

Stop prejudice against AIDS patients, homosexuals: PM

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Monday called for more sensitivity towards HIV/AIDS patients as well as homosexuals and commercial sex workers to win the battle against the dreaded disease.

'The fact that many of the vulnerable social groups, be they sex workers or homosexuals or drug users, face great social prejudice has made the task of identifying AIDS victims and treating them very difficult,' said Manmohan Singh.

'If we have to win this fight against HIV/AIDS, we have to create a more tolerant social environment. One need not condone socially unacceptable or medically inadvisable sexual practices in seeking a more tolerant approach to the problem,' he emphasised.

The prime minister was speaking after releasing the report of the Commission on AIDS in Asia entitled 'Redefining AIDS in Asia: Crafting an Effective Response' here.

'It is in the interests of the entire society that everyone afflicted by AIDS wins the battle against it. They deserve and have the right to live lives of dignity and self-respect.

He said efforts must be on to remove legislative barriers that hinder access of high-risk groups to services.

'There is a proposal for a law, which would penalize anyone discriminating against an AIDS infected person from access to employment, property or other services. This should be given serious consideration,' the prime minister said.

The report warned that around 10 million Asians would be HIV positive by 2020 unless effective steps are put in place.

'By then (2020), AIDS is also expected to claim an estimated 500,000 lives annually if governments do not change policies,' said the report commissioned by UNAIDS, Unicef and UNDP.

Currently India is home to 2.5 million HIV/AIDS patients.

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