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SCO Secy General for joint efforts to fight coronavirus

Pak committed to peace in Afghanistan



US ready to work with Pakistan



EXCLUSIVE detailed interview to appear in CENTRELINE magazine

SCO Secy Gen for joint efforts to fight virus

SCO Secretary General Vladimir Noro talks to daily Islamabad Post, DNA news agency and CENTRELINE magazine; Secretary General tells about the cooperation of the SCO countries in the conditions of the global pandemic, about the unpreparedness of major international structures and alliances to crises and about the fact that no state can provide its own security by suppressing the coronavirus only on its territory. Here are excerpts from his interview.

STAFF REPORT

BEIJING: *Dear Mr. Noro, we are well aware of the situation with coronavirus and a fight against disease in China. Could you tell us about the measures taken to combat the pandemic in other SCO member states?*

The scale of the epidemic in China in January and February has allowed many countries to assess in advance the level of the impending threat and take preventive measures. In mid-March, the epidemic landscape began to change dramatically, and the SCO countries were also faced with this previously unknown to anyone, dangerous disease. In order to avoid a widespread outbreak of the virus in many SCO member states, an emergency regime is currently in place, and the headquarters, committees and commissions responsible for the epidemiological situation have been established and are working systematically to mobilize the necessary resources.

I would like to highlight a few key factors.

First, the people of the SCO countries understood the forced measures to close educational institutions, to restrict the activities of enterprises, to shut down transport communications and borders, to postpone public and entertainment events.

Secondly, all government institutions, especially those responsible for healthcare, have been mobilized and are working to combat the Coronavirus epidemic in accordance with WHO recommendations. Ministries of health have demonstrated their readiness to quickly and effectively counter the virus wave, but, as everywhere else, there are cases of infection of doctors themselves in the process. In this regard, measures are taken to support healthcare personnel who are at the frontline of the fight against the dangerous virus. The already tense daily life of doctors has now turned into a real battle, they are risking their lives to treat the infected, but at the same time they



remain calm and cheerful. This attitude of doctors towards their work and the sick is deeply respected and appreciated. In this regard, the governments of the SCO countries take measures to materially encourage the work of doctors and

medical workers, which is quite fair and justified given the degree of danger of treating the coronavirus patients. I think that the care at the state level, unity of spirit, solidarity and moral support from the population for the efforts of doctors

give them additional strength and a sense of confidence in overcoming this common threat.

Thirdly, in the fight against the coronavirus, the possibilities of foreign ministries were mobilized to the maximum extent, which did a great job on the return of their citizens from other countries.

Fourth, financial and economic resources have been mobilized. Most SCO member states have adopted anti-crisis packages of measures that define the rights and obligations of citizens in connection with the introduction of the emergency situation, and provide for measures to support public and private enterprises, preserve wages, reduce taxes and provide assistance to the most vulnerable social strata.

The law enforcement and defence forces have also consolidated all their capacities and ensure public stability, taking the necessary measures to prevent the negative trends that have been observed in some countries of the world amid the growing epidemic. Unfortunately, some citizens have shown irre-

responsibility, in particular, in many countries there is the spread of inaccurate information related to coronavirus, concealment of symptoms of disease or intentional infection of others, growing organized crime through the Internet, production of counterfeit medical products and medicines. There is also the risk of terrorist and extremist forces exploiting the coronavirus situation, which imposes many restrictions and pressures on the functioning of key public security services. The epidemic is also experiencing the reliability of the widespread use of information and communications technologies in human life. The issue of information security and the security of critical infrastructure has become particularly relevant due to the increased attention paid to the coronavirus in the information space, as well as the mass transition of people to online and remote communication, which undermines established norms for the secure functioning of systems on the Internet.

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Briefs

CJP tests negative for virus

DNA

ISLAMABAD: According to a spokesperson of the Supreme Court Pakistan, Chief Justice Pakistan Justice Gulzar Ahmed, his family and his secretary had undergone testing for coronavirus and all have tested negative. However, the virus has been detected in a staff member of the Supreme Court after the worker exhibited symptoms of the viral disease and got tested. After his test returned positive, the infected staff member, Ehsan (Naib Qasid), has been shifted to polyclinic isolation ward where he is being given treatment. He was a member of Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed's chamber and has been shifted to the Polyclinic Hospital in Islamabad.

COAS, Khalilzad discuss peace in Afghanistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad and Resolute Support Mission Commander General Austin Scott Miller visited Islamabad on April 14. In a meeting with Chief of Army Staff General Qamar

Javed Bajwa, Ambassador Khalilzad and General Miller discussed the United States' ongoing efforts for a sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's military leaders reaffirmed their support for U.S. efforts and renewed their commitment to act to advance a political settlement to the conflict.

Govt approves SOPs for flights

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Government of Pakistan has approved the operational SOPs for International Private flights to Pakistan for 14th to 19th April 2020.

The SOPs comprehensively cover effective steps required to control the spread of COVID-19. The health and safety of

both the passengers as well as the flight crew have been kept in focus.

The operators and Ground Handling Agents for private aircraft shall have to follow strict health safety measures including required steps involving the pre-embarkation stage, during the flight, and post-embarkation stage. The SOPs have been formulated on the basis of best industry practices.

IMF issues report on Pakistan

NEHAL MIRAJ

ISLAMABAD: International Monetary Fund (IMF) has acknowledged Pakistan's measures to contain spread of the coronavirus. IMF's recent publication 'Policy Tracker' of its 193 member-states said that COVID-19 has been spreading rapidly in the past month in Pakistan, with 4,489 confirmed cases claiming 63 deaths, as of ninth of this month.

