


# Islamabad POST


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**Business climate of Pakistan improved, says Spanish Ambassador**

**Pak army working closely with GB govt**

**Kyrgyz envoy keen to cement ties with Pakistan**

# PM unfurls hefty relief package

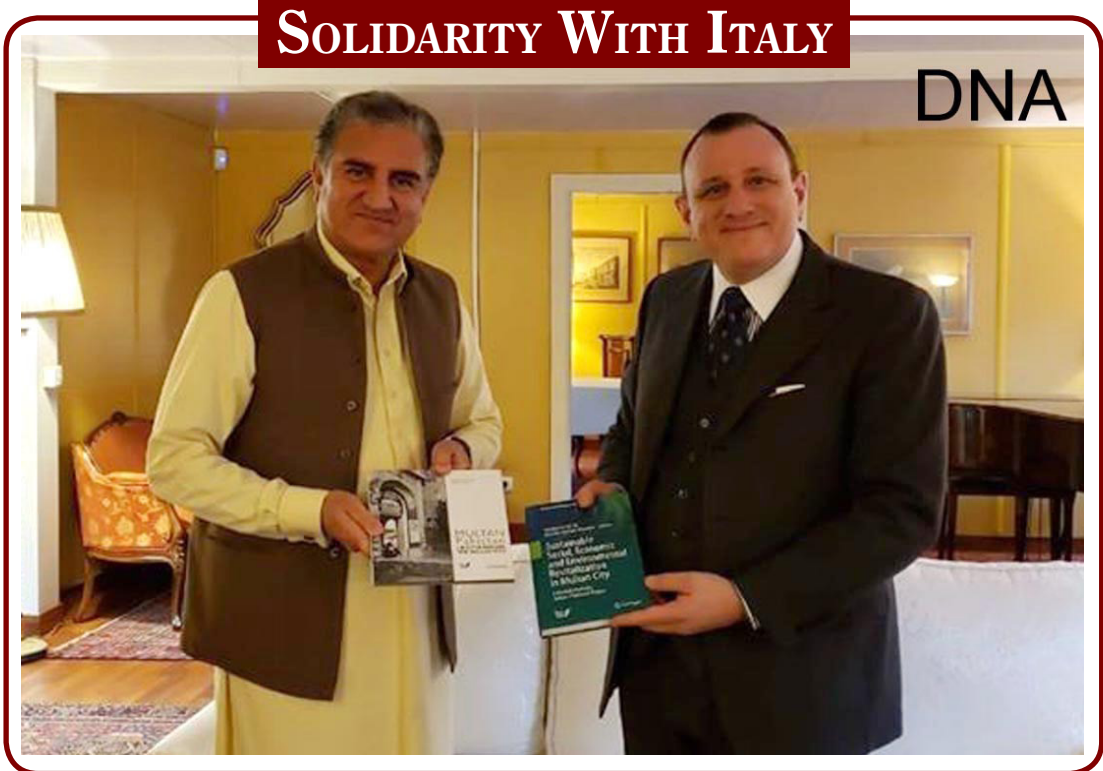
Rs 200 billion allocated for the labour class; for small industry, agriculture sector, another amount of Rs 100 billion set aside; for the construction industry, the government would announce a separate package; calls upon people not to panic

**STAFF REPORT**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan Tuesday announced a huge relief package aimed at providing financial support to the different sectors of economy affected by the economic slowdown unleashed by the coronavirus (COVID-19) all over the globe. During an interaction with media persons, the prime minister said the government had decided to allocate Rs 200 billion for the labour class, which had been hit hard in the difficult times. To help the industrial sector and especially the export sector, it was decided to release tax refunds amounting to Rs100 billion, besides, deferring of the interest payment to bolster this sector, he added. For the small and medium industry, and agriculture sector, another amount of Rs 100 billion was set aside with deferred interest pay-

ment, the prime minister said, adding concessional loans would also being extended to the sectors. The government wanted to bring down the input costs for the farmers. Other packages, he said, included additional amount of 50 billion for the Utility Stores, Rs 280 billion for the wheat procurement, slashing of petrol and diesel prices by Rs15 per liter for which the government would have to bear the burden of Rs75 billion. An amount of Rs100 billion was allocated separately for the emergency situation, he added. The prime minister said power consumers using 300 units and gas users with Rs 2,000 monthly bills would be facilitated to deposit their bills through three monthly installments. A sum of Rs 50 billion was also allocated for the medical staff. The National Disaster Management Authority would get Rs 25 billion for purchase and procuring

of kits, he announced. Imran Khan said for the vulnerable families who were bearing the brunt of the difficult time, it was decided to allocate an amount of Rs 150 billion for a period of four months. He said they were also expanding the network of Panagah (shelter houses) where the precautionary measures had been strictly practiced. Besides, he said, it was decided to either completely cut taxes or reduce them on different edible items. For the construction industry, the government would announce a separate package within days, which, he promised, had never been witnessed in the country's history. Reiterating that the country could not afford a complete lockdown with the imposition of curfew, the prime minister said the situation in the country so far did not warrant for resorting to that last step.



