BULLETIN 28

PREAMBLE

For over two years, the Coronavirus CivActs Campaign (CCC), supported by the Open Society Foundation (OSF), debunked fake news, misinformation, and myths around COVID-19. The campaign now focuses on building healthy information ecosystems where we will lead and support efforts to stop the spread of fake news and misinformation in Pakistan in a broader manner. The focus of our work might not necessarily be around COVID-19 unless, of course, we face a new wave. We plan to tackle fake news around health emergencies (remember, polio is still a challenge in Pakistan, and fake news is responsible for creating perennial vaccine hesitation), politics, sociocultural taboos, and other similar phenomena.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- COVID-19 Updates
- Digital Literacy for youth to counter Misinformation and Fake News
- Fake News, Misinformation and COVID-19
- Steps involved to stop the spread of fake news

COVID-19 DASHBOARD (PAKISTAN)
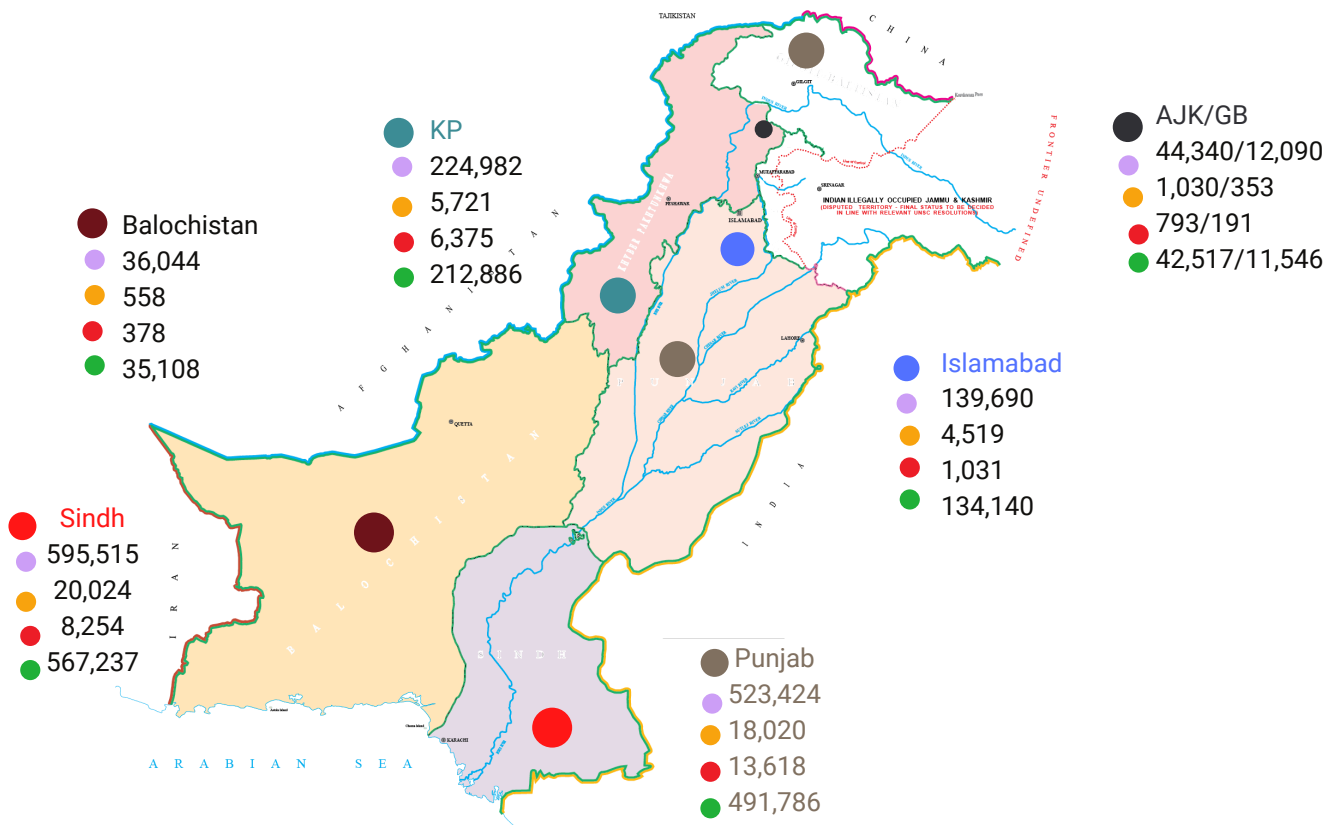
Confirmed Cases
1,576,085
Last 24 : 5

Critical Cases
709
Last 24 : 0

Deaths
30,640
Last 24 : 19.%

Recoveries
1,544,736
Last 24 : 16

KP
- 224,982
- 5,721
- 6,375
- 212,886

Balochistan
- 36,044
- 558
- 378
- 35,108

AJK/GB
- 44,340/12,090
- 1,030/353
- 793/191
- 42,517/11,546

Islamabad
- 139,690
- 4,519
- 1,031
- 134,140

Sindh
- 595,515
- 20,024
- 8,254
- 567,237

Punjab
- 523,424
- 18,020
- 13,618
- 491,786

Confirmed Cases   critical cases   Recoveries   Deaths

24 NEW COVID CASES REPORTED

ISLAMABAD: According to Health officials, 24 new coronavirus instances were reported during the last two weeks across the country. As per data shared by using the National Institute of Health (NIH), the case positivity ratio is 0.40 per cent while 22 patients were in critical condition. No death was reported from the Coronavirus within the final 24 hours, even as 4,447 Covid-19 Corona tests have been carried out. One case was reported as confirmed from 304 tests which have been carried out in Islamabad, 4 confirmed cases out of 844 tests in Lahore, four showed cases from 242 checks in Karachi, two confirmed cases from 430 cases in Peshawar and two confirmed cases out of 156 tests have been stated from Rawalpindi.

