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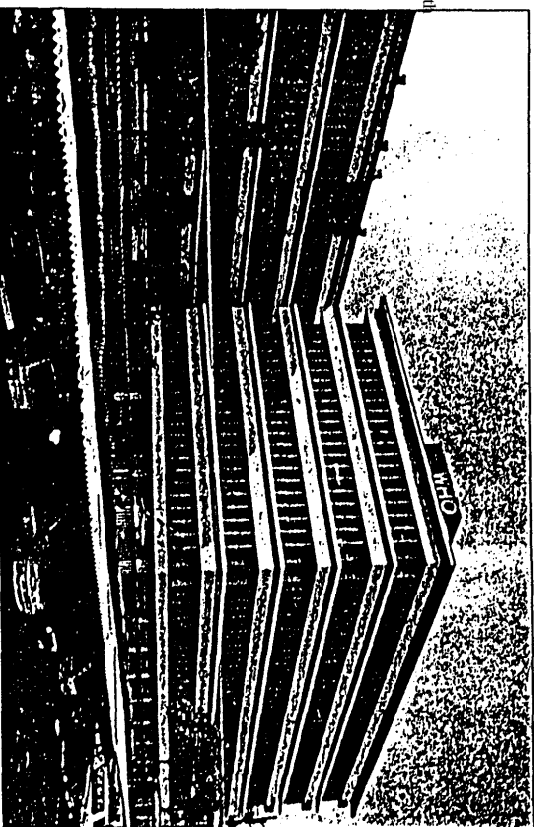
INSIDE

WHO lacks transparency: Members cautious

Indrani Roy Choudhury
New Delhi

In a strange development, Sweden, discontented with the working of WHO, has finally decided to slash its funding by 50% from its current supporting limits. The Swedish government in joint consultation with two development authorities—SIDA (Swedish International Development Authority) and SAREC (Swedish Agency for Reseach Cooper&on)—has decided to terminate the current agreements with WHO. Swedish contribution for 1995 is now projected at 5.175 million Kroner (RS 207 million), as against 103.5 million Kroner (RS 414 million), promised earlier.

The reasons attributable to this step down is that Sweden feels itself being let down by the inefficient and unprofessional approach towards fund utilisation by WHO. A letter to Dr Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General, WHO, Mr. Peter Schori, Swedish Minister



for Development of Cooperation at says: "During several occasions at the WHO Executive Board, as well as the World Health Assembly, member states have strongly expressed the need for a reformed, efficient and relevant WHO as stated in the document, 'Response

for Development of Cooperation at Global Change.' The reform process as it has been progressing the WHO Executive Board, as did not have much impact on the performance and effectiveness of the organisation. There is a lack of transparency and an apparent reluctance, on the part of WHO to enter into a constructive dialogue

with Member States on the issues involved and on the steps needed to be taken by the organisation to carry the reforms."

WHO, which is currently on its 1994/95 budget has a global allocation of 1.8 billion dollars by member countries, of which one

billion is granted by the member countries for specific health program mes under the heading 'extra budgetary resources'. The balance amount of 0.8 billion dollars is allocated to WHO by way of subscriptions by member countries and WHO is free to utilise the amount for its own programmes. However, WHO sources when contacted were of the view that Sweden must have reduced its commitment by way of cutting from extra budgetary resources; their commitment in the form of regular subscription remains intact. Officials were of the opinion that the major contributors to WHO are very particular about proper utilisation; they keep tabs on how funds are being utilised for specified purposes. If that is not in order, they have all the means to dictate terms. Interestingly, India's commitment to WHO is 0.35% (89.3 million rupees) as compared to an astounding 25% (6370 million rupees) by the USA and other European countries.

The Board of WHO and its assembly has made a demand for reform in its activities. "Sweden is willing to continue supporting WHO, in return the working system has to be upgraded to a more professional and efficient one," says Mr. Schori. "We want this decision to influence the reformative works of WHO, in order to make the organisation play an important role in the international health work of human beings," he added. In view of the current funding difficulties, the board has requested the Director General to shift 5% (approx US\$ 40 million) of the budgetary resources towards activities with the highest priority.

One thing is for certain—that over the years the World Health Organisation's efficiency has been questioned and Sweden's example may be just the tip of the iceberg of ferment. The situation amply demonstrates that there is an urgent need for timely action to be taken before WHO loses its grip on the funding, and also the goodwill, it currently enjoys.