External Affairs

Can Richard Gere save India?

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If you're looking for Mr. Goodbar, he's busy taking on the AIDS pandemic in India. Richard Gere, an activist and a gentleman known for his pro-Tibet campaigns, spent 23 days there last March urging drastic measures to stop the spread of HIV. "You have not taken the issue seriously," said a breathless Gere. "The country will die if AIDS is ignored."

After spending time with the Dalai Lama in the northern town of Dharamshala, the Buddhist actor headed to New Delhi, where he organized a fashion show. He and film diva Shabana Azmi auctioned off clothing by famous Indian designers to raise money for a new AIDS awareness program. They then flew to Bombay, the city that produces the most movies in the world, for another auction of dresses worn by Bollywood stars—all in the name of creating an AIDS crisis center and funding nongovernmental AIDS service organizations. Indian AIDS activist Ashok Row Kavi, who was at the Bombay fashion show along with the glitterati, described it as "outrageously high camp."

Castigating India's prevention efforts, Gere told reporters on the last day of his visit, "This country is 15 years behind the United States as far as efforts in tackling the AIDS menace is concerned."—Gabi Horn

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