Meanwhile, Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Abdul Qadir Patel said that the government had strengthened the role of Border and Health Services in Pakistan to deal with any sub-variant of Covid-19. The minister said there had been a surveillance system at any entry points of the country, including airports. He stated that there might be rapid exams and screening of passengers at all airports.

He stated the state of affairs changed entirely under control and asked the general public to avoid listening to rumors. He added that the Corona case passivity ratio changed to just 0.3 to 0.5 in the country while 90 per cent of the country's population already got the COVID-19 vaccine. An efficient system with the right management team is absolutely functional in the country to remain vigilant. It is prepared to make an emergency plan to address any sub-variation of Covid-19. Border and health services in Pakistan ensured the implementation of international health regulations. In case of any untoward situation, the health system was fully prepared to deal with any sub-variant of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, including BF.7 in the country

Source: Business recorder,

JOURNALISTS STRESSED DIGITAL LITERACY FOR YOUTH TO COUNTER MISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS

An awareness session was arranged by the Accountability Lab on "The Effects of Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation and Role of Journalism" at the National Press Club in Islamabad. At the event, speakers discussed the key drivers and impacts of fake news and disinformation on society and especially on our youth. Dr. Zafar Iqbal, Dean,

Social Sciences Department, International Islamic University, Islamabad; Ms. Zill e Huma, Deputy Director, Press Information Department; Mr. Iftikhar Sherazi, Bureau Chief, Dawn News and Dr. Sadia Kamal, who is a senior journalist and former vice president of the NPC, were among the key speakers. The event was attended by representatives from local media, civil society and students from various academic institutions.

Dr. Zafar Iqbal - HoD, Department of Mass Communications, International Islamic University

"Much like in the rest of the world, fake news and misinformation are now a significant threat to public discourse and democratic values in Pakistan. Online disinformation has created or amplified challenges regarding access to credible information, political polarization, manipulation of social media conversations, trust in the news media, health-related information, and hate speech. With an internet user base of around 85 million, the risks and impact of fake news and misinformation are exacerbated manifold.

"During the Covid-19 pandemic, the undeniable negative role of online disinformation was felt due to the public health and safety risks created by rumours, conspiracy theories, and false messages related to the coronavirus. It is important for academic institutions to provide students with a solid foundation and perspective on media and information literacy as part of the curriculum. Teachers must be well-trained to empower students with the necessary competencies to critically understand and assess information reported by all forms of media."

Ms. Zill e Huma - Deputy Director, Press Information Department, Ministry of Information Broadcasting, Islamabad

"It is the constitutional right of every citizen to express their opinion, and the government, in consultation with the stakeholders, monitors the continuously evolving situation and develops frameworks to ensure the freedom of speech to everyone. However, it is the responsibility of us all not to spread fake news and misinformation that may affect the lives of many."

Dr. Sadia Kamal - In charge Siraiki Unit, Assoc. Press of Pakistan (APP)

"People depend on the media for vital information enabling them to make informed decisions. And it is the responsibility of the media to ensure transparency in reporting. The NPC regularly arranges educational and learning activities for the professional development of its members and to promote responsible journalism."

Iftikhar Shirazi, Bureau Chief of Dawn News

"In the present era of technology, social media, commercialism and competition, the risks related to fake news and misinformation have increased. He stressed the need for a forum where all stakeholders, including the government, media, civil society and public representatives, can frequently interact, discuss the challenges and propose viable solutions acceptable for everyone."

FAKE NEWS, MISINFORMATION AND COVID-19

During the past three years, COVID-19 spread rapidly globally, and along with it, so did the fake news around it. There were a lot of rumours and misinformation that spread across the country during the pandemic. Many lives were at risk due to the spread of false information. Some key and widely spread examples of COVID-19 rumours include:

Drinking bleach may kill the virus.

This outbreak is medical terrorism.

With an internet user base of around 85 million, the risks and impact of fake news and misinformation were exacerbated.

Ayesha Zahid, a young student from Multan, under AL's virtual media caravan initiative, developed a video to document the experiences of people from various fields fighting against misinformation and its spread during the pandemic.

The video also highlights people's challenges during the pandemic and how they countered them. Another aspect the video has covered is the strategies people can adopt in any future health emergency. Click the link below to watch the video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tq7etvJWNEl&t=73s

HOW TO STOP FAKE NEWS

CONSIDER THE SOURCE
click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.

READ BEYOND
Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks, What's the whole story?

CHECK THE AUTHOR
DO a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?

SUPPORTING SOURCES?
Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story?

CHECK THE DATE
Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevent to the current event.

IS IT A JOKE?
If it is too oldish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.

CHECK YOUR BIASES
Consider if you have your own beliefs could affect your judgement.

ASK THE EXPERTS
Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.