

India defeats polio, global eradication efforts advance

AFP, New Delhi

India yesterday marked three years since its last reported polio case, meaning it will soon be certified as having defeated the ancient scourge in a huge advance for global eradication efforts.

The milestone confirms one of India's biggest public health success stories, achieving something once thought impossible, thanks to a massive and sustained vaccination programme.

India's health minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, along with global groups who have been working to eradicate the virus, hailed the three years as "a monumental milestone".

"In 2009 India accounted for over half of the global polio burden and today is the historic day when we have completed three years without a single case of wild polio," the minister told reporters in the capital.

With the number of cases in decline in Nigeria and Afghanistan, two of only three countries where polio is still endemic, world efforts to consign the crippling virus to history are making steady progress.

"In 2012, there were the fewest numbers of cases in endemic countries as ever before. So far in 2013 (records are still being checked), there were even less," Hamid Jafari, global polio expert at the World Health Organisation told AFP.

"If the current trends of progress continue we could very easily see the end of polio in Afghanistan and Nigeria in 2014," added Jafari, hailed as having played a crucial role in India's victory.

Success and caution the success, isolated polio outbreaks in the Horn of Africa and war-racked Syria emerged as new causes for concern in 2013.

To celebrate India's success, the Rotary International charity, which has been a key donor, will illuminate the India Gate and Red Fort monuments in New Delhi with a message of congratulations.

India "proved to the world how to conquer this disease" despite its population density and sanitation problems, said Nicole Deutsch, head of polio operations for UN children's arm UNICEF in India.

Countries are certified by the WHO as being polio-free if they go 12 months without a case, and are then said to have eradicated it after a period of three years without new infections.

India will likely receive this endorsement only in March, which will trigger more

exuberant celebrations than yesterday.

There also remain reasons for caution, with the virus still considered endemic in neighbouring Pakistan, where vaccinators are being killed by the Taliban which views them as possible spies.

A fake vaccination programme was used by the CIA to provide cover for operatives tracking Al Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden, who was killed in Pakistan by US special forces in May 2011.

Hopes of progress were given a boost last month when cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan pledged to personally spearhead vaccination efforts in the troubled northwest of the country.

In India, the wretched sight of crippled street hawkers or beggars on wheeled trolleys will also remain as a legacy of the country's time as an epicentre of the disease.

In the absence of any official data, most experts agree there are several million survivors left with withered legs or twisted spines who face discrimination and often live on the very margins of Indian society.

Million of vaccinators The country's success was built on a huge vaccination programme that began in the mid-1990s with the backing of the central government and a coalition of charities, private donors, and UN agencies.

An army of more than two million vaccinators, backed by local religious and community leaders, canvassed villages, slums, train stations and public gatherings in even the most remote parts of the country.

The country reported 150,000 cases of paralytic polio in 1985, and it still accounted for half of all cases globally in 2009, with 741 infections that led to paralysis.

In 2010, the number of victims fell to double figures before the last case on January 13, 2011, when an 18-month-old girl in a Kolkata slum was found to have contracted it.

The girl, Rukshar Khatoon, is now attending school and leads a "normal life", although she still suffers pain in her right leg from the disease, doctors and her parents told AFP.

"She can now stand on her feet and walk, but can't run," her father Abdul Saha said. "When her friends play, she remains a spectator."

Saha, a father of four, conceded he had taken his son to get immunised but not two of his daughters. "It was a grave mistake," he

Govt fully prepared

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clearly proves that the international community has full support for the new government, reports our diplomatic correspondent.

"Otherwise they (diplomats) would have skipped it," he observed.

Shahriar made the remarks at his first press meet with diplomatic correspondents at the foreign ministry when journalists sought his comment on how the government will move forward amidst the widespread criticism from the international community over the January 5 elections.

The state minister said BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami have no moral right to do politics.

Speaking about the war crimes trial, Shahriar said though there has been conspiracy at both home and abroad to halt the trial, but the government would be able to overcome any obstruction in this regard.

