

IMF Devastation Brings Dengue to the Americas

by Paul Gallagher

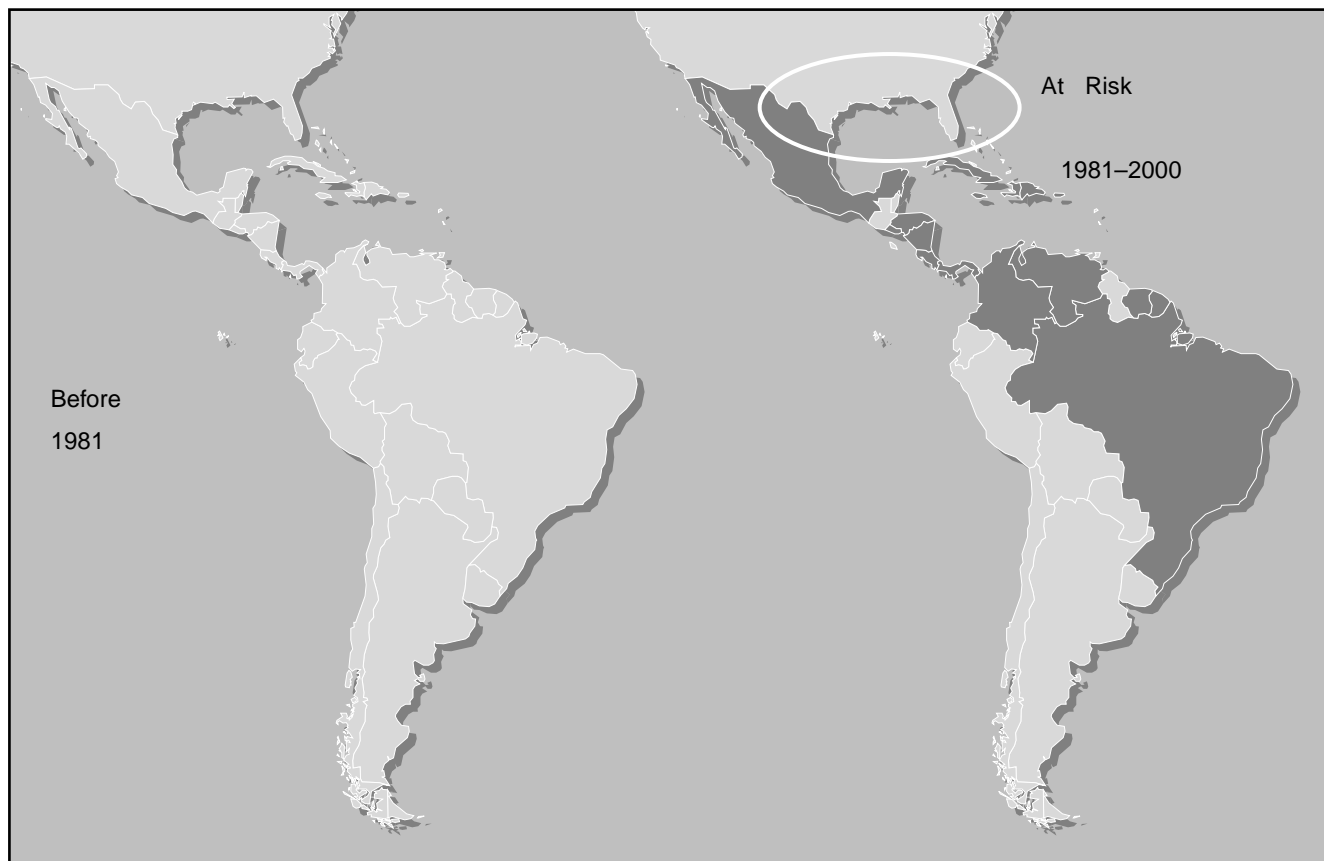
The IMF-driven collapse of the economies of Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, and even Brazil has now triggered the second epidemic, rapidly spreading in early February and March, of a feared disease never present in the Americas before 1980: dengue fever.

Dengue—painful “breakbone fever” in its general form, and mortal in its hemorrhagic form—is transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* and *Albopictus* mosquitoes, but sponsored by the International Monetary Fund-imposed “free-trade” policies which have wrecked the primary South American econo-

mies since 1980. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) calls dengue, which is now spreading out of control in Brazil and has entered Argentina’s North, “basically a problem of domestic sanitation”; its causes “reinfestation of *Aedes aegypti*, lack of good, inexpensive insecticides, lack of financial resources, deterioration in prevention and control programs,” and cutbacks in surveillance programs for the mosquito. In other words, the collapse of basic governmental health and sanitation programs due to IMF “reforms.”

