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NOMADISM AND THE OPERATIONAL DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO IT

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1. Nomadism

The nomadic population of Afghanistan is about 2,431,296. The movements of the nomads are both from province to province within the country and from this country to the neighbouring country of Pakistan. The movement involves the whole community including their cattle, sheep, goat and camels, and takes place more or less at fixed periods each year and covers a fixed circuit for intra-country movements, whilst the community moves as a whole regularly out and back every year through the same specific route for inter-country movements.

2. Movement within the country

2.1 From Low Kataghan plains to Kokcha valley in the province of Badakshan

The moving pastoral communities of low Kataghan plains migrate from Kataghan to Kokcha valley of Badakshan, which is situated at a height of 2,000 metres and is rich in grazing grounds in summer, and

return to Kataghan plains in winter. The upward movement of the population along with their cattle starts early in May and is completed by the end of the month. The moving pastoral communities spend their summer in cooler places like higher areas in Badakshan, grow their farms, participate in harvesting of crops, utilise the grazing ground of Kokcha valley as summer pasture areas and return to the low Kataghan plains in September and sometimes in the middle of August, where they spend their winter and get busy with local vocations.

This movement of population creates two kinds of problems:

- a) Epidemiological: On account of the possibility of introduction of malaria parasite carriers in the protected areas of Kataghan from the unprotected area of Badakshan, and;
- b) Operational: On account of the absence of the pastoral population from their dwellings in Kataghan province during the spraying operations.

These difficulties were overcome by establishing check posts on the route heading from Faizabad, the capital of Badakshan, to Kataghan, which is the only route by which the nomads travel. The check posts are instructed to collect blood films from all available individuals during the period of their return to Kataghan from the grazing grounds as well as during their movement from Kataghan to Badakshan in May and treat all malaria cases. The operational difficulty was dealt with by spraying their dwellings immediately on the commencement of spraying operations.

2.2 Movement from the province of Nangarhar to the adjoining places of the province of Kabul

The nomad population of Nangarhar and adjoining places starts moving along with their cattle to Kabul via Sarobi from early spring (March-April) and completes the upward movement by the end of spring (about mid-June). The population spends the summer in cooler places of higher altitudes of the province of Kabul by working in the fields and returns to Nangarhar in early autumn. The eastward movement commences in mid-October and is completed by the end of November.

This movement does not create any special malaria problem as it takes place during the non-transmission season and as both the provinces are included in the malaria eradication programme. As a special precaution check posts are however established at strategic points through which the nomads pass.

3. Movement from Afghanistan to Pakistan

The nomads from the central high plateaus of Afghanistan which are free from malaria move in large numbers along with the cattle to Pakistan during the month of September and remain in that country throughout the winter and get busy with work of all kinds. They start returning to Afghanistan in the beginning of March and complete their upward movement by the end of April. These pastoral communities spend their summer at high altitudes of the central plateaus of Afghanistan, which are rich in pastures. They grow their own farms and gardens and have plenty of green grass for their cattle, sheep, goats and camel.

These movements were, however, not possible in the year 1961 due to closure of Afghan-Pakistan border.

It will be observed that this nomadic population spends its summer in the central high plateaus of Afghanistan which are situated at great altitudes and are non-malarious, and perform their movement at a time when there is practically no transmission of malaria, and stay in Pakistan during the winter months when it is expected that there will be no malaria in the country. This vast movement of the population from one country to the other will therefore have no serious epidemiological repercussions, but still a strict watch has to be kept on either side to search for parasite carriers for their treatment and for their follow up.

4. Check posts

Two check posts - one at Kalafghan and the other at Faizabad in Kataghan and Badakshan respectively, have been established at strategic points in the fixed circuit through which the nomads pass between Kataghan and Badakshan. Two other check posts - one at Dharamtar bridge and the other at Sarlenkhan have been established on strategic points in N ngirhar through which the nomadic population regularly moves out and comes back every year. The check posts are required to take blood films of all fever cases of nomads passing through their posts and to administer presumptive treatment to them. The blood slides are examined immediately and radical treatment given to all the malaria positive cases. The epidemiological investigation and follow up of all positive cases is carried on by the malaria director of the province concerned.