



# Islamabad POST

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Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

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**Canadian envoy thanks PIA for special flights to Canada**

**Chinese envoy reiterates support to Pakistan**

**Japan provides another cache of grant: envoy**



## Chinese envoy reiterates support to Pakistan

China had been supporting the PRCS for COVID-19 in many ways; China had supported the PRCS in procuring 200,000 masks including N95 for doctors and para medical staff, which was exposed to coronavirus due to direct support to patients

DNA / APP

ISLAMABAD: Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Yao Jing has said that the government of China would continue its support to Pakistan in form of medical assistance, expertise and facilities to combat COVID-19. "We are trying our level best to provide medical assistance on daily basis to Pakistan," he said while addressing a press conference here at Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) headquarters the other day. He expressed the hope that Pakistan would over-

come this pandemic with its leadership and awareness of society and discipline and unity of people. He appreciated the efforts of the PRCS for taking prompt and effective measures against COVID-19 including setting up hospital, providing medical services, creating awareness and mobilizing volunteers at community level. He said Red Crescent Society across the globe had been contributing for humanity and well-being of people. PRCS Chairman Abrar ul Haq thanked the Chinese ambassador for his continuous support especially in fight against the

COVID-19. He expressed gratitude on behalf of the people of Pakistan for extending support particularly in hard times. He said China had been supporting the PRCS for COVID-19 in many ways. He added China had supported the PRCS in procuring 200,000 masks including N95 for doctors and para medical staff, which was exposed to coronavirus due to direct support to patients. He said China had also provided personal protection equipment (PPE) kits to the PRCS for safety of doctors and other medical staff.

He said the government of China had also offered further assistance in other areas also to help Pakistan in controlling the disease. He said the PRCS had established 120-bed hospital in limited time in Rawalpindi which was ready to serve the corona patients. He added there would be nine ventilators while 27 patients could be treated at the hospital's intensive care unit (ICU). He said there would be ambulance services with ventilator facility to shift the patients to other hospitals in case of problems of other medical complications like kidney disease.



ISLAMABAD: FWO is constructing hospital for COVID-19 patients in Islamabad. – DNA

## Capital to have infectious disease hospital by May 5

ADNAN YOUSAF

ISLAMABAD: National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Wednesday said that a 250-bed prefabricated state-of-the-art 'Isolation Hospital and Infectious Treatment Centre (IHITC)' in the federal capital will start functioning by May 5. According to an official of NCOC, the hospital would

be used to treat not only coronavirus (COVID-19) infected patients under best available equipment and medication but also be available for treatment of other infectious diseases. He said that as part of national effort for containment of COVID-19, Frontier Works Organization (FWO) is constructing this Isolation Hospital and Infectious Treatment Centre in collaboration with National Dis-

aster Management Authority (NDMA) and National Institute of Health (NIH) on Turnkey basis. The construction work on the project is in full swing and would be completed within 35 days. The earth breaking of said facility was done by Prime Minister Imran Khan on March 26. The construction teams of FWO are working round the clock, ensuring proper anti-corona precaution.

## Brig Ahmed new MS of PM

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Brig. Mohammad Ahmed has assumed the charge of new Military Secretary to the Prime Minister. The outgoing Military Secretary Brig. Waseem Itikhar Cheema today paid farewell call on the Prime Minister. During farewell call, the Prime Minister appreciated the services of outgoing Military Secretary and wished him success both in his professional career as well as personal life.

## Briefs

### DG ISI calls on PM

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Director General Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) Lt Gen Faiz Hamid called on Prime Minister Imran Khan here on Wednesday. According to PM Office, the matters pertaining to national security were discussed during the meeting. – Picture on Back Page

### Moscow to review lockdown

MOSCOW: Moscow said Wednesday it will review a new electronic permit system to regulate its coronavirus lockdown after large crowds formed in metros as police checked passes. Moscow authorities began issuing digital permits to residents using cars or public transport this week in an effort to reduce isolation violations.

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GSS experts discuss recommendations for uplifting lockdown and aftermath

China's success serves as source of inspiration: envoy – Back Page

## No political affiliation in Ehsaas Programme: PM

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday said Ehsaas Cash Emergency Programme was being carried out regardless of any political affiliation besides ensuring utmost transparency and merit. In a meeting with Central Vice President of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Haleem Adil Sheikh, the Prime Minister said the federal government was taking every possible step to provide relief to general public during the tough times of coronavirus situation. Imran Khan said the government was cognizant



of the problems faced by people and termed poverty another big challenge along with COVID-19. He said the government was formulating the strategy to address the situation keeping in view the economic problems of people. He lauded the spirit of youth of the country in

joining Corona Relief Tiger Force and stressed contribution of philanthropists to help the government mitigate the situation amid epidemic. He urged the political figures to motivate the affluent to help the needy and deserving during particular situation. Haleem Adil Sheikh apprised the prime minister on overall situation of coronavirus in Sindh and the problems faced by the people. He said the people of Sindh were grateful for the financial assistance given by Prime Minister Imran Khan through Ehsaas Cash Emergency Programme.

