

ASIAN RELATIONS CONFERENCE

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in Afghanistan

by Abdul Majid.

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REPORT ON PUBLIC HEALTH ACTIVITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

The following is a brief report on the public health activities going on in Afghanistan, in the light of which we hope to find ways and means for mutual co-operation and collaboration

Public health protection in Afghanistan is the function of the Government which is administered through the Ministry of Public Health. The duties and responsibilities of the public health authorities in the country have grown through the past few years to encompass the protection, in general, of all the people of the country. As for example, to prevent the introduction of contagious or infectious diseases into any part of the country from infected regions of other countries, or to prevent the spread of such diseases in the country, to improve the general health of the people as a whole and to increase the ways and means of sanitation in each community.

The main work of the public health administration is based upon the fundamental needs of human welfare and embraces a profound program, a portion of which has already been realised while the other parts are included in the plans which are going to be put into effect in a very near future.

The Ministry of Public Health or the health control administrative body has tried to provide the country with a number of hospitals, Sanitaria, infirmaries and polyclinics which are built in cities and small towns. There are also a number of mobile infirmary units equipped as much as possible with all the elements essential to public health work. These units start moving from central districts towards those points where hospital care is rather scarce. The central hospitals are primarily for the care of the sick, but have in addition other functions such as prevention, training of doctors, nurses and other personnel.

Child welfare and child hygiene undoubtedly are the most important undertakings of the Ministry of Public Health. Realising that childhood is the best time for preventing work, the executive body of the Health Ministry in co-operation with the Medical College of the University started to organise a children's hospital. The periodic health examinations of children in schools which is carried out in co-operation with the Ministry of Education, is, of course, a part of the child welfare problem.

It is a well known fact that the dominant factor in hygiene or the care of the person is immunity; therefore, the process of immunizing the individuals in the community is essential for a well-ordered health program. The Institute of Bacteriology in Kabul, founded 12 years ago by a joint effort of the Ministries of Public Health and Public Education, can at present provide the country with anti-cholera, anti-typhoid, anti-small pox and anti-rabies vaccines. Immunization of children against small pox is accomplished very easily and is a regular and compulsory practice. The process of vaccination is carried on in the infant welfare centers, hospitals and schools. Physicians in private practice acquaint mothers of the necessity of protecting children against the disease.

Anti-typhoid vaccination is a routine practice among the communities as a whole, and it is especially conducted in schools, colleges and the army. That is why the number of typhoid cases, in cities, dropped down to a mere few each year.

Anti-cholera vaccination is normally required, each year, only of those who cross the Afghan frontier into India. For, unfortunately, the disease is endemic in certain parts of this country and each year visits, at least once, the Afghan frontier. So it is deemed necessary by the Afghan health authorities to watch it closely and to take all possible precautions to prevent its introduction into the country.

During an epidemic of cholera, however, which once in a while starts off in the country, proper measures are taken by our competent health authorities and anti-cholera vaccine, prepared in Kabul, is used generously for the active immunization of the population. I am pleased to say that the few cholera outbreaks which we have had during past few years, had been checked successfully due to the quick and skillful measures taken by the public health authorities.

It is in this connection that the Afghan health authorities earnestly desire a close co-operation with the Indian health officers. It will be interesting as well as beneficial for both the countries to study the problem together more closely and to take proper steps towards the more successful campaign against cholera outbreaks.

The Ministry of Public Health in conjunction with the municipality health authorities have passed certain rules and regulations, according to which they are given the power and authority to examine, from time to time, the hotels, coffee-shops, market places, food stuff, meat, fruits and the food handlers. The city water supply is always under the control of the municipality health authorities.

The health offices of the Afghan Government agreed, according to the International Sanitary Convention of Paris, to notify the existence of communicable diseases to the neighbouring countries and to those who are interested in it. This agreement, to prevent the spread of infection by co-operation, is an outstanding example of what governments can do by peaceful methods.

Public health education is considered, by the Afghan health authorities, the most important and fundamental factor in raising the health level of the country as a whole. In the first place they try to gain knowledge by studies at the bed side and in the field, and the University tries to offer better and extensive courses of instruction in hygiene and sanitation. In the second place they try to impart and diffuse information concerning health and the prevention of diseases. Nearly all the Afghan schools have included in their curriculum the structure and functions of the body, hygiene of the person, and sanitation of his surroundings. Health education through radio, movies, newspapers, health publications and other health propaganda are not uncommon in the country.

But, as you all know, the public health and its administration deals more particularly with the mass phenomena of the community than the problem of the individual. Its progress also depends upon the structure and social status of the community. Public health authorities and welfare agencies are intimately related. The problems of sociology, therefore, are in part the problems of preventive medicine. In the same way as there exists a pressing need for social co-operation among the people of the nations, so it is for a successful public health co-ordination. In reality the future progress of the nations, both socially and economically, is to be sought not through strifes and hatreds of the nations, but rather by their friendly co-operation in the growth of the spirit of friendship and mutual confidence.

A STATEMENT BY MR-GOKHALE
ON THE INDIAN QUESTION.