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Feachem Speaks Out on AIDS in India

India has the world's largest number of HIV-infected people, Global Fund Executive Director Richard Feachem said during a visit to India last month.

According to UN data, the number of people with HIV in India is 5.1 million, behind South Africa with 5.6 million. But, "I don't believe in the official statistics. India is already in first place," Feachem said.

"I am happy to be wrong. But I think I will be proved right, soon," he said. "There are large gaps in AIDS surveillance in India. So how can you say there are only 5.1 million infections?" he asked, adding, "The India epidemic is on an African trajectory ... It is a grave, ticking time bomb."

India's response, he said, is "way short of what is necessary to turn around the epidemic."

In a press conference a few days later in Tamil Nadu, the Indian state with the highest numbers of HIV/AIDS cases, the health minister, Anbumani Ramadoss, said there is no reason to get alarmed over the number of AIDS patients, as only 0.5 per cent of the population is infected.

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