## SBP working for financial relief: Baqir

DNA

KARACHI: Governor State Bank of Pakistan Reza Baqir has said that SBP is constantly working with stakeholders and taking appropriate measures to bring financial relief and provide pragmatic support to the industries in order to maintain financial sol-

vency and retention of the workforce especially in these trying times. "SBP is constantly engaged with bankers to ensure that the initiatives undertaken by SBP are implemented on fast track basis in order to achieve the objectives," he added while speaking at a meeting with Directors of Employers Federation of

Pakistan through a 75-minute video conference to discuss the SBP Refinance Scheme for Payment of Wages and Salaries to the Workers and Employees of Business Concerns. These include direct deposit of wages and salaries into worker's accounts, payment through employers to workers if the employers provide complete information.

## Rupee weakens against dollar

ISLAMABAD: The exchange rate of Pakistani rupee against US dollar witnessed a decrease of 03 paisas in interbank on Wednesday and traded at Rs166.98 against Rs166.95 on last trading day, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported. However, according to Forex Association of Pakistan, the buying and selling rates of dollar in open market were recorded at Rs165 and Rs167 respectively. – APP

## Canadian envoy thanks PIA

Stranded Canadians to reach home safely; second flight to operate on April 17

A.M.BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: High Commissioner of Canada, Wendy Gilmour has thanked officials of Pakistan International Airline (PIA) and staff members of Islamabad International Airport for arranging special flights for smooth departure of 304 Canadians nationals who were stranded

in Pakistan because of suspension of international flights during lockdown in the country. Wendy Gilmour, High Commissioner of Canada expressed these views on her official twitter account. She also praised Canadian staff for their efforts for working 0300 hrs to ensure all Canadian nationals went back smoothly.

## 'Ramadan to begin from April 25'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Science and Technology Fawad Chaudhry has said that Ramadan moon will be sighted on April 24 and masses will fast from April 25. In a tweet, Fawad Chaudhry said that Maulana Muneeb-ur-Rehman is respectable but he does not see such a big moon, how can he see such a small coronavirus.

## Centre's lead role to continue: Firdous

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information and Broadcasting, Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan says protection of the people of Pakistan is our top priority.

In a tweet on Wednesday, she said federal government will continue to further strengthens measures adopted by the provincial governments to check the spread of coronavirus. She said Imran Khan is the Prime Minister of Pakistan and his aim is to

ensure protection of the rights of the people of all the federating units. The Special Assistant said all provinces are free and independent to make their decisions. She said eighteenth amendment guarantees constitutional powers of provinces.

## Japan provides another cache of grant

The Government of Japan will continue to support the Government of Pakistan not only in its efforts to fight against COVID-19 but also other matters related to Japan-Pakistan socio-economic development cooperation, says Ambassador Matsuda

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Japan has decided to provide third cache of assistance worth USD 1,000,000 to the Government of Pakistan through United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to equip Pakistani people and Afghan Refugees to fight against COVID-19. Prior to this grant assistance, the Government of Japan has provided USD 2,410,000 to

equipment/material to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by considering the situation on the ground on the request of the Government of Pakistan. This support will boost Pakistan's capacity to quickly track the coronavirus affected persons and treat them accordingly. This assistance will also help in reducing and delaying the transmission of COVID-19. Hence, minimizing serious illness and associated deaths due to COVID-19. Furthermore, it will also

strengthen the ongoing health services during epidemic peak period and will help in minimizing the socio-economic impact. MATSUDA Kuninori, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, while appreciating the tremendous efforts of the Government of Pakistan has stated that the spread of COVID-19 has become a serious issue worldwide and it is now crucial for the international community to take necessary measures to address this disease. He further stated that the Gov-

ernment of Japan will continue to support the Government of Pakistan not only in its efforts to fight against COVID-19 but also other matters related to Japan-Pakistan socio-economic development cooperation. The Government of Japan has also made a huge amount of contribution to Pakistan through UNHCR over the past 40 years which is over 160 million US dollars and is committed to continue extending support to Afghan refugees.

## Section 144 extended in Islamabad

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad administration on Wednesday extended Section 144 for two more weeks following the countrywide extension in lockdown till April 30. According to a notification, there will be a complete ban on public gatherings and public transport across the capital city. Restrictions on social distance and businesses that previously exempted will remain in place, the notification reads.



