

# Priority Programme

I am confronted by some critics and sceptics about the possibility of eradicating polio within one year. They are questioning the 'scare tactics' that Government and other programme managers seem to apply. I wish to state that the scare is real. May be polio is now confined to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and in some pockets of other States. The fact is that it will not be long before this virus travels to other parts of India and even cross the borders. Let us not be accused of exporting a disease to neighbours.

During my periodical surveillance visits to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, I have always found that the Government machinery is willing to cooperate fully with Rotary in combating polio. Rotary's new initiative of introducing zinc tablets as an oral rehydration programme has also found favour with the Governments. What is now required is a sweeping healthcare overhaul for children and mothers in these two states. This has eluded the Government machinery and Rotary for decades.

It was the opinion of the programme managers that it is not possible to waste time with those who are not co-operating with the implementation of the schemes which are put in place for polio eradication. But this sometimes proves to be the challenging phase for total eradication. It is the duty of Rotarians

to be patient and convince anyone who seems to be non-cooperative to see the benefits of saving their children and future generations. The initiative in forming the Ulema Committee is



a point to be considered where sheer determination and honest attempt to convert a section of the society paid dividend.

Rotary clubs in these two States should know that the time for games has passed. The time for bickering among members is over. Now is the time for action. Polio eradication, above all, is a moral issue. At stake is not just the life of children who are born now but the generation of children who will be born in the years and decades to follow. Helping others is a paramount character found in all the people in our country. Social justice demands that we do what is good for the community now and for the civilisation that will be in place in the next century.

The specifics of implementing the programme were left to the individual Rotary clubs. Help, in the form of literature, guidance and publicity materials were handed out.

The District Governors have the responsibility to see that every club in the district participates in the immunisation programme during the NIDs. The leaders of the district need to embrace a plan of action and take some fresh proposals aimed at curbing the virus. Too many of the Rotarians have used the NIDs as an opportunity to score brownie points and an occasion for photographs and fellowship. This has to change now. Despite years of awareness-building campaigns,

Rotary clubs in the polio endemic areas have not risen to meet the challenge. It is true that the campaign has resulted in more people being reached and keeping the incidence of polio from sky-rocketing. But there is much more to be done.

I was not the first Director of Rotary International and I am not the first Trustee of The Rotary Foundation to take up this cause. But I am determined to be the last.



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