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'Victory' as 11 nations polio free

NEW DELHI: The World Health Organisation has officially certified India and 10 other Asian countries free of polio – a milestone lauded as a “momentous victory” over an ancient scourge.

The southeast Asian region, which includes India but excludes Afghanistan and Pakistan, was certified by a panel of experts after the countries went three years without reporting a single new case.

The WHO said the certification meant 80 per cent of the world's population lived in polio-free regions and was an important step towards global eradication of the crippling disease.

“This is a momentous victory for the millions of health workers who have worked with governments, non-governmental organisations, civil society and international partners to eradicate polio from the region,” said WHO southeast Asia regional director Poonam Khetrpal Singh.

There are only three countries where polio is still endemic — Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan. The countries certified were India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, South Korea, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and East Timor.