



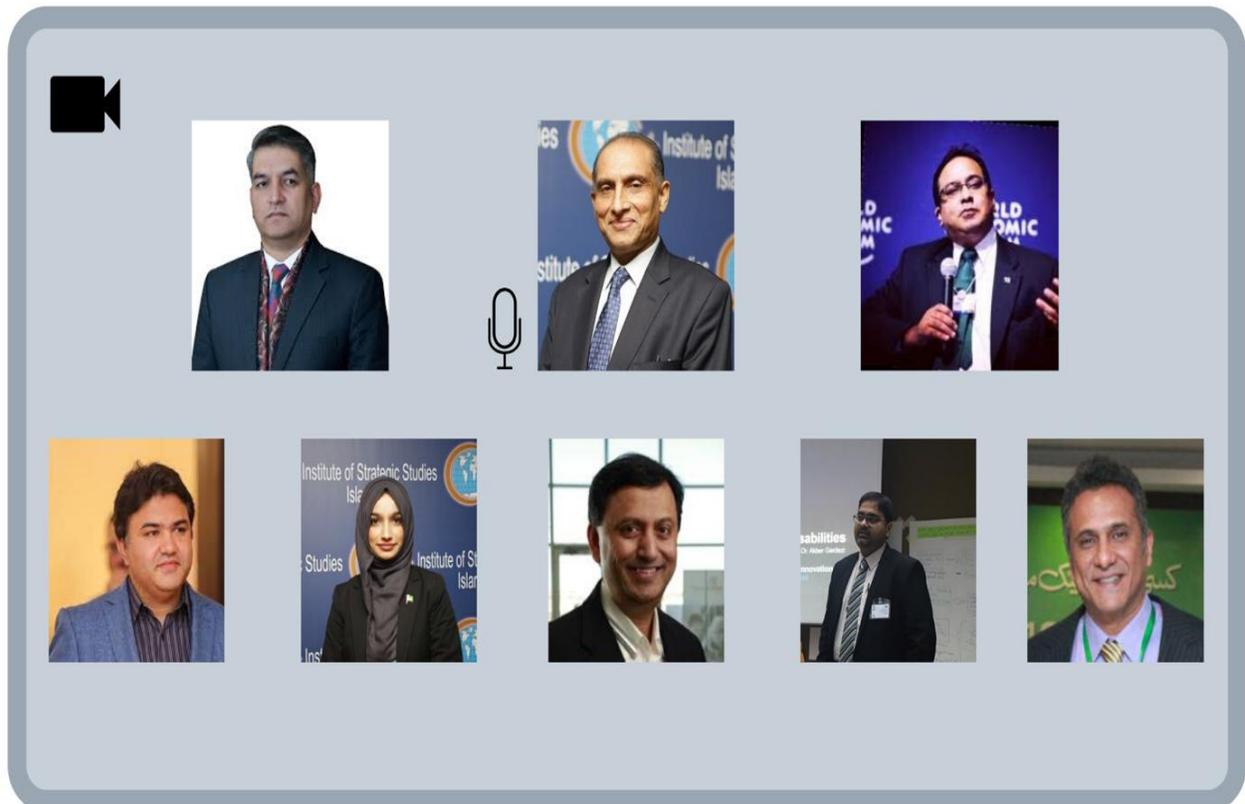
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Report – Webinar

“Emerging Technologies: Important Tool to Combat COVID-19”

April 27, 2020



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China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) in collaboration with Mishal Pakistan and Wusool hosted a Webinar on April 27, 2020 titled '*Emerging Technologies: Important Tool to Combat COVID-19*'. Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, DG ISSI, was the Keynote Speaker at the occasion. Speakers at the webinar included: Barkan Saeed, Founder Vizteck Solutions; Mr. Hassan Syed, Advisor to the Ministry of Science and Technology; Amna Rafiq, Research Associate, ISSI; Dr. Akber Abid Gardezi, Assistant Professor, COMSATS University, Islamabad; Dr. Shumail Daud Arain, President Prime Institute; and Mr. Yousuf Hussain, Former CEO, Ignite - National Technology Fund. More than 100 participants joined the online session and took part in the discussion. The session was moderated by Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director CPSC.

Welcoming the participants, Mr. Amir Jahangir, CEO Mishal Pakistan, said that it is the need of hour to understand and make use of emerging technologies. Government needs to devise a system to use digital technologies for welfare of the people. His co-host, Dr. Talat Shabbir, added that use of technology has proven to be crucial in containing the virus. He said that countries like China, South Korea and Germany adopted modern technology and thus were able to swiftly respond to COVID-19.

Mr. Barkan Saeed touched upon the use of technology in China to combat coronavirus. He said that China is successfully using thermal detectors and cameras to detect COVID-19 patients. This technological advancement is helping China to combat coronavirus effectively. Similarly, Pakistan can deal with COVID-19, by pursuing timely detection, and making extensive use of thermal cameras.