**Briefs**

**IHC issues written order in schools plea**

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) Wednesday issued written judgment in a petition, moved by private schools association against decision of 20% reduction in students' fee during two month vocations in wake coronavirus outbreak. Justice Aamer Farooq of IHC issued the two-page judgment in which the court ordered to send the matter to Private Education Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA) and rejected the request of private schools to suspend the fee reduction notification. The order directed the PEIRA to decide the matter related to fee of April and May after hearing the stance of private schools. The decision said that the petitioner's lawyer had expressed satisfaction if the matter was sent to PEIRA to hear the private schools. The IHC had issued directives to its Registrar office to refer the matter to PEIRA. — APP

**KP CM for minimizing his security escort**

PESHAWAR: As part of precautionary measures in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister on Wednesday issued SoPs for official visits of his own and directed to minimize the security escort as much as possible and keep all programmes simple. A notification issued here to all deputy commissioner by Chief Minister Secretariat, said that the CM desired to minimize his security escort to two vehicles and a Jammer along with his own official vehicle. "I believe in the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan. We have to keep out visits as simple as possible. I had issued SOPs for my visits in districts and give a clear message to keep my convoy as brief as possible and program as simple as possible," the CM said. The principal of social distancing will be implemented in letter and spirit during the Covid-19 pandemic and no official meals, launches, dinners would be served during his visit to any district. — APP

**Students urged to use Online methods**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training/National History and Literary Heritage Division Shafiqat Mehmood Wednesday stressed upon teachers and students to use online learning opportunity productively during the lockdown situation prevailing in the country. It is necessary to work out new methods of imparting education to students by connecting them with teachers under this extraordinary situation," Minister said while speaking to a private news channel.

**COVID-19: Sikhs to celebrate festivals with closed doors**

The traditional hustle and bustle with multi colored turbans missing, group prayers, services, entertainment and martial arts as well as procession named Nagar Kirtan – and features chanting, singing and colourful clothing, singing and chanting hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib, none of that will happen this year at Gurdwara Punja Sahib Hassanabdal

MUNIR FAISAL

THE centuries-old Sikh religious festival of Baisakhi—also known as Sikh baptism ceremony—like other religious festivals including Passover and Easter before it—takes place in the dark shadow of the coronavirus COVID-19 epidemic at Gurdwara Punja Sahib Hassanabdal in Attock. The traditional hustle and bustle with multi colored turbans missing, group prayers,

services, entertainment and martial arts as well as procession named Nagar Kirtan – and features chanting, singing and colourful clothing, singing and chanting hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib, none of that will happen this year at Gurdwara Punja Sahib Hassanabdal. With a few participants, the Guranthi, or Chief Pastor Kulbeer Singh offered the main Bhog ceremony while Pardhan (President) Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Sardar Satwant Singh offered the Ar-

das. On this occasion, special prayers were also carried out by Sikh elders for safety and prosperity of Pakistan in this testing time when whole world is suffering from coronavirus COVID-19 epidemic. For the followers of Sikhism, Baisakhi—celebrations to mark the new year of Sikh religion and also known as spring harvest festival is important event in Sikh calendar in which not only Sikhs living in Pakistan celebrate the event at Gurdwara Punja Shaib Hassanabdal but also highest

number of pilgrims from India as well as across the world participate the three day festival here. Chief Pastor Kulbeer Singh said that every year the festival begin with a visit to the gurdwara, followed by parades, singing and chanting hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib. None of that will happen this year. He said that in an extraordinary step to prevent from coronavirus COVID-19 epidemic, the Sikh community, the largest religious minority of the country, has closed all gurdwaras and

offered the highest religious festival in low key with few participants. President Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Sardar Satwant Singh and Dr Aamer Ahmed Chairman Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) expressed and shared their best wishes for the local and international Sikh community with the hope and pray that soon Sikh pilgrims across the world will be visiting these Gurdwaras again when the situation will be normalized.

**Registration for Tiger Force ends**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Registration for the Prime Minister's Coronavirus Relief Tiger Force has ended, on Wednesday. The registration process for the programme started on March 31 through the PM's Citizens Portal. So far, 941,000 volunteers have registered. The force will be run under the supervision of deputy commissioners across the country. All decisions regarding functions related to it will be taken by Youth Affairs Adviser Usman Dar. The Tiger Force is a force of volunteers formed to combat the novel coronavirus. In case a curfew or lockdown is imposed in the country.



