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Outrage as India minister labels gay sex a 'disease'

NEW DELHI: Indian gay rights activists voiced shock and outrage yesterday over public comments by the health minister who said that homosexuality is unnatural and a "disease" brought to India by foreigners.

Speaking at a national meeting Monday of district and mayoral leaders on HIV/AIDS prevention, the minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, stated that gay sex was "unnatural and not good

for India."

"It is a disease which has come from other countries," he added.

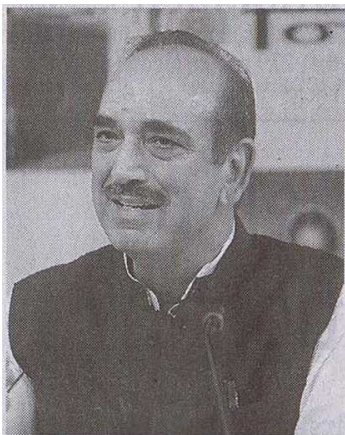
Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the president of the ruling Congress party also attended the meeting, but had left before Azad spoke.

Coming almost two years to the day after a landmark Delhi High Court ruling that decriminalised homosexuality, his

comments prompted a storm of protest and calls for an immediate retraction.

"I think the minister needs to apologise immediately. He has insulted the entire homosexual community," said Mohnish Kabir Malhotra, a publicist and gay rights activist.

"Homosexuality is very much a part of nature and it even finds references in religious texts. To call it unnatural is absurd," Malhotra told AFP. — AFP



Ghulam Nabi Azad