## FROM MEXICO

# Henequen diseased

Henequen plants, the basis of a projected economic comeback in Yucatan, are being destroyed by a disease unfamiliar to agronomists on the scene.

The plants, which are related to the century plant and sisal, were to have provided the raw material for a large new paper and pharmaceutical supply industry in the impoverished region.

The disease, which destroys the leaves of the normally sturdy plants, first appeared after hurricane Beulah swept the peninsula. Thus, there is a possibility that the wind and rain of the storm may have damaged in some way the henequen plants which are used to near-desert conditions.

The Yucatan Government has appealed to the Mexican Department of Agriculture to send experts to determine the nature of the plant disease.

The Yucatan Government has been engaged in a program of total exploitation of henequen, known scientifically as Agave fourcroydes.

Plants for processing the stiff, waxy leaves into industrial paper, newsprint and rope, and the juice into a base for drugs and cleaning agents are already in late planning stages. A loan of $28 million for a cellulose plant and paper mill has been obtained.

The plans are based on research into the industrial uses of henequen conducted by the National Laboratories for Industrial Development.

Henequen fibers, they found, have a greater resistance to tearing than sugar cane fibers or those from conifers—now a principal source of pulpwood. Waxes can be obtained from leaf skins.

Henequen is now used to make rugs, ropes, bags and a variety of fiber products sold to tourists. The total exploitation program is expected to bring back some of Yucatan's former prosperity. In the early 1900s rich henequen planters sent their children to European schools and built enormous haciendas. *Emil Zubryn*

## FROM GENEVA

# Diarrhea deadly

Outside his hut in a tropical village, the child keeps defecating until he gets too weak to walk. His body loses water, salt and nutrients.

His ignorant mother gives him simple starch and he grows more dangerously undernourished. At last he goes into shock and dies.

This is the biggest and saddest world health problem. Unbelievably, one of every three children in the world dies before five, mostly this way.

**Troublesome** since antiquity when Hippocrates described it, infantile diarrhea continues as the worst killer of child life, according to World Health Organization expert Dr. S. M. K. Wasti of Pakistan's Lahore Mayo Hospital.

He and others concluded after a conference at the United Nations medical agency that seven-eighths of all children today are exposed to the risk of lethal diarrhea, despite increasing availability of medical care, UN efforts and aid from richer countries.

WHO classifies all disease in which it is a major symptom as diarrheal, thereby including intestinal parasites, bacterial and viral infections, gastritis and malnutrition.

The agency has about 50 projects under way in a score of countries and more are being designed for next year.

One of the most important projects to date has been the unique, extensive mission of the WHO Diarrheal Diseases Advisory Team. For five years, this handful of devoted doctors has carried out surveys, mainly on pre-school children, in seven countries: Ceylon, East Pakistan, Iran, Mauritius, Sudan, United Arab Republic and Venezuela.

**Major studies** have been conducted on the influence of water supply and other sanitation, parasitology and bacteriology. The team includes pediatricians, bacteriologists, parasitologists and sanitary engineers.
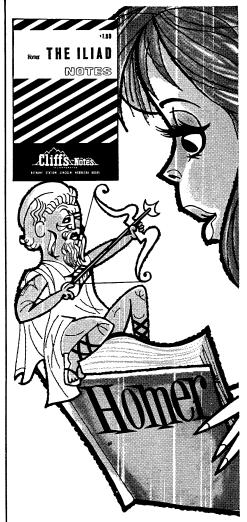
"We have had our problems," says Dr. W. J. van Zijl, team-leader epidemiologist who reported the results at WHO headquarters. Only about four percent of the child population was usually examined. Some of the children had obviously recently recovered and others were becoming ill.

A large number of positive reactions was given by clinically healthy children, the team leader reports. The doctors found a large difference between reported rates and detection rates of bacteria, usually between 20 and 30 percent. Some cases were probably viral. The team could not list the causes by importance, Dr. van Zijl explains, because of the frequent multiple infections. *David Alan Ehrlich*

## FROM CANADA

# UFO study

The University of Toronto's Institute of Aerospace Studies is about to begin taking Canada's first major look at unidentified flying objects. Dr. Gordon Patterson, head of the Institute, declares that the U.S. Air Force has in the past tried to explain all sightings away as hoaxes, hallucinations or misinterpretations of data, and that not all UFOs can be thus dismissed. A special truck equipped with measuring instruments may be assembled by the Institute to visit the sightings. *Tom Weissmann*