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Shortcomings of Balochistan health system highlighted

By Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR, April 11: A member of the Balochistan Assembly, Rahila Durrani, on Wednesday took the concluding session of the provincial parliamentary seminar on HIV/AIDS by storm when she highlighted the state of the health services in her province.
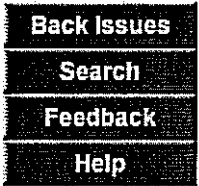
She demanded that Balochistan's health-care services be brought at par with those of the other provinces. Even though the provincial government made tall claims, even hepatitis vaccines were not available in the tertiary-care hospitals in Balochistan, she said.

Ms Durrani asked: "Why does Balochistan get the least attention whenever national policies are devised?" And pointing towards the possible reasons behind neglect of the health services in her province, she remarked: "We do not know about national health programmes and all this has turned our province into the most neglected one."

She briefed the participants on the health status of women and children in her province. She claimed that they were leading a pathetic life and needed the proper attention of policy-makers.

During her address the lawmaker time and again requested health managers to involve her province in devising national health policies so that its population could get due share in different national programmes.

The concluding session witnessed another unusual situation when the chief guest for the day, Speaker of NWFP Assembly Bakht Jehan Khan, slammed the

provincial health minister's step of changing the programme's agenda and termed the move contrary to protocol.

Mr Bakht floated the idea of arranging HIV/AIDS awareness programmes in far-flung areas to involve all community leaders.

During the first session of the day, parliamentary secretaries of all four provinces presented the HIV/AIDS situation in their respective provinces.

Dr Muzaffar Ali Shah of Punjab put the participants in a quandary when he cited two comparative studies — one conducted in 2000 confirming zero prevalence of HIV among 200 Injecting Drug Users and the other one carried out in 2005 which spoke of 20 per cent prevalence of HIV/Aids among IDUs.

He said that the two studies confirmed that the disease was spreading fast among the IDUs and other vulnerable groups.

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HIV AIDS Seminar in Pakistan

Ross Robertson, MP for Manukau East, is also Chair of the International Council of Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA).

PGA is an organisation comprised of over 1300 legislators from more than 100 countries that focuses on a wide range of international humanitarian issues, including HIV and AIDS.

As Chair of the International Council, Ross is opening the Third Provincial Parliamentary Seminar on HIV and AIDS. It takes place on 9 April in Peshawar, Pakistan.
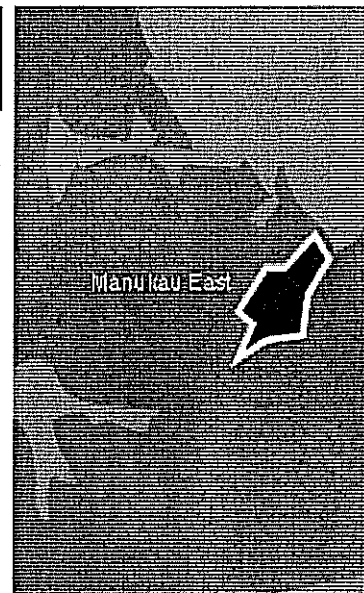
This seminar is the third in a series aimed at providing parliamentarians with a forum to discuss and act upon the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

"We want to challenge delegates to respond by allocating resources towards prevention and treatment," Ross Robertson said.

He believes that these seminars are instrumental in addressing the specific HIV/AIDS needs of vulnerable groups in South Asia.

"Ultimately, it is PGA's objective to get parliamentarians to support policies that promote prevention and safe reproductive health strategies as well as decreasing the stigma associated with HIV/ AIDS."

Last year, the PGA held two provincial-level seminars in Pakistan and a sub-regional seminar in Bangladesh which followed from the first sub-regional seminar held in Islamabad, Pakistan during 2005.

Manukau East

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The seminar series is part of the PGA's HIV/AIDS initiative which falls under its sustainable development, health and population programme.