



JPNN|Pakistani authorities have arrested hundreds of parents

who are refusing to vaccinate their children against polio, officials have said, as community opposition and Taliban threats block efforts to eradicate the crippling disease in one of its last strongholds. Frustrated officials turned to police to deal with parents influenced by some clerics who decry government vaccination campaigns as a tool to undermine their Islamic values, according to Pervez Kamal, director of health for Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa region in the northwest. "There was no other option. We have run so many awareness campaigns for the parents and general masses that there is no harm in the vaccine, but to no avail," Kamal said on Tuesday. Pakistan reported 306 polio cases last year, out of the 359 cases recorded worldwide by the Global Eradicate Polio Initiative. Kamal said on Tuesday that a list of "chronic" refusal cases has been prepared and warrants issued for more than 1,000 parents. **"We have decided to take it**

"So far, we have arrested 471 parents and efforts are under way to capture others," a police officer in Peshawar said. Once a common childhood disease, polio - which can cause paralysis and mostly affects children under age five - has declined by 99 percent in the last 25 years with aggressive vaccination campaigns, according to the WHO. Polio has made a comeback in Pakistan since the Taliban, seeking to topple the state and establish strict Islamic rule, began targeting government health workers conducting vaccine campaigns. Sixty-four people have been killed in attacks on polio teams and their security escorts since 2012, when the Taliban banned vaccinations in areas they controlled. Some Pakistanis are also against vaccinations because they believe they are part of a Western plot to sterilise children. The government conducts a national campaign against polio every month. Data from the first campaign of the year shows that nearly 60,000 children had been missed due to parental refusals. A government official, Riaz Mehsud, said there had been more than 14,000 refusals alone in Peshawar. "We have decided to take it a challenge and make sure that every child gets

vaccinated," Mehsud said. Source: Agencies