

## Birlas, Mittals join fight against polio

Concerned about the renewed polio threat in the country, leading Indian industrialist families like the Birlas and Mittals have stepped forth with generous financial support to the immunisation drive against the disease in India and elsewhere.

In the last few months Rajashree Birla, mother of leading industrialist Kumar Mangalam Birla of the Aditya Birla group, has donated \$300,000 to the Rotary International for its fight against polio.

According to Rotary officials, Rajashree Birla was inducted to the Klumph Society, the club of leading donors to the organisation, in April. Soon after, she made a 'surprise announcement of an additional \$1 million commitment'.

Rajashree Birla has said: 'Rotarians symbolize a culture of giving and caring which is strikingly close to our group's philosophy.'

Neema C., a spokesman of Rotary India, told IANS: 'These are great gestures by industrial families. This will not only help the fight against polio but will also set a precedent for others to join hands for a healthy cause.'

India is still the number one country in terms of polio prevalence. In 2007, it reported over 870 polio cases. In the first six months of this year, over 290 cases have been reported in the country, of which Bihar accounts for over 200.

The Rotary officials said that in May, Rajashree Birla arranged a brief meeting on polio eradication with Usha Mittal, wife of London-based India-born Lakshmi Mittal, who heads ArcelorMittal, the world's largest steel maker.

'At Birla's encouragement, Mrs. Mittal generously responded with a \$1 million contribution to the challenge,' said Rajendra Saboo, Rotary International's past president.

'What makes the contribution very significant is not only the generous monetary contribution she committed spontaneously, but her desire to participate in polio immunization campaigns in India,' Saboo added.

With such huge donations, the country has become a major donor for Rotary projects in India and worldwide.

'There has been a dramatic rise in contributions to the foundation from the Rotarians in India. In the past three years, India has moved from ninth to fourth position in countrywise contributions to the foundation worldwide,' said Deepak Kapur, chairman of the India National PolioPlus Committee.

Authorities said Harshad R. Mehta, an industrialist from [Mumbai](#) who is currently operating out of UAE, too has donated for the healthy cause.

In 2006, Mehta and his wife made a \$1 million gift to Rotary and became the first donors from India to surpass that milestone of support. In December last year, the Mehtas committed to give \$2 million over the next three years to Rotary's \$100 Million Challenge for polio project.

'We must further strengthen our resolve, as we are so close to the ultimate goal (of eradicating polio),' a Rotary official said quoting Mehta.

Neema said other than India, the US, Britain, Germany, Japan, Australia, Canada form the top echelon of donor countries to Rotary International, a charity involved in many health related campaigns. India currently has over 90,000 Rotarians.

*Prashant K. Nanda ( © IANS / India eNews)*