ISLAMABAD: German Ambassador holding staff meeting. — DNA

**Influential mafia more dangerous than coronavirus**

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Influential wheat and sugar mafia is more dangerous for the masses than the coronavirus and other calamities, a business leader said. The whole world is battling coronavirus but people in Pakistan are also facing an onslaught of merciless mafia coupled with uncoordinated and futile efforts on the part of policymakers, said Shahid Rasheed Butt former President ICCL. He said that so far coronavirus has resulted in 113 deaths in Pakistan while the cruel mafia has made life difficult for hundreds of millions of people. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that Pakistan has become a heaven for hoarders and profiteers where plunder, unethical practices and organised crime has been allowed in the name of the business. He said that

prices of flour and sugar remained high despite recent probe which indicates the influence of mafia in the corridors of power. The role of NAB has left much to be desired as it seems only interested in flowery statements and harassing politicians, he added. The business leader said that sugar mafia has minted billions but it has also stopped payments to the growers, the prices of pulses are increasing despite tax relief and reduced transportation charges, and the poultry prices in being increased artificially. Almost every sector is plundering masses with impossible without connivance with those who matter, he observed. Mr. Butt said that highly tilted contracts were signed with independent power producers for five years but they are intact after 25 years which is amazing.

**Doctors for starting online services**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) Insaf Doctors Forum Chairman Dr Khawar Sultan has appealed to start online services of Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) to facilitate the medical practitioners. In a statement, he said with online services, doctors could apply for their licences or certificates while staying home and paying fees through online banking. "We respect the decision of the court regarding resumption of PMDC and expressed the hope that the PM&DC will function properly and doctors across the country will get relief," he said. — APP

**AIOU extends admission date for Post-Graduate programs: VC Dr Zia**

SHAHEEN QURESHI

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) on Wednesday extended the date of admission for the semester spring 2020 for its Post-Graduate and Bachelors level programs up to June 5. The decision has been taken by the University's administration in a high-level meeting held here yesterday under the chairmanship Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum. The last date for the admission was extended, keeping in view the current crisis situation in wake of COVID-19 in the whole country. Earlier, the last date was



April 15 which has now been extended up to June 5, 2020 to facilitate the fresh as well as continuing students of the AIOU belonging to different nooks and corners of the country. However, these admissions have been extended only for MA, MSc, M.Ed, B.Ed, BS, BA, BBA, Associate Degree and Post Graduate Diplomas. The details and eligibility criteria along with admission forms to apply in

these programs is available on the University website [www.aiou.edu.pk](http://www.aiou.edu.pk). Fresh and continuing students of the AIOU are encouraged to apply Online through admission portal. The Vice Chancellor stated on this occasion that the decision of extension in the date of admission aims at facilitating the students of AIOU and hoped that the current crisis situation will not stop their pursuit to get higher education. He further stated that the AIOU will take every possible step to facilitate its students who are eager to obtain and continue their education for the uplift of their families, society and their families, society and the Nation.

**Pak Post launches financial services**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Post has recently launched various important financial services to restore the confidence of its customers and enhance revenues of the department. Talking to APP, an official said that "we have started Urgent Mail Service (UMS) and through this service the people can immediately send their parcels to any part of the country. "Rates of this service are very low as compared with the private couriers," he said. He said that Pakistan Post started initially export parcel service 'EMS' in seven countries. Under this service, Pakistan Post is ensuring delivery of parcels in 72 hours, adding that this service would be further expanded. — APP

**'Pakistan needs to ready for 4th industrial revolution'**

ISLAMABAD: The post COVID-19 crisis, Pakistan will be able to better equip itself for the 4th industrial revolution, and "we need to remember that how would the world look like if there is a digital virus and this millennium bug would erase all data." This was stated by experts at an online consultation titled 'Higher Education and Digital Inclusiveness in Times of COVID-19' organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) here at Islamabad,

said a press release issued by SDPI here on Tuesday. Managing Director, Quality Assurance Agency, Higher Education Commission, Dr. Nadia Tahir said COVID-19 has placed higher education at the forefront of the quality frontier, and now we have to address that access is key to success. ED SDPI Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri said that digital inclusiveness also addresses inequality, but one thing we need to address is its regressive effects on marginalized and vulnerable segments of the society. — APP

**Next year difficult for Pakistan's economy: expert**

Pakistan has a labor force of 63 million out of which 46 million people are employed in the informal sector and are most at risk of job loss. He said even the most cautious estimates put job losses at 3 million