The fund said that the government announced relief package worth 1.2 trillion rupees to help daily wagers, common people of Pakistan and boost economy. Other measures, include quarantining over three thousand travelers from Iran, closing borders with neighboring countries, international travel restrictions, school closures, social distancing measures, and lockdowns in cities and provinces across the country.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan chairing Cabinet meeting on Tuesday. - DNA

Country opens albeit partially

Lockdown extended till April 30

ADNAN YOUSAF

ISLAMABAD: Federal cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday approved extension in countrywide lockdown to mitigate coronavirus crisis. The cabinet has decided to extend lockdown till 30th April across Pakistan. Earlier today, a detailed briefing was given on current Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation and measures being adopted to combat

the disease at National Command and Operation Centre (NCOCC).

Brig (r) Ijaz Ahmed Shah, Minister for Interior, Muhammad Hammad Azhar, Minister for Industries and Production, Omar Ayub Khan, Minister for Energy, Khushro Bakhtiar, Minister for Economic Affairs, Fakhar Imam, Minister for National Food and Security, Moeed Yousaf, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on National Security, Dr Zafar Mirza, Special Assistant to Prime

Minister on Health and Abdul Razak Dawod, Advisor to PM for Commerce attended the briefing. Minister for Planning, development, Reforms and special initiatives Asad Umar chaired the meeting where the forum reviewed progress made so far and future course of action.

Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Chief Ministers of Sindh, Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan, Chief Secretary Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa participated through video.

Govt reopens six airports

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on National Security Division Moeed Yousaf said on Tuesday the government has decided to reopen six airports till April 20 so stranded Pakistanis can return home.

Speaking at a media briefing alongside Prime Minister Imran Khan, he said more than 2,000 Pakistanis have been repatriated after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. He added the federal government has made arrangements to bring back Pakistanis from abroad. The special assistant said 35,000 Pakistanis want to fly back right away.

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Pak, Poland agree to expand cooperation in diverse fields

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Pakistan indebted to China for support

Ambassador Yao Jing calls on Finance adviser Dr. Abdul Hafees Shaikh

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Dr. Abdul Hafees Shaikh on Tuesday thanked the Chinese Government for all the assistance it has provided so far to Pakistan in dealing with the Corona Virus Pandemic.

He expressed these views during his meeting with Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Yao Jing.

The adviser shared with the Ambassador the details of the Economic Relief Package given by the Government of Pakistan to the people whose lives and businesses have been effected by the pandemic.

He said that during this difficult time, the government has three major priorities: to provide health care and safety to its people, provide cash assistance to the most vulnerable and keep the wheel of the economy moving in slow but steady pace.

The government has come up with a comprehensive relief package of worth Rs 1.2 trillion, which inter alia includes, Rs 200 billion assistance for workers and labourers, Rs 100 billion for supporting SME and Agriculture sector, Rs 107 billion as sales tax refunds and Rs 50 billion income tax refunds from 2014 onward.

Moreover, Ehsaas Program through its urgent cash disbursement is taking care of the most vulnerable in the country. Reduction



in petrol and diesel prices and deferment of payment of bills are some other significant steps. Incentivizing the construction sector is also an opportunity for those who are in need of work. The Adviser also discussed with the Ambassador the effect of the

Corona virus Pandemic on the overall growth of the economy of the country as exports and remittances shall both suffer as the global economies are in recessionary phase.

He said that different economies have different levels of strength

to deal with the economic losses and the developing countries will be the worst hit by the impact of this slow down. Keeping in view the present circumstances World Bank, IMF and G-20 countries are talking about debt relief without which developing countries will be worst affected. The Adviser expressed hope that these forums would be able to come up with a plan enabling developing countries like Pakistan to not only meet its international obligations but also to provide relief to its population adversely effected by this pandemic.

The Adviser said that Pakistan looks forward to Chinese support in dealing with this unprecedented situation arising because of this pandemic.

Gold price increases

DNA

KARACHI: Gold price reached an all-time high of Rs100,400 in Pakistan on Tuesday, according to the All Sindh Saraf and Jewellers Association. This is the first time that gold has shot above Rs100,000 in the country's history. The precious metal saw an increase of Rs700 per tola in its price. The prices compiled by the ASSJA come with a lag of a day after changes in international prices.

Briefs

Speaker for safe return of Pakistanis

ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser has directed all authorities concerned to ensure safe return of stranded Pakistanis abroad. He was chairing the second meeting of 'Special Committee on Affecteds of Coronavirus in Islamabad, to review the progress reports. The Speaker said the committee has diligently discussed the problems of Tableeghi Jamaat and pilgrims with their representatives, collected certified data and shared it with the departments concerned. He said the provincial Chief Ministers including Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister have also been taken on board. - APP

Field hospital for virus patients established

DNA
ATTOCK: The district administration has established field hospital for Coronavirus COVID-19 patients at the site of proposed mother and children care hospital in Attock to isolate and treat confirmed patients in a safe and secure environment. The field hospital is able to accommodate 70 patients. The provincial Minister for Revenue Col (ret'd) Mohammad Anwar Khan on Monday visited the field hospital. Member Punjab Assembly Jamsheed Altaf, Deputy Commissioner Ali Anan Qamamr, Assistant Commissioner Jannat Hussain Nekokara, CEO Health Dr Sohail Ejaz and officials of the health department accompanied the minister to the field hospital for the quarantine facility for the coronavirus COVID-19 patients.

CDA obtains possession of Park Enclave-II

DNA
ISLAMABAD: Capital Development Authority (CDA) has taken over possession of further 140 kanals land of Park Enclave-II on Tuesday. The operation was conducted in continuation of authority's operation initiated during the last week to take over possession of land of Park Enclave - II. Up till now, during this operation, possession of around 250 kanals vacant land has been obtained by authority. The operation is being conducted in line with instructions to obtain possession of 450 kanals vacant land so that early and prompt initiation of development activities in Park Enclave -II could be ensured. The operation is being participated by Enforcement Directorate, revenue staff of L & R Directorate, Planning Wing, Sector Development, MPO and other concerned formations while assisted by ICT Administration and Islamabad Police.