The map shows the areas of the first appearance of dengue in South and Central America, particularly in a 1994-95 epidemic, which included 29 Texas cases and threw the Centers for Disease Control onto an alert. In a Feb. 21, 2002 communiqué, PAHO recalled that dengue fever “exploded . . . to more than 717,000 cases in 1998.” And this year, it has already infected 430,000 people in Brazil. Some 52,000 Brazilians were sick with dengue on March 4, showing a real “explosion” from Jan. 15, when the number was only 1,700. Nearly 10% of the state of Rio de Janeiro’s workforce have contracted dengue fever; a doctor working for the state’s Federation of Industries warned that smaller companies will be forced to

Dengue Fever in the Americas



stop production altogether.

The hemorrhagic form of dengue had caused 25 deaths in Rio and the capital, Brasilia, as of March 4.

According to *O Estado de São Paulo*, the mosquitoes were present in only 640 Brazilian municipalities in 1991, but have extended to more than 3,600 by this year. The paper's source, the National Health Foundation, Funasa, acknowledges the government resources allocated to combat the mosquito are inadequate, and so are the sanitation monitoring agencies and the public sanitation system.

The epidemic, even in January, spread to states north of Rio, such as Pernambuco and Goiás, as well as to Mato Grosso in the West. It is moving south, with 8,500 reported ill in the state of São Paulo. Argentina's daily, *Clarín* nervously reported on March 4, that dengue hemorrhagic fever has caused its first death in the Brazilian state of Paraná, much farther south than São Paulo, and bordering Argentina. On March 6, *Clarín* cited the Health Minister of the Argentine state of Misiones, Telmo Albretch, that there have already been four dengue cases reported there.

The U.S. Marines, who are conducting a military exercise in this region, have signed an agreement with the Health Ministry of Misiones, to track and control spread of dengue that might occur in the triple-border region of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil.

It is now late Summer in South America, but as the dengue epidemic moves south, it is heading out of tropical areas. What is most worrying Brazilian health authorities, according to *Clarín*, is that the *Albopictus* mosquito tolerates cold, and can live, and reproduce, in the Winter. The Health Department of Rio de Janeiro reports that the resistance of the virus—previously considered a tropical virus—has modified, which is complicating treatment, and making symptoms worse.

The fact that many areas have now been hit with multiple years of dengue epidemics, brings a further complication. Four serotypes (or strains) of the disease have been identified in the Americas. Infection brings likely immunity to *one serotype*, but later reinfection by *another* strain of dengue, puts the individual at increased risk for hemorrhagic shock syndrome, or the often fatal dengue hemorrhagic fever. So the incidence of the mortal form of this IMF-borne disease, has been rising.

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China Congress Told It Faces 'Volatile' World

by Mary Burdman

China's Prime Minister Zhu Rongji delivered a very sober "National Work Report" to the Ninth National People's Congress which opened its annual session in Beijing on March 5. His and other Chinese government leaders' speeches emphasized that China would strive to continue the fundamental economic, domestic, and foreign policies of, especially, the past five years. However, while confident these policies will sustain real economic growth in China, and improve international relations, particularly with China's neighbors, Zhu Rongji concluded that "this year, the work will be quite arduous."

"The international situation changed dramatically in 2001," Zhu told the Congress. China must "correctly size up the complicated and volatile international political and economic situation," to be able to continue building its economy at the rate essential for national security and stability. The warning on the "complex and volatile" world situation, was echoed by other Chinese leaders, especially State Development Planning Commission Minister Zeng Peiyang, at the Congress opening.

Zhu first reviewed the "good momentum of development" of China's national economy—something worth highlighting, given the drastic decline of the world economy during the year. He said Beijing's commitment to develop its huge domestic market, and its "unswerving implementation of the proactive fiscal policy and stable monetary policy"—launched in 1998 to counter the devastating financial crisis in Asia—have made it possible to create growth which can be sustained. Such astonishing "great projects" as the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to the "Roof of the World," and the west-to-east power transmission grid were launched; the "Move South Water North" project will be next on the agenda. No other nation is carrying out infrastructure construction on this scale.

Industrial/Rural Problems

Yet China has severe economic and social challenges, and, Zhu Rongji said, "we must be soberly aware of these problems that demand urgent solutions." The most urgent, is bringing China's vast 800-900 million rural population into a developing industrial economy. That is the *real* issue China faces; at the National Congress, it was presented more flatly, as the problem of stagnating incomes in the rural economy. At the same time, reform of the state-owned enterprises has meant growing unemployment for the urban workforce. For