**Indian cases set to rise**

India the world's second most populous nation, will have the largest number of Aids sufferers by the turn of the century and ignorance about the disease remains rampant, experts say.

According to a UNDP report, 900 of every 100,000 Indian adults will be HIV-positive and 820 of every 100,000 will suffer from full blown Aids by the year 2000, taking the number of infected Indians to some five million.

"It's a guessing game," a top health expert said on condition of anonymity. "The number could even swell to 10 million or above." Government officials, hitherto squeamish about the subject, have begun fighting the epidemic on a large scale but efforts have been strapped by poor infrastructure, taboos and a misconception that Indians were immune.

"The first Aids case was detected in 1986 in Madras but there may have been thousands of cases already in the country," said Mr Peter Godwin, head of the UN regional project on HIV and Development for Asia and the Pacific.

Mr Godwin said the early· anti-Aids campaigns were hindered by the notion that it was a "decadent" foreign disease, transported to Indian soil and unlikely to have a significant impact on the country's 927 million people.

The National Aids Control Organization (NACO), India's premier anti-Aids body set up by the Health Ministry in 1989, says the main constraints are not lack of

funds but their poor utilization and a tendency to sweep the disease under the carpet.

"Only 30 to 40 per cent of the 100 million dollars Aids budget has been utilized," said Mr Durgadas Sengupta, a NACO consultant.

"The World Bank has released 85 million dollars for use till 1997 but the funding may stop if we cannot use the money. "

Mr Godwin said only two to three per cent of the estimated three million HIV positive people in India knew they were infected.

"Three million people are going to die by 2000," he said. The National Family Health Survey 1995 found that only 36 percent of women interviewed in New Delhi had heard of the disease despite relatively high literacy rates and an extensive media campaign in the Indian capital. (AFP)

**Major drive by activists**

AIDS awareness campaigners distributed condoms and leaflets in Jakarta's

Kramat Tunggak red light district today, but Islamic leaders condemned the handout of condoms.

Non-governmental groups gave out condoms, T-shirts emblazoned with "Careful, Condoms Needed" and leaflets to prostitutes and their customers in Kramat Tunggak to mark World Aids Day, witnesses said.

Their action came the day after a meeting on Acquired Immune Deficiency

Syndrome by the Indonesian Council of Ulemas (MUI), the country's highest Moslem authority, objected to the use of free condoms in the anti-AIDS drive,

the Pikiran Rakyat daily said.

The meeting in Bandung issued a five-point statement that called on followers to avoid "sinful actions" that may spread Aids, treat Aids patients as humans with dignity, and understand the dangers of the disease.

The statement also called on the government to encourage high ethical and moral standards within the society and for Muslim scholars to cooperate in activities to prevent the spread of the disease.

The statement however, objected to mention the use of condoms as preventive means to stem the spread of Aids.

Population Minister Haryono Suyono on Wednesday called on Muslim preachers to include Aids topics during Friday Prayer sermons for the next three months.

Almost 90 percent of Indonesia's 195 million inhabitants are Muslim. (Reuter)

**Aids a top killer, says UN**

UNITED NATIONS. Friday

Aids continued to be the leading cause of death in the past year for people under 45 in the United States and Western Europe, claiming more victims than violent crime, the head of the UN anti-Aids programme said today.

"In the past year, the World Health Organisation estimates that over two million men, women and children became infected with HIV, the virus that causes Aids. And close to three-quarters of a million people who were infected years ago died an untimely death," Dr Peter Piot, a Belgian physician, told an Aids Day symposium at UN headquarters.

The epidemic had so far claimed more than four million people in what should have been their prime of life, he said.

"In the United States and Western Europe, Aids continued to be the leading cause of death for people under 45 - a bigger killer than violent crime, which gets far more media attention," he said.

Mr Piot, executive director of UNAids, which coordinates the efforts of a number of UN agencies, said experience showed that '. says had been found to care for people with HIV 'and help uninfected people remain free of the virus.

Referring to factors that created vulnerability, he said more progress was needed in achieving equal rights for women. (Reuter)