

PROFILE

Dr. Harsh Vardhan

**Former Health & Education Minister, Delhi (India) and President,
Bharatiya Janata Party, Delhi Pradesh**

Born in December 1954 in Delhi, Dr. Harsh Vardhan had his initial education in Delhi itself. After brilliant academic achievements he went to G.S.V.M. Medical College, Kanpur, U.P., in northern India to pursue his medical studies. After obtaining his bachelors degree (M.B.B.S.), he followed it up with masters in Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Surgery (M.S.) from the same college where the department of ENT was rated as one of the finest in India.

He returned to Delhi in early eighties and initially joined Sir Ganga Ram Hospital for a brief period and eventually settled in private practice in its eastern part of Delhi as a consultant ENT surgeon more with an intent to serve the needy and poor than acquiring material wealth. The desire to serve the community and the people through various professional and social organizations was his mission which he went on fulfilling relentlessly. His soft-spoken and unselfish approach in practice endeared him to many and soon it became difficult for him to extricate himself for anything other than serve the suffering and needy.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan by now had attained a deep understanding of health which he believed was only attainable through a holistic approach. He became a strong votary of this new vision and began working for strengthening public and preventive health through Indian Medical Association's East Delhi branch, which he served as its general secretary and later as its president. Later on he went on to become the secretary and ultimately the President of Delhi Medical Association. Though, politics was something of an anathema to him, he consented to contest an election for the Delhi legislative assembly on the demands and persuasion of a large number of his admirers in party and outside in the year 1993.

After a successful win in the 1993 assembly elections with a very handsome margin he became the obvious choice for the position of health minister which he has served with a great vision and aplomb. Very early on, to give a concrete shape to his plans, he called up the leading health specialists to chalk out an agenda. The public health problems, of which polio was the most notorious and rife in Delhi, as also in India, became his priority. He roped in a large number of people, social and philanthropic organizations to launch a 'polio eradication movement' in October 1994. More than 1.2 million children were immunized in one single day (2nd October, 1994) when the city was plagued with deadly plague, dispelling the prophecy of doomsayers who believed that such a campaign

will be a non-starter in India. Taking cue from his success, the union ministry of health in India took up the programme as a national programme next year in 1995. The programme ultimately crossed the boundaries of India and spread to various other countries in the South East Asia Region.

The next on his hit list was 'tobacco'. As a specialist in ENT he was well aware of the conclusive evidence that had piled up in last forty years regarding the dangers which smoking creates for smokers, as well as non-smokers. As ENT specialist he saw, diagnosed and treated a large number of cases of laryngeal, as well as oral and lung cancers attributable to the use of tobacco and its products. He was actually aware of the magnitude of the 'tobacco related illness', which was on the rise in India due to a well designed marketing and sales promotion tactics of 'tobacco companies'. To pick up a gauntlet against such powerful tobacco lobby's interest was fraught with risks. Taking cue from ancient Indian scriptures, which exhort individuals to pursue good deeds without any fear or want of any reward, he asked the officials of his ministry to draft a bill. Despite much hindrances, for the first time in the history of the nation a bill was adopted eventually in 1996 as 'the Delhi prohibition of smoking and non-smokers health protection act, 1996'. It is only now that the people are appreciating with pride the fact that such a rigorous and beneficial piece of legislation has not been enacted even in some developed countries. Several states in Indian union have introduced similar legislations and the central government in India has also introduced a bill on similar pattern. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has also issued directions to all the States as well as the Centre for getting an Act enacted against tobacco on the lines of the Delhi Assembly Legislation against smoking in public places. **For this historic effort Dr. Harsh Vardhan was nominated to receive the Director General of WHO's Commendation medal and certificate for making outstanding contribution worthy of international recognition for achieving 'tobacco-free society'. He received this coveted honour in a glittering ceremony held at Rio-De-Janeiro, Brazil on 28th May, 1998 by the World Health Organization. This prestigious award has been earlier received by eminent personalities like former President of U.S.A. Bill Clinton, Health Minister of Canada and international Brazilian football player Pele.**

Dr. Harsh Vardhan took up several issues which even though important, hitherto escaped the attention of planners. He actively promoted the 'Environment and Health', as well as safety and accident prevention by establishing a centre for Occupational and Environmental medicine in Maulana Azad Medical College, the first such centre in a medical school in India. He is continuously contributing to plans to strengthen the centre further and to make it a centre of excellence.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan has received the Rotary International's 'Polio Eradication Champion Award' which was presented to him by the Prime Minister of India Sh. Atal Behari Vajpayee on January 22, 2001 at New Delhi. This prestigious award has been earlier received by international dignitaries like former US President Bill Clinton, former British Prime Minister John Major, First Lady of Egypt Smt. Suzanne Mubarak, President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo, President of Angola

Jose Edurado Dos Santos and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan. Dr. Harsh Vardhan is the first Indian to receive this award.