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi visited Italian embassy and met with Ambassador Andreas Ferrarese to show solidarity with Italian govt and people. – DNA photo

## China boosts cross border trade, counters COVID-19 strains

**AGENCIES**

BEIJING: China pledged to ramp up support for cross-border trade in further effort to facilitate foreign trade amid the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. The country will seek to minimize the impact on the industry chain and supply chain of cross-border trade by tackling difficulties like financing and cash liquidity for companies in the border and cross-border economic cooperation zones in seven provincial regions including Heilongjiang, Yunnan, and Guangxi, said a circular released Monday by the Ministry of Commerce and the Export-Import Bank of China. More efforts should be made to nurture small industry clusters within three square km while the country enhances credit support to help establish integrated platforms featuring trade, processing, production, services and logistics in the economic cooperation zones, according to the circular. The document also called on the cooperation zones to expand export to emerging economies and import of agricultural products and key technologies, as well as to deepen involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative.

## Pak army working closely with GB govt

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD: In the wake of COVID 19, Pakistan Army is cognizant of the challenges facing the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. We are working closely with GB Govt and civil administration to provide all possible support while additional resources are being arranged on war footing. He added, 'We will never leave the people of GB alone in these challenging times. Pakistanis will fight against COVID-19 as one nation.

## Briefs

### Pakistani American man dies of coronavirus

**APP**

NEW YORK: Coronavirus, the deadly pandemic sweeping the United States and many parts of the world, claimed its first Pakistani-American victim here on March 23, the Pakistan day. Haji Muhammad Anjum Iqbal, a resident of Long Island, New York, died of the virus on Monday. He was 63. Iqbal, a businessman who ran a gas station in Queens, a borough of New York City, tested positive to coronavirus at a hospital where he went on March 16 after feeling sick.

### U.S. first lady tests negative

**APP**

BEIJING: The world is now in a battle against the common threat of COVID-19, a disease caused by a previously unknown coronavirus that has spread to over 192 countries and regions.

### SBP cuts interest rate

**DNA**

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Tuesday slashed its key interest rate by 150 basis points to 11 per cent. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the country's central bank in an emergency meeting decided to cut the benchmark interest .

## Morocco to build mosque in Islamabad

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD: Moroccan Government will Build a mosque in the CDA Project Park Enclave-I. In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had forwarded a request of Moroccan Government through its Embassy to the CDA. The Moroccan Government will construct this mosque as token of brotherhood and cordial relations between the governments and people of both countries. The mosque would be built on Moroccan style and would be a masterpiece. The CDA has already allocated 11 kanals of land in the Park Enclave-I for the construction of mosque. Ministry of Foreign Affairs has asked the CDA to identify the site to for the mosque and provide site possession, as well as the title and other details for the construction of the mosque so that Moroccan Government could be informed. The mosque will be sign of brotherly relations between the two countries.

## PM to launch App

**APP**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday will launch a modern-tech mobile application, developed by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) administration, to ensure provision of 43 different online services to the residents of the federal city at their door-

## CAA reduces non-essential staff

**DNA**

KARACHI: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Tuesday announced to reduce the non-essential staff working in its offices aimed at taking precautionary measures to tackle the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). According to a circular issued from the authority, non-essential staffers including old age and ailing officials, either male or female, are exempted from duty for 13 days beginning from 24 March until 05 April. It said that the officials are encouraged to work from home through internet and telephone to meet official requirements, wherever possible. The directives also asked the CAA employees to urge official visitors to discuss the matters on phone and should only visit if necessary while asking to limit any non-official visitors to reception desk only. The aviation authority directed to discourage handshakes and social embracing.

## China to provide doctors protection, testing kits

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD: National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Chairman Lieutenant General Mohammad Afzal has urged people to help other nationals instead of profiteering amid coronavirus crisis. NDMA chairman Lt Gen Mohammad Afzal, while addressing a group of journalists, said the authorities are making decisions as per available resources. "We have tried to place purchase orders for medical equipment including ventilators around the world but it is unfortunate to find nothing from the countries except China. China has assured to provide ventilators and other equipment to Pakistan and the first shipment of N95 will arrive in the country tomorrow from China." "Our actual work will commence from Friday when medical equipment starts arriving in the country. China will provide us with doctors' protection kits, 50,000 testing kits and other necessary equipment. It is possible that Pakistan will temporarily open border for one day on March 28. We will place the order to China on March 27 and the equipment will reach to Pakistan on March 28." "Pakistan has booked six orders during the last 1.5 months. People should avoid profiteering and step forward to help the nation. It is the time to help others and you can earn money as well when [the crisis of coronavirus ends]." "Many European countries booked orders with Chinese companies for one year each. However, China has still assisting Pakistan and timely providing all necessary equipment," said Afzal. Earlier, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced a multi-billion package involving relief for labour and underprivileged class, business community and industries and farmers besides lowering fuel prices in the country amid shutdown in various parts of the country out of coronavirus fear that has already claimed seven lives.