LALAMUSA: A man ready to unload ration for poor people. - Khurshid Nadeem

Ehsaas Programme beneficial

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Special Assistant on Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation, Dr. Sania Nishtar Monday said Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme was equally benefiting the minorities living in the country. In a tweet, Dr. Nishtar said "the initiative aims to equally benefit minorities. Many non-Muslim women in Tharparkar and Umerkot are beneficiaries of Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme." The program was designed to leave no one behind. Anyone with a national CNIC can apply for support, she added.

PTA sends 811.97 mn messages

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), under its ongoing extensive campaign, has sent 811.97 million messages to mobile phone users aimed at creating awareness about preventive measures against the coronavirus (COVID-19). Since March 19, the messages had been sent in Urdu, English and regional languages for comfort of the PTA subscribers across the country. Awareness SMSs in Urdu and English have also been sent to the travelers/suspected persons who may have come into contact with coronavirus patients during travelling. - APP

AIOU assignments' submission date extended upto Apr 27

The University has earlier earmarked fifteen regions of the country for submission of academic assignments to the designated tutors through Online

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has allowed its students of BA, B.Ed, MA and other post-graduate programs to submit their academic assignments till April 27. Earlier, the last date for the submission of assignments was April 15. The students were given further time for accomplish-

ing this academic work to facilitate them in wake of current lock-down owing to COVID-19 outbreak. According to the Directorate of Regional Services, the decision to this effect was taken with the consent of the University's Academic Council. Meanwhile, the last date for punching the assignments of results by the tutors have also been extended till May 4.

Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Zia-Ul-Qayyum advised the students that they must send their assignments to their assigned tutors by the stipulated date, since this is an essential requirement on their part for qualifying their respective academic program. The University has earlier earmarked fifteen regions of the country for submission of academic assignments to the designated tutors through Online.

The regions are: Islamabad Rawalpindi, Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Multan, Rahim Yar Khan, Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, Quetta, Bahawalpur, DG Khan, Abbotabad and D.I. Khan. A separate LMS portal (<http://aaghi.aiou.edu.pk>) has been generated for this purpose. The students of these regions have already been sent password and user-names for online submission of the assignments.

As was announced earlier, on the country-wide basis the students were required to send their assignments (both first and second) by the due date through Post offices. As per the directives of the Vice Chancellor, the University was trying its best to compensate its 1.4 million students across the country in their academic pursuits during the spread of the deadly virus.

PM enhances upper limit of loans to youth

Now the budding entrepreneurs can get a loan upto 25 million rupees instead of five million rupees. The Prime Minister also decided to reduce the applicable markup rate from eight percent

SHAHEEN QURESHI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan has approved enhancing upper limit of loan, under Kamyab Jawan Program, from five million rupees to 25 million rupees to facilitate youth to go for big business ventures. The approval was granted

during his meeting with Finance Adviser Dr. Abdul Hafeez Sheikh and Special Assistant on Youth Affairs Usman Dar in Islamabad on Tuesday. Now the budding entrepreneurs can get a loan upto 25 million rupees instead of five million rupees. The Prime Minister also decided to reduce the applicable markup rate from

eight percent. Speaking on the occasion, Imran Khan said that young entrepreneurs will be encouraged more as soon as relaxation in lockdown occurs. He said youth is a precious asset of the country and the government will invest more in them. He said young people have greater role in strengthen country's economy.

NADRA asked to reduce charges

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Committee on Issues of Cellular Mobile Operators (CICMO) has asked the National database Registration Authority (NADRA) to reduce charges of biometric verification of SIM keeping in view the situation in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak.

In line with directions of Prime Minister Imran Khan, the Committee on Issues of Cellular Mobile Operators was formed to evaluate the issues of cellular mobile operators and formulate recommendations for onward submission to the Prime Minister's Office, including settlement of licence renewal matters with cellular mobile operators that would help the government in valuable income generation in the current crisis situation.

Govt releases Rs 4,118.810 mn for power projects

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The government has released an amount of Rs 4,118.810 million for various power projects under annual Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for fiscal year 2019-20 so far. According to the data of Planning Commission, an amount of Rs 42,531.230 million was allocated for various power sector projects in the current fiscal year.

Similarly, an amount of Rs 215 million has been released for the construction of 132 Kv Grid Station at Deep Sea Port Gwadar, Rs 183.810 million for construction of 132 KV Grid Station at Dadar and 132 KV SDT Sibbi-Dadar and Rs 75 million each for electrification works at different valleys of District Chitral and establishment of 132 KV Grid System along with the upgradation of existing 33 KV Grid Station in Chitral.

President to convene Ramazan meeting

ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi on April 18 (Saturday) will convene a meeting of the provincial governors and Ulama from all provinces to chalk out proposals for masjid's congregations in the holy month of Ramazan and Taraweeh prayers etc. This was decided in a meeting at the Presidency attended by Minister for Interior, Brig(R). Ijaz Ahmad Shah, and Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Pir Noor ul Haq Qadri, a press release said. - APP

IRSA releases 104,500 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) Tuesday released 104,500 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 116,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in the Indus

River at Tarbela Dam was 1474.17 feet, which was 88.17 feet higher than its dead level 1386 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 25,700 cusecs and outflow 20,000 cusecs. The water level in the

Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1195.20 feet, which was 155.20 feet higher than its dead level of 1040 feet whereas the inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 41,100 cusecs and 35,000 cusecs respectively. - APP

Decision on this year's Hajj to be made by end of Ramazan: Qadri

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister For Religious Affairs Noor-ul-Haq Qadri has said that any decision on Hajj 2020 would be made by the end of Ramazan. Talking to media after meeting with the attorney general of Pakistan, Noor-ul-Haq Qadri said the government of Pakistan is in touch with the Saudi Hajj authorities over the matter.

