

Wednesday, December 28, 2005, Ziq'a'd 25, 1426 A.H.

# DAILY NEWS

## Govt urged to adopt a policy on HIV, AIDS control programme

By A Correspondent

KARACHI, Dec. 28: A dialogue on "National Analysis - The Challenge of HIV and AIDS in Pakistan" was held under the aegis of Pakistan National AIDS Consortium (PNAC) with the collaboration of Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) and European Union, at hotel Atrix on Tuesday.

In his welcome address, PNAC President Dr. Khalid Mahmood said that this dialogue is part of their campaign on "One Soul One Heart" the main objective of which is to mainstream the HIV and AIDS in the development initiatives of the country as well as to civil society organizations. He stressed the participants that at present there are more than 3,000 persons reportedly HIV+ in Pakistan while around 150,000 are estimated according to UNO/WFP reports. He said that generally society links HIV/AIDS with wrong sexual behaviour of people, due to which the HIV positive persons not only face the disease but also the stigma and discrimination from the community. He stressed the need to protect them from this social behaviour by enhancing awareness and realization about other reasons

which are responsible for spreading this disease, e.g. blood transfusion, re-use of syringe, etc.

While talking about media role, PPP Secretary General Owais Aslam suggested that besides emphasizing media's role in awareness building there is also a need of accountability because the figures about reported HIV+ cases are continuously on the rise. Government organizations and NGOs should also involve media at all level including the formalization of the policy so that the media can play an effective role in spreading desired information and awareness about the diseases to public. He also stressed the need for removing social stigma attached to the disease.

Dr. Saleem Azam, criticized the behaviour of doctors working in government and private hospitals who most of the time refuse to entertain any HIV+ patients. He noted with shock that even some of the doctors have a lack of knowledge also.

Dr. Qadeer Baig, National Manager, PNAC, insisted on the privacy rights of HIV+ people and stressed the need to eliminate the stigma and discrimination against these people. He said that there is dire need for sex education. While commending the role of

media in this regard, he urged the government to adopt a proper policy regarding AIDS control and provide treatment to the patients as well as to save them from social discrimination.

Shaukat Ali of Sindh AIDS Control Network, told the audience that ARV drug which is a preventive medicine for HIV+ patients has reached Pakistan and after necessary official work will be available to the patients very soon. In this connection an arrangement has been made with SIUT, Karachi.

Dr. Shahid Zafar and Abbas Hussain also shared their views and presented different suggestions regarding awareness and capacity building among the public and victims of this disease.

For the first time, an AIDS patient was presented before the media who described his social and economical problems due this ailment. "Society has very badly rejected us," he said. A representative from Trans-gender and an FSW (female sex worker) also shared their experiences and challenges which they have been facing as AIDS control workers in creating awareness about the disease in their respective communities.