## Wuhan to lift travel restrictions on April 8

**APP**

WUHAN: Wuhan, the Chinese city hardest hit by the novel coronavirus outbreak, will lift outbound travel restrictions from April 8 after over two months of lockdown, local authorities said Tuesday. People in Wuhan will be allowed to leave the city and Hubei Province, where Wuhan is the capital, if they hold a green health code, meaning no contact with any infected or suspected COVID-19 cases, according to a circular issued by the provincial COVID-19 control headquarters.

# Business climate of Pakistan improved, says Spanish Ambassador Manuel Duran

**ANSAR M BHATTI**

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Spain Manuel Duran has said business climate of Pakistan has improved adding many Spanish companies and businessmen are keen to set up businesses in Pakistan. He said a Spanish company is opening super markets in various cities of Pakistan catering to day to day needs of people. The Spanish ambassador made these remarks during a reception hosted in his honour by the business community of Islamabad. The President Islamabad



strengthening of bilateral relations. Zafar Bakhtawari added Spain was an important country of European Union therefore can help Pakistani product have access to EU markets.

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## Time for Taliban, Kabul to seize opportunity

CONSIDERING that the Afghan Taliban have often referred to the Western-backed government in Kabul as a ‘puppet regime’, the fact that both sides communicated via videoconference on Sunday is something to be welcomed. While it may not herald the beginning of an ‘official’ dialogue between the two warring parties, it should definitely be considered an ice-breaker.

The conversation centred on the exchange of prisoners – a key sticking point which has threatened to scuttle the peace deal signed between Washington and the Taliban in February. While the Afghan authorities were initially reluctant to release any Taliban prisoners, that stance may be about to change. As per a Taliban spokesman, “... there were initial agreements on some issues regarding the release of prisoners” during Sunday’s discussion.

Both sides hold thousands of each other’s men, and the mutual exchange of prisoners could be a confidence-building measure to further the intra-Afghan dialogue. Officials from the US and Qatar had helped set up the videoconference.

Clearly, it appears that the Americans, eager to get their troops out of Afghanistan, are using all the tactics in their playbook to ‘convince’ the Kabul government to help save the deal with the Taliban. The first batch of American troops has already left Afghanistan, while Washington is trying to bring together rival Afghan power elites to put up a united face in front of the Taliban.

Despite the global coronavirus pandemic, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was in Kabul on Monday to try and make Afghan President Ashraf Ghani – who won the presidential election – and his arch-rival and former CEO of the country Abdullah Abdullah – who ‘inaugurated’ himself on the same day as Mr Ghani – patch up.

The Americans know that if there is infighting in the Afghan government, the peace deal will be worthless, as the Taliban will battle all other pretenders to Kabul’s throne for power as soon as the last American soldier leaves.

Therefore, to prevent further chaos in the country, unity is needed in Kabul to show the Taliban and the world that the dispensation in Afghanistan is legitimate and functioning.

Moreover, dialogue between the Kabul power elite and the Taliban should continue, for any peace deal the militants sign with foreign powers will not amount to much unless all Afghan stakeholders are on board. To prevent a return to chaos in Afghanistan, the focus should now be on the intra-Afghan dialogue. – *Courtesy Dawn*



## America should reinvent itself – II

Many attribute that shift to the increasing role of “money politics” - campaign contributions, traditional lobbying, and the elimination of constraints on corporate political spending by the Supreme Court’s notorious Citizens United decision in 2010. But an even more fundamental factor may have been the rise of “status politics,” whereby political power accrues disproportionately to well-to-do, highly educated, coastal elites. Tech entrepreneurs, Wall Street tycoons, and management consultants have become increasingly influential in Washington, DC, not just because they are rich but because they seem to represent enlightened competency.

These are the conditions that gave rise to Trump, who might still ride a wave of misinformation to win re-election in November, especially if the opposition remains fractured. But even if Trump is defeated, the task of radically reforming America’s economic and political institutions will have only just begun.

What would an effective anti-Trump reform agenda look like? For starters, it must include a plan to generate more good jobs.

This objective is different from simply strengthening the social safety net (which is necessary, but insufficient), and it is worlds apart from diversionary schemes like a universal basic income. Creating good jobs requires increased investments in technologies that raise worker productivity and lead to new employment opportunities. It also requires stronger labour-market institutions and protections for workers, including minimum wages and collective agreements that induce firms to build long-term relationships with their employees, rather than opting for labour-replacing automation or offshoring. By the same token, better regulation and stronger antitrust enforcement would reduce large corporations’ labour-market power and foster more competition and innovation, setting the stage for faster labour-demand growth.

