

INDECENT EXPOSURE

In early April, a scrap dealer in Delhi was admitted in Apollo Indraprastha Hospital with the bizarre complaints of progressive hyperpigmentation, hair loss, nausea and vomiting. His blood counts were very low. Several other men working for him also developed unexplained skin burns and similar complaints. Very quickly a diagnosis of radiation injury was made. The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) was informed and investigations zeroed down on a radioactive cell containing Cobalt 60 at the Mayapuri scrap market. It was apparently bought from Atomic Energy Department, Canada by the Chemistry Department of Delhi University and had been lying unused since 1985. The University auctioned it and the scrap dealer bought it in February 2010. One month later he was seriously ill. So far six people have fallen ill and one has died due to the radiation exposure. An enquiry is underway and new guidelines for the procurement, transport, storage and disposal of all hazardous material, including chemicals and radioactive substances is being formulated. The problem of orphan radioactive sources is a global issue. The incident is a clarion call to us to streamline our waste disposal systems. (*The Telegraph 27 April, 2010, www.nature.com 8 May 2010*).

THE HEALTHY CITY

The World Health Day theme this year is Urbanization and Health. Fifty percent of the world lives in cities and by 2050 it will reach 70%. In India, the number that currently lives in cities is 28% and it is predicted to rise to 41% by 2020. One third of these urban dwellers live in slums. That

your physical and social environment shapes your health is a worn out cliché, but like most clichés, unfortunately true. In the long haul, civil engineers may impact health more than all the doctors doling out pills. The WHO, with the Ministry for Urban Development, has also brought out a guide atlas for the multi-level planning of a healthy city (*www.whoindia.org*).

HOW MALARIA IS DISAPPEARING IN SOME COUNTRIES

Just like India, Sri Lanka had once got its malaria cases down from 2.8 million cases in 1947 to a paltry 17 in 1963. Subsequently, case numbers shot up due to a faulty end game strategy. However, unlike India, Sri Lanka has once more tightened the noose by bringing down cases from 200,000 in year 2000 to 670 cases in 2008 and amazingly, no malaria deaths in the last 2 years. Philippines has made 22 of 81 provinces malaria free. Eight of 20 malaria endemic countries in the Pacific and Western Asia region have documented more than 50% decline in annual malaria case rates. Ten countries including Bhutan, China, North Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Vanuatu are gathering in Australia for the 2nd Annual Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network meeting. From India, Goa state is also being represented for its work in malaria elimination. Most countries aim to eliminate malaria in the next 5-10 years. These achievements have gone generally unrecognized and unsung in an era when malaria control has nearly become an oxymoron. (*Lancet, 2010; 375, 1586 - 1587*)

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