Though, Dr. Harsh Vardhan has carried on his work with the sole aim of securing health for all Delhiites, the excellent work done by him has not gone unnoticed by many organisations. National and International Organizations have showered on him the coveted honours and awards. He was conferred 'Paul Harris Fellowship' by Rotary International twice. He has been nominated as the 'Fellow of Polypathy', by International Institute of Polypathy. He has been conferred the Lions International Service Award by its President Mr. C. Pino Grimaldi in 1995. In 1994 he received 'IMA President's Special Award of Appreciation' and in 1996 and 1997 he was once again chosen for 'IMA Special Award to Eminent Medical Men for Distinguished Achievement of Highest Order'. Very recently he has been honoured with the IMANDB Swasthya Ratna (Doctor of the last decade award) for being the "Noblest Medical Campaigner of the Last Decade" on Doctor's Day 1st July, 2002.

Prestigious Social organizations have continued to recognize his services and honoured him on several occasions. Maharaja Agrasen Forum conferred upon him 'Aggarwal Ratan Award', Jain Mahasabha bestowed on him 'Ahimsa Samman' and 'Sewa Shree Samman' was showered on him for his meritorious services and outstanding achievements in his field by Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Indian Finance Minister and present Prime Minister, All India Conference of Intellectuals has conferred 'Delhi Ratan Award' on him. Acharya Kshemchand Suman Seva Samiti has conferred on him the prestigious Acharya Suman Shree Samman for the year 2001. He has also received Vocational Excellence Award by the Rotary club of Delhi Uptown for his outstanding contribution in serving the community with exemplary dedication and commitment in providing relief to Gujarat Earthquake victims. He also received a Certificate of Excellence from Dr. Bhisham Narain Singh, former Governor of Tamilnadu on behalf of the India International Friendship Society for outstanding services, achievements and contributions. He was recently honoured at the Polio Plus International Presidential Summit held in Mumbai on 22-24th February, 2002 in acknowledgement of his work in eradication of Polio. Dr. Harsh Vardhan has also received the Human Care Award of the millennium for excellence in medical profession on 20th December, 1999 by the Chief Minister of Delhi Smt. Shiela Dixit on behalf of the Punjab & Sind Bank. Dr. Harsh Vardhan has also received Certificate of Academic Excellence from the International Institute of Integrated Medical Sciences. He has also received the National Environmental Seva Samman at the 1996 World Environment Congress for his services in the field of environmental protection and improvement and related issues. He has also received Rashtriya Hindi Samman in 1996 at the All India Hindi Sammelan by Dr. Ganga Sharan Singh, Rashtriya Hindi Sansthan. Recently Dr. Harsh Vardhan has been chosen for the prestigious National Citizen's Award of India by a distinguished jury comprising Mr. Justice P.N. Bhagwati, Chairman, United Nations, Human Rights Committee as its Chairman and other great luminaries of India as its members.

As a minister of health Dr. Harsh Vardhan launched the WHO Essential Drug Programme for the first time in India in the city of Delhi. The programme has now been accepted as a model by WHO and is known as the Delhi model and is being replicated and followed by about a dozen state Governments in India as well as by a number of countries like Vietnam, Kampuchea, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand, U.K. and many others. The Delhi Society for Promotion of Rational use of Drugs is at the moment coordinating this effort in India and abroad in collaboration with WHO Geneva and Dr. Harsh Vardhan continues to be associated with the society as a guiding force.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan has launched multitude of schemes and campaigns based on international trends, World Health Organization guidelines and the priorities had been set by his administration after several brainstorming sessions with eminent health specialists, planners, management experts, non-governmental organizations and public interest groups. Leading scientists and health experts from across the globe continue to call upon him knowing his penchant for accepting new challenges and trying out new and innovative ideas to improve health of all.

