

Polio-free India - The one year Milestone

This year on January 13, India completed an entire year without an incidence of polio. India is a country of 1.2 billion people. Out of these approximately 174 million children make India's population. With such figures, it is hard to imagine the herculean task of making India polio-free.

But today, the polio eradication campaign is one of the biggest public health programmes in the country. Every NID (National Immunisation Day) as many as 174 million children of India are reached with the polio vaccine. We have done it over and over again so successfully that today we are on the threshold of making history.

The entire country, Rotarians, health workers and polio partners are in a jubilant mood with the end so close than ever. And definitely, this is a time to rejoice for we have earned it. Having said this, I am confident that Rotarians are aware that while the 'one year without polio' milestone has been achieved, we still have the polio-free goal to achieve in the next two years. And how we do that — two more years without an incidence of polio — is where the challenge and our greatest triumph lies.

Now is not the time to get complacent but now is definitely the time to up the ante and ensure India's path to polio-free goal. In light of this, the Rotary leadership has managed to enlist the support of the Government of India and will be hosting with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Polio Summit on 25th and 26th February. The Summit will not only discuss the course of the campaign in the next two years but will also renew the commitment of the stakeholders including Rotary in sustaining the efforts towards making India and the world polio-free. The Prime Minister Shri Manmohan Singh is expected to launch the event, with the Union Health Minister Shri Gulam Nabi Azad and his ministry closely involved in organising the event. The onus is also on Rotarians in India to make this event which will be attended



RI General Secretary John Hewko immunising at the polio campaign.

by the Health Ministers/delegates from neighboring countries a shining example of our partnership with the Government and commitment to make the country polio-free. Each and every one of you must be there on 25 February to mark this historic event in India's fight against polio.

While you ensure your participation in this historic event, please also remember that Rotary's commitment to ensuring funds for the campaign is equally important. Despite the amazing response to the Gates' challenge grant where Rotarians managed to match the funds by raising USD 202.6 million (as on 17th January), there is still much to be desired. The global polio campaign is facing huge challenge with the increasing fund gaps. These funds are extremely important to sustain the on ground eradication activities in endemic countries like India, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria. The fund deficit must be bridged to ensure India's success is sustained in the coming years. Good news is, the Gates' Foundation recognising Rotary's amazing effort towards the challenge grant has announced to contribute additional USD 50 million. Rotarians should be encouraged by this gesture and faith shown in them to take

lead in meeting the challenge. I am confident each one of you will give your best in bridging this gap, in your club, in your district and in your region.

For the first time in the history of the campaign in India, we start a year without a case of polio. We will continue to keep the lead and be out again on 19 February, NID to protect India's approximately 174 million children against polio. Rotarians through their club, the district must ensure that no child is left without the vital two drops.

2012 will be remembered as the year when India came off the endemic countries list. But just as Robert Frost said, "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep ... and miles to go before I sleep" ... we still have a long way to go!



*Rtn. Ashok Mahajan
Trustee, The Rotary Foundation
Director, Rotary International
2007–2009
Member, International PolioPlus
Committee*