

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Towards a healthier tomorrow, today

After vanquishing polio, the South-East Asia Region continues to make life-saving advances in newborn and child health. Seven years ago this month, the South-East Asia Region recorded its last case of wild poliovirus. In 2014, three years later, the Region was declared polio-free. Not a single case of wild poliovirus has been recorded Region-wide since, sparing millions of children the risk of contracting the paralyzing and life-threatening disease. The Region's achievement, and its contribution to global polio eradication, is one of the world's great public health success stories. Our progress continues. Last year, 3 million more children in the



Region survived the first five years of life than in 1990 – the most dramatic reduction anywhere in the world. The Region's contribution to global under-five mortality meanwhile dropped to 25%, down from 37% at the start of the same period. The Region has now achieved the Millennium Development Goal target for under-five mortality, while a few of its Member countries have already surpassed the child health-related Sustainable Development Goals. In short, across the South-East Asia Region, more children than ever are not only surviving, but are growing into strong, healthy and productive adults. To maintain this trajectory and ensure all countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, accelerated progress is nevertheless needed. By 2030 all countries should have reduced under-five mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1000 live births, while neonatal mortality should be at least as low as 12 per 1000 live births. Maternal mortality – a related concern – should meanwhile be reduced to less than 70 per 1000 live births. To achieve these targets, concerted action is needed. First, Member countries should expand access to good quality health services, especially for women, children and adolescents, with universal health coverage (UHC) remaining a top priority. Through targeted investments countries can greatly reduce each of the leading causes of maternal, newborn and under-five deaths (a Regional Flagship Priority), including complications associated with prematurity, pneumonia, birth asphyxia, diarrhea, sepsis and birth defects. Notably, better services will have the added benefit of encouraging institutional deliveries. As per the Decade of Action on Human Resources for Health, a good way to achieve these outcomes is by recruiting more health workers, advancing the skills of health workers at all levels of care, and finding innovative ways to retain health workers in rural and hard-to-reach areas. Second, and complementary to UHC, Member countries should focus on mitigating cause- and context-specific mortality. Even where national averages are good, for example, children belonging to poor or marginalized groups can suffer mortality rates well above national levels, often due to easily preventable diseases such as pneumonia or diarrhea. By pursuing equitable access to safe water and sanitation and reducing indoor air pollution, for example, Member countries can forge progress that not only reduces mortality from these diseases, but also – crucially – helps ensure no child is left behind. This is especially so when combined with the promotion of health-positive habits such as handwashing and toilet usage generally, and exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of a child's life specifically. And third, we must not be complacent. Member countries should continue to strengthen routine immunization programmes, including surveillance. In recent years enhanced routine immunization has been responsible for some of the Region's greatest achievements in newborn, child and maternal health, including the elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus. As the Region strives to eliminate measles – a major childhood killer – by 2020, Member countries must ensure each and every child receives two doses of the combined measles and rubella vaccine. To their immense credit, Bhutan and Maldives have already eliminated the disease, demonstrating that the 2020 target is readily achievable. Importantly, Member countries must go beyond the 'survival agenda' and aim to ensure that every child in the Region can live, grow and thrive in an era of unrivalled opportunity. That means ensuring every child is adequately nourished and has the energy needed to engage in physical activity and play. It means ensuring every child lives in an environment where health hazards are mitigated or removed, and where early childhood development is invested in and nurtured, especially during the first three years of life. And it means ensuring that as every child grows into adolescence they can access the health services needed to navigate a phase of life that has its own special needs. Each one of these outcomes and more can be achieved. As the Region's victory over polio attests, a whole generation's health and wellbeing can be dramatically enhanced when the right priorities are set and society-wide commitment is secured. As countries across the Region strive to reduce newborn, child and maternal mortality to levels at or below the SDG threshold, this opportunity must be fully grasped. Our children are our future. A healthier tomorrow must begin today.

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### From the "TRIVIA BOOK"

The most abundant metal in the Earth's crust is aluminium. The Chinese were using aluminum to make things as early as 300 AD, although western civilization didn't rediscover aluminum until 1827. Napoleon III provided his most honored guests with knives and forks made of pure aluminum. At the time the newly discovered metal was so rare, it was considered more valuable than gold.

