

Infectious Diseases in South-East Asia

Drago Štambuk, Alex G. Andjaparidze¹

Croatian Ambassador to India and ¹ World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia, New Delhi, India

At present, infectious diseases are the leading causes of death worldwide, claiming at least 17 million people annually. The South-East Asia Region (SEAR), unfortunately, accounts for almost 41% (7 million) of these deaths. In SEAR, a significant success has been achieved in the eradication of poliomyelitis and guineaworm disease. The elimination of neonatal tetanus and leprosy as public health problems is envisaged by the turn of the century. Infectious diseases primarily affecting children under five years of age have been significantly reduced. Today, the spectrum of infectious diseases in the countries of SEAR is rapidly changing due to dramatic socioeconomic and ecological changes. Age-old diseases such as cholera and tuberculosis have constantly dominated the disease pattern in the region, whereas diseases like malaria, plague, and kala-azar, which were on the verge of eradication, have reappeared. New diseases, such as cholera 0139 and HIV infection, are being reported in the region. Extreme poverty, overcrowding, rapid urbanization, and environmental health hazards are responsible for the emergence of these diseases. High morbidity due to infectious diseases also exacts a staggeringly high economic price from individuals, families, and communities in terms of health care and loss of productivity. Strengthening national capabilities and intersectoral and intercountry collaboration for the prevention and control of infectious diseases are imperative to stem the tide.

Key words: *Asia, southeastern; infectious diseases; morbidity; mortality*

Received: March 6, 1997

Accepted: September 15, 1997

Correspondence to:

Dr Drago Štambuk
Croatian Ambassador to India
70, Ring Road
Lajpat Nagar-III
New Delhi- 110 024, India