

Bihar to wipe out kala azar by 2010

The Bihar government targets to turn the state free of kala azar, a fly-borne fatal parasitic disease that has killed hundreds, by 2010.

The government has formed a special task force, to be headed by former central health minister C.P. Thakur, to battle the disease.

Kala azar has spread to 31 of the state's 38 districts and affected an estimated 24,000 mostly poor people, government sources said.

'We have set 2010 as the deadline for wiping out kala azar with the help of the central government and other agencies,' Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said.

Kala azar - medically known as Visceral Leishmaniasis - is the second-largest parasitic killer in the world after malaria. Bihar faced a kala azar epidemic in 1991 when 250,000 cases were reported.

Around 90 percent of kala azar cases are found in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sudan and northeast Brazil. Over 60 percent of the cases in India are found in Bihar alone, experts say.

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