

INTERNATIONAL

Africans using nets to fight malaria

BOANE, Mozambique (AP) — Death starts at dusk for the children of Boane.

That is when the mosquitos fly in from the Umbeluzi River, carrying with them one of Africa's biggest killers: plasmodium falciparum, a parasite that causes malaria.

Overshadowed by the more notorious scourge of AIDS, malaria has been on the rebound in recent years after the failure of widespread eradication programs based on insecticide spraying.

The cause of nearly 1 million deaths a year, malaria is one of the continent's worst health problems and until last year was the leading cause of death. Most of the dead are children. The World Health Organization reported May 11 that AIDS has surpassed malaria as Africa's deadliest infectious disease.

Health officials are turning to a new weapon, which is being tried out in this rural district in a government project spotlighted by the World Health Organization — mosquito nets treated with insecticide.

The principle is much the same as the condom for AIDS — create a barrier between human beings and the organism that causes the disease.

The health agency says treated bed nets have contributed to a 98 percent decrease in malaria in Vietnam over the past decade. Trials in the African nations of Gambia, Burkina Faso,

Some facts on malaria

Associated Press

Some facts about malaria:

- 300 million to 500 million cases each year in more than 90 countries, with 40 percent of world's population.
- 1.1 million deaths annually, 95 percent in Africa, making malaria one of continent's most widespread health problems and, until surpassed by AIDS last year, its leading killer.
- Each non-fatal malaria bout causes average loss of 12 days productive output.
- In Africa, malaria mainly caused by plasmodium falciparum parasite, deadliest of four types of plasmodium parasites.

Ghana and Kenya have reduced malaria deaths in children by 25 percent to 40 percent.

But the method has met with limited success in places like Boane (boe-AH-neh), an hour's drive southwest of Maputo, the capital, because of the cost. Even though subsidized by the government, the nets still cost roughly \$5, beyond the reach of many Mozambicans, who on average earn little more than five times that a month.

Down at the riverbank, where women scrub and slap clothes against rocks in shin-deep water, Amida Enosso told of how her 3-month-old baby Isabel died of malaria in February.

"She had a high temperature and was coughing," the 20-year-old said blankly. "It's difficult to live here because of the mosquitoes."

Her family of six had only one net, and her parents slept under it. That is typical. A

study of whether the nets would work in Boane found that adults — those most resistant to malaria — were most likely to use them.

The study also found a realistic price for encouraging purchases of the nets would be \$2.30 each, but the government doesn't have money for further subsidies. Given the competition for donor dollars to fight AIDS and other diseases that make life so fragile in Africa, the prospect for more funds is dim.

Malaria, a disease marked by fever, shivering, joint pain, headaches and vomiting, has surged in recent years. Mosquitoes are growing more resistant to insecticides and parasites to drugs. Breeding sites are increasing as forests are cleared and irrigation put in place. People without natural resistance are migrating to malarial areas.

Virtually everyone in Boane suffers frequent bouts of malaria, which the World

Health Organization estimates costs Africa \$2 billion a year in lost productivity and medical costs.

And nearly everyone here knows more than one person who has died of the disease. WHO says it kills about 1 million people a year worldwide, behind only AIDS and tuberculosis among communicable diseases. Almost all malaria deaths are in Africa, and most victims are children under 5.

It is not just the poor who suffer. Maputo, the capital of this former Portuguese colony recovering from a long civil war that ended in 1992, was buzzing in mid-April when a prominent civic figure, Carlos Botta, died of the disease.

"People were so shocked. They could not believe it," said Cristina Horta, a librarian of Portuguese descent who said she has suffered four serious bouts of malaria in her 50 years. She said Botta neglected to go to a hospital.

A cornerstone of WHO's anti-malaria strategy, which (See Malaria, Page 18)

WORLD BRIEFS

MANDELA FULFILLS PRESIDENTIAL DREAM OF RAINBOW NATION

CAPE TOWN (IPS) — President Nelson Mandela's dream of forging a united, non-racial South Africa across the chasm inherited from 45 years of apartheid remains largely unfulfilled as he prepares to step down. Mandela, who has won admiration from all sectors of the South African society, will step down after the June 2 elections. Political analysts expect few changes from the 1994 polls when the ruling African National Congress got 94 percent of the Black vote; 4 percent of the colored (mixed race) vote; 1.5 percent of the Indian vote; and 0.5 percent of the White vote. As voters prepare for the upcoming elections, opposition parties have abandoned plans for a united front to try to stop the ANC from winning the two-thirds majority, or 62.5 percent of votes, it needs to change South Africa's constitution. A survey conducted by the Pretoria-based Human Sciences Research Council in March shows that the ANC has surged ahead of the Inkatha Freedom Party in Kwazulu Natal and slightly leads the New National Party in the Western Cape. According to racial breakdowns, the NNP is the country's most "rainbow" party comprising 42 percent white, 36 percent colored, 13 percent black and 9 percent Indian supporters.

NO AGREEMENT REACHED ON U.N. SPECIAL DISARMAMENT SESSION

(IPS) — After four years of protracted negotiations, the United Nations failed to reach an agreement earlier this month on hosting a major U.N. conference on global disarmament. The proposed Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD IV) — the fourth in a series — was expected to discuss several global security issues, including nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, regional disarmament, conventional arms, weapons of mass destruction and the arms race in outer space. India, which initiated the idea of SSOD IV, changed its mind about the session after it became clear that NATO and nuclear weapon countries see arms as a way of preserving peace.

Annan calls for U.N. role on Kosovo

KUKES, Albania (AP) — Refugees cheered U.N. chief Kofi Annan last week as he strolled through the dusty tent cities of northern Albania, and he called for the United Nations to play a key role in resolving the Kosovo conflict.

Annan walked around two camps in Kukes, a town that is the temporary home to 100,000 ethnic Albanians, the biggest single concentration of the nearly 800,000 people who have fled the neighboring Serbian province of Kosovo.

The United Nations has been largely sidelined in diplomatic efforts to settle the Kosovo crisis, but Annan said there was a broad consensus that the world body ultimately must be involved.

"All the parties engaged in this conflict have agreed that the (U.N.) Security Council should play a central


role and that a Security Council resolution would be necessary for us to move forward," Annan said at the end of his brief visit to the camps.

"I think what is important is that we get the Yugoslav soldiers and paramilitias and police to withdraw, (that) we are able to put in an international military force that will secure and protect the refugees when they go back," he said.

Annan and his wife Nane visited a camp hospital and spoke briefly with a woman who had been shot in the foot during her departure from Kosovo. The woman was also caring for a 7-week-old baby.

Annan said the conditions in the camps were "reasonably good" and expressed hope that the refugees could return home soon.

He also toured refugee camps in Macedonia.



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