

From The Editor

Water, mosquitoes, and sugar

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The Asian Oceanian Congress of Radiology (AOCR) 2024 was held in Taipei by the Taiwan Radiological Society (TRS) during 23-25 March. Out of 2,978 registrations, participants from ASEAN countries ranked the second place after East Asian countries and those from South Asia took the third place. This is not a surprise as these three regions have more than 2,000 years of sea trading history with a very short interruption during the colonial time which took place for only a few decades. Geographically, the culture and the wealth of ASEAN countries, as they are located in Southeast Asia, should be closely related to those of the South and East Asian countries.



The editor with AOCR faculty in AOCR 2024, Chinese Taipei.

Songkran Festival in April is the traditional new year occasion in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia as well as among minorities in Vietnam, China's Yunnan province and Sri Lanka. In Thailand, Songkran is marked as a family moment when young people express their gratitude to their parents and seniors by pouring fragrant water on their hands or parts of the body. This is the occasion that young people who work in cities travel across the countries to their hometowns to celebrate and spend the special time with their families. Unfortunately, it is also the peak of road accidents in Thailand which now ranks number one in the world. The government, to promote safer road practices to reduce accidents, continues the 7-day road safety campaign, which covers the Songkran Festival period from 11 April to 17 April, for many years. This year, on the final day of the campaign, there were 2,044 mishaps leading to 2,060 injuries and a tragic losses of 287 lives [1]. Speeding was identified as the leading cause of these accidents, accounting for 37.6%, while drink-driving (23.9%) and reckless lane-switching (21%) followed closely [2]. Thailand post-Songkran period has also seen a rise in COVID-19 infection, as well as Influenza which is also widespread with 128,156 cases reported since the start of the year [3].

After Songkran was the World Malaria Day on 25 April. In 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported 608,000 deaths from 249 million cases of malaria, a mosquito-borne infectious disease, across 85 countries. Accordingly, Thailand is striving to eliminate malaria from 2017 to 2026. Currently, 49 out of 76 provinces in Thailand are malaria-free. Since January, 2,913 infections have been identified, largely among foreign residents living at the border of the country accounting for 60% of the cases [4].

Dengue fever and Zika virus, also transmitted by mosquitoes, were on the rise. Dengue fever in Thailand showed a 2.2-fold increase over the same period last year, according to the Disease Control Department [5]. Of the total of 24,108 cases, the primary sufferers are children aged 5 to 14 and of the 22 fatalities, people over 65 years old were the most major group [3]. Noted with deepest condolences, among 22 deaths is a female doctor in Songklanagarind Hospital with which I am affiliated, Songkhla Province. The Zika virus affected at least 758 individuals in 36 provinces across the country [6].

On March 4, three cases of anthrax were identified in the Champasak, a Laos province which shares a border with northeastern Thailand, raising concerns for potential cross-border transmission [7]. Transmission to humans is by consumption of uncooked meat from contaminated animals. Surveillance measures and checks for smuggled livestock along the Thai-Lao border were ordered while reports any sudden animal deaths from farmers were requested, and vaccines were prepared.

As excessive sugar consumption is one of the risks in developing non-communicable diseases such as heart attack, strokes, cancer and diabetes, a collaboration among organizations including the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, the Excise Department, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Public Health imposed a sugar tax under the Excise Act 2017, targeting drinks with high sugar content. The result was a 35% surge in sales of beverages with lower sugar content and a significant decrease in the overall sugar consumption. However, Thai citizens still consume on average 23 teaspoons of sugar per day, almost quadruple the daily limit of six spoons per day recommended by the WHO [8].

Lured by the appealing designs of the devices and the extensive range of flavours, rapid popularity of e-cigarettes among Thai youths, despite their illegality under Thai law, was generally witnessed. Online marketing strategies, advertisement methods, lower prices and being able to be used repeatedly had also contributed to the surge [9]. Because the level of awareness about the real health impact of e-cigarette use remains relatively low, the Medical Association of Thailand with the Royal Colleges of physicians will officially state their concerns on the spread of use, harms of use to health, and support the government to ban the sales according to WHO's call to action [10].

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