Mr. Hassan Syed stressed upon the need to focus on care and cure. Our top priority should be producing more ventilators and testing kits. He said that e-commerce industry will benefit and new ideas are developing in response to changing social and economic circumstances. He outlined four ways to deal with COVID-19: First, is cure. Second is care i.e., employing Artificial Intelligence (AI), Ventilators, and tele-medicine. Third, is extensive tracking. Fourth is detection while life begins to resume gradually. He noted that at present, life has moved to digital platforms, with e-commerce expanding, and people connecting through zoom etc. As people deal with the virus, new avenues are opening up. Smart systems can detect movement of people using

AI systems. Meanwhile, e-commerce can be used to start the economic wheel, while cloud-applications can power smooth functioning of organizations. He highlighted that Pakistan can focus on developing local products to meet these demands using software industry in the country, and government should promote such products at the international level.

In her remarks, Ms. Aamna Rafiq highlighted the systems available to track coronavirus patients such as satellites, drones and mobile devices, while adding that modern gadgetry can be used to deliver services and help maintain social distancing. She noted that government can employ AI to map the spread of virus, and also produce local maps. Referring to prevalence of fake news and conspiracy theories, she underscored that technology can be employed to counter-fake news, as Facebook is already using AI for this purpose. She argued that right combination of technologies, expertise and policies can bring about many positive changes.

Dr. Akber Gardezi stressed the need to implement Information & Communications Technology (ICT) in resolving current challenges. He highlighted that ICT can address challenges faced by marginalized communities. During this pandemic, these communities have become even more marginalized. In terms of inclusion, technology use is creating a gap as it has a socio-economic impact and access as well as affordability is an issue. For instance, in Gilgit-Balitistan, ICT infrastructure is an issue like slow internet which creates problems for effective communication and learning. Such issues can be addressed by employing wide range of ICT products, enabling distance learning for students across the country. For this, in the long-term, technology indigenization is important.

Dr. Shumail Daud, who has wide experience of supplying to hospitals, highlighted that the trend will now be more usability of tele-medicine. Resultantly, he believed, quality of equipment and peripherals will go up. In Pakistan and around the world, money has been invested in early detection and prevention of COVID-19 and even HEC has set up a fund to support new research. Going forward, Pakistan and world will invest more in healthcare system. Technology and digitization will be the new tools. In addition to this, investment needs to be made in quality manpower and labs. Data scientists should be working with both public and private sectors.

Mr. Yousuf Hussain underscored two broader impacts of COVID-19. First, it will have both positive and negative impact on fourth industrial revolution. Some industries have been badly

impacted like leisure and hospitality, and some benefited like food and medical. Second is US-China trade war, which if it continues, will have far-reaching consequences for global economy moving towards recession. With pandemic we might see easing of US-China trade tensions. On evolving situation in Pakistan, he noted that at present, surveillance ecosystem is being used to detect COVID-19 patients. Meanwhile, focus should now also be on addressing by-products such as, thalassemia patients not getting blood as hospital systems are at standstill. These need to be addressed.

In his keynote remarks, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General ISSI, applauded CPSC, Mishal and Wasool teams for putting together a timely webinar. Sharing his thoughts, he underscored that the future belongs to knowledge economy and R&D is central to that if you look at education and other sectors. Technology race has already begun with companies and countries exploring avenues for collaboration. It is surprising how 5G technology was being resisted by US. International and regional partnerships will be essential. US is already ahead and for China and India it is just a matter of time to catch up. Google and Apple are already working together.

For Pakistan in the current situation, Ambassador Chaudhry highlighted, equitable access to health is extremely important as well as regional cooperation with China. R&D at home is extremely important for detection, vaccine development, data collection and analysis. For Pakistan, indigenization of technology is extremely important. We need homegrown solutions. Meanwhile, on the response of government, he noted that while generally government has been slow, but its direction is clear. Some of government ministries like Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ehsaas program are employing technological platforms in their functions, hence, the direction is clear.

This was followed by a Q&A session, where participants raised a number of questions to the panellists. Dr. Abdul Rauf in his comments noted, that Pakistan needs to develop indigenous applications, we will not be needing much of infrastructure but more knowledge. But there are issues regarding online security and cybercrime. We need to be careful about being online and then about the online posture to be presented as one entity. Mr. Akbar Gardezi recommended

that Universal Service Fund (USF) could be utilized for ensuring necessary infrastructure development in far-flung areas to ensure availability of internet services.

The webinar ended with a vote of thanks from the moderator, Dr. Talat Shabbir, who thanked panellists for sharing their thoughts on an important aspect in dealing with the challenges posed by the pandemic. He commended the participants for a vibrant discussion.