

## PM for law to stop discrimination of AIDS patients

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Monday said the HIV/AIDS situation in India was "not alarming" even as he advocated for a stringent law to stop discrimination against AIDS patients and other "vulnerable social groups".

"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," Manmohan Singh said.

"We should work to remove legislative barriers that hinder access of high-risk groups to services," he said.

"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.

'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.'

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

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

He said the epidemic has brought into focus "many of our prevalent social prejudices. The overwhelming number of cases is due to transmission through the sexual route.

"Strategies for tackling it, therefore, require more inclusive and less judgmental social approaches to questions of public health and personal hygiene.

"This must begin by addressing the issue of the social stigma that attaches to those who carry the AIDS virus. They deserve and have the right to live lives of dignity and self-respect.

"I do believe that growing consciousness about HIV/AIDS is forcing us to address these issues but the speed of the response need to be greatly accelerated," he added.

He, however, said: "It is a matter of some satisfaction that the situation in India is not as alarming as it was portrayed to be some years ago. But there is no scope for complacency.

"We cannot be satisfied with the status quo and you must therefore strive to improve the effectiveness of prevalent strategies as well as the programme content.

"I appeal to all medical practitioners, hospitals and blood banks across the country to adopt zero risk and best practice methods for blood collection and blood transfusion. Every citizen must have complete confidence in our blood safety practices," the prime minister emphasised.

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

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