UNAIDS Progress Report

What is the issue?

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- India has made good progress in prevention and treatment of HIV-AIDS.
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- But reducing stigma against the disease is vital to further the progress.
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What are the worldwide trends in HIV treatment?

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- A report of “Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS” (UNAIDS) notes that rapid progress has been made regarding HIV in the past decade.
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- Notably, 75% of the people with HIV know their status and 21.7 million are taking treatment to delay the progress of the disease.
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- HIV incidences have reduced worldwide (particularly Africa) and anti-retroviral therapy is also being provided to many patients worldwide.
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What is the status in India?

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- India too brought down the number of new cases and deaths by 27% and 56%, respectively, between 2010 and 2017, which is a significant achievement.
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- Notably, tuberculosis (TB) is the biggest killer of HIV patients and India is now capable of treating over 90% of the notified TB patients for HIV.
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- Social stigma surrounding AIDS-infected people in India is still high but this is said to be declining slowly with increased awareness campaigns.
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- Surveys indicate that the number of people unwilling to buy vegetables from a person with HIV came down from over 30% to 27.6%.
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- In spite of all this progress, with 2.1 million cases, India is among the largest burden countries in the world and there are critical gaps in its present strategy.
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What are the gaps in India’s approach?

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- A country’s laws can legitimise stigma and incentivise the harassment of certain groups that are at the highest risk of HIV.
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- Notably, homosexuals, drugs addicts, and sex workers are particularly vulnerable to AIDS, and their fate becomes more dismal due to social stigma.
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- Indian laws that criminalise “homosexuality (sec.377) and several aspects of sex work (Immoral Traffic Act)”, only aggravate their woes.
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- Fear of prosecution under such laws prevents homosexual men, drug-users and sex workers from seeking HIV screening and treatment.
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- As a result, these groups lag behind average treatment rates, although their requirements are higher.
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What is the way ahead?

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- If India is serious about tackling HIV, it must find ways to reach out vulnerable groups, even if changing the law outright is not an option.
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- Sensitising police personnel and educating female sex workers can greatly reduce arbitrary police raids and arrests.

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- Right to health is universal and India must ensure that nobody is left behind.
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Source: The Hindu

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