He said that the Saudi government was analyzing the situation closely in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic. "They have different options on the table for allowing Hajj proceedings this year," he added. Qadri said he called on attorney general of Pakistan to discuss issues related to the ministry of Religious Affairs. - DNA

Air quality improves due to lock down: Experts

"We have started shifting to high quality fuel and now our focus is more on areas occupied with air pollution," he said, adding that the government is working on installing 10 new modern stations for monitoring air quality in big cities

ADNAN YOUSAF

ISLAMABAD: Experts at an online policy dialogue agreed that air quality has improved across the world due to lockdowns amid COVID-19 outbreak and stressed the need for regional cooperation to maintain air quality in future by sharing data. The online Policy Dialogue titled "COVID-19 and Air Quality" was organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) here on Monday. Prime Minister's Advisor on Climate Change, Malik Amin Aslam, has said the world has observed improvement in air quality because it has linkages with industrial and transport emis-

sions, which means willingness of people can change the air quality. "We have started shifting to high quality fuel and now our focus is more on areas occupied with air pollution," he said, adding that the government is working on installing 10 new modern stations for monitoring air quality in big cities. He said consequences of lockdown on daily wagers may be very harsh, so the Ministry of Climate Change is considering engaging daily wagers with proper protective measures in tree plantations drives to make environment and people better simultaneously. To a question, he said air pollution is a regional issue, so regional collaboration is the need of hour to overcome the issue and it's time to talk about data gathering.

He said electric vehicles policy is in the offing and soon the country will start manufacturing from two wheelers and move to 3 and 4 wheelers. SDPI Executive Director Dr Abid Qayyum Suleri said if we can close down our activities due to fear of pandemic, then we can also reduce our activities voluntarily post COVID-19 to make our air clean and breathable. Discussing the damage done to environment due to increasing pollution, he said one positive aspect of COVID-19 is that nature is healing due to closure of factories and transport. "We all know that climate change is no longer a natural phenomenon, but it is occurring due to human activities, which must be run under certain SOPs for which national policies need to be

devised," he maintained. In Indiana, he said, 90 per cent reduction in vehicle traffic has been observed, which improved the air quality. Similarly, in China particularly Wuhan, the shutdown of transport and factories improved the air quality, he maintained. Citing comparisons from recent studies done in Indianapolis, he said the problem with air quality as a metric is it varies over time because of human emissions, atmospheric conditions, etc., so studies show 38 per cent reduction in these emissions. He said we have direct link to our own environment, so our action can improve local health. Stressing the need for change in ecosystem of cities, she expressed surprise that despite the working of

thermal power plants, the air quality has improved. In rural India, she said, mixture of clean fuel and traditional fuel (most pollutant) in household use is the key reason behind high rate of deaths. She further said we should share data regionally and look forward to launch campaigns and initiatives through joint platform. Ms Rushati Das from Climate Action Network South Asia, said India is in lockdown since March 23 and within a week, the air quality has become better, especially in the North of the country. The air quality will again get worse, she warned, if a proper policy to keep it under control was not adopted. She said. She also stressed the need for co-operation across borders, to maintain good air quality.

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The way forward

AS the inevitable crisis approaches fast to devastate the economies of the world, countries such as Pakistan are at greater risk of being hit in a big way.

The recession that is inevitable now has even prompted experts from the IMF and World Bank to scratch their heads. A World Bank report has projected that in South Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan will be particularly in a bad shape in the aftermath of Covid-19. Amid all these doomsday scenarios, there is little expert advice about what is to be done apart from doling out aid packages to people and offering incentives to industries.

How long can the economy sustain in this situation and what will be the outcome of a prolonged lockdown if it carries on for months to come? All these questions need not one but multiple possible answers so that at least some planning is in place if things really go out of hand. There are two possible trajectories for Pakistan. First is the rosy one, in that the number of deaths remains relatively low and the lockdown is lifted in the coming weeks.

Most parties are just focusing on giving away aid and charities, but the potential for such generosity will soon exhaust. We need a panel of competent economists who can go beyond talking about doom and gloom and suggest some concrete measures to be taken in the coming days. There are a few steps that must be avoided: first a decision to print more currency notes is an easy but disastrous one. The more notes you print, the more able you are to hand out cash to the needy, but at the same time you create more inflation which is already running high.

Second, more external borrowing is also not suggestible as we are already under a tremendous yoke of foreign loans. Third, you can't carry on with an incompetent team. And finally, there is no need to create more rifts in society by targeting the opposition and the media which can be your potential ally in your fight against the Covid-19 crisis. So if these steps are to be avoided, what needs to be done that can alleviate the concerns of the people and offer us a way forward? An urge to print more notes must be curbed and the money distributed must be in line with what we have in the kitty. The government must stop all non-development expenses and divert them to heal the economy. Domestic borrowing – rather than external one – may be a way out.

That means you utilize all funds available from the domestic sources, just like you do in a war-like situation.



LoC firing

EVEN while Covid-19 sweeps through the world and kills thousands, the LoC between India and Pakistan continues to remain tense.

On Sunday, at least four civilians were killed on both sides of the border as fierce artillery fire was experienced over the Line of Control. Tortured Kashmiris who already face the risk of disease – along with the brutality of the Indian forces – now also face renewed firing over the border. Their situation is an unsafe one.

