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## Condom shortage hampers India's AIDS fight

**NEW DELHI** — Indian sex worker Shaalu is using fewer condoms when she meets her clients in New Delhi — not out of choice, but because a funding crunch and procurement delays in the state-run HIV/AIDS programme have disrupted supplies of free condoms.

"I am more scared of HIV now," said Shaalu, 32, who often resorts to unsafe sex as free condoms are scarce and she is hard pressed for funds to repay a debt of US\$4,500 (RM19,345).

India gives free condoms under its community-based AIDS prevention programme that targets high-risk groups like sex workers. That strategy, the World Bank estimates, helped avert three million HIV infections between 1995 and this year.

But government data released last week showed about two-thirds of India's 31 state AIDS units had less than a month's supply of condoms, some only enough for a few days.

In Maharashtra, the stock of free condoms was one-eighth of its monthly requirement of 3.3 million condoms on Oct 17.

The shortages come after Prime Minister Narendra Modi slashed federal AIDS funding in February by a fifth. He hoped states would fill the gap, but the cut came as regional AIDS units faced bureaucratic payment delays. — Reuters