

## Stay vigilant against recurrence of polio, cautions President

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The president of India, Mr Pranab Mukherjee addressed the Polio Free Conclave 2014 organised by the Rotary International, at New Delhi on March 30, 2014. He also presented mementos of appreciation and recognition to the former health minister Dr A Ramadoss and Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, Union health minister for health and family welfare.

Speaking at the occasion, the president applauded the efforts of various agencies including the government in ridding the country of the disease. The president said that this was a momentous and landmark achievement. Health has been the priority of the Government of India for quite some time, he said. Unprecedented programme to eradicate the polio virus from the country was taken up by the central and state governments supported by several national and international agencies such as Rotary International, UNICEF, WHO, CDC and Melinda and Gates Foundation, he added. The President said that the agencies helped with material resources and best practices to wipe out this crippling disease. Initiative was taken up at several levels to spread awareness, provide prompt medical attention and administer the polio vaccine. The unique challenge in India, the President noted, was the sheer number of people combined with the difficult terrain in many states. He applauded the unparalleled dedication of all concerned and the relentless efforts put in by the workers, doctors, activists and various stakeholders including parents of children in achieving this day.

The President stated that India must assist other countries such as Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan in their fight against this disease in improving their health systems and infrastructure. He stated that we must be vigilant. There is need for

watchfulness and preparedness to see that there is no recurrence of this disease, the President said.

The Union health minister addressing the gathering said that this was a momentous and historic achievement. He thanked all the stakeholders and partners in this challenging yet deeply satisfying journey. He credited this achievement to decision to introduce the new bivalent polio vaccine which was indigenously developed for the first time, aggressive immunization and micro block level planning covering the most endemic areas which had an electrifying effect, strong political will at the highest levels that ensured pumping in of required financial resources and deployment of huge manpower in this gigantic task, constant monitoring and maintaining supply chains, involving over a million Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) across the country. He said that a 2.3 million strong team of frontline polio workers, volunteers and 150,000 supervisors worked day and night for the success of the polio rounds. Shri Azad complimented the Rotarians who have been contributing resources, time and effort to the cause.

Present at the occasion were Shri Lov Verma, Health Secretary, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Mr. Gary Huang, Rotary International President Elect, Mr. D. K. Lee, Chairman, Rotary Foundation, Sh Rajendra Saboo, Conclave Chairman, Sh P T Prabhakar, Rotary International Director and Sh Kalyan Banerjee, Conclave co-chairman.