According to Reuters, this year in the month of March the number of such incidents across the international boundary has doubled compared to March last year, and they run over 400 for the current year. It is both astounding and atrocious that in this time when disease and death stalks countries, people will still have to face gunfire and bullets.

The hostilities over the LoC and international border have now continued for many months, taken many lives and created a huge degree of fear amongst those who live in the border villages.

The fact that this should continue even when nations are spending all their resources and energies in combatting the pandemic is shocking. This is a time for unity. Which is something the Indian government must understand, as it continues with horrendous policies both at home and on the border.

The socio-economic conditions in Pakistan and India are very similar. So is the situation of public sector healthcare, with limited facilities for those unable to afford private care.

This then is a time for cooperation and not for war. People deserve to be made a priority. Firing on the border will help no one.

We hope the Indian state understands that the pandemic is a problem the world and countries which neighbour each other must fight together. It is time leaders considered this carefully and learnt their lessons.

We need to work to save lives rather than take more.

It is unfortunate that at a time when people are already dying in droves, the Indian leadership has focused more on killing still more and unnecessarily provoking cross-border firing.

The Kashmir issue and Pakistan's options

Ansar Mahmood Bhatti



Pakistani leadership is trying to make the world understand that the Indian decision would drive the region towards precipice. Both countries happen to be the nuclear powers – a fact which makes things more complicated for any armed conflict would prove fatal for the region and the world at large. Despite our 'frantic' efforts, the world seems least interested in playing any role on this issue

AUGUST 5, 2019 decision of Indian parliament to change status of Kashmir seems to have backfired as Modi government since then is struggling against all sorts of odds both at home and abroad. The Congress party, the main opposition party in India, has already girded up its loins against BJP thus giving it a tough time to the extent that the Modi government, out of sheer frustration, has started a political witch-hunt. It is also because of this frustration that the incumbent Indian government has resorted to persecution of minorities including a vast Muslim population. The Indian govt presumably wants to muzzle all dissenting voices being raised after its unlawful and unwarranted action in occupied Kashmir without knowing the fact that all such coercive measures would ultimately end up in uniting the suppressed class of so-called biggest democracy of the world. Such tactics would surely prove a recipe of disaster for India particularly in Kashmir.

By doing away with the constitutional provisions India in fact has exhausted all its options on Kashmir and provided Pakistan with an ample chance of not only raising this issue at all available forums but to resurrect this matter in the Security Council also, which it has ably done. Now the question is, is it enough to bring Indian under pressure to withdraw its decision? Certainly not. It may be a hum-

ble beginning. It needs a fearless follow up to force India for a revision of the decision.

Unlike, India seems to have put itself in a vantage position by scrapping the constitutional provision. Pakistan now will have to make sure that the decision is withdrawn and India is forced for a plebiscite in occupied Kashmir as per the UN resolutions. The task is arduous and uphill.

Pakistani leadership is trying to make the world understand that the Indian decision would drive the region towards precipice. Both countries happen to be the nuclear powers – a fact which makes things more complicated for any armed conflict would prove fatal for the region and the world at large. Despite our 'frantic' efforts, the world seems least interested in playing any role on this issue. Disappointing response from the Muslim world must compel the Pakistani political and security leadership to sit together and try to find causes of such a lukewarm response. Insuperb response from the Western world was expected though keeping in view huge business interests that those countries have in India.

The incumbent PTI government needs to focus more on foreign front, which can be done through proactive approach and by engaging with the foreign missions based in Pakistan. Regrettably our foreign office mandarins have not made any such effort. Lack of coordination

has virtually left us in the lurch and tyranny of the matter is that we still are not ready to learn from our mistakes.

Instead of blaming others for all our woes, we need to put our own house in order which can be done only by achieving self-reliance especially in the economic field. Fact of the matter is that edifice of Pakistan's economy is erected on international financial institutions and loans and grants from friendly countries. This is not the way to manage economy. It may be a stopgap arrangement but not a permanent one. During last one year our exports have dropped down to an alarming extent. Abnormal devaluation of rupee is yet another factor that has not only dealt a deadly blow to our economy but continues to take a heavy toll on hapless Pakistanis.

Governance remained at the lowest ebb during the first year of PTI government with level of corruption increased considerably. Prime Minister Imran Khan needs to immediately grapple with this situation before it gets too late. In order to make world realize that Pakistan is a strong and self reliant country, we have to stand on our own feet, which is possible only by achieving economic independence. We must keep in mind that beggars can't be choosers!

The writer is Editor daily Islamabad Post, DNA News Agency and CENTRELINE journal.

Gender-balanced foreign service can make this world a better place

Mariam Javed Asghar

Unfortunately, Pakistan is not among those countries, despite of the fact that it was once led by Benazir Bhutto; the strongest and the only woman to lead Pakistan both in her life and death. Critics doubt the rewards of addition of more women to policy making and the durability of feminist policies, they are also skeptical of any links between women in executive positions and stirring outcomes

AS a woman of 21st century, that's ironic for me to watch, how the efforts to bring women from periphery to center of foreign policy still make headlines. Despite coexisting with men ever since Adam and Eve, daughters of Eve-the otherhalf of world population-have long been ignored in crafting policies related to the same world they share with their male counterpart. International relations reflect a world of men in which, they influence international affairs through their physical capacities, through their (masculinist) practices at institutional level and through the symbolic links between masculinity and power. For centuries, gender equality and human rights have remained secondary issues or matters of low

politics in patriarchal realm, but this century has seen unprecedented rise of global activism specially for gender equality which urged policy makers to consider the relevance of gender sensitive policies. Women in key decision-making positions were traditionally treated in three ways.

