

## India celebrates 2 years without polio

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The National Immunization Day, 2013 was celebrated with aplomb on January 13<sup>th</sup>, as it coincided with India being polio free for two whole years. As a part of the commemoration of this important milestone, the president of India, Mr Pranab Mukherjee administered polio drops to children at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, union minister of health and family welfare, Mr S Gandhi Selvan, minister of state for health and family welfare, Dr AK Walia, health minister, government of NCT of Delhi, representatives from WHO, UNICEF, USAIDS and Rotary India and other partners were present on the occasion.

Speaking on the historic occasion, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad said, "I am extremely happy to inform this august gathering that today is a momentous day for the whole country, as India has completed two years without any case of wild polio virus."

On 25<sup>th</sup> February 2012, the World Health Organization had removed India from the list of polio endemic countries, which was a historical achievement since there was a perception among many experts that India would be the last country to eradicate polio. Until 2009, India accounted for half of the total polio cases in the world.

Mr Seth Berkeley, CEO, GAVI Alliance, one of the leading non profit agencies working in the area of vaccines tweeted that, "India's second polio-free anniversary is a huge achievement. Vaccination and surveillance must continue to end polio. (Now) the stakes are higher than ever to sustain progress and end polio globally."

Mr Azad pointed out that the polio eradication effort will continue to be one of the thrust areas of the Government. Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria still continue to be polio endemic countries in the world. Mr. Azad also added, "I am happy to inform you that the nation-wide immunization campaign for polio eradication will start on 20 January, 2013, in which more than 170 million children of less than five years of age will be given polio drops. More than 23 lakh volunteers will participate in this massive national effort, with more than 1.5 lakh supervisors monitoring the quality and coverage of the Immunization activity."