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Healing touch

WE have to be thankful for small mercies, especially in times of need. However, the lowering of the cost for drug therapy for HIV/AIDS patients from RM1,200 to RM350 a month is certainly no small matter. Although the cost is still steep, especially as the medicines are needed every month, it will alleviate somewhat the heavy financial burden on patients and their families. This, said Malaysian AIDS Council president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir, will mean more HIV-infected patients can get access to the three-in-one combination drug treatment. Thanks to the Health Ministry's amendments to the Patent Act, the much needed drugs can now be sourced at a cheaper rate from India.

This respite is yet another blessing in our fight against so dreaded an ailment. For unlike other diseases, HIV/AIDS comes with psychological baggage that makes prevention harder to realise. The bloated and stubborn social stigma that hounds the disease makes it difficult for people like Marina and her team to drum in the fact that the number of patients can be reduced if people know the real score and that the infection is not something people get because they deserve it. Despite all the good work that NGOs and the authorities are doing to educate people that it is a matter of life and death to fight this creeping epidemic on two levels, prevent and/or treat, Malaysia is still a plodder compared to countries like Vietnam and Thailand. There, they seem to have come to terms with reality. They know not to let social prejudices and taboos hamper their fight to curb the disease. We, too, must know how to harness our personal phantoms to fight bigger ones.

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