The agenda also must include reforms to give a majority of Americans a voice in politics once again. In the 1960s, political scientist Robert A. Dahl concluded that most of the power in local politics resided not with high-status elites or political parties but with regular people who were actively engaged in local issues. That finding may have never been completely true (Dahl’s study focused on Connecticut); but we should nonetheless aspire to citizen-driven politics.

Here, the priority should be to break the cozy relations between politicians and their CEO, consultant, and financier friends. That will take systematic changes in how access to politicians and top civil servants is regulated, as well as greater transparency at all stages of the policymaking process. Creating new agencies to represent the interests of labour and other neglected constituencies would also be helpful.

# Growing business opportunities in the Azerbaijan

Lt. Col. Khalid TaimurAkram (Retd)



*Azerbaijan’s strength is not only in its economy but being a multi-ethnic country and representative of multiculturalism, a spirit of tolerance has always prevailed in Azerbaijan. Thus, the Republic of Azerbaijan has managed to maintain its economic stability and sustainability*



Currently, Azerbaijan is ranked among the top twenty countries in terms of fabricating reforms in “Doing Business 2020”. The country has focused vigorously on its socio-economic reform, structural development, and industrial advancement through ensuring transparency. Structural changes within the government are also an imperative step towards efficiency and productivity of the state apparatus. To ensure more sustainable development, a strategic roadmap has been adopted by the government of Azerbaijan including comprehensive, institutional, monetary, financial modifications, tax, and customs management.

Azerbaijan’s strength is not only in its economy but being a multi-ethnic country and representative of multiculturalism, a spirit of tolerance has always prevailed in Azerbaijan. Thus, the Republic of Azerbaijan has managed to maintain its economic stability and sustainability. Azerbaijan is a strategic meeting point for entire Eurasia. This has led the country to trade advancement for economic outcomes. The oil-enriched country has redefined itself over the past two decades from a struggling newly independent state to a major regional energy player. It is a hybrid of Turkic, Persian, European, and Caucasian influences, which gives this part of the region a unique history. The period of cultural and economic growth in Azerbaijan started in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This economic rise also led to a cultural revival. During the last 15 years, Azerbaijan’s economy grew more than three times. Approximately, \$260 billion worth of investments have supported the country to modernize its infrastructure and transportation. As far as diversification is concerned, primarily the attention is aimed at the development of industry, agriculture, tourism services, and information communications technologies. The multiple pipelines to transport the oil and gas to international markets are aimed to diversify the state economy, to invest foreign capital and to create sustainable opportunities for growth. Azerbaijan through utilizing its geographical location has invested in building bridges between Asia and Europe. Today, the business climate in Azerbaijan is one of the most advanced in the world. According to the latest report of the World Bank and International Finance Corporation, Azerbaijan has ranked 25th among 190 countries in the “Doing-Business-2019” rating.

### Witnessing Economic Boom



President Ilham Aliyev’s visionary and comprehensive policy initiatives have turned Azerbaijan’s natural resources into a sustainable development tool for the country. His pragmatic strategy has yielded enormous benefits to Azerbaijan. Strategically positioned at the confluence of southwestern Asia with southeastern Europe north of Iran and south of Russia, the Republic of Azerbaijan has maintained a positive trade balance in its imports and exports level.

The momentous export products contain minerals, vegetables, metal, precious pearls, and stone articles. Similarly, the imports comprise of heavy machinery, mechanical, and electrical equipment. The top export destinations of Azerbaijan are Italy, Israel, Turkey, Germany, and the Czech Republic. The prominent import origins are Russia, Turkey, China, Germany, and Ukraine. Azerbaijan Export and Investment Promotion Foundation (AZPROMO) under the Ministry of Economic Development has organized nine export missions in 2019 including seven countries containing; UAE, China, Poland, Latvia, Qatar, Switzerland, and Russia in 2019 to promote national products under the “Made in Azerbaijan brand”. Other strengths include gas abundance in the Caspian Sea, an increase in exports to Turkey and Europe, facilitating as a geographic liaison between China and Europe, and a positive general business environment.