Replying to another query, he claimed that there is no tradition that every country will have to make phone calls to greet the new government.

On restoration of GSP facility in the US market, he said, "That's a challenge. (But) I would say it's a matter of time now only to get that back. It's my personal belief. We'll also give priority to increase business in the European market."

Ershad's aides claim

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The next day he got release from CMH and became special envoy to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This means he will enjoy ministerial status.

That day, after attending the oath-taking ceremony of the fresh cabinet at Bangabhaban, the former army dictator told journalists, "I'm quite well. Soon, I'll get released from CMH."

Another JP central leader Soheli Rana told journalists, "It is not true that he was undergoing treatment at the hospital. He came back home and is now taking rest."

He also said Ershad would certainly join parliament as he had taken part in the election. JP Secretary General Ruhul Amin

Hawladar asked journalists to be patient, saying that Ershad would meet journalists within a few days and explain everything.

On whether Ershad willingly took charge as the envoy, Hawladar made a counter question, "Has Ershad made any statement that he had rejected the charge?"

Meanwhile, Ershad appointed Hawladar and another presidium member, GM Quader, also his younger brother, as JP spokespersons.

A statement signed by Ershad's Press and Political Secretary Sunil Shuvo Roy added that none except these two persons could make any statement about JP and that the announcement will also be applicable for both JP and Jatiya Party Parliamentary Party.

Top Tory minister spurns demands for British EU veto

AFP, London

British Foreign Secretary William Hague yesterday rejected demands from restive fellow Conservative lawmakers for parliament to be given a veto over all European Union laws.

Some 95 backbench Conservative MPs have written to Tory Prime Minister David Cameron saying parliament should have the authority to block new EU legislation and repeal measures that threaten the "national interest".

But Hague insisted such a pick-and-choose approach would undermine the 28-country bloc's single market.

"What you can't have in any system that relies on some common rules -- even in a free trade area that relies on common rules -- is each of the parliaments being able regularly and unilaterally to say we are not applying this or that," he told BBC radio.

Cameron has promised to take back powers from Brussels as part of a renegotiation of Britain's membership of the EU ahead of a promised in-out referendum by 2017.

The pledge has helped calm the restive eurosceptic flank of his Conservative Party, but this weekend's letter to The Sunday Telegraph newspaper threatens to reignite internal party tensions.

The signatories, who represent more than half the Conservative backbenchers, urged Cameron to "make the idea of a national veto over current and future EU laws a reality".

The letter said such a veto would "enable parliament to disapply EU legislation, where it is in our vital national interests to do so".

"This would transform the UK's negotiating position in the EU," it added.

Many Conservatives are fearful their voter base is being encroached on by the anti-EU populist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which could even top the polls at the European Parliament elections in May.

Cameron's referendum pledge was viewed as an attempt to head off this threat, but the Tory leadership have drawn the line at the eurosceptics' latest demand.

"Clearly a single market or a free trade area would not work on that basis. Even the Swiss or Norwegian arrangement with the European Union couldn't work on that basis," Hague said.

Jamaat remains

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Although almost all top leaders of the alliance attended the meeting, no other BNP leader was there.

In the meeting, alliance leaders discussed their failure to resist the "one-sided" January 5 election and wage tougher movement in the capital.

Khaleda also lambasted top BNP policymakers, including Dhaka city leaders, for their inactivity.

The alliance partners enquired Khaleda of diplomats "failure" to stop the government from holding the January 5 election.

An alliance leader drew Khaleda's attention on diplomats' presence in Sunday's oath taking of the PM and ministers at Bangabhaban, said a meeting source.

In response, the BNP chief said diplomats did not go there to congratulate the new government. "They rather went to express their concern centring the farcical election," an alliance leader quoted Khaleda as saying.

