

FROM GENEVA

## Malaria returns to Ceylon amid gem strike

A few months ago a woman in the Central Province of Ceylon discovered a gem stone worth a small fortune.

Gem fever shot through the region, and thousands of people began digging. More and more gems were unearthed—and malaria, once believed eradicated, returned with a vengeance. The outbreak is regarded as serious, though figures are not yet available.

From all over Ceylon, prospectors converged on Elahera in all kinds of strange vehicles. They camped in the country.

Their methods involve sinking pits up to 30 feet deep, and sifting the gravel in wicker baskets. Over a large area prospectors took gems and left thousands of pits—excellent breeding places for malaria-carrying mosquitoes.

Minister of Health Harry Jayawardena has appealed to the army to help his department to fill the holes.

Ceylon thought it had eradicated malaria with a final five-year push that started in 1958 with the aid of the World Health Organization and the United States. The incidence had fallen from 2.5 million in 1945 to 11,000 in 1955, to 1000 in 1958. Deaths fell from 8,539 in 1945 to one in 1958.

The country had suffered several major epidemics in earlier years. The worst, in 1935, took 50,000 lives among five million people and debilitated many more.

Health officials today are concerned also that jungle territory newly brought under cultivation may become malaria foci.

## WHO moves against Chagas' disease

Medical scientists and laboratories in six countries are collaborating to combat Chagas' disease, a heart and digestive ailment widespread in nations still too poor to suffer many coronaries. The acute form of the disease is most prevalent in infants and children.

The disease is transmitted by bacteria in a common insect's excreta.

The program has been organized by the World Health Organization's cardiovascular division under Dr. Z. A. Fejfar, an authority on heart muscle disorders. He is stimulating studies in Africa, India and South America.

Following a meeting of the United Nations medical agency's advisors in this field, he is asking collaborating researchers to send material from selected cases to a central laboratory in

Israel for electron microscopy, chemical and immunological studies.

Focus for this task force is a team under Prof. A. M. Davies, chief of the department of medical ecology at Hebrew University's Hadassah Medical School.

Other teams are in the medical schools of Kampala, Uganda; Ibadan, Nigeria; Salvador-Baia, Brazil; Ribeirao-Preto, Brazil; Caracas, Venezuela; and Trivandrum-Kerala, India.

The hope, after incidence and causes are determined, is to facilitate earlier diagnosis and to spur research for an immunologic and/or chemotherapeutic attack.

Dr. Fejfar describes Chagas' disease as "an acute, subacute or chronic disease resulting from infection with *Trypanosoma cruzi*, transmitted via the feces of blood-sucking bugs of the family Triatomidae.

"It is endemic in large areas of South and Central America," he says. "The heart disorder of the acute form is most frequent in infants and children. In the chronic form the disorder is usually seen in subjects between 15 and 50."

*David Alan Ehrlich*

FROM AUSTRALIA

## Serum against sea wasps

Scientists at the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories in Melbourne hope to have preventive serum for sea wasp stings soon. The director of the laboratories, Dr. W. R. Lane said that the serum to make people immune to the stings would be taken before entering the water during the November-March season of the sea wasp, a stinging jellyfish.

Pre-contact immunization is essential since the effects of a sea wasp sting are almost immediate and often fatal. "If you weren't immunized, you would have to have the antidote in your hand as you were bitten for it to be effective in time," says Dr. Lane. Scientists at the laboratory have been working on the serum for about 12 months.

"It has virtually been a full-time job," he said, "and it is far too early to say when we will have the serum available; but it is our hope that we will have it during this sea wasp season." Eight persons have died from sea wasp stings in northern Queensland in the past 10 years. On January 1, a 12 year old boy received extensive stings while swimming at Babinda, near Cairns. Although he received a heavy dose of poison from the jellyfish, the boy is continuing to make a remarkable recovery in the Babinda hospital.

Dr. J. H. Barnes, of Cairns, an authority on the sea wasp, said the stings

received by the boy had been the most massive anyone had so far survived. He stopped breathing twice after being stung, but his heart kept beating and his breathing was quickly restored.

*W. A. Scholes*

FROM BRUSSELS

## Conservation year proclaimed by Council of Europe

The countries of Europe are waking up to the urgency and the economic necessity of nature conservation. The 18-nation Council of Europe, whose seat is in Strasbourg, France, has declared 1970 the European Conservancy Year and this has led to a proposal for the five years 1968-72 to be an International Conservation Quinquennium.

The Council of Europe's Economic, Social and Cultural Committees of national experts are expanding their activities in this field. They are preparing a series of national conferences, exhibitions, and a manifesto designed to prepare public opinion for a convention on the conservation and development of the natural environment in Europe.

The manifesto will concentrate on the preservation of the natural environment—soil, air, water and wildlife, but will also include noise abatement. The Council is particularly keen to promote interest among farmers, engineers, town planners, shipping owners, industrial chemists and the tourist trade, and emphasises the economic as much as the aesthetic importance of nature conservancy.

A full-scale publicity campaign is being launched to attract as many European countries as possible, including those in Eastern Europe. To mark the conservation year every member country has been asked to establish something practical—a nature reserve, a field study center, nature trails, or some other permanent contribution.

Preparation for the year will take place in close cooperation with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and the World Wild-Life Fund.

*John Lambert*

FROM JAPAN

## Space spending up 20 percent

The Japanese government's Science and Technology Agency has obtained a \$1,635,000 boost in funds for its space developments program for fiscal 1968, bringing the total space appropriation to just under \$9 million.

With this increase, the agency will finally be able to set up its long-proposed

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