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Victory against AIDS within reach, says UN

> 'Killer disease could be wiped out by 2030'

GENEVA: Global AIDS-related deaths and new HIV infections have fallen by over a third in a decade, raising hopes of beating the killer disease by 2030, the United Nations said on Wednesday.

With more than half of the 35 million people living with HIV unaware they are infected, the battle is far from over however, said Michel Sidibe, head of UNAIDS.

"If we are smart and scale up fast by 2020, we'll be on track to end the epidemic by 2030, so that AIDS is no longer a public health threat," he told reporters.

"We have a fragile window of opportunity, because what we do over the next five years will determine the next 15."

"Working together, ending the AIDS epidemic is possible, and it will take leaving no one behind."

Africa remains the hardest-hit continent, with 1.1 million deaths last year, 1.5 million new infections, and 24.7 million people living with HIV.

UNAIDS said the battle needed to focus squarely on 15 countries which accounted for three quarters of new infections.

Nine are in Africa: Cameroon, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

But the spotlight is also on Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, and the United States - where black women, Hispanics and

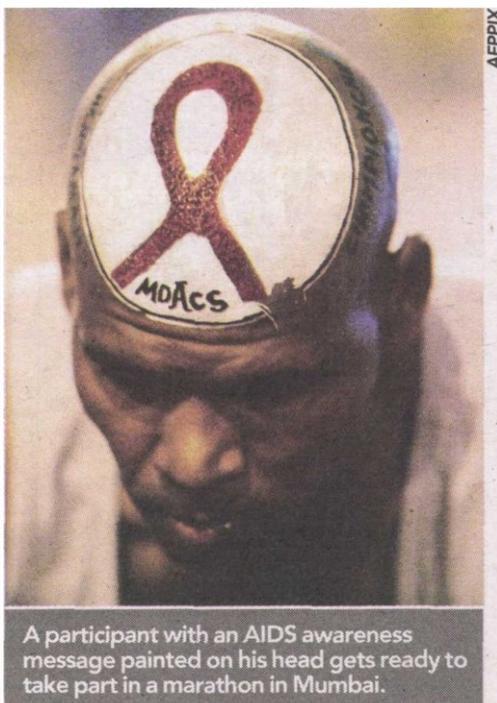
young gay men are most affected.

Globally, the report said 35 million people were living with the virus last year, up from 34.6 million the previous year.

A major problem, Sidibe said, is that 19 million do not know that they are HIV-positive.

To beat the disease, testing must be more widely available, given that tardy diagnosis is a key problem.

Global efforts to increase the number of people getting access to anti-retroviral drugs have advanced fast, with 12.9 million now receiving treatment compared with 5.2 million in 2009, UNAIDS said. - Agencies



A participant with an AIDS awareness message painted on his head gets ready to part in a marathon in Mumbai.