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**India's efforts at containing Polio set exemplary standards
Pakistan delegation on health comes to learn from Indian experiences**

Special Assistant to Prime Minister of Pakistan and Focal Person on Polio Eradication, Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali today called upon the Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad. Accompanied by a high-level delegation of Pakistan Government's health officials, Ms. Wazir Ali was here to primarily discuss the key initiatives that helped India stop poliovirus transmission.

Addressing the delegation, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad noted that India and Pakistan share numerous similarities and hence concerns too about basic health indicators about maternal and child health, challenges of health services in government sector, shortage of doctors and other health professionals. Shri Azad however said that recent success of containing Polio has been a morale booster and gives hope that even the coverage under routine immunization programme can be widened to reach out to each and every child ensuring better health prospects. Shri Azad said the Polio success can be largely attributed to the unwavering commitment shown for the cause at the highest echelons. He said the Central government has ensured that adequate domestic funding, to the tune of more than 12000 crore rupees, as also other logistic arrangements are readily made available to the States notwithstanding the fact that Health is a State subject. Apprising the delegation of the magnitude of the task, he informed that every National Immunization Day in India deals with more than 17 crore children. The Pulse Polio campaigns have involved nearly 24 lakh volunteers, 1.5 lakh supervisors apart from efficient surveillance mechanisms, innovative communication strategies to overcome resistance and now Rapid Response Teams for continued preparedness and swift response. The Minister also invited the Pakistani delegation to find time to look at other national programmes being conducted by the Ministry.

The nine-member delegation led by Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali expressed appreciation for the progress made by India in fighting polio over the last two years despite challenges. Recognizing the similarities in issues faced by both the nations in reaching the high-risk groups including migrant population, Ms Shahnaz Wazir Ali said the strategies adopted by the Indian health authorities and partners in India can serve as guidelines for health interventions in any polio endemic country. "Over 75 per cent of the polio cases in Pakistan are among the migrant Pashtun community. We are keen to learn from India's experience of tracking, mobilizing and immunizing the migrant population," Ms Ali said.

The delegation also had detailed discussion with senior Health Ministry officials led by Ms Anuradha Gupta, Additional Secretary and Mission Director National Rural Health Mission and representatives of partner organizations. Prominent among others in the Pakistan delegation are Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, Member National Task Force for Polio, Mr Babar Muhammad and Dr

Altaf Bosan, National Coordinator, Prime Minister's Polio Monitoring Cell.

Pakistan is among the three remaining polio endemic countries in the world along with Afghanistan and Nigeria. In 2012 so far, Pakistan has reported 15 cases of polio, a sharp decline from 198 cases in 2011. With its intense emergency eradication programme, Pakistan has reduced cases by more than half this year compared to the same time last year.

India was struck off the list of polio endemic countries in February 2012 after completing over a year without any fresh case of polio. The unprecedented progress in India, considered the most difficult place globally to stop polio, is being cited by the global experts as an example that the present strategies work if implemented with full zest and earnest.

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