

WORLD HEALTH DAY

7th April, 1950.

The 7th April, is being observed in most parts of the world as World Health Day. In the countries of Southeast Asia this can scarcely be a day of triumphal rejoicing, for despite the valiant efforts of medical men and public health services, the great mass of the population never attains real health. Nor however should it be a day of unrelieved gloom, for although millions in Southeast Asia die every year from preventable diseases, this state of affairs can now be rapidly improved at a not unreasonable cost by modern methods of disease control.

Rather is it a day for opening our eyes to facts, facing squarely up to the health situation in our country, and seeing what each one of us can do to raise our own and our community's standard of health.

Many people, dismayed by the enormity of the problem, prefer simply not to think about it at all. But health is one and indivisible. Realising this, sixty-eight countries of the world have signed the Constitution of the World Health Organisation which contains the statement that "Unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of disease is a common danger". This is equally true within each country, for disease is no respecter of persons, and any section of society living in poor and insanitary conditions is a danger to all. Everyone can help to improve such conditions in his own neighbourhood and to spread knowledge of the elementary rules of hygiene.

How many people have any precise knowledge concerning health facts in their own and neighbouring communities? The fact, for instance, that one third of the babies born in Southeast Asian countries die in infancy. That malaria alone kills over a million people each year. That malaria and plague, cholera and smallpox, typhus, venereal disease, yaws and other major diseases can now be controlled given quite modest expenditure on health services. Ignorance and apathy are no longer defensible, for they are the principal obstacles to better health and well-being in the individual, the family and the community.

Even more important is it to realise that health and economic prosperity go hand in hand. Here are more hard facts: It has been calculated that all commercial exports from a malarious country carry a "Hidden malaria tax" which can amount to 5 % of the value. Bad health can be shown to be one of the most potent factors in reducing food-production and crippling the economic life of a country. Health comes with a higher standard of living, it is true, but it is equally true that increased prosperity follows energetic efforts to raise health standards. As an eminent authority has stated recently, "Investment in the health of the people has always paid much wider dividends than were envisaged at the time".

National efforts to raise health standards are now receiving practical aid and expert guidance from international bodies like the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). This outside help can produce significant results only by strengthening and stimulating national health services to a point where they can effectively deal with their own health problems. And the combined endeavours of international bodies and national governments will achieve comparatively little until and unless they are backed by the enlightened co-operation of people in all walks of life.

*By Courtesy of
World Health Organisation*