Feb 1 Th	2 Fr	3 Sa	4 Su	5 Mo	6 Tu	7 We
0101 2.4 0728 0.2 1414 2.1 1917 0.9	0148 2.4 0807 0.2 1450 2.2 2004 0.8	0231 2.3 0845 0.3 1524 2.2 2053 0.8	0312 2.2 0923 0.4 1558 2.2 2148 0.8	0354 2.1 1000 0.5 1632 2.2 2256 0.8	0438 1.9 1037 0.7 1708 2.1 2348 2.0	0903 0.8 0532 1.7 1116 0.9 1748 2.0
Feb 8 Th	9 Fr	10 Sa	11 Su	12 Mo	13 Tu	14 We
0101 0.8 0649 1.5 1158 1.0 1836 1.9	0201 0.8 0815 1.4 1255 1.2 1934 1.9	0310 0.8 0949 1.4 1416 1.3 2037 1.8	0421 0.8 1122 1.5 1549 1.3 2143 1.8	0516 0.7 1211 1.6 1659 1.3 2246 1.9	0557 0.6 1242 1.7 1745 1.2 2338 2.0	0631 0.5 1308 1.8 1821 1.1
Feb 15 Th	16 Fr	17 Sa	18 Su	19 Mo	20 Tu	21 We
0020 2.0 0703 0.5 1332 1.9 1853 1.0	0057 2.1 0732 0.4 1357 2.0 1924 0.9	0132 2.2 0802 0.4 1423 2.1 1957 0.9	0205 2.2 0832 0.4 1452 2.1 2033 0.8	0245 2.2 0904 0.4 1523 2.2 2116 0.7	0325 2.2 0939 0.5 1556 2.2 2208 0.7	0409 2.0 1017 0.6 1634 2.2 2313 0.7
Feb 22 Th	23 Fr	24 Sa	25 Su	26 Mo	27 Tu	28 We
0501 1.9 1100 0.8 1716 2.2	0024 0.6 0612 1.7 1149 0.9 1808 2.1	0131 0.6 0744 1.6 1249 1.1 1913 2.1	0240 0.6 0920 1.6 1401 1.2 2027 2.1	0354 0.5 1049 1.7 1525 1.2 2146 2.1	0500 0.4 1152 1.8 1643 1.1 2304 2.2	0551 0.4 1238 1.9 1742 1.0
Feb 28 We	Mar 1 Th	2 Fr	3 Sa	4 Su	5 Mo	6 Tu
0551 0.4 1238 1.9 1742 1.0	0007 2.2 0632 0.3 1316 2.1 1830 0.8	0059 2.3 0708 0.3 1350 2.2 1914 0.7	0144 2.3 0742 0.4 1421 2.3 1956 0.6	0225 2.2 0815 0.4 1452 2.3 2039 0.6	0303 2.1 0848 0.5 1521 2.3 2124 0.6	0342 2.0 0920 0.7 1548 2.2 2215 0.6

## 'Please Explain'

### Bermuda Triangle

When compared to the rest of the world, the Bermuda Triangle is quite large, but its reputation is enormous – much bigger than its size would indicate. Geographically speaking, the triangle is an area in the Atlantic Ocean bounded by Bermuda, Puerto Rico and Miami in Florida. However, the Bermuda Triangle is so disappearances associated with the Bermuda Triangle is so powerful that books, TV documentaries and even movies have been made about it. The seeds of the myth began at 2.10 pm, on 5 December 1945, when a flight of five Avenger Torpedo bombers lifted off from the airstrip of the naval base at Fort Lauderdale in Florida, on a routine bombing-training run. The story goes that in perfectly clear weather, these experienced aviators become mysteriously disoriented, and in a series of increasingly panicky radio transmissions, asked for help. The last radio transmission from Flight 19 was at 7.04 pm. By 7.20 pm a Martin Mariner rescue plane was dispatched – and it too vanished without a trace. (By the way, the missing pilots and their missing planes made a brief appearance in the movie, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, where it was implied that they had been abducted by aliens.) But the myth claims that not only planes vanish in the area. Including Many Ships apparently came to foul ends in the Bermuda Triangle, including the 19th-century sailing ship, the *Mary Celeste*, which was supposedly found drifting and abandoned in perfect condition. The Bermuda Triangle has moved with the times, and since then, many more ships, including the nuclear submarine, *USS Scorpion* have vanished there without a trace. The real story is more prosaic. First, the Bermuda Triangle is huge – over one million square kilometers, or one-fifth the area of Australia (or the contiguous continental United States). You can fit a lot of ships in an area that size! Second, the triangle is just north of the birthplace of most of the Atlantic hurricanes that lash the east coast of the United States. The Gulf Stream, the 'river in a sea', flows swiftly and turbulently through the Bermuda Triangle, dumping huge amounts of energy there. Many wild storms can suddenly burst into existence, and can, just as suddenly, fade away. Third the undersea landscape is incredibly varied, ranging from shallow continental shelf to the deepest depths of the Atlantic Ocean, about 30 000 ft (9144m) deep. This means that some wrecks would be very difficult to find. Fourth, it's one of the heaviest-travelled routes for pleasure craft in the world. So you would expect many nautical mishaps. Fifth, a survey by insurance underwrites Lloyds of London shows that, on a percentage basis, there are no more ships lost in the Bermuda Triangle, than anywhere else in the world. When you examine the specific stories more closely, the myth unravels even more. The *Mary Celeste* was found abandoned on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, between Portugal and the Azores. Contrary to legend. Its sails were in very poor condition, and it was listing badly – definitely not in near perfect condition, the *USS Scorpion* was found, sunk, near the Azores, again, a long way from the Bermuda Triangle. The story of Flight 19 on 5 December 1945, is the key. The naval aviators were not experienced. They were all trainees, apart from the commander, Lt Charles Taylor. Reports say that he was suffering from a hangover, and tried unsuccessfully to get another commander to fly this mission for him. The weather was not clear – a sudden storm had raised 15-m waves. The Avenger Torpedo bombers simply got lost, ran out of fuel and sank in the storm, after dark, and in high seas. One of Commander Taylor's colleagues wrote, '... they didn't call those planes "Iron Birds" for nothing. They weighed 14 000 pounds (over 6 tonnes) empty. So when they ditched, they went down pretty fast'. The Martin Mariner rescue plane sent to look for the Avengers did not vanish without trace. These rescue planes were virtually flying fuel tanks, because they had to remain aloft for 24 hours continuously. And prior to this incident, they had a reputation for leaking petrol fumes inside the cabin. The crew of the *SS Gaines Mill* actually saw the Mariner breaking up in an explosion about 23 seconds after take-off, and saw debris floating in the stormy seas. After this Mariner plane exploded, the Navy grounded the entire fleet of Martin Mariners. The myth of the malevolent supernatural powers hiding in the Bermuda Triangle began when Vincent H. Gaddis wrote rather creatively about Flight 19 in the February 1964 issue of *Argosy: Magazine of Masterpiece Fiction* in a story called, 'The Spreading Mystery of the Bermuda Triangle'. But the myth really took off in 1974, when Charles Berlitz released his bestseller *The Bermuda Triangle*, an even more imaginative account. Exotic explanations for these disasters include power crystals from Atlantis, hostile aliens hiding under the waters, violent vortices from other dimensions, and evil human beings using antigravity machines. At least it's true that the stories are far more interesting than the real explanation, but that's about the only truth to them.

