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# Indian drug giant Cipla cuts prices of anti-cancer drugs

**NEW DELHI:** Indian generic drug giant Cipla said on Friday it had slashed by up to 76 per cent prices of three anti-cancer medicines in what it called a "humanitarian" move and promised to cut the costs of more products.

There are 2.5 million cases of cancer diagnosed in India each year, according to the World Health Organisation, with most patients receiving inadequate treatment as drugs are priced beyond their reach.

"Business is business, but it has to be linked with one's social responsibilities. This initiative of price reduction is a humanitarian approach by Cipla to support cancer patients," company chairman Y.K. Hamied said.

"This is the beginning — we have done it with three products, we will do it, I hope, with many more," Hamied said, adding that Cipla had around two dozen anti-cancer drugs in its range.

Cipla cut the price of Soranib, a generic version of German giant Bayer's blockbuster kidney cancer drug, Nexavar, by 76 per cent, and will sell it at 6,840 rupees (RM389) for a monthly dose, down from 28,000 rupees.

It also said the lung-cancer drug Gefiticip, originally produced by AstraZeneca, would be priced at 4,250 rupees, down by over half, and it cut by three-quarters the price of brain-cancer drug Temoside, originally made by Schering, to 5,000 rupees.

"Drugs constitute a significant proportion of the overall cost of cancer treatment and a reduction in costs can greatly relieve the burden," Hamied said.

Cipla makes its cancer drugs at its plant in the southern state of Goa that has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration.

The family-led company first hit headlines in 2001 when it offered to supply life-saving triple therapy

AIDS drug cocktails at prices sharply below those of multinational firms, with Hamied saying the move was for "social reasons".

Competition among generic manufacturers in India, known as the "pharmacy to the developing world", has reduced HIV drug prices from US\$10,000 per person per year to US\$150, Medecins Sans Frontieres says.

Cipla has been pushing the Indian government to allow widespread use of so-called "compulsory licences" for production of life-saving patented drugs to overcome barriers for people in accessing affordable medicines.

Compulsory licences are allowed under the World Trade Organization's TRIPS Agreement, which governs trade and intellectual property rules.

Analysts said Cipla's move could prompt a price war in the 15-billion-rupee Indian drug market — challenging multinationals which sell costly patented medicine and Indian firms whose generic range is less expensive but not as cheap as Cipla's. **AFP**



A **pharmacist** standing near a display of **Cipla products** in Mumbai. Cipla makes cancer drugs at its plant in the southern state of Goa.