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India PM hails success in halving HIV infections

NEW DELHI: India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday hailed the country's success in slashing new HIV/AIDS infections by half in the past decade.

"Our HIV/AIDS programme can justifiably claim a measure of success," he told a conference in New Delhi on the disease, but added "there should be no room for complacency" with an estimated 2.3 million Indians still living with HIV.

"With the introduction of antiretroviral treatment, HIV has become a chronic but manageable health condition," Singh said.

But while Singh was praising government efforts to combat the virus, around 100 people living with HIV protested outside the ministry of health saying efforts were insufficient.

So-called "first-line" antiretroviral therapy (ART) - a cocktail of drugs to slow the effects of the virus on the body's immune system - has been widely available and free of charge in India's public health system since 2004.

But more expensive "second-line" ART is also free, although access to it is limited to just a few centres across the country.

"India's testing and treatment for HIV/AIDS have increased their reach, Singh said.

Now, Indian health workers are focusing on prevention of transmission from infected pregnant women to their newborn children, making it a "priority area," Singh said. - AFP