

DAWN LAHORE Wednesday February 22, 2006

# METROPOLITAN

## Pakistan no more among HIV low prevalence states

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE, Feb 21: Punjab AIDS Control Programme (PACP) project director Dr Ali Razaque says Pakistan should no longer be classified as a low prevalence country as concentrated HIV epidemics has already surfaced among injecting drug users (IDUs) in different cities.

He was speaking at a seminar on "meeting the challenges of HIV and AIDS in Pakistan", organized by the Pakistan National AIDS Consortium (PNAC) in collaboration with the European Commission and Punjab AIDS Consortium (PAC) at a local hotel on Tuesday.

Dr Razaque said that the incidence of HIV and AIDS among IDUs had been recorded at 10 to 12 per cent in different cities of the country.

He said that there were around 40.3 million people infected with HIV/AIDS in the world. During last calendar year alone, he said, some 4.9 million more people got infected from the deadly virus, while around 3.1 million such

patients died.

In Pakistan, Dr Razaque said that there were estimated 100,000 people infected with the disease, while only 3,200 of them had got themselves registered, including 590 in the Punjab.

In order to tackle this growing health and social problem, he said the government had launched a five-year Enhanced HIV/AIDS Control Programme to improve the human capital with specific reference to improving the public health in the Punjab by keeping the HIV/AIDS epidemic at the current low level of below one per cent among general adult population and below five per cent among vulnerable population groups.

Under the programme, Dr Razaque said that NGOs had been engaged to work at grassroots level to increase prevalence of safe behaviour and improved availability of services for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among vulnerable population. He said the programme was also

aimed at improving knowledge and practice of HIV preventive measures, including use of high quality STI services by the general adult population. It would also strengthen capacity to effectively manage HIV/AIDS prevention programme in both public and private sectors.

Answering a question, Dr Razaque said the PACP was providing hepatitis and HIV/AIDS screening kits to all public sector blood banks to ensure safe blood transfusion. He said the government had also established a blood transfusion authority which would soon start monitoring the working of public and private sector blood banks.

PNAC national manager Qadeer Beg explained the HIV and AIDS prevalence in the country.

PNAC president Raja Khalid Mahmood, provincial manager Saeed A Mirza, NGO representatives, vulnerable groups representatives and some AIDS patients also spoke on the occasion.