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The corona virus pandemic has hit Pakistan's economy hard like the rest of the world but the post-crisis period during the next fiscal year will be even more painful as the country will face \$19 billion of debt payment including principal and interest, a big drop in remittances and exports, and a worst-case scenario of up to 5 million job losses, according to an economics expert. Zafar-ul-Hassan Almas, Chief Macroeconomics, Planning Commission of Pakistan, speaking at a webinar titled 'Economic impact of COVID-19 on Pakistan' highlighted the macroeconomic challenges facing the country due to the pandemic and how to cope with these issues. It was organized by Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad as part of its webinar series 'COVID-19: Global Challenge, National Response' initiated to cover different aspects of the corona

virus pandemic. The event was chaired by Dr Waqar Masood Khan, former federal finance secretary and member of IPS Academic Council. Almas said during the post-corona virus period countries would launch policies to protect their interests that would adversely affect global trade and employment opportunities. There would also be problems of liquidity of banks, fiscal space constraints and re-setting of IMF program targets. The expert said the biggest problem for Pakistan is lack of fiscal space. Next year the country has to make payment of \$19 billion on account of principal and interest to international creditors. Pakistan will have to arrange the amount from the international market in the form of new loans. However, tightening of financial conditions will complicate the refinancing of external debt. Almas said exports and remittances have a greater impact on the economy than imports. He said the government was expecting exports worth \$24

billion along with around the same amount in remittances this year. However, there will be a sharp downtrend in remittances in the last quarter of the fiscal year as overseas Pakistanis would continue to be made redundant. This is projected to drive remittances down by around \$2 billion. The government has reports that 30,000 Pakistanis have lost jobs in the UAE and other Gulf countries and this number is going to increase. The employment market will not get a boost even in the post-crisis period as it would be a huge challenge to accommodate the returning expats, he added. Pakistan has a labor force of 63 million out of which 46 million people are employed in the informal sector and are most at risk of job loss. He said even the most cautious estimates put job losses at 3 million. Almas said the major loss will be in exports and imports with the country taking a hit of \$1-1.5 billion in exports. The loss is \$1.52 billion for one quarter during

this financial year but it could increase significantly in the next quarters. Imports are expected to contract by \$35 billion. Fortunately, he said, the country is in a comfortable position regarding the current account deficit. The data for March shows a positive impact due to the low oil prices while imports have gone down substantially. The expert said the major channel for the hit on economy is the drastic fall in domestic demand for energy and goods as consumption has dropped sharply. The closure of industries is also resulting in postponement of investment decisions, he said. The government estimates that if only the food, pharma and retail sectors are allowed to remain open the GDP could fall to 2 per cent. He said the government was expecting 3.3-3.4 per cent GDP growth before the crisis but now the estimate has been cut to 2-2.8 per cent. The financial sector may see an increase in non-performing loans and there could be bankruptcies, all of

which would also affect the services sector. Almas said before the crisis the government was expecting to contain the deficit at 7.4-7.5 per cent. It is now expected to hit 9 per cent due to increasing expenditure demand and fall in taxes and non-tax revenues. Almas said the next budget will focus on restoring the economy as there will be a plethora of challenges regarding growth, fiscal deficit, and expenditure and revenue losses. Dr Waqar said the government must focus on providing food assistance to deserving people without resorting to politics. He was critical of the way monetary relief was being distributed to people and said that disbursement should be done through digital platforms. He was of the view that life would not return to normal for quite some time even after the crisis blows over. There was no chance of positive growth so there would be a huge increase in poverty, he added.



## Food shortages

**T**HE UN has warned that the Covid-19 pandemic that has affected 210 countries around the world with 1,918,679 cases of infection and 119, 212 deaths currently reported could also result in a lockdown of the food supply system.

While the agency and its Food and Agriculture Organization has said that at the moment there are no food shortages, and stocks are available in markets, it is warned that the disruption occurring to the system of supply could result in food insecurity and put a strain on the complex systems which tie together farmers, agricultural inputs, processing plants, shipping, retailers and more.

The problem is not one of food scarcity. Rather it is one of the drastic measures put in place to halt the spread of the virus also preventing food from reaching people who need it. These measures include the closure of borders, restriction of movements and disruptions in shipping and aviation.

This means it is harder to move food internationally and already there are reports of cargo ships carrying large loads of foods being unable to dock at any port because many countries have closed down ports and airports.

Around the world, thousands of aircraft have been grounded and the systems usually used to bring food into countries have in some cases ground to a virtual halt.

In Pakistan, there have already been discussions on how to transport loads of harvested wheat to warehouses and how to bring labour to areas where wheat is waiting to be cut.

The Sindh government also suggested at the National Coordination Committee meeting that no food be exported this year given the uncertainty over production, transportation and supply as well as their inability to predict how much would be produced next year.

The hoarding and black-marketing of food have added to the problem for people in the country as costs rise sharply, and the prime minister will need to deliver on his promises to effectively tackle this problem. Pakistan is among those fortunate countries which produce enough food to feed its people.

