

**Press Information Bureau
Government of India
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**

25-February-2012 15:25 IST

**India No Longer in Polio Endemic Countries' List: Azad
PM Inaugurates the Polio Summit 2012**

WHO has taken India's name off the list of polio endemic countries in view of the remarkable progress that India achieved by being polio free for the past one full year. The Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad shared this important development today in the presence of Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh at the inaugural of the two day Polio Summit 2012 in New Delhi. The Polio Summit organised jointly by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Rotary International also saw participation of Federal Minister for Interprovincial Coordination, Government of Pakistan, Mir Hazar Khan Bijrani; Minister of Health and Population, Government of Nepal Rajendra Mahato; Deputy Minister of Health, Government of Sri Lanka, Lalith Dissanayaka; Ministers of State for Health and Family Welfare, Shri Sudip Bandyopadhyay and Shri S Gandhiselvan, Secretary Health and Family Welfare Shri P K Pradhan, Rotary International President Mr. Kalyan Banerjee and The Rotary Foundation Chairman Mr. William Boyd as also subject experts from developing partners who have gathered at the Summit to renew and reinforce their commitment to eradicate polio in India.

Reaffirming the commitment of India to achieve full immunization, Dr Manmohan Singh said "We must ensure that every Indian child, rich or poor, whether living in Ladakh or in Delhi has equal access to the best immunization. To this ambitious task I commit our government". He noted that the coordinated efforts of the Government of India with close partnership of States Governments, international organizations and groups including the Rotary International, the World Health Organization and UNICEF and the 23 lakh volunteers as also supervisors, has helped to rid our country of the terrible scourge of Polio. The Prime Minister said "it is a matter of satisfaction that we have completed one year without any single new case of polio being reported from anywhere in the country. This gives us hope that we can finally eradicate polio not only from India but from the face of the entire mother earth. The success of our efforts shows that teamwork pays".

Dr Manmohan Singh also emphasized the need for nutritious food, safe drinking water, proper sanitation and education in addition to Universal access to safe vaccines. He said that we need to accelerate our efforts to achieve goal of providing universal access to health care at affordable cost for all our citizens. "The rising cost of health care is another key challenge. We are, therefore focusing our attention towards social security of the poor with regard to their health care. Public expenditure on health has increased from less than 1% of our GDP in 2006-07 to an estimated 1.4% of GDP by the end of the Eleventh Five year Plan. But we will need to work harder and do more if we have to reach our goal of increasing public expenditure on health to at least 2.5% of the GDP. Education and health will be the key priorities of the Twelfth Five Year Plan" he emphasized.

Recalling India's journey of combating Polio, the Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad noted that the achievement of one full year without even a single polio case, which is being acclaimed worldwide, is the result of a strong political will at the highest levels making sure that there was never any shortage of resources or funds for the polio eradication initiative. He informed that 27 % of the global expenditure on polio eradication has come from India's domestic resources. More than 99 percent coverage of children in the two remaining endemic states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is unprecedented, not witnessed anywhere else in the world on such a large scale, Shri Azad said. The aggressive mop up response against the polio virus has enabled us to stop further transmission of polio virus. He however added that we are highly mindful of the risks that persist not only on account of indigenous transmission but also importations from other endemic countries. "There is going to be zero tolerance for any new polio case and such a case will be declared as a public health emergency" he reiterated. All the states bordering the neighbouring countries have been alerted to strengthen surveillance for early detection of any imported polio virus. Special booths have been established in the bordering areas like Wagah border and Attari train station in Punjab and Munabo train station in Rajasthan, to ensure that all children under 5 years of age coming from across the border are given polio drops, the Minister added. The Polio Programme in India is the most shining example of strong and effective partnerships, Shri Azad noted. Shri Azad urged that we should re-dedicate ourselves and resolve that we will continue our efforts with the same vigour, so that India can be declared Polio Free by the year 2014.

Over the two days, the Summit will deliberate on how to build synergies to ensure that the present momentum against polio is maintained until the disease is eradicated. The Summit is expected to provide a platform for sharing and learning lessons for all the key players in the end game strategy for polio eradication – government, partners, donors and frontline workers. The battle has been won but the war against Polio is not yet over is the underlying sentiment of the 2-day Summit.

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