They were either ignored altogether, portrayed as overpowered or presented as underpowered and lacking the capacity for high-level roles. However, the rise in number of women successfully serving executive posts is negation of previously self-assumed stereotypes. In September 2018, Canada and the European Union co-chaired the first ever meeting of female foreign ministers; eighteen of the almost thirty serving female foreign ministers attended, from countries spanning five continents. Past few years have seen surge in numbers of women running for office around the globe even in war-torn countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. 417 female candidates appeared in 2018 for Afghanistan parliamentary elections 2,011 in Iraq 111 in Lebanon and US had also seen unparalleled female candidates running for statewide office in 2018, over 500 women ran for Congress. Pakistan and India, usually at odds but shared the same trend of increased women participation in politics. Both have witnessed a record-breaking number of females running for office in last elections; 183 women contested for parliamentary elections in Pakistan and 700 women contested for Lok Sabha.

The two dominant gender identities; men and women share entirely different traits, masculine traits include aggression, competitiveness, dominance, independence, and a willingness to defend one's beliefs at any cost, typical feminine traits are compassion, tenderness, warmth and sensitivity to the needs of others. We are not living in a perpetual peace nor it's a war like situation, cooperation and conflicts are running parallel which require both the competitiveness of men and the compassion of women.

In 2014, Swedish government adopted a so-called feminist foreign policy, since then, only few coun-

tries including Canada, Mexico and France has followed the suit and other handful countries which include Malaysia, Spain and Luxembourg have intentions to develop similar policies. Sweden's foreign minister, Margot Wallström explained feminist foreign policy as, "striving toward gender equality is not only a goal in itself but also a precondition for achieving our wider foreign, development, and security-policy objectives".

The addition of more women to the tables of policy making can make this world a better place, why? Because women are more pacifist than men, they oppose violence, sensitive towards casualties, opt peaceful means to end conflicts and turn out to be dovish politicians. Francis Fukuyama claimed that "a world run by women would follow different rules": it would be "less aggressive, adventurous and competitive."

Research by US think-tank Council on Foreign Relations shows that women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution can improve outcomes before, during, and after conflict because women are often perceived as 'honest brokers'. With the presence of women in conflict resolution, parties are more likely to reach sustainable agreements, peace agreements are 64 percent less likely to fail, peace agreements are 35 percent more likely to last at least fifteen years and narrowing the gender gap can decrease interstate and intrastate conflicts.

The collaborative approach of women to peace-making and their ability to organize themselves across cultural and sectarian divide, increase the prospects of long-term stability and reduce the likelihood of state failure, conflict onset and poverty. Closing the gender gap in workforce participation could add as much as \$28 trillion to the global GDP. Feminist foreign policy approach aims to unlock the potential of half of the world population, so, the improved status of women promises real benefits in every sector and it's a win-win situation for all.

Rhetoric and shallow promises will not reap those

marvelous benefits of gender-equality, states must be held accountable for their work; they should commit to issuing public annual reports that assess progress toward time-bound and measurable goals along the road to equity. Most of the countries have dedicated their resources to ensure gender equality in every sector, some of them are following specific plans and 83 countries have adopted UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs) to encourage women participation in peace and security processes. Unfortunately, Pakistan is not among those countries, despite of the fact that it was once led by Benazir Bhutto; the strongest and the only woman to lead Pakistan both in her life and death. Critics doubt the rewards of addition of more women to policy making and the durability of feminist policies, they are also skeptical of any links between women in executive positions and stirring outcomes. It's true that there are few examples which validate the encouraging impacts of more women to the policy making tables, their efficiency to reshape peace agreements, aid infrastructure, decrease militarism or more stable economic policies.

As a matter of fact, these matters depend on the nature of institutions rather than individuals and these institutions have remained male dominated for centuries, it's not a cake walk for women to just walk in and make some space for themselves in such well-established patriarchal settings. It's too early to negate or authenticate these viewpoints, because it's not been a century since women won the right to vote and unfortunately, many of them are still struggling to exercise this basic right. Even in such challenging environment, women have proven themselves worthy of executive positions, as leaders of states, as fighters in battlefields, as heads of global institutions and on the international trade and environment portfolios. Keeping in view the brief history of women in these areas and their extraordinary performance over such a short period of time indicates that this may not be necessarily long but definitely a rewarding road.

Briefs

PM reiterates resolve to fight corona



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday reiterated his firm resolve to continue efforts for curbing the spread of coronavirus as well as take steps to save the people from poverty, starvation and unemployment in the wake of ongoing lockdown in the country. Briefing media persons about the decisions taken by the Federal Cabinet meeting chaired by the Prime Minister, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information and Broadcasting Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan said the cabinet was informed that an ordinance was being promulgated to control inflation in the country and ensure uninterrupted supply of items of daily use. The cabinet members recommended inclusion of strict punishments for hoarders and smugglers in the proposed legislation, she added.

CAA conducts mock exercise

DNA

KARACHI: Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority on Tuesday conducted a full-scale mock emergency exercise to ensure the health and safety measures of passengers arriving from all over the World in the wake of COVID-19 at Jinnah International Airport, Karachi. The purpose of conducting mock exercise was to minimize the spread of coronavirus in Pakistan. Representatives from Sindh Government, NDMA, Federal Health, and ASF have also witnessed the mock exercise and expressed their satisfaction on all arrangements and found that exercise informative and helpful.

Hoarding may land you in jail for 3 years

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The federal government is working on a new ordinance to discourage hoarding and make the punishment against profiteering more strict. A draft of the ordinance has been sent to the PM. The ordinance is being drafted on the advice of PM Imran Khan. He had given the task to Law and Justice Minister Farogh Naseem. The ordinance has recommended maximum sentence of three years in jail for the offenders. They will also be fined 50% of the cost of the items they were hoarding.