However, nations which depend on food that must be transported into their countries with few alternative food sources available to them are high risks.

The world will need to work together to solve the problem and ensure no one in any nation goes hungry because of the grounding of airlines and ships containing food, medicines and other essential products.

The UN has said it will be devising a strategy on this aimed at protecting the poor in the world and we must hope that this plan will be effective so that a food catastrophe on a gigantic scale can be avoided.

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## Stranded overseas

**T**HE novel coronavirus has brought with it a host of unexpected problems. As the result of the curbs on air travel and the suspension of flights into Pakistan on the orders of the federal government to prevent the spread of the virus, around 40,000 Pakistanis are said to be currently stranded overseas.

Some of them face risks from the Covid-19 pandemic in the country where they are currently stationed. The majority of these persons are based in the Middle East according to Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

He has also said that additional special flights are being organized to bring as many people home as possible. Some of the Pakistanis have lost jobs or have traveled for tourism or business and are facing shortages of cash or the means to sustain themselves overseas.

Among those stranded are 2,248 members of the Tableghi Jamaat who had presumably set out on preaching missions. There are also smaller numbers of Pakistanis in the UK, US, Italy and Thailand. Special flights had gone out before but not all the Pakistanis could be collected.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said the data of all those currently overseas has been collected and they will be tested on their arrival home and placed in quarantine if necessary.

Many of these people have complained over the past weeks that they have received almost no support or guidance from Pakistani missions based overseas. But there have been exceptions.

The Pakistan consulate in Milan has arranged food packages for Pakistanis in the city and has been sending these out to meet the urgent needs of those who cannot return.

For the present, stranded Pakistanis will be able to return only aboard special flights. However, the aviation division has said that in the next phase it will hopefully be possible to make major airports operational so that more persons can return home.

The challenges posed by Covid-19 are unprecedented. However, given the plight of some of the Pakistanis unable for the present moment to return home, the initiative taken by the government is welcome.

We must hope now that testing and quarantine procedures for these persons can be carried out in an organized manner to ensure that anyone carrying the virus is placed in isolation. We must avoid other pockets of Covid-19 appearing in the country. But at the same time it is our responsibility to bring home stranded Pakistanis so that their miseries can be eased and they are able to reach their own country, in some cases after spending months overseas in difficult circumstances.



## A sustainable lockdown strategy: national consensus need of hour

Miftah Ismail



*In essence, the government wanted us to fight this war but without any weapons. Next, it spectacularly failed in containing the virus at Taftan. Our health adviser himself visited Taftan yet somehow the government turned the quarantine facility into an incubation centre and then released the infected*

**T**HE coronavirus pandemic is the gravest crisis Pakistan has faced. The virus is spreading exponentially worldwide, and once it infects the chances of serious illness and even death are quite alarming. Unlike what our misinformed prime minister told the nation a few days ago – only to backtrack later – the virus can be lethal for all, including the young and the healthy.

This pandemic has devastated the public health systems of advanced countries and its effect can only be imagined in Pakistan. Fortunately, so far the death and devastation in Pakistan are not at the level suffered elsewhere. But this shouldn't make us lower our guard. We may be just a few days behind other countries and end up worse off than them if we don't continue our focus on slowing the spread of the virus. Unfortunately, the current government has failed to deal with this crisis, especially in its initial containment efforts. Its first failure was in not ordering enough ventilators, protective equipment and testing kits between January and mid-March, or planning to add emergency healthcare capacity in the country.

The failure continued at airports where thousands were allowed to come in without proper screening. And it continued when the Tableghi Jamaat was allowed to hold its Ijtema. The ijtema ended sooner-than-scheduled but only after other institutions intervened. Likewise, it was due to such intervention that the Punjab government enforced a lockdown in the face of obstinate and misguided opposition from the prime minister, who to this day has failed to own the lockdown and articulate an integrated national strategy to face this crisis. His initial dithering has cost the nation precious time in this fight.

Now weeks into the lockdown we are seeing some positive results as Pakistan hasn't climbed a steep curve either on infections or deaths. It seems, however, that the slow growth in confirmed cases is due both to the lockdown and also limited testing. For low coronavirus deaths too, scanty testing is partially responsible as patients who weren't tested when alive aren't reported as coronavirus fatalities. However, things are likely to get worse as infections continue to creep up.

Since there is no cure or vaccine, one strategy is to let the virus spread and achieve 'herd immunity', the notion that when enough people within a population get infected and gain immunity then further spread of the virus becomes slow. Great Britain pursued herd immunity for a time before changing course once it was understood that it may suffer up to a million deaths before herd immunity is achieved.