Jamaat's working council member Redwan Ullah Shahedi, Jamiat-e-Ulamaye Islam acting secretary general Shahinur Pasha, Khelafat Majlish Secretary General Ahmed Abdul Quader, Liberal Democratic Party Chairmen Oli Ahmed, Islami Oikya Jote Chairmen Abdul Latif Nezami, Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chairman Andaleev Rahman, Bangladesh Labour Party chief Mustafizur Rahman Iran, Jatiya Gonotantrik Party President Safiul Alam Pradhan, Bangladesh Kalyan Party Chairman Syed Mohammad Ibrahim, Islamic party chairman Abdul Mobin, National People's Party Chairman Sheikh Shawkat Hossen Nilu, National Democratic Party chief Golam Murtoza, Muslim League chief AHM Kamruzzaman Khan, National Awami Party Sheikh Anwarul Haq and Democratic League General Secretary Saifuddin Moni, among others were present in the meeting.

Mysterious fire

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It took nine fire engines an hour to douse the flames. Two garment workers sustained minor injuries trying to put out the fire.

Fire brigade could not say how the fire began but Sentu Talukdar, general manager (admin) of the factory, suspected foul play.

Sentu said the factory closed for the day around 5:00pm and there were only a few senior officials and security guards on the first and second floors.

Habibur Rahman, a marketing official of the factory, told The Daily Star, "We tried to douse the fire for 20 minutes but failed. It was spreading fast and we had to get out," he said.

Anwar quits

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Majority of JU teachers under the banners of Jute and Shikkhak-Shikkharthi-Karmarata Karmachari Oikya Forum had been demanding Prof Anwar's removal since February last year.

They accused him of committing irregularities in teachers' recruitment, spoiling teacher-student relations, delivering unwelcome words to teachers and misbehaving with them, letting BCL men attack the agitating teachers and misusing university funds.

In November last year, agitating teachers waged a movement demanding execution of the chancellor's directives to hold the VC panel election.

The chancellor issued four directives asking the JU authority to arrange a VC panel election soon, as teachers had kept Prof Anwar confined to his university residence for several days.

In the face of relentless protests by teachers-students, a team of police escorted Prof Anwar out of the campus on December 5 last year.

On December 16, agitating teachers forced Prof Anwar to leave the campus as per their earlier decision of not letting him enter there.

Since then Anwar had been carrying out his duties from a rented house in the capital's Uttara.

Plant 50 trees

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Council, filed the case on March 8 last year against Majid and 21 others for cutting down seven trees.

The accused felled those trees to block the road from Abader Hat to Rajarpur on March 3 during an anti-government programme, Assistant Attorney General Gazi Md Mamun-ur Rashid told The Daily Star. Police arrested Majid on September 9.

ADB says China and Japan should tackle pollution together

AFP, Hong Kong

China and Japan should put aside their diplomatic differences and find common ground in protecting the environment, the Asian Development Bank said yesterday.

Takehiko Nakao, ADB's president, said China could learn from Japan's historical record in cleaning up its once heavily polluted environment.

"The area of environment is a good area of cooperation between these two countries," he told AFP in Hong Kong where he was visiting for the Asian Financial Forum.

"Japan had serious air and water pollution in the late 1960s and in the 1970s and there were so many laws enacted and there were so many actions taken," Nakao said, adding that China could learn from Japan's experience.

Though China's economy is one of the fastest growing in the world, it is plagued by major environmental problems associated with the pace of its industrial growth.

Dense, acrid smog shrouded China's commercial hub Shanghai and other eastern cities last month, delaying flights and spurring sales of face masks.

And levels of PM 2.5 -- tiny particles considered particularly hazardous to health

-- hit as high as 24 times the World Health Organization's safety guidelines.

Nakao said Japan could share its green expertise with China such as renewable energy technologies and innovations in low-emission hybrid vehicles.

He also said Chinese officials were very serious about the country's environmental issues, but urged swift implementation of regulations to lower pollution.

Asia's economy "cannot be sustained," Nakao warned, if nothing is done to address the problem of pollution.

