

An Opportunity in Bihar

India is looking at Bihar Chief Minister Mr. Nitish Kumar. Will he take the reins that history has graciously given him to change the future of one of the most backward states of the world? Leading television channels in India have conducted polls on the popularity of Chief Ministers and Mr. Nitish Kumar is one of the best according to their reports.

Rotary International is also looking towards Mr. Nitish Kumar along with the rest of India. His assurance that he will change the focus in Bihar from politics to economics and development is heartwarming to say the least. He has worked against all odds to change the way we all see and feel about Bihar. What the people in Bihar and rest of the world were looking for is eradication of polio.

Bihar has been an endemic state for polio and efforts to curtail the virus with the help of the states machinery had not yielded much result earlier. But when Mr. Nitish Kumar became the Chief Minister of Bihar in 2005, a new chapter opened in Bihar's healthcare programme. And that is the greatest hope for India to eradicate polio from the country. The people were actually desperate and wanted someone who would rescue them from a situation which seemed to be heading towards a bleak future. They no more wanted to be a part of a failed state when it came to providing healthcare for the people, especially children. Chief Minister Mr. Nitish Kumar has shown that he can reduce the polio cases in the State and also eliminate it in the near future.

Rotary International and its partner agencies UNICEF and WHO have been monitoring the progress of the polio eradication efforts in Bihar. There was a marked progress in the awareness amongst people, especially the poor and

the immunisation programme was nearly one hundred percent successful. Chief Minister Mr. Nitish Kumar had inspired the bureaucracy that was numbed by years of inactivity on the healthcare front. They were motivated to get back their self-esteem and pride in building a state and infusing it with their commitment and vision. The healthcare machinery in

District Governor Anil Kumar Singh, NCM Dr. B N Singh and the leaders of RI District 3250 were also present at the impressive function. Established in 1995, this is the highest award which Rotary International gives to honour heads of States, health agencies and others who have made significant contributions towards polio eradication.

Bihar has 111 cases of polio this year out of which 38 are P1 type. Accepting the award Mr. Nitish Kumar pledged to wipe out the remnants of the polio virus from Bihar and said, "A polio-free Bihar will be a changing Bihar." Fame and success began courting Mr. Nitish Kumar from 1985 when he was elected to the State legislative assembly. But his inherent simplicity continues to be his trump card. It isn't as if he meticulously chalked

out his career. From 1974 when he joined the Jayaprakash Narayan movement to becoming the Chief Minister now, he straddles the State and Central political scene with casual comfort. He hasn't let success get into him and you know that he is telling the truth. That, in a sense is Mr. Nitish Kumar for you.

Eclectic is perhaps the best adjective to define Mr. Nitish Kumar. Fame sits very casually on his shoulders. On his part he said, "I receive this award for all those involved in polio eradication. This is not my personal achievement. But I will give the children of Bihar a wonderful future." We can see what he means.



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Mr. Nitish Kumar (extreme right) being welcomed at the ceremony.

the State was revamped and given clear instructions on the goal to eradicate polio. The results were there to see.

The top leaders of Rotary International decided that the commitment of Mr. Nitish Kumar in eradicating polio must be recognised and decided to confer on him with the Polio Eradication Champion Award. At an impressive function held in Patna on December 6, 2009, Chairman of RI's International PolioPlus Committee and former TRF Trustee Chair Dr. Robert Scott handed over the coveted award to Mr. Nitish Kumar. The award ceremony was held in the presence of more than 300 people which included the Health Minister of Bihar, the Health Secretary of Bihar, representatives from the political field and leaders of the Muslim community.

Ms. Carol Pandak, Manager PolioPlus Division of RI, Dr. Ajmal Pardis, Public Health Director and Chair PolioPlus Committee, Afghanistan, Chairman of INPPC PDG Deepak Kapur, Mr. Carl Tinstman, Global Consultant of UNICEF,