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Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan during his recent US visit, held a four hour long meeting with top experts at the world famous Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at Atlanta.

During the talks, the health minister highlighted the annual visitation of Japanese encephalitis and acute encephalitis syndrome (AES) which leads to heavy loss of life in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The minister, who is on an official tour of the US, said, "Though I have personally visited the affected areas of the two states recently and overseen an immunisation drive, I feel that CDC's research assistance could go a long way in understanding the root causes (etiology) of AES which is still a mystery. So I made a request to Dr Tom Frieden, director in this regard.

Dr Harsh Vardhan also discussed the possibility of CDC giving technical assistance for development of early warning, epidemic preparedness and response, development of field friendly rapid diagnostic kits and bilateral cooperation for development of Dengue vaccine.

The minister visited the Emergency Operations Centre of CDC. Dr Steve Monroe, one of the senior functionaries, highlighted the emerging and zoonotic infectious diseases which are of grave concern before the world community.

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During the talks, the problems faced by India in combating multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB were raised. The CDC's scientists had identified major problems in India as being poor health coverage, inadequate data on the rising MDR cases and cases of hospital employees catching the infection.

There was much focus on tobacco control, environmental and occupational medicine. The Minister and the CDC specialists exchanged views on programs for diabetes, hypertension, ending the culture of physical inactivity and on the need for strengthening global health security.

Dr Harsh Vardhan requested Dr Frieden that the CDC carry out an objective assessment of India's TB control program. The CDC director suggested that the Indian government strengthen the program's management at the national, state and district levels.

The health minister reiterated his intention of making health for all a social movement in India. Dr Frieden responded by saying that the excellent social mobilisation network set up for the pulse polio mission in India should not be dismantled. Rather it should be used for achieving 100 percent immunisation coverage for all vaccine preventable diseases, with a special focus on measles elimination and rubella control for the near future.

The CDC delegation shared information with the visiting Indian minister on research progress in a variety of diseases. The future could see more collaboration between India and this premier institute.

The health minister announced that it had been decided that CDC would designate a doctor who would work for better coordination of Indian projects that the organisation handles, by acting as a communication bridge between the Director and India's Health Minister.