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Zuma breaks taboo in launching SAfrican HIV tests

JOHANNESBURG: South African President Jacob Zuma revealed his HIV status Sunday as he launched a scaled-up counselling and testing campaign in the world's worst affected country.

"After careful consideration, I have decided to share my test results with South Africans," said Zuma, who said he had tested negative recently.

"The purpose is to promote openness and to eradicate the silence and stigma that accom-

panies this epidemic," he said.

Zuma, who told a court in 2006 when charged with raping a HIV-positive woman that he had showered rather than worn a condom to ward off the risk of HIV, revealed he had been taking regular HIV tests.

"My April results, like the three previous ones, registered a negative outcome for the HI virus," the 68-year-old Zuma told thousands of people who attended the event at

Natalspruit hospital, formerly Katlehong hospital, east of Johannesburg.

However, Zuma said that by disclosing his status his aim was not to put pressure on any citizen to do the same.

"Anyone's HIV status is private and confidential. Disclosure is an individual decision. We must respect the decisions of those who choose to keep their status confidential, whether positive or negative," Zuma said.

The campaign, which hopes to test 15 million people by the end of June 2011, is aimed at providing anti-AIDS drugs to 80 percent of South Africans in need of treatment. The UN estimates 5.7 million people in South Africa, out of a population of 48 million, are HIV positive.

Zuma said the health department's 4,300 clinics and hospitals were ready to provide HIV counselling and testing services to all. - AFP