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# Myanmar healthcare needs cash injection

**PATIENTS TURNED AWAY:** Hospitals on life support because of excessive army spending

**YANGON**

**S**TARVED of funds and medicine during decades of military rule, doctors in a clinic here offer their usual advice to one HIV patient: come back when you're sicker.

Scarce anti-retroviral drugs are given only to those with the advanced form of the illness.

"If I don't get the treatment, I'm worried the disease will get worse," a 47-year-old farmer said at the clinic run by charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) after she was diagnosed with the virus.

During almost half a century of military rule, which officially ended last year, the junta generously funnelled cash to the armed forces, but presided over one of the world's lowest outlays on public health.

Non-governmental organisations and patients using their own money have scrambled to plug the gap, but with limited success given the scale of demand from the estimated 60 million population.

"Patients are upset, it is difficult to tell them, but we cannot refer them anywhere. The government doesn't have it (medicine) either," said Soe Yadanar, one of four doctors at the clinic in a poor neighbourhood here, which has more than 2,000 patients.

"We tell them they can come back later. But they know the situation in Myanmar."

MSF said only a third of the 120,000 people living with HIV in Myanmar, who under World Health Organisation standards should receive anti-retrovirals, were being treated.

The shortage of medicine extends to tuberculosis and malaria.

The country had a high number of doctors but lacked medicines and wider support systems to treat

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patients, said MSF head of mission Peter Paul de Groot. quadrupled the health budget for this year and next.

And while the state press bur-nishes the government's image as a provider for its people, with pic-tures of brand-new hospitals, the reality is markedly different. But there are fears the rever-berations of the global economic crisis may mean donors are re-luctant to reach for their wallets.

**AFP**

Reformist President Thein Sei