

Young MPs join hands against malnutrition

They are young, educated and mean business. Several Indian MPs, cutting across party lines, have joined hands in rare political unanimity to raise awareness about health issues - and malnutrition is their first stop.

Putting behind their political ideologies, these young parliamentarians from the Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the DMK have been spreading awareness in various states.

'It's unacceptable to me that 46 percent of children in our country below the age of five are malnourished,' said Sachin Pilot, a young Congress MP from Rajasthan.

Brajesh Pathak, a BSP MP from Uttar Pradesh, said creating awareness about health worries is one of their jobs as people's representatives.

'We want to see a healthy nation. Unless our children are healthy, the country cannot continue to grow,' Pathak told IANS.

According to Unicef, every year 2.1 million children in India die before celebrating their fifth birthday. While malnutrition is the primary reason behind it, other factors like lack of health facilities, hygiene and good nutrition compound the problem.

'In the last seven years, the malnourishment level among Indian children has gone down by merely one percent. While 47 percent of children were malnourished seven years back, currently it is 46 percent,' said Marzio Babilie, head of health at Unicef India.

Last week, Pilot, Pathak and at least 15 other MPs like K. Kanimozhi of the DMK, Jay Panda of the BJD and the NCP's Rajya Sabha member Supriya Sule had carried out a candlelight vigil near the India Gate landmark. Holding placards and posters, they advocated a wholehearted war against malnutrition.

'The India Gate event was just one of the initiatives. We have already visited three states, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. We are going to Bihar May 12,' said the BJP's Shahnawaz Hussain.

He said their group of MPs has already met Congress president Sonia Gandhi, BJP veteran L.K. Advani and Women and Child Development Minister Renuka Chowdhury.

Hussain said in Bihar they would visit Vaishali district and interact with communities and local authorities on 'how things can be improved'.

Pilot believes states, the centre, civil society and the media must treat malnutrition as a 'high priority issue'.

'A lot has been written about polio and AIDS. But malnutrition has not been a priority agenda so far,' he said but praised the young MPs for joining hands to fight the problem.

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