Diplomatic relations between Tokyo and Beijing cooled in 2012 in the wake of a dispute over an East China Sea island chain.

The Manila-based ADB in October urged the two nations, along with neighbours South Korea and Mongolia, to set up a climate research network and an emissions trading scheme.

A carbon trading market could see the countries hit their greenhouse gas emission targets at a "significantly lower cost than acting alone", it said at the time.

As an export-oriented industrial powerhouse, the East Asia region accounts for 30 percent of the world's total energy-related greenhouse gas emissions, the bank said.

Three suspected rebels killed in Indian Kashmir police

AFP, Srinagar

Indian security forces killed three suspected rebels in restive Kashmir yesterday during an ongoing gun battle, police said.

Soldiers and police special forces cordoned off a village northwest of the main city of Srinagar, on suspicion that rebels were hiding inside, sparking the mid-afternoon gun battle, a police officer said.

The battle at Dangerpora village just outside the town of Sopore, 45 kilometres (28 miles) from Srinagar, was still going on, police superintendent Abdul Qayoom told AFP.

"We have seen three bodies so far. Two more (rebels) could still be engaged in fighting," Qayoom said.

The firefight comes one week after militants killed a senior counter-insurgency police officer and wounded three others in the same area.

Chinese boost for new govt

FROM PAGE 1

Emerging from the meeting, the US, EU and Canadian envoys in Dhaka strongly condemned the recent violence, particularly the attacks on minorities.

They said the acts of violence were unacceptable, and called upon the BNP and its allies to shun hartal and blockade.

They also urged the government to give enough political space to the opposition.

Dan Mozena, US ambassador in Dhaka, told reporters, "My country's position is very clear. We are disappointed by the election, as we feel it did not credibly reflect the will of Bangladeshi people."

He, however, said, "We are very pleased that seemingly both sides are looking ahead for dialogue. We hope the dialogue will lead to an election as soon as possible."

Mozena stressed the need for creating an environment conducive to dialogue and the holding of an inclusive election.

The US Ambassador also hoped that both sides would take measures to create that congenial environment.

Urging the BNP to avoid programmes like hartal and blockade, Mozena said acts of violence are not acceptable, and those against the minorities are most deplorable.

It is the government's responsibility to give the opposition political space and allow it to hold rallies and processions. And the opposition is also obligated to use that space peacefully, he said.

Mozena said the government should allow the opposition activists free access to their party offices, and also release the political detainees.

EU Ambassador William Hanna said, "Bangladeshi people didn't get the opportunity to vote and exercise fully their democratic rights."

Hanna said it was very important that a condition was created for a dialogue to take

place for holding transparent, inclusive and credible elections.

Earlier, Canadian High Commissioner Heather Cruden called for putting a stop to violence, saying it cannot be a political tool.

She was pleased that the BNP had suspended its agitation programmes, and said it would help create a space to engage the political parties in dialogue.

Meeting sources said some diplomats wanted to know whether the BNP would sever ties with the Jamaat-e-Islami.

The BNP leaders said Jamaat is not a permanent component of the BNP-led alliance and the BNP's relations with the Jamaat is strategic.

They also mentioned that the Jamaat was a partner in the Awami League-led combine that launched a movement in 1994 for introducing the caretaker government system.

Video clips of "police action on opposition men" and low turnout of voters in the January 5 election were screened at the meeting.

The diplomats were provided with discs containing the video clips and also newspaper clippings on low voter turnout.

Envoys of the UK, France, Brazil, South Korea, China, Japan, India, Pakistan, Australia, Germany, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka and Nepal also attended the meeting.

BNP leaders Reaz Rahman, Abdul Moeen Khan, Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury and Sabihuddin Ahmed were also present.

Meanwhile, Dr Margaret Chan, director general of World Health Organization, congratulated Hasina on her re-election as PM.

Chan said she and her colleagues would stand ready to support the efforts of the prime minister of Bangladesh, according to



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