### Ice That Burns

The Bermuda Triangle doesn't sink ships. But there is something very strange lurking under the ocean floor of the Bermuda Triangle – an ice that burns. It's called a 'methane hydrate' – a single molecule of methane trapped in a cage of six water molecules. Methane has the chemical formula of CH<sub>4</sub> one atom of carbon surrounded by four atoms of hydrogen – while water is your standard H<sub>2</sub>O. If methane and water are together in the same place, and if the pressure is high enough and the temperature low enough, you can get a methane hydrate. If you bring a lump of methane hydrate of the surface, the icy water sense, these methane hydrates are a little like vampires – they will fall to pieces if you bring them out into the light. It was only in the late 1960s that Russian scientist discovered natural hydrates in the freezing Siberian permafrost. In the 1970s methane hydrates were discovered at the bottom of the Black Sea. The Black Sea is loaded with these methane hydrates. In fact, sailors have long reported seeing bolts of lightning set fire to the methane on the sea – methane that had spontaneously bubbled up from below the ocean floor. And since then, they have been found in many, many places under the ocean floor. Including the notorious Bermuda Triangle. The methane hydrates are now the largest untapped source of fossil fuels remaining on Earth.



## ENTERTAINMENT

**Bataclan massacre film drama 'will be broadcast' in the future** A French broadcaster behind a controversial film about the 2015 terror attack on the Bataclan in Paris says it will be shown at some point. In December, France 2 said the fictional love story, *That Night*, would be postponed until survivors and victims' families had been consulted. Now, a spokesman has told the BBC the film will see the light of day. Ninety people were killed when terrorists stormed a gig played by US band Eagles of Death Metal. The film was postponed after Claire Peltier, whose partner David was among those killed, called for the "scandalous" film to be shelved. Her petition to block the film has been signed by more than 46,000 people. She said it was too soon for "such a painful" story. **'Taken aback'** On Tuesday, the France 2 spokesman told the BBC the film had now been finished. Before a transmission date could be set, the station's management and production teams would have to review the film and consult again with associations representing victims of the attack. According to Deadline, the film is understood to centre on a fictional romance between a single mother and an Afghan refugee who meet on the night of 13 November as they rescue survivors of the attacks. Zoe Alexander, whose brother Nick was killed at the Bataclan, told the BBC she was "slightly taken aback" when she first heard about the film. "I think it's inevitable that the story will be told or dramatised in some way," she added. "I think it's kind of important that it's told and that we don't forget what happened - the horror of the event - but it felt very soon to me. "There's still an ongoing legal process in France, there are people in custody and I'm surprised that it was considered to go ahead before it has reached a conclusion." US rock band The Eagles of Death Metal were performing to around 1,500 people when masked gunmen stormed the venue, firing at the band and their fans. It was one of several co-ordinated attacks in the French capital that left 130 people dead. *BBC*