

The Final Assault in Uttar Pradesh

Budaun is an administrative district of Uttar Pradesh with its headquarters located at Budaun town. It was an ancient city where Sufi saints lived in 11th century. The town is located on the bank of the holy river Ganges. The district which is spread over 5,000 sq. kms has 2,081 villages. The literacy rate is below 20 percent and the place has a dominant Muslim population. Badaun city, which is over 230 kms from New Delhi, is a revered place and the Maulanas congregate here. Majority of the population live in rural areas and the number of hospitals in the district is insufficient to cater to the needs of the people.

The occurrence of polio cases in this area during 2009 made this a high-risk area. However, due to the efforts taken by Rotary volunteers and NCM Member PDG Dr. I S Tomar, the number of cases reduced to just one during 2010. The advocacy efforts have been effective. With a view to give a fillip to the tremendous work being done by the Rotarians there, I visited Badaun on February 14, 2011 and met over 300 Maulanas from 16 Blocks of the district. The Chief Guest Maulana Uzaid Ul Hak Khadari, who is the most influential person of the Muslim community in the district, addressed the well attended meeting. I would consider that this meeting as the most productive engagement with the leaders of the community. Every member listened attentively and took a solemn pledge to support Rotary's effort to save the children of the area from polio.

The importance of hygiene was stressed by PDG I S Tomar and DG P P Singh. They appealed to the gathering to increase the literacy rate in the district and give more importance to the education of the girl child. The Ulemas recognised that the task of eradicating polio rests with every family in the district and promised that every child will be given the vaccine during the NIDs and routine immunisation programmes.

Maulana Uzaid Ul Hak Khadari quoted verses from the Holy Quran Sharif and appealed to the members of the community to give top priority to health related issues. It is said in the Holy Quran that 'Everything good that happens to you is from God; everything bad that happens to you is from your own actions.' In fact washing all the exposed parts of the body at least 5 times a day has been emphasised in the holy book.

It's hard to imagine that anyone could object to a campaign to eliminate polio, a disease that maims,



and paralyzes, and even kills its victims, who are mostly children. Yet, in one of the more bizarre confrontations between some sections of the minority community and the modern world, a tiny group of people in India did just that and gave new life to the deadly disease. This situation has now changed rapidly due to the formation of the Ulema Committees in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra. Uttar Pradesh had appallingly bad hospitals and health services. Muslims, who are among the poorest of Indians, bear the brunt of this collapse in the state's health infrastructure. There was a sense of frustration among many Muslims and they told the health workers, "We've never seen anyone coming to take care of us, why are you coming just to give us polio drops?" This is the area in which Rotary clubs must concentrate. Health care of the community cannot be left entirely to the Government especially when the infrastructure is still being developed. Eradication of polio depends on total health care and hygienic conditions in the locality.

The final assault on polio needs your support. Rotarians must divert their financial resources at least for the next two years and support the health care initiatives of Rotary in polio endemic states. This is our final chance to win.



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