Most countries in the world are trying to contain the virus with various types of lockdowns as the only viable strategy. We have to follow the same course. However, we must be honest with the nation. This pandemic will likely get worse before it gets better and thus lockdowns might be in place, off and on, for quite some time. But since this battle must be fought until a vaccine is discovered, the lockdown has to be economically sustainable and culturally appropriate.

A lockdown has four principal advantages. First is to slow the spread of the virus, what is referred to as 'flattening the curve' of infection, so that a large proportion of the population doesn't get sick at the same time and public healthcare systems are not inundated with millions of people getting sick simultaneously and competing for limited medical resources including hospital beds, ventilators, etc. Slowing the spread of the virus has an enormous impact on the number of infections and fatalities. The New York Times estimated that in America a no lockdown situation would have led to more than 150 million infections and 1.8 million deaths but a 60-day lockdown would lead to 13.9 million infections and 82,300 deaths. So 'flattening the curve' is crucial to saving lives.

A second advantage is to gain time to build infrastructure to contain the virus and fight the disease. This means building field hospitals tailored specifically to tend to Covid-19 patients, creating quarantine and isolation centres, and even temporary shelters for people most at-risk. We also need to procure ventilators and protective gear for medical personals and the public.

A third advantage is getting time to test as many at-risk people as possible and where appropriate isolating them and tracking and testing their contacts. The main reason South Korea and Singapore have been so successful in containing the virus has been their ability to track, test, isolate the infected.

Finally, the fourth advantage is to gain time in the hope that a cure is soon found. Research is ongoing and it is possible that a vaccine or a cure can be found in the coming months. Our effort to slow the spread now and buy time can save millions of precious lives.

Lockdowns have enormous economic costs but we can reduce these by certain mitigating measures. It goes without saying that large gatherings should be banned everywhere. But economic activity that is vital and can be carried out with minimal risk may continue. Authorities should expeditiously come up with protocols of how factories and businesses can protect their workforce and customers by minimising the risk of infection. Only those factories that meet the requirement may then be allowed to re-open.

Businesses that can result in spreading the virus, such as restaurants, salons, gyms, etc must remain closed. But other shops could be allowed to open, perhaps on alternate days to ease traffic and congestion in the markets. Similarly, public transport like busses could be allowed but with passenger capacity truncated. People selling things on pushcarts or small kiosks should be allowed to conduct their business, but again with restrictions such as a limit on how many can park their pushcarts in the same area, etc. These measures minimise the risk yet provide employment opportunities for our people.

While people are making sacrifices, our governments must do their part. At this time of economic crisis, our monetary policy should be geared towards providing liquidity for businesses, especially small and medium enterprises, so good businesses don't go bankrupt due to a liquidity crunch. This will permanently reduce our national income. More importantly, our fiscal policy should primarily focus on helping the poor through this crisis. Cash transfer to the poor has been a good start. Much more needs to be done.

No strategy can be successful if it is not universally accepted and fully implemented. This is not to say that the lockdown specifics should be the same in, say Faisalabad and Pasni, but it does mean that the principles and rationale of the strategy should be the same and implemented uniformly. The government must take ownership of the situation and come up with an integrated national strategy.

**The writer has served as federal minister for finance, revenue and economic affairs. Article first published in The News, April 15, 2020.**

## SAARC: the sluggish organization of South Asia

Khalid Mahmood Faisal



*The rivalry between India and Pakistan and India's ambitions to achieve regional hegemony threatens its neighbor, Pakistan. Pakistan has friendly relations with China, these friendly relations have twofold benefits for Pakistan; economic prosperity and strategic balance in the region, because China is hostile towards India and its hegemonic pursuits backed by Washington, hence, India's ambitions to enjoy hegemonic position in South Asia always confront China*

**I**N such a time when the entire world is fighting against the COVID-19 virus, two member states of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have also contributed financially fund to combat this pandemic.

Pakistan has pledged \$3 million as emergency funds to support regional efforts, however, Islamabad has reservations about utilization and administration of funds, therefore, wants this process to be administrated through SAARC secretary general along with modalities for its use to be finalized with the consultation of member states as per organization charter. Similarly, Indian premier Mr. Modi has also taken such initiatives in a video conference of SAARC member states, \$10 million had been allocated for COVID-19 emergency funds. Mr. Modi has also offered rapid response team of doctors and specialist to provide services to the SAARC members. It is fortunate to see that SAARC member states are coming forward to help South Asians.

SAARC as an organization is bigger than European Union, while Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) surpass both these organizations in terms of territory and population, moreover, this is indigenous organization which has China in leading role, hence, external interference is impossible, which is not the case with SAARC. Despite the fact that SAARC is 35 years old, it has failed to achieve its goals and to implement any solid welfare policy for people of South Asia.