Combating COVID 19: EuroAsian and CAs countries share experiences

CGSS organizes online conference; Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M), (Retd)- President CGSS welcomed guests; envoys and defence attaches share their views

STAFF REPORT / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad organized an "Online Conference" with the Ambassadors and Diplomats of the Embassy of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and, Russia on the topic "How EuroAsian Countries are Ensuring Preventive Measures Against COVID-19 & Their Suggestions for Others.". Keeping in view the recent situation of COVID-19 in Pakistan and around the globe, CGSS organized an online session to analyze and discuss the measures taken by Eurasian countries to effectively combat COVID-19. The session was commenced by Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M), (Retd)- President Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS). He welcomed the panelists to the online conference and highlighted the impor-

tance of preventive measures taken on regional level. Brig Mansoor Saeed, discussed the steps taken by Pakistan Government for battling COVID-19, he also mentioned the special Tiger Force and their responsibilities. Ali Alizada - Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Pakistan shared the preventive measures taken by the Government of Azerbaijan, they have imposed a country wide lockdown with limited mobility. He further mentioned the special organizations formed to control the spread of COVID-19. Ismatullo Nasredin -Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan mentioned that till date no cases have been reported officially but Tajikistan Government is prepared and fully equipped to deal with any emergency. The government has closed all international borders and prohibited all large gatherings. Akan Rakhmetullin, Amba-



sador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan expressed his views and mentioned that, serious quarantine measures have been taken in the country to control the spread. Furthermore, he

briefed about the special measures taken for the most vulnerable citizens, they are being provided with free groceries. Furqat A. Sidikov - Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbek-

istan shared his thoughts and highlighted that all Educational Institutions and Offices have been closed to ensure social distancing. Moreover, to facilitate the effected tourism industry of Uzbekistan special financial support has been provided to hotels and tourist agencies. Colonel Anatoly A. Fedotov- Defense Attache - Embassy of Russian Federation to Pakistan stated the goodwill gestures by Russian Government of sending aid to effected countries in the form of medical equipment. Furthermore, the government has also made a volunteering force for assisting the elderly citizens of the country. Colonel Mehman Novruzov- Defense Attache, Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Pakistan highlighted the special flights arranged to facilitate the citizens of Azerbaijan around the world. He further stated that COVID-19 tests are being done regularly to limit the spread of the pandemic.

Lt Gen Naem Khalid Lodhi, (Retd) - Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS advised the citizens to play their role in helping the government for collectively fighting the pandemic. Dr. Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan - Member Board of Experts, CGSS & Regional Geopolitical Analyst reviewed the diversified policies taken by Eurasian countries against COVID-19 and appreciated the effective measures taken by Eurasian countries. Brigadier Akhtar Nawaz Janjua (Retd)- Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS stated that this pandemic can be defeated by staying united as a nation. Syed Muhammad Ali - Member Advisory Board CGSS gave valuable suggestions regarding the political, cultural, economic, and diplomatic measures that need to be taken in order to defeat COVID-19. The online conference was attended by 25 participants including experts from academia and health sector.

Pak, Poland agree to expand cooperation in diverse fields



RAWALPINDI: Ambassador of Poland in a meeting with Zobiaida Jalal. - DNA

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Poland, Piotr Opalinski met with Federal Minister for Defence Production, Zobiaida Jalal on Monday. In a call on meeting by Ambassador of Poland, Piotr Opalinski, Federal

Minister for Defence Production, Zobiaida Jalal said Pakistan and Poland are friends and important potential trade partners. She said Pakistan highly values it's relation with Poland and wanted to work closely with defense industry of Poland. Pakistan and Poland can share their

defense related experiences, from which the defense industries of both the countries can benefit, the minister said. The Polish ambassador thanked the federal minister for her good wishes and said Poland also desired to further expand it's bilateral ties with Pakistan.

FBR asks taxpayers to update profile

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Tuesday asked the taxpayers to update their Institutional Research Information System (IRIS) profile and provide international bank account number (IBAN) for electronic transfer of refunds. According to an FBR press release, the Board had devised a centralized system of online payment of Sales Tax, Federal Excise Duty and Income Tax refunds directly in the bank accounts of taxpayers and for that purpose, it had requested the taxpayers to update their IRIS profile. In the given bank account details were in the system while IBAN details row was added wherein taxpayers were required to add their complete IBAN number. - APP

China's support in combating virus continues

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan-China relationship has proved test of time once again during critical timings once world was facing COVID-19 challenges. China not only looked after Pakistani students in Wuhan but also provided necessary medical assistance on emergency basis for containment of COVID-19. According to an official of National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), a team of Chinese medical experts visited Pakistan to share their experiences of recently fighting COVID-19 in China. The team met doctors, government and health officials in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Lahore and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. China provided critical medical supplies includ-

ing 529,924 N95 masks, 33,744 Protective suits, cover all, testing kits 10,000, 1558,379 medical masks, 36 ventilators, 180 thermometer, 100 thermal scanners, 24,900 gloves, 59,376 goggles, 10,000 litre sanitizers and 1,442 kg non-woven fabric for making protective suits. For Gilgit-Baltistan, special effort was made and medical supplies were sent to GB at Khunjab included five ventilators, 200,000 face mask, 2,000 N95 masks, 2,000 testing kits and 2,000 protective suits. Pakistan Army helicopters were flown to get these to various parts of GB. The Chinese medical experts' team also visited Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP) and discussed the ways to prevent and diagnose COVID-19 with Pakistan Military counterparts.