### Indicators of Economic Stability

ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT					
GDP (BLN USD)	75.2	77.8	82.8	86.9	88.9
GDP GROWTH (%)	2.8	3.3	3.1	3.1	1.4
NON-OIL GDP (BLN USD)	45.9	47.8	49.8	50.0	52.6
NON-OIL GDP GROWTH (%)	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.5	1.8
GDP PER CAPITA (USD)	7,986	8,333	8,922	9,188	9,700
INFLATION (%)	1.4	0.8	12.4	20.3	2.3
TOTAL INVESTMENT (BLN USD)	27.2	28.8	34.3	38.0	35.2
FOREIGN INVESTMENT (BLN USD)	15.2	16.8	19.3	20.0	18.2
DOMESTIC INVESTMENT (BLN USD)	16.2	18.0	14.2	18.0	17.0
FDI (BLN USD)	7.6	7.5	7.3	7.0	4.3
FOREIGN TRADE (BLN USD)	31.0	33.0	37.6	38.0	30.9
2014 2015 2016 2017 2018					

During the previous five years, Azerbaijan’s GDP growth exceeded 2% in 2019, while non-oil GDP grew by 3.5 % and exceeded the pace of economic growth worldwide. In the last ten years, GDP and foreign trade have doubled in size. Investments grow to worth \$ 270 billion. The country has benefited from high oil reserves and increased gas production, although its non-oil and gas sectors have also shown an ascendant trend. The GDP composition by sectors is changing by the course of time. The non-oil sector is forming an increasing portion of the economy in the current scenario. The share of the non-oil sector in GDP is approximately 58.85%. This ratio shows how Azerbaijan has diversified its economy and converted its reliance from the oil and gas sector to the non-oil zone. The country has shipped US\$19.6 billion worth of goods around the globe in 2019. **Establishment of Reformed Business Environment** The Republic of Azerbaijan has implemented several fundamental reforms aimed to promote exports and investment prospects. The novel economic reforms have launched by the President through the series of “Strategic Road Map”. Also, Azerbaijan has improved access to



the tourism and business industry through launching the ASAN e-visa system. The government has made the regulation system flexible for strengthening the business environment. The legislative reforms are also among the top priority areas of the current administration, following the “Azerbaijan 2020: The Vision of the Future” and national development model. Attractive Investment Climate and Skilled Labour Force Azerbaijan is providing excellent investment incentive schemes to foreign investors. There is no restriction related to the capital input and output and the repatriation of profits. All the necessary measures have been taken to protect and promote foreign investment. There exist 49 bilateral investment treaties and double taxation accords with various countries. Along with the wide-ranged investment prospects, the country possesses about half of its economically active population and holds one of the highest employment rates in the region. The major driver of employment ratio is the private sector. The Republic of Azerbaijan has an extremely high literacy rate of 99.8%. **Regional Hub with Abundant Resources**

Azerbaijan located on the south-eastern border of Europe is serving as the natural bridge between Europe and Asia. The Trans-Caspian East-West Trade and Transit Corridor is a key route connecting two major global economies, China and Europe. The South-North Transit Corridor spreads across Iran to Europe, proving the Republic of Azerbaijan as a regional hub with numerous resources. It is renowned as the logistic hub for the Caspian region as well as possessing the biggest airport, seaport, and rail network. The territory of Azerbaijan stands for its complex geological structure and diversity of minerals. It holds 9 climatic zones out of 11 which are existed in the world ranging from humid subtropical climate to semi-arctic. Azerbaijan has major deposits of oil and gas. Ferrous and nonferrous, rare and fine metals: iron and chrome ores, copper, lead and zinc, cobalt, molybdenum, aluminium, quicksilver, and gold are in abundance. Nonferrous minerals and construction materials: building stone, facing stone, clay, cement raw materials, construction stone, sand-gravel, sand, bituminous sands, perlite, pumice, gypsum, anhydride, alabaster, bentonite clays, sodium chloride, dolomite, quartzite, limestone for flux and soda, and ceramic raw materials are the precious natural resources contributing in country’s revenue generation. **Developed Infrastructure** One can observe the utmost state of the art transport infrastructure in the Republic of Azerbaijan across the region. The state has built about 19,000 Km of hard-surface roads, 6 international airports, in which Baku operates the largest international airport in the entire region. The new international seaport, located at Alat, amid to add 10 to 11.5 million tons of cargo with annual capacity are the mega projects initiated by the current government. The rail network of 2000 Km, the “Iron Silk Way”, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars trunk-railway connecting European and Asian railway systems, is under construction. Thus, Azerbaijan has become the center of trade between Asia and Europe for millennia, as the silk Road is passed through Azerbaijan. Today, as trade flows increase between Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan is



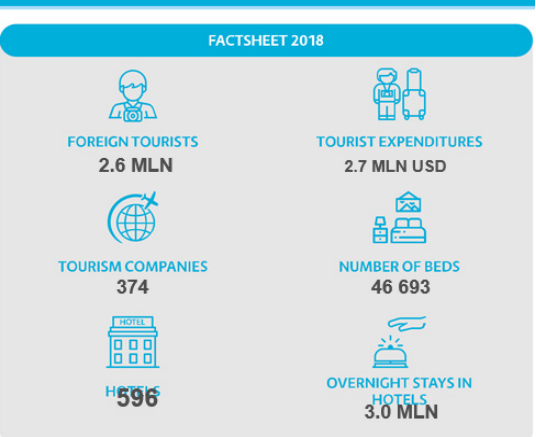
emerging as a transport and logistic hub at the cross-road of Eurasia. Also, it will become a strategic international logistics pivot by 2025.

