

Dr Heymann said bio-terrorists were unlikely to resort to polio stocks for myriad reasons, including the fact that the disease only causes paralysis in 1 of 200 people infected. As the world prepares for the post-certification era (the period after global certification, which could occur as early as 2008) there will need to be an international consensus on whether to continue routine immunization with the oral poliovirus vaccine. Such decisions will be taken only after carefully balancing the risks associated with the options available. These must also bear in mind the small potential risk of an inadvertent release of wild poliovirus from labs that are storing the virus or from vaccine manufacturers who must produce their vaccines from live poliovirus strains. Ultimately, individual countries will decide their future immunization policy, based on such considerations. ■

Fiona Fleck, *Geneva*

## India remobilizes against polio

In the last five days of July, 1.79 million children received polio drops in the neighbouring states of Assam and Meghalaya in eastern India. A second five-day immunization campaign would start on 31 August, WHO officials said.

The drive was occasioned by the detection of a wild poliovirus in Goalpara in western Assam in June this year, in the course of routine surveillance.

Arun Thapa, WHO's adviser for polio in the South-East Asia Region, says that the virus probably reached Assam — where there had been no cases for two years — from neighbouring Bihar, where there were 121 cases last year.

One case of polio may not sound alarming. But health officials warn that even one case, if undetected, can infect hundreds of children, each one of whom can infect hundreds more.

"We are taking this threat of polio very seriously," says the Chief Minister of Assam, Bhumidhar Barman, "We are doing all that we can to ensure that the virus does not spread." This includes awareness campaigns on the need for immunization, conducted with the help of schoolchildren, teachers, village leaders and government health workers.

According to Sunil Bahl, WHO's Immunization Coordinator, the July-August immunization programme — in 7 districts in Assam and 5 in Meghalaya — has been successful so far in most areas, though still falling 7–9% short of the 100% coverage needed. "There were a few areas where the health infrastructure was found wanting," he says. "In some places, for

instance, there were not enough health care workers. Elsewhere, the workers were not proactive enough, which means that they couldn't mobilize every child in the neighbourhood for immunization."

India witnessed a serious outbreak last year, when over 80% of all polio cases in the world occurred in this country.

"Huge progress was made in 2000, when there were only 272 cases of polio in India," says Louise Baker, External Relations Officer for Immunization and Vaccine Development at WHO's Regional Office in New Delhi. "But just when the Indian Government thought that it had the virus under control, it made a comeback."

The government has now gone back to an earlier programme of setting aside two national days for immunization, as well as four subnational ones, which target the key northern states that remain heavily infected.

WHO officials report that there has been a drastic fall in the number of polio cases in India this year as a result of the epidemic and the increase in polio campaigns: as of 18 August it is down to 102 from 1600 in 2002. ■

Bishakha De Sarkar, *New Delhi*

## Obituary

### Nadia Younes 1946–2003

Nadia Younes, who died in the bomb attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August, was serving as Chief of Staff for Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations Special Representative in Baghdad. She was seconded from WHO to this position in May 2003.

Prior to her appointment in Iraq, Nadia was WHO's Executive Director in charge of External Relations and Governing Bodies from August 2002. Her responsibilities included relations with WHO's Member States, and WHO's governing bodies — the Executive Board and the World Health Assembly.

Nadia worked as United Nations Chief of Protocol from 1998. From July 1999 to

January 2001, she worked in the United Nations field mission in Kosovo, where she was in charge of the information and communication office in the Cabinet of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Bernard Kouchner.

Nadia joined the United Nations secretariat in 1970, and worked with the Department of Information in various capacities. Later assignments included Information Officer for the World Conference of the Decade of Women, Deputy Spokeswoman for the Secretary-General (1988–93), Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Rome, and Director of the Media Division in the Department of Public Information in New York.

Born in Cairo, Egypt, in 1946, Nadia held a Master of Arts degree in political science and international relations from New York University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from Cairo University.

"She was an amazing person — full of life, energetic and extremely resourceful. Nadia was with us at WHO for less than a year, but she immediately became known as one of the most charismatic people in the organization", said Dr Jong-Wook Lee, Director-General of WHO.

Nadia is survived by her brother and her sister. ■