In addition to two of his most famous achievements in the field of polio eradication and tobacco, his administration had launched 'Matri Suraksha Programme' to strengthen reproductive health, 'Cancer Control Programme', 'Cataract Free Delhi Programme' and 'Shravan-Shakti Abhiyan' (for deafness affecting old and rehabilitation of elderly deaf) and special immunisation campaigns for children. His imaginative initiative led to the enactment of 'Delhi Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Bill' and 'Delhi Artificial Insemination Act'.

His administration launched 'Healthy City Project', 'Hepatitis B Immunization Programme' and had set up a 'Delhi Research Centre for Modernized Promotion of Ayurveda', (the Indian System of Medicine). Dr. Harsh Vardhan has carried over the concept of health to schools in a big way by introducing 'Compulsory Yoga and Positive Health Education' in schools and by initiating a value based calendar (Sukriti) to promote and inculcate moral values among children at a tender age. As minister of education in Delhi he had made 'Sports' a compulsory subject in Delhi Schools'.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan is associated with a number of national and international organisations as a life member and is serving them regularly for last two decades. To name a few, these organisations are International Medical Parliamentarians Organisation, Antar Rashtriya Sahyog Parishad, Council for International Affairs and Human Rights, Indian Medical Association, Panchnad Research Institute, IMA Academy of Medical Specialties, Association of Otolaryngologists of India, All India Rhinology Society, Gems Association and Delhi Society for Promotion of Rational Use of Drugs.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan has presented research papers at several national and international scientific conferences, published his research work in leading medical journals and has travelled widely inland and overseas, visiting centres of excellence to learn and transplant if feasible, their experience in India to improve the health and well being of its citizens.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan had also been one of the senior member of an Expert Advisory Committee for Health Programme on Doordarshan Bharti Channel of Prasar Bharti, India

Dr. Harsh Vardhan has given a new direction to the health in Delhi which is being emulated by other States as well as the central government. Perhaps it was this on the back of his mind when former Prime Minister of India Sh. Inder Kumar Gujral speaking before an international gathering pronounced 'If I have to single out one minister for an outstanding award in India, then my choice will be Dr. Harsh Vardhan'. Despite his immense achievements within a short span, Dr. Harsh Vardhan remains polite but firm and soft but determined. Not content with these accomplishments, Dr. Harsh Vardhan remains committed to launch and initiate many more projects to make Delhi a showpiece and a model not only in India, but on the planet.

Recently Dr. Harsh Vardhan has been concentrating all his effort on achievement of the goal of polio eradication by the year 2005, not only in India but also in other parts of the South East Asia Region-he continues to give his services off and on as Temporary Advisor to Regional Director World Health Organisation SEAR. He was a member of the Global Technical Consultative Group as well as member of the Technical Consultative Group of the South East Asia Region for drafting all policies and recommendations pertaining to polio eradication in the world.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan was also nominated as a member of a Global Committee of 18 experts (Strategic Advisory Group of Experts-SAGE) for developing strategies and advising World Health Organisation on all global policies pertaining to vaccines and biologicals in the year 2000-2001. He was probably the only Indian nominated on this panel of Global Experts in recent times.

The Presidents of Bharatiya Janata Party Sh. Jana Krishnamurthy and Sh. Bangaru Laxman had assigned the responsibility of National Convenor of BJP's Doctors Cell to Dr. Harsh Vardhan in the year 2000-2001 which he accepted and followed it up with action by ensuring the establishment of vibrant Doctors Cell Units all over the country. The President of Bharatiya Janata Party Sh. Venkaiah Naidu had included Dr. Harsh Vardhan in his new team of national office bearers as the National Vice-President of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Presently he is working as President, BJP, Delhi Pradesh since December 2003. Dr. Harsh Vardhan also continues to represent his constituency Krishna Nagar in the Delhi Legislative Assembly after winning the election 3rd time in succession in 2003. He has been representing the constituency since 1993.

Recently, he had completed writing his own book on the polio eradication movement in the world and more particularly about its relevant details pertaining to India-this movement was started by Dr. Harsh Vardhan in Delhi for the first time in 1994. The book "A tale of two drops" was released by former Prime Minister of India Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee at a glittering function in New Delhi on 7th December, 2004 in presence of Shri L.K. Advani, former Deputy Prime Minister of India, Shri Mohan Bhagwat, General Secretary, Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, Mrs. Sushma Swaraj, former Union Health

Minister, Govt. of India and Dr. Samlee Plianbangchang, Regional Director, World Health Organisation, South East Asia Region.