### Tourists Destination

Azerbaijan’s capital Baku is among the top 10 world’s tourist destinations. Presently, it is enjoying a tourism boom due to its easy visa system and attractive tourist sites. The world Economic Forum named Azerbaijan the most improved country in the travel and tourism competitiveness index of 2017.

The “Strategic Roadmap” for the development of the Tourism industry aims to push the sector into the next stage of development. This includes the promotion of tourism based on the national values of Azerbaijan in the international marketplace and locally. Moreover, it contains improvements in the tourism communications infrastructure and classified hotel’s certification. This will create opportunities for companies with expertise in the service industry, investing in human capital and practical anticipation within the country. **Reform Initiatives for Enhancing Business Prospects** Azerbaijan has been revolutionized by the constant structural reforms. The era of President Aliyev in the office is marked by overcoming major political and economic challenges, achieving economic expansion and steady growth. Following Reforms initiatives have been taken to ensure transparency and structural modifications: Significant changes have been implemented in the customs and taxation fields to tackle monopolies and to

### TOURISM & HOSPITALITY



equalize the regulatory regimes for import and export products.

The taxation procedures have made updated to fully comply with major global transparency indexes following successful reforms in the field of taxation. The upgraded functions are dedicated to cover taxation and privatization of state properties, which is expected to accelerate the privatization of numerous state companies while attracting foreign investments in the upcoming years.

“Industrial parks” and “Free Trade Zones” have been formed, giving tax incentives, and a “seven-years tax-free regime”, to foreign investors. Furthermore, “Special Economic Zones”, like the new Baku port of Alat are exempt from duties and taxes.

President Aliyev has signed a verdict of judicial reforms in April 2019, urged for the rapid execution of focused reforms to counter corruption in the legal system and increasing transparency and consistency of judicial processes.

The diversification of the economy and the state program has introduced during 2014-2018 entitled as the socio-economic development of Azerbaijan. This particular initiative has made a huge contribution to the non-oil sector, due to its potential for production of non-oil products of Azerbaijan.

### Conclusion

The Republic of Azerbaijan is gaining ground in the fields of business and investment with its sound legal system, simplified land ownership, and property rights, regularized licensing, and valid taxation mechanism. The systematic and efficient policy reforms receive a positive attitude and outcome from the people of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan’s policy based on national interests, security, stability, economic, social development, and its growing role in the international arena provides a solid base for its future progress and prosperity. The results achieved in all spheres of life have made a great contribution to the overall development of the country.

*The writer is Executive Director, Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad.*



## RCCI lauds economic relief package

STAFF REPORT

**RAWALPINDI:** The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) welcomed the Economic Relief Package announced by the government. In a statement, President RCCI Saboor Malik said the business community was anxiously awaiting for this package. The interest rate drops by a hundred and a half basic points. This will restore the confidence of the manufacturer and local investor. He said inflation would come down in purview of drop in Rs 15 per liter in petroleum products. He said that the immediate release of 100 billion refunds for exporters is very much appreciated. He expressed hope that similar relief package will be announced for the real estate and construction sector too soon. He said that the Rawalpindi Chamber has also set up a fund in the wake of the Corona virus. Under this fund ration packets will be provided to the needy people, especially the daily wagers and the patients.

## Nobel-winning peace negotiator Ahtisaari has coronavirus

APP

**HELSINKI:** Nobel laureate and former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari has contracted the new coronavirus, his office said on Tuesday. The 82-year-old was awarded the Peace Prize in 2008 for his career over three decades mediating peace deals to conflicts around the world, including Indonesia, Kosovo and Namibia. The former UN diplomat, who went on to serve in Finland's highest office between 1994 and 2000, was confirmed to have caught the virus on Monday, the Finnish president's Office said in a statement. "President Ahtisaari is doing well given the circumstances," it said. On Saturday, Ahtisaari's 83-year-old wife Eva also tested positive for the infection.

## Over 71,150 people discharged from China hospitals

DNA

**BEIJING:** According to the latest figures from the NHC, March 19 saw 730 patients cured and discharged from hospital in China's mainland, bringing the tally to 71,150. China and Latin American and Caribbean countries will hold a video conference on COVID-19 next Tuesday, March 24. Officials from the Chinese Foreign Ministry and National Health Commission and experts in the areas of disease control, clinical treatment, civil aviation, customs and community-based quarantine will share information and experience with their counterparts from Latin American and Caribbean countries.