Inactivity of SAARC is evident from the fact that, since 1985, only 19 summits have been held and last SAARC summit was held in 2014 in Kathmandu, which was attended by head of states or their representatives. On top of the agenda were three connectivity agreements on road, rail and energy, to be endorsed by the eight SAARC leaders. Only one of these - on energy - was signed, overall, that was a disappointing SAARC summit.

After that, the 19th summit was planned to be held in Islamabad but canceled as a result of Uri attack in Indian Occupied Kashmir. Obviously, India which is always at odds with Pakistan refused to attend this

summit and other member states dominated by India followed Indian decision and it was called off.

India is an influential state among SAARC members because of its territorial superiority and being a second largest populace country in the world.

It borders with all states in South Asia except Afghanistan. India has tried to pursue its hegemonic ambitions mainly at the expense of SAARC and Pakistan has always tried to halt these efforts hence, SAARC is rendered powerless because of two nuclear arch rivals. Further, the Kashmir question and the opposite poles hold by Pakistan and India have caused serious damage to SAARC.

The rivalry between India and Pakistan and India's ambitions to achieve regional hegemony threatens its neighbor, Pakistan. Pakistan has friendly relations with China, these friendly relations have twofold benefits for Pakistan; economic prosperity and strategic balance in the region, because China is hostile towards India and its hegemonic pursuits backed by Washington, hence, India's ambitions to enjoy hegemonic position in South Asia always confront China. China has the status of observer state in SAARC since 2004 which is definitely unnerving for India. Moreover, Beijing takes serious interest in uplifting the poor South Asian nations, its engagement with South Asian states both at political and economic fronts alarms New Delhi. Despite having territorial disputes and irrespective of fighting a war in 1962, China and India are biggest trade partners in the region and Beijing has also welcomed India in SCO.

The rivalry of India and Pakistan has been a prime cause of inoperativeness of SAARC, the core reason of this rivalry is Kashmir. The animosity has been triggered in recent times, after India has revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under article 370 of the constitution and bifurcated the state in to two union territories.

The region has been placed under the lockdown since last nine months. Corona virus has also reached the union territory; 245 people have so far been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the region, the health minister of Pakistan raised the issue of virus in video conference

of South Asian states, he demanded the removal of restriction imposed in Jammu and Kashmir.

For Pakistan, Kashmir is vital, hence, it is hostile towards its occupier; India, other than that, Pakistan has always tried to play positive role in the region, this is evident from the recent breakthrough of finalization of Afghan peace process. Islamabad facilitated the negotiations between USA and Afghanistan held in Qatar. In the past Islamabad had supported Sri Lanka in its war against Tamil tigers.

Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi reiterated that, SAARC provides an important platform to carry out the agenda for regional cooperation, to tackle common challenges; he exchanged these views with his SriLankan counterpart in detail aimed at the situation arising from Corona virus outbreak, he also affirmed readiness to host the coming SAARC summit.

The South Asia vision of 2030 of SAARC Chamber, launched by the state members would set the foundation of an era of progress, development and welfare of people in the region. Its depend on the sincere efforts and interest of state members specially India and Pakistan, the one has ambitions for hegemony and the other has to stop the pursuit of this ambition for the sake of its own security and survival.

However, the current plague has exposed the vulnerability of even the richest nations on earth, it's a golden opportunity for both states to reconsider their hostile approach towards each other, at this moment, South Asia is comparatively save from the horrors of COVID-19 but in future, may be this luck won't prevail, hence, the arch rivals should realize the nature of non-traditional security threats and how vulnerable they are. It is the time to invest on their people rather than bullets and bombs.

As a host Pakistan Prime Minister, Mr. Khan has invited to Mr. Modi to participate in coming summit of SAARC that will be held in Islamabad, let's hope, this summit will set the foundation of cooperation and development of South Asia because, there is no other option except cooperation as another financial crisis is imminent.



## Briefs

**UN chief says not proper time to reduce WHO funds**

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday it was "not the time" to reduce resources for the World Health Organization (WHO), a Geneva-based UN specialized agency, after President Donald Trump halted U.S. funding over the body's handling of the coronavirus pandemic. In a statement, Guterres said it was "not the time to reduce the resources for the operations of the World Health Organization or any other humanitarian organization in the fight against the virus."

"Now is the time for unity and for the international community to work together in solidarity to stop this virus and its shattering consequences," the U.N. secretary-general added. As of Tuesday, there are more than 1.8 million confirmed cases, according to WHO figures, with more than 117,000 confirmed deaths, