

National Immunisation Day (NID)

Polio Eradication in Bangladesh

by Shoeib Shazzad Khan

The Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI) has been conducted throughout the country by the Government of Bangladesh in assistance with NGOs and other UN organisations to combat six deadly child diseases with the view to reducing child mortality and ensuring child health in the country. This EPI campaign has already achieved remarkable success, although it has to go a long way to reach its desired goal. As a part of this campaign the National Immunisation Day (NID) programme has been taken up to fully eliminate polio from the country. As per the programme the NIDs have been planned to conduct in 1995, 1996 and 1997 throughout the country with two rounds each year at an interval of one month. As many as nineteen million children will be covered under this three-year NID programme.

manner. It is worth noting that an estimated amount of over two billion dollars has been saved since the eradication of small pox in the 1970s. Equally, if polio can be eradicated, children will no more suffer from life-long disabilities caused by polio virus. Furthermore, they will no longer require vaccination against polio which will result in the savings of enormous budget for health worldwide. It sounds great to estimate that globally the savings from polio eradication will equal the resources invested within 5-7 years after the polio is eradicated. To achieve this goal, besides routine vaccination, observance of NIDs has remarkable significance and effect.

Although oral polio vaccine is effective under ideal conditions, still three routine doses are not hundred percent effective in preventing polio. Again in the developing coun-

previous vaccination, the key objective of NIDs is primarily to interrupt the circulation of wild polio virus by replacing it with vaccine virus. NIDs are most effective when the amount of circulating wild polio virus is lowest, which is usually during the cool, dry and winter months. NIDs also create demand for other immunisations, resulting in increased coverage for all antigens.

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wild polio virus. Innumerable contributions were made by the government, UNICEF, WHO, USAID-BASICS, Rotary Int'l and many other NGOs, let alone thousands of devoted volunteers from all over Bangladesh.

This year the NIDs are going to be conducted on April 16 and May 16 with massive programme. Over seven million dollars has been committed by the government and many other agencies viz. CDC, Atlanta, JICA, Rotary Int'l, UNICEF, USAID-BASICS and WHO. Already over 25 million doses of OPV have been distributed throughout the country. Moreover, 15 million children will be supplemented with Vitamin A capsules. NIDs will be conducted simultaneously throughout Bangladesh in all districts, thanas, municipalities and wards. All target-age children presenting to a vaccinating site are to be vaccinated with oral polio vaccine, regardless of vaccination status or whether or not their parents are registered as residents of that administrative locality. The whole programme is intended to implement it simultaneously all over the country on April 16 and May 16, 1996, although, considering local situation, the activities may be completed within a few days on some selected dates without the same week in certain areas.

The NIDs will perform four specific activities this year viz. 1) administer oral polio vaccine to under five-year-old children, 2) administer Vitamin A to children aged over six months to five years, 3) identify 9-12 months children requiring measles vaccine and tell them to come to same site for the next vaccination, and 4) screen pregnant women needing tetanus vaccine and tell them to come to the same site for the next vaccination. It should be noted here that NIDs will be used to 're-vaccinate' unvaccinated and partially vaccinated children into the routine EPI system, so that these children can become fully vaccinated against all EPI diseases.

It must be a pride for Bangladesh that through so successfully and intensively conducting NIDs the country has earned laurels from all over the world. Bangladesh's expertise in NIDs in preparation and implementation has been profusely acclaimed by many countries. High level government health officials from Bhutan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka had already visited Bangladesh prior to and during the second round of 1995 NIDs (April 16) to acquire the procedures of successfully conducting such a mammoth programme. Many health officials of other countries are planning to observe 1996 NIDs in Bangladesh.

Following Bangladesh's example, Burma, India, Indonesia and Nepal conducted or will conduct NIDs in their respective countries. Thus Bangladesh has established itself as the leading nation in successfully conducting polio eradication for the Southeast Asian region. Furthermore, though NIDs Bangladesh has upheld a good example of its commitment to the rights of the children to free and unrestricted access to health services as evidenced by its signing the 1991 Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Polio cripples and kills young children — this is a harsh reality. The disease has devastating consequences for not only the infected children but also for the country's economy. To achieve the goal of eliminating polio by the year 2000 routine polio vaccine allied with conducting NIDs are must for us — this is a truth we ought not forget and an opportunity we ought not let slip away.

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tries such as Bangladesh, protection can not be ensured for hundred percent children with polio vaccine. Thus, even with high vaccination coverage, a considerable percentage of children is still remaining unprotected from polio. Against this backdrop it is very important to organise NIDs all over the world, specially in the developing countries, in order to interrupt the transmission of the wild polio virus.

The NIDs are annual events in which comprehensive campaign is carried out to administer two extra doses of OPV on two separate days at the interval of four to six weeks to all young children nationwide, up to the age of five years, regardless of their previous vaccination status. Thus NIDs are not the replacement of routine vaccination, but are supplementary to it. It is very important to note that, although NIDs in effect help provide protection against polio for previously unvaccinated children and for the children who may be unprotected in spite of having

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Last year, the NIDs were conducted on March 16 and April 16 with the help of 600,000 volunteers. Over eighteen million (94 per cent) children of the country aged 0-5 years received at least one dose of OPV and over thirteen million (85 per cent) children aged 1-5 years received Vitamin A supplementation. The number of cases of poliomyelitis reported to EPI during the six months following the NIDs was reduced by 50 per cent in comparison to previous years, distinctly indicating the success of NIDs in the first of three-year programme in interrupting the transmission of

EPI in Bangladesh: Factors Behind Success

by Syed Naquib Muslim



EXPANDED Programme for Immunisation (EPI) has assumed an essential element of child and woman development (CWD) package developed both by the GOs and NGOs in Bangladesh. It is so because there are evidences that the quality of child and maternal health and survival rate of children have improved significantly after the successful operation of the immunisation programme. For a country like Bangladesh which is characterised by low literacy rate, fatalistic outlook of the people and scarcity of resources, attaining a high coverage of immunisation is decidedly a formidable task.

The success of EPI through social mobilisation has prompted the policy-makers to apply or repeat the same communication strategy in other social development areas like primary education, sanitation and youth development.

Door-to-door Approach by Field-workers: Despite effective health service delivery system and continuous advertisements through Radio and TV, the mothers do not receive the messages about immunisation because they remain occupied with day-long household chores and can pay little attention to what is being advised through electronic media. Numerous mothers still do not have access to radio and TV facilities because of poverty. The EPI workers therefore moved from door to door to talk with them about the benefits of immunisation. Pursuing the 'marketing' strategy, health workers visited each household and told mothers about causes and effects of the six fatal diseases from which their children could be saved through immunisation.

They advised mothers to avail vaccination facilities when the government workers visited them. The health workers did not go into details of medical facts; they told the key facts mothers should always remember, which would help them in deciding and acting. Thus approaching the mothers through direct interpersonal contact and teaching them the benefits of immunisation in simple, catchy and short phrases was one of the key factors that contributed to EPI's exemplary success.

Non-interruptive Advocacy: Advocacy was another important aspect of the social mobilisation process. Local politicians, stars of national and international sports and filmstars were used as mouthpieces to advocate for and to create awareness of EPI and convince the public of the benefits of immunisation. Symbols, flyers, stickers, flags were used to attract attention of the illiterate masses.

Inter-ministerial Collaboration: Traditionally inter-ministerial efforts have been comparatively limited in Bangladesh. But the case of EPI

proved an exception. In addition to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, a number of other ministries became allies for undertaking the crucial task of disseminating the EPI messages. Ministry of Education incorporated EPI ingredients into the school curriculum and involved students to work as volunteers in a number of EPI activities. Last year, Ministry of Information allocated free, prime-time on radio and television everyday.

Ministry of Religious Affairs sent an information package to 200,000 imams throughout the country, and special sessions on EPI were held with imams in a number of thanas. Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs instructed their staff to get involved in EPI activities through their widespread network in villages. Volunteers became involved in immunisation sessions and door-to-door visits to support and promote the programme. The Cabinet Division issued several instructions to Deputy Commissioners and Thana Nirbahi Officers to get directly involved in monitoring and implementation of EPI through the District Development Coordination Committee and Thana Development Coordination Committee.

GO-NGO Collaboration: NGOs and a host of other agencies became operational partners of GOs in the EPI. They have strengthened the immunisation programme throughout the country by training the vaccinators, managers and communicators; providing immunisation services in areas where government services cannot easily reach; furnishing many of the communications materials which have supported programme expansion; and mobilising local talents and resources for the programme.

Local Rotary Clubs raised funds as part of Rotary International's Polio-Plus campaign. Scouts, girl guides and other service clubs contributed to the campaign while manufacturers and retailers provided free advertising space on their products and displays.

Role of Media: Another important element of the plan was programme communication through social mobilisation. The basic example of which is the 'Moni' logs. Moni was not only used on posters and billboards, in newspapers and on TV but also on cars, buses, trucks and rickshaws. Apart from the service delivery channels, the comprehensive use of the mass media provided opportunities for the promotion of maternal health consciousness. Frequent discussion programmes through radio and TV helped in demystifying the goals of EPI to the illiterate rural people transmit to others seems a key to avoiding confusing messages.

Service Delivery through Outreach Posts: Social mobilization for EPI led to the creation of 108,000 outreach posts, most of them in private houses lent regularly for the purpose.

The success of EPI was dramatic and exemplary. The question now arises: Is the same strategy applicable to other areas like primary education, sanitation?

Primary education is decidedly a vulnerable area. EPI is simpler because specific time and place are fixed for an event (vaccination) to occur. And it is easier to convince the mothers to bring their children to the vaccination site because vaccination is a life-saving matter. It is not time-consuming and it is free of cost. The pay-off was immediate. Moreover, the communities have supported and encouraged the programme which was clearly evident from the response of villagers to participate in vaccination sessions and then organise them in their homes.

The impact of primary education is not immediate. It is also difficult to explain the significance of education specially female education to parents majority of whom are illiterate and dogmatic. Moreover, opportunity cost of sending children to schools is quite high for poor families who engage their children in income-earning or household activities. Controversy still continues about the priority of female education from the economic and social perspective in our country. Therefore, it is doubtful whether communities can be mobilised for primary education as it could be for EPI.

As a social service, primary education has proved much more expensive than EPI. EPI did not need to hire additional staff for vaccination and extra incentives were not required to bring the children to the vaccination sites. This provides best evidence for managerial sustainability of the programme. But Compulsory Primary Education Programme is not free from such costs, and therefore, it will be difficult to ensure managerial sustainability of the programme.

It can safely be concluded that success of a programme through social mobilisation will depend on the nature of the programme. Mobilising all segments of society for primary education or for sanitation is likely to be difficult and time-consuming than EPI because the first two require two things:

i) Major behavioural or attitudinal change of various people and ii) Strengthening of the existing service delivery machinery. If the primary education authorities keep these in mind they can achieve similar success.

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Power but No Respect

The United States may be the world's last superpower, but these days it is not getting the respect it thinks that status deserves. Jim Lobe of Inter Press Service reports from Washington.



Also, the expulsion and 19-hour incommunicado detention this month of a US defence attaché in China and Beijing's decision to restrict international financial news... into China have caught Washington off guard.

While senior officials insist that the latter are relatively minor events, they concede that continuing problems like these do little to promote an improvement in relations.

The big challenges looming ahead, according to these officials, are how China will react to a number of developments: a Taiwan's presidential election in March and Lee's all-but-certain victory, and to US and Western efforts to get the UN Human Rights Commission to condemn repression against dissidents.

The question is whether the damage from this can be contained and not spin off in a way that creates a more destructive dynamic, said one senior official.

In India, Washington faces a more immediate problem which some believe could become a major crisis.

While bilateral ties — especially in the economic arena — have reached unprecedented levels since Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao launched his reform programme in the early 1990s, relations plunged in November when Congress approved the delivery to Pakistan of US \$368 million worth of US weapons.

Politically weak and beset by nationalist and Hindu fundamentalist opposition, Rao has responded by some not very subtle sabre-rattling which Washington fears will dash any hopes of preventing a nuclear arms race between the two neighbours.

Last month, US intelligence detected signs that India was preparing a nuclear weapons test — the first since 1974. And then New Delhi announced it would deploy its Prithvi ballistic missile which, according to the US State Department, would be 'destabilising'.

Washington has also warned Rao that if India goes ahead and tests a nuclear device, it would cut off virtually all economic and trade assistance. It would also oppose all loans for India which come before the boards of multilateral financial institutions like the World Bank, officials say.

Rao understands the stakes, but he has domestic political stakes, too, said one official. 'The pressure on him to show that he can stand up to the United States will be greater.'



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by Jim Davis



On the record, US officials are seething about these moves, insisting the Kremlin shifts are more about image than action. 'Yeltsin knows that if he wants more assistance and Western support, he can't back away from fundamental reforms,' said one senior Clinton aide who noted that 'appearing to be in charge can be a successful election strategy'.

But others say Primakov's rise may be more than symbolic. Jim Hoagland, foreign affairs columnist for the Washington Post, warned that the former Soviet journalist, while pragmatic, 'has always displayed a constant and deep distrust of US motives in foreign affairs'.

And the New York Times' William Safire, with good contacts in US intelligence and military circles, warned Primakov may not only try to stymie US efforts in the Middle East, where he is a specialist, but may also be a harbinger of a new Russo-Chinese entente.

New strains with China — the leading candidate for assuming the Soviet Union's mantle as Washington's nemesis in the post-Cold War era — also concern Washington policymakers.

In the past several weeks, Beijing has taken a number of actions which some analysts believe could portend a new plunge in bilateral ties similar to that which took place last year when Clinton rejected

Chinese protests over his decision to grant a visa to Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui. The actions have included the 14-year sentencing to prison of long-time dissident and political prisoner Wei Jingsheng and continuing assertiveness towards Hong Kong and Taiwan. At the same time, reports of systematic abuse of children in Chinese orphanages have inflamed public opinion here.

There is also the United States' mushrooming trade deficit with China and Senate majority leader Robert Dole's plan to call during his campaign for president that Beijing not be admitted to the World Trade Organisation.