# Kazakhstan minister calls for further cementing of bilateral ties

The minister also talked about the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) which is an inter-governmental forum for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in Asia

DNA

**ISLAMABAD:** First Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Shakhmat Nuryshev has said both Kazakhstan and Pakistan enjoy close relations adding both countries have huge potential to further promote and deepen these relations. He expressed these views while speaking during an interaction with Pakistani media and intellectuals facilitated by think-tank CGSS. The Kazakh minister along with his delegation visited Pakistan for the Inaugural Session of Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) between Pakistan and Kazakhstan.

The minister thanked the Pakistani hosts for facilitating the dialogue in a constructive and friendly environment. He said both countries possess geographic and

strategic importance and have been cooperating with each other on various forums. The minister also talked about the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) which is an inter-governmental forum for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in Asia. It is a forum based on the recognition that there is close link between peace, security and stability in Asia and in the rest of the world. The key idea of the Conference is based on the priority of the indivisibility of security, joint initiative and mutually beneficial interaction of small and large states. He told that the idea of convening the CICA was first proposed by Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev at the United Nations General Assembly. Minister Nuryshev made it clear his coun-



try strongly believes in nuclear non proliferation. He said Kazakhstan happens to be the biggest producer of natural uranium, which is essential for developing civil-nuclear technologies. Nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation have remained a hallmark of Kazakhstan's foreign policy since the country got sovereignty in 1991 and up to the present. Our country was among those former Soviet republics, who inherited a massive nuclear arms arsenal of the late USSR. The uneasy dilemma of whether to keep or get rid of them was solved by the first President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev in favor of the latter. Following his decision nuclear weaponry was either dismantled in Kazakhstan or removed out of the country.

Dilating further on bilateral relations the minister said both sides during the interaction also discussed ways and means to further enhance bilateral relations especially in trade, politics and economy. Both sides also discussed cooperation in energy sector as well. Kazakhstan intends to export energy to neighboring countries through various initiatives including CASA 1000. Apart from those medicines, pharmaceuticals and textiles are other sectors that provide both countries an excuse to come close to each other adding both sides shall be able to further cement bilateral cooperation in these sectors also. The minister assured that the Kazakhstan side will do its best to promote, diversify and strengthen relations with Pakistan.

## 'Naya Pakistan' expects ten areas of cooperation with China: Ambassador Hashmi

APP

**BEIJING:** Pakistan Ambassador to China, Naghma Hashmi has listed more than 10 areas that Pakistan expected investment and welcomed cooperation without a break, including renewable energy, electric vehicles, aviation and transportation, telecommunications, distance education, medical facilities, IT, mechanized agriculture and drip irrigation, pest control and dairy industry. "It is a huge era of opportunities between Pakistan and China. You must take advantage of the opportunities and possibilities which are now opening up in "New Pakistan," she told

in an interview with China Economic Net (CEN). About the impact of epidemic on the two countries' economy and trade, Ambassador Hashmi said there was no need to excessively worry about that. "The first and second quarters will be affected, but we should be able to make it up in the third and the fourth quarters. The FTA that has become operational from January this year has already resulted in 17% increase in our exports to China." When it came to a proposal on hundreds of Pakistani and Chinese enterprises making joint efforts to achieve small goals of development after the epidemic, she expressed her appreciation. "It's a very good message. There is no other way of achieving development except when everybody plays his part. The infrastructure projects of the first phase of CPEC have now been completed. The energy shortage is a thing of the past." Ambassador Hashmi urged all the entrepreneurs and business people in Pakistan, and urged all the Chinese business strength and companies and enterprises to look at Pakistan, adding, "Now is the time to look at Pakistan. This is the time to actually put your heart and soul and effort towards increasing bilateral investment,

bilateral trade and setting up joint ventures." On bilateral relations between the two countries, she said, "As President Xi Jinping himself said that gold becomes solid and shining when it goes through fire. The friendship between China and Pakistan has grown stronger and stronger because of the difficult times that it has gone through previously." Also this time it had withstood the test of time like a true good neighbour, true all-weather strategic cooperative partner and true iron brother, she said and added, "Our president's visit shows that Pakistani people will stand

by Chinese people in both good times and difficult times. We are very happy to see that China has a lot of good leadership vision, strategy and faith. They have been able to overcome this very difficult epidemic." About the decision not to evacuate Pakistanis from China, Ambassador Hashmi talked more about her understanding of the public opinion. "We have 28,000 students in China, of which about 1,200 are in Hubei." We genuinely felt that our children were safer here than if we were to evacuate them from there. Therefore, a very conscious decision was made."

