

The Challenge and You

Immunising children against polio virus alone is not enough. It is regular immunisation married with surveillance married with immunisation on NIDs that yield results. This alone will make our hearts sing when polio is nearly on the way out from India. RI President Kalyan Banerjee struck the chord by visiting many polio endemic places in India on two New Year's Day. He and many others have made the Rotary movement synonymous with polio eradication.

Rotarians are always used to challenges. They are brave enough to think differently, bold enough to believe they can change the world and talented enough to do it. When the leaders of Rotary International decided to eradicate polio from the world, more than two decades ago, they had an idea. Today 1.2 million Rotarians share that idea. When the last nail in the coffin of polio has been put in place, the legacy of Rotarians, as those who challenged themselves to fight polio all over the world, will outlast many lifetimes.

Rotarians were always challenged to live each day as if it was their last. They had to do good that very day. They were trained to ask themselves, "If today was the last day of my life, what would I want to do today?" And the answer in all the instances has been, "I want to leave behind a polio-free world for the children of this world." Rotarians have been trained not to have the fear of embarrassment or failure when it came to fighting polio in every nook and corner. The world has reported 410 polio cases this year compared to 682 last year. In India we are still fortunate with just one case being reported this year. But the challenge is to eliminate the virus and this needs money. The global effort of polio eradication is facing a fund deficit of US \$520 million. The cases of polio reported from Pakistan and Nigeria are worrying. They have been seen to have crossed the borders. China also reported a case.

The challenge now is to bridge the funding gap. We in Rotary gained the confidence of Mr. Bill Gates and he gave Rotary US \$355 million. But we had to match that with US \$200 million. Rotarians in Korea, Japan and Taiwan have donated generously towards this challenge grant and districts there have given 20 percent of their DDF for this grant.

Rotarians in India must know that their children are the direct beneficiaries of this worldwide polio eradication campaign. They should make the big choice in their life to support this drive. People know that almost everything they have will just fall away when a child in their home is afflicted by polio. By donating generously towards the challenge grant Rotarians have nothing to lose but everything to gain. There is no reason not to follow your heart.

Our time is limited. We cannot waste it. Don't let the noise of other choices of spending drown out your own inner voice. Have the courage to join with others in fighting polio and giving your future generations a polio-free world. Everything else is secondary. In India, a child is born every



Bill Gates challenges Rotarians.

two seconds and the challenge is to make it grow up, walk, run and lead a healthy life. The challenge is to ensure that the polio virus is nowhere in the vicinity of our country. The challenge is to give more of us, give more of our resources to make this happen. This is your challenge. Meet it.



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