

Mexico," Dr. Alba said, "but training of others is going ahead rapidly. In a new federal subsidy program, the most promising students are sent to the United States or Europe for advanced work.

"It must not be overlooked that we are just starting, actually, in the atomic field. The first Van de Graaff reactor was installed at the National University in 1952, just 15 years ago.

FROM GENEVA

Smallpox Campaign

Errors by technicians, popular superstition and consequent burdens on supervising doctors: these are among the experiences that mar an early progress report from Asia on this first year of the 10-year global smallpox eradication campaign launched by the World Health Organization.

The report has reached Geneva headquarters from the regional office for Southeast Asia in Delhi. It finds a "good beginning" has been made, despite many obvious and some bizarre problems.

Most critical is the supply of high quality, freeze-dried vaccine. The Soviet Union gets praised for giving Asia "hundreds of millions" of doses—a Russian health ministry official told a correspondent in Geneva it had almost hit one billion—mostly to India but also to her neighbors.

The region covers Afghanistan, Burma, India, Thailand, Ceylon, Mongolia, Maldive Islands, Nepal and Indonesia. It is the most populous of the six regions with India at almost 510 million and Indonesia, fifth biggest in the world, at 105. WHO and UNICEF are helping them to start their own vaccine production and providing testing facilities; Burma, Thailand, India and Indonesia have already started production (U.S. aid is pouring into West Africa for this campaign; Switzerland, France and Scandinavia are contributing to WHO's stockpile; German and Japanese doctors told a correspondent they plan to give freeze-dried vaccine as soon as they can produce WHO-approved quality.)

An odder problem: many Asian women won't let males vaccinate them. Team leaders also need strong persuasion to overcome stubborn "magic and witchcraft . . . and superstition about health."

Many villagers, vaccinators report, must be nagged not to obviate the vaccination by wiping it off, exposing their arms to the sun to dry the vaccine or to "cover the scratch marks with cow dung."

UN doctors warn that prolonged

stays of vaccine shipments in open air dumps at airports or rail terminals, without cooling facilities at peripheral depots, is jeopardizing the entire campaign through loss of potency. To illustrate, they say Russian stuff is air shipped 10 hours at temperatures between minus 20 and plus 20 Centigrade—time and temperature just within tolerance values. The vaccine must then be stored at 2 to 4 degrees C. Liquid or lymph vaccines deteriorate rapidly in the sun and WHO opposes their use. If they are not used, they must be discarded in seven days if stored at 0 to 10 degrees and 24 hours if at higher temperatures.

The Asian report says the incorrect reconstitution of the freeze-dried vaccine is often cutting the campaign success rate in half. Whenever it is reconstituted a day before use, it becomes as unstable as the old liquid vaccine.

Fortunately, "transmission is higher in the more densely populated areas than in the sparsely ones. (Hence) The immunity level must be raised in the cities." WHO officers are flogging systematic vaccination programs immediately in dense areas. They hope that "smallpox may spontaneously die out in remote, inaccessible areas where populations are scattered and travel is very costly and time consuming."

NOTES FROM ABROAD

Korea Fights Distoma

South Korean doctors are training Red Cross youth to wage a long-range health education campaign against a "grave national health problem," distoma. The parasitic disease is caused by the fluke.

Six million are believed infected and no available medication has been found effective. To prevent the infection, therefore, young volunteers will alert everyone to the dangers of eating raw fish and crabs, harborers of parasite eggs.

The campaign is the latest in the Korean Red Cross rural service program. Recently 684 high school students gave up their winter vacation to work in 172 villages.

Spanish Drivers Tested

Barcelona ophthalmologists are directing a new program designed to reduce traffic accidents caused by myopic drivers. At special centers set up by the city branch of the Spanish Red Cross, the doctors are giving appropriate tests. The program is still voluntary but could eventually apply to all licensees.

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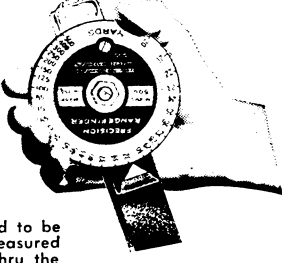
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