SCO Secy Gen calls for Joint efforts to fight coronavirus

Continued from page 01

According to experts, the main threats are leakage of personal data, cyber-attacks on test laboratories, medical facilities, banks, financial fraud, and malicious messaging. Given that the entire world faced an information security challenge during the pandemic, it is important to look at these experiences from an organizational and technical perspective, as there is a need for further improvements in the regulatory framework, national sustainable structures, high-tech software systems and information security tools. I think that these issues will be given special attention within the SCO as China, India and Russia have more sustainable systems and mechanisms that can be introduced in other SCO countries. I am convinced that the SCO Working Group on IT-technologies will conduct an analysis on all the positive and vulnerable factors of the new reality that lies in the practical establishment of the technological way of life.

- How do Member States help each other?

-The coronavirus epidemic has become a test of the unity and strength of cooperation within the SCO countries. First of all, it demonstrated its readiness to share not only epidemiological and organizational experience, but also to provide financial, economic and food aid to each other. Since the beginning of the epidemic, the SCO member states

have been in close contact with each other at the level of heads of state, heads of ministries and agencies responsible for health-care and public security. In the current difficult situation, coordination, exchange of information and mutual assistance are essential in overcoming all the negative consequences of the pandemic. It is well understood in our countries that no state will be able to ensure its own security by suppressing the coronavirus only on its territory as long as the disease continues to spread in neighbouring countries. As it is known, in the midst of the epidemic in China, the SCO member states provided assistance to the Chinese government. Currently, China, where the virus has gone down, is providing necessary assistance to the SCO countries by sending humanitarian aid. Chinese and Russian specialists are working on developing the vaccine. Back in February Russia transferred test systems for laboratory diagnostics of coronavirus to Central Asian countries. China, Russia, and Uzbekistan, despite the tense process of containing the epidemic, are now sharing available food supplies and medicines with the most needy countries in the region. In particular, Uzbekistan has provided humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan. According to Kyrgyz experts, this noble step shows that today relations in Central Asia have a completely different face. Assistance at such a difficult time indicates brotherly relations

in the region, which seeks cooperation, integration and improvement of mutual relations, which will also have a beneficial impact on the SCO. Russia, China, Uzbekistan have also sent assistance to Iran and Afghanistan, our observer states. Kazakhstan expressed willingness to help Central Asian nations in case of need. China has sent doctors and specialists to Iran and Kazakhstan. All this demonstrates the commitment of SCO nations to mutual support and cooperation in order to jointly overcome this emergency. I am fully convinced that our countries will withstand this ordeal with dignity and emerge from the situation with even stronger spirit and consciousness to build a new future on the basis of their experience. **What efforts should the international community make to combat the Coronavirus pandemic?** - The proliferation of coronavirus has become a global problem that deserves attention at the highest international level. The efforts of one or more countries are definitely insufficient, as experience shows. In this regard, the practical implementation of the proposals and initiatives voiced at the recent meeting of the G20 heads of state, including leaders of SCO member states - China, Russia and India, is very important. In particular, President Xi Jinping's proposal on consolidation of forces to accelerate vaccine development, introduction of drugs and test systems

seems important from the point of view of concrete definition of the most effective treatment and prevention methods. President Vladimir Putin, in his proposal to create so-called green corridors, free of trade sanctions, for mutual supplies of medicines, food, equipment, as well as a solidarity moratorium on the restriction of essential goods, as well as financial transactions for procurement against the countries most affected by the pandemic, rightly noted that this is a matter of life and death, and it is entirely a humanitarian issue. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has noted a paradoxical statistic that 90% of COVID-19 cases and 88% of deaths were in G20 countries, despite owning 80% of world GDP and living in 60% of the world population. It should be said that the coronavirus has seriously tested the national health systems of all countries of the world and their ability to withstand epidemiological shocks. The disease caused problems not only in the sphere of health care, but also provoked the economic crisis, revealing all the imperfections of the social sector responsible for the welfare of elderly people and people who do not have a permanent job. In general, the coronavirus has endangered the constantly circulating mechanism of globalization by halting the international flow of finance, goods and people. It is important that China's economy has begun to recover.

As you know, China is one of the few countries in the world that has all the chains of real production. Now more than 90% of China's major industrial enterprises have restored production, and under current conditions of shortage of medical protective equipment, basic necessities and food, China's powerful production and supply capacity has become even more important. The coronavirus has also shown that major international structures and alliances are not prepared for emergency and crisis situations requiring joint action. The virus has also affected the global balance of power, but the attempts to use the pandemic to increase sinophobia have not been particularly successful. I support the UN Secretary-General's opinion that the cause of the pandemic should be sought after it has been overcome. This is a time for unity, solidarity in order to save lives and reduce devastating social and economic consequences. We need to support the work of the UN as a universal and effective platform for global cooperation. Politicizing the virus is of no benefit to anyone but the virus itself. **- I would like to ask if there are any changes in the schedule for the SCO summit in St. Petersburg today?** - No changes have yet taken place in the date of the meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO member states in St. Petersburg, and we are still planning to hold it in July this year. At

the same time, the measures taken to limit transport communication objectively force us to postpone the dates of preparatory events or to switch some of them online, to the format of videoconferences. On April, 1 a meeting of experts from the healthcare ministries of the SCO member states was held in the format of a video-conference, during which the participants reviewed the epidemiological situation in the SCO countries, discussed the issues of enhancing cooperation on strengthening control over the development of the situation with COVID-19 and finding an effective method of treating patients with confirmed diagnosis. The experts agreed on the need to develop methodological recommendations on the safety of medical personnel at the national level in SCO member states. We intend to continue consultations on the fight against coronavirus at a higher level and to take decisive action together to counter the spread of the disease. Moreover, to agree on a large package of documents we plan to maximise the contacts of the SCO Permanent Representatives to the SCO Secretariat in Beijing. Thus, on April, 9, they held a meeting and considered draft documents such as a statement by the Heads of SCO member states on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Victory Day and a statement by SCO member states on cooperation in ensuring international information security.