## Shehbaz calls for national unity to face coronavirus

APP

**LAHORE:** Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif Tuesday called on the nation to rise to the occasion and forge unity among its ranks for combating the novel coronavirus. Collective efforts could help convert the challenge into an opportunity and everyone would have to play their role to fight the pandemic, instead of doing politics, which was not be appropriate, he said while addressing a press conference. Shehbaz Sharif said the effective steps being taken by the government to control the spread of coronavirus should be appreciated while highlighting any loopholes in a positive manner. He expressed the optimism that despite economic problems, Pakistan would overcome the challenge with combined efforts of the entire nation. The PML-N president urged the Federal Government to convene a meeting of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and take all the provincial governments into confidence on the strategy to deal with the contagion. A national task force should be constituted with representation from



all the political parties, he added. Shehbaz Sharif said the government should take steps on war footing to ensure all the required medical equipment and gadgets to treat the coronavirus, including safety kits for the medical staff and ventilators for the patients. The poor people should be given free of charge testing facilities for the coronavirus, besides financial assistance, he added. He announced that the PML-N would provide 10,000 safety kits to the medical staff treating coronavirus patients in hospitals. Shehbaz Sharif also called for decreasing petroleum prices to Rs 70 per liter as it might help control inflation in the country. Interest rate should also be brought down, besides deferring the payment of electricity and gas bills of upto Rs 5,000, he added.

## FM Qureshi talks to his French and Spanish counterparts

DNA

**ISLAMABAD:** Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi held a telephone conversation with his French and Spanish counterparts, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. The two Ministers held detailed discussions on the COVID-19 pandemic as well as ways to enhance cooperation to combat the spread of the disease. Expressing deep concern over the loss of precious lives, Foreign Minister

Qureshi lauded the steps being taken by the French authorities to contain the virus, and thanked the Foreign Minister for looking after 13 Pakistanis affected in France. He also briefed Foreign Minister Le Drian about the measures underway in Pakistan to contain the outbreak. Foreign Minister Qureshi informed that the number of affected people in Pakistan due to COVID-19 was increasing. COVID-19 had spread to almost all countries of the

world, and the situation demanded a coordinated approach by the international community to combat its spread. In view of the situation in Iran, Foreign Minister Qureshi underscored the need for immediate lifting of sanctions and extending humanitarian assistance to enable Iranian authorities to save precious human lives. He also expressed deep concern over the continuing communication and movement lockdown in Indian Occu-

pied Jammu and Kashmir which was depriving 8 million Kashmiris of critical information and essential medical supplies needed to effectively contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Foreign Minister Qureshi also expressed concern over the fragile state of financial systems of the developing world. To allow developing countries to cope with the crisis, and mitigate the economic fallout, he underlined the Prime Minister's call for debt restructuring.

## "We'll die like cattle': Kashmiris fear

APP

**ISLAMABAD:** As the world scrambles to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, fear and anxiety prevail in Indian Occupied Kashmir after four COVID-19 cases were detected. Hospitals in the disputed Himalayan region have an acute shortage of doctors and paramedics, while its healthcare facilities are insufficient to meet the crisis.

# WHO highly appreciates Azerbaijan's preventive measures, says Hikmet Hajiyev

DNA

**BAKU:** Azerbaijan's necessary preventive measures are highly appreciated by the World Health Organization (WHO), Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan, Head of Foreign Policy Affairs Department of the Presidential Administration Hikmet Hajiyev said. Hajiyev made the remark in Baku at the briefing in connection with the special quarantine regime announced in Azerbaijan, Trend reports. "WHO has not yet raised

an alarm in relation to the situation in Azerbaijan," assistant to the president of Azerbaijan added. "This is the result of organizing the governance system in Azerbaijan at the perfect level under the leadership of the president," Hajiyev said. "At the same time, this shows the country's preparedness for such emergency situations. Azerbaijan took the necessary preparatory measures in early January when the epidemic was slightly observed. All this is highly appreciated by WHO."



During the meeting of the Azerbaijani Cabinet of Ministers held on March 23 under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Ali Asadov, a decision was made to impose a special

quarantine regime to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Taking into account the experience of various countries in combating the coronavirus COV-

ID-19 worldwide and in order to protect the population's health and prevent its spread in the country and possible consequences caused as a result of infection, Azerbaijan announced a special quarantine regime from 00:00 (GMT+4) March 24 through April 20 in accordance with the Article 25 of the Law of the Azerbaijan Republic about Sanitary and Epidemiologic Well-being. Azerbaijan remains one of the countries, least affected by the rapidly spreading coronavirus disease

(COVID-19). The country's official structures are applying necessary measures to prevent any possible exposure of coronavirus. Azerbaijan has also imported necessary medical equipment to carry out coronavirus tests. Azerbaijan's official structures have also set up quarantine centers in the country's districts, which would allow to react faster to the possible outbreak due to joint borders. Azerbaijan shares border with Iran, where coronavirus is currently spreading rapidly.

## Turkey puts 348 passengers under quarantine

APP

**SAKARYA:** Turkey placed 348 passengers arriving from overseas under quarantine as part of measures to contain the novel coronavirus on March 23, 2020 in Sakarya. The passengers were checked by medical staff at Istanbul Airport and transferred to Sakarya province.