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Discrimination fuels rise of HIV in Philippines

MANILA: Discrimination against homosexuals and people infected with HIV is contributing to the rapid rise of the incurable disease in the Philippines, officials and health activists said yesterday.

Despite the country's tolerant image, people with HIV are being ostracised by their communities and even by doctors, the officials said at a forum on the rights of infected people.

Among the forms of discrimination are people being tested without their knowledge, test results being leaked and infected people being detained, quarantined and even forced to leave their homes.

"AIDS is the modern day leprosy," said Edu Razon, head of Pinoy Plus, an association of people infect-

ed with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

As a result, many people hide the fact that they are infected or even avoid testing outright, making it harder to prevent the spread of the disease. "People don't want to be tested because of the stigma. There is this fatalistic notion -- they'd rather not know," Razon told the forum.

The number of HIV/AIDS cases detected in the Philippines, which has a population of 94 million people, is still relatively small with only 9,669 cases recorded since 1984, health department figures show.

But the Philippines is one of only seven countries listed by UNAIDS (the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) to have suffered rising infection rates in 2010.- AFP