **81**, 1302–1307) outlines an alarming fact that India has more people infected with HIV, the AIDS causing virus. In the year 2000 alone, a total of 5.3 million people were infected with HIV worldwide¹. Since the epidemic started two decades ago, this immunestripping disease has killed 22 million people globally. India, Indo-China, and the former Soviet republics have seen the most rapid raises in recent years. AIDS experts have raised alarm bells over its spread in the Asia-Pacific region and called for a united effort to control it. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates between 3 and 5 million people in India alone are infected!

According to the Ministry of Health in Delhi, only 3% of Indians use condoms for birth control, since the tradition and culture dictate the women to undergo sterilization or to take pills. Prostitution plays a major role in spreading the disease among heterosexuals in urban areas. Although Mumbai appears to be the main focus for AIDS, rapid spread has occurred through other major cities as well². Mobility of people from cities to rural areas is so rapid that the disease may already be out of control in many areas.

The blood screening tests conducted at most hospitals in rural areas are not

adequate to confirm the virus, making blood transfusion no longer safe. The National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), the apex body for controlling AIDS in India has reported a high incidence (8.2%) of HIV positive among healthy blood donors in urban areas³. Moreover, used syringes are sometimes repacked and marketed for sale, which also threatens the transmission of contagious diseases, including AIDS.

AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease and as long as people are educated thoroughly and warned about the dangerous consequences of unsafe sex, there is less to fear. Unfortunately, the intervention programme launched by the NACO had very little impact in controlling the spread of the epidemic³. The current educational programmes are often restricted to the passive dissemination of information through posters, media and the display of safe-sex billboards behind automobiles. More aggressive efforts are therefore needed to reach out to each and every rural/urban community throughout India, to combat the spread of this disease. The state and central government agencies must build specialized shelters for the victims. More funds must be spent for effective AIDS awareness campaign, research, routine screening tests and treatment.

People from all walks of life must take an active role to promote AIDS

education. It is time for the regional and national celebrities to involve themselves in helping the victims and educating everyone, because it would certainly bring quicker awareness among the rural public. Remember, how the late Princess of Wales (Diana) reached out to the AIDS victims, shook hands to console them and also raised millions of pounds for their welfare? India has experienced and handled the outbreak of deadly diseases in the past⁴ and we hope that AIDS can also be controlled and eradicated eventually.

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GOVINDASAMY AGORAMOORTHY*
MINNA J. HSU

*Department of Biological Sciences,
National Sun Yat-sen University,
P.O. Box 59-157,
Kaohsiung 80424, Taiwan
For correspondence.

e-mail: agoram@mail.nsysu.edu.tw