

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

CORPORATE ART CENTRES

India Inc taking to care of AIDS-affected in a big way

Our Bureau
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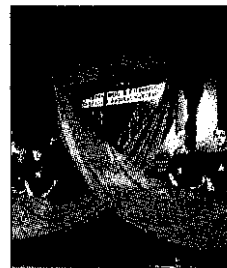
CORPORATE India is beginning to take baby steps towards dealing with the HIV/AIDS menace. While 1,000 companies have agreed to implement an HIV/AIDS policy mandating awareness and non-discrimination at workplace, corporates are now also setting up anti-retroviral therapy (ART) centres for care and treatment of affected people. About 1,000 member companies of industry chamber CII including the Tata group companies, ITC, Pepsi, Ford and DCM Shriram Consolidated have signed its HIV/AIDS policy.

The policy mandates companies to provide a safe and healthy work environment, educate employees on the HIV/AIDS, maintain confidentiality about HIV-positive employees and ensure that they are not discriminated against at work. India Inc is also

moving beyond awareness to care and treatment of infected people. Cement company ACC has already set up an ART centre at Wadi in Karnataka, which provides testing, counselling and treatment to patients. It has also signed an MoU with Christian Medical College, Vellore, for another ART centre. Ballarpur Industries (BILT) is setting up an ART centre in Chandrapur in Maharashtra, while Godrej & Boyce would set up one at Vikhroli as an extension to the Godrej Memorial Hospital.

"Our aim is to get 100 companies to set up ART centres across the country," said CII chief mentor Tarun Das. Following a public-private partnership approach, National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) on Friday signed an MoU with BILT and ACC to supply free anti-retroviral drugs to their ART centres.

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HELPING HAND

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NACO also released its operational guidelines for an ART centre, including the manpower requirements and the training required, to help companies set up such centres. India Inc is also training employees to conduct HIV/AIDS awareness sessions at the workplace. HLL, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, SRF group, BILT, Apollo Tyres and Transport Corporation of India are some of the companies which have partnered the International Labour Organisation (ILO), whereby ILO trains the companies' employees on disseminating information about HIV/AIDS at the workplace. Corporates are also educating truckers about prevention, control and

care at their factories and have also tied up with the state AIDS control societies for awareness sessions for truckers.

The CII has launched the access to care and treatment (ACT) project, along with four NGO partners, to build awareness and get the corporate sector more involved in dealing with the issue. "With the CII coming forward with the ACT Project, we are now planning to set up a number of ART centres over a period of time," said BILT CMD Gautam Thapar. There are about 5.2 million HIV/AIDS affected people in the country and according to a study by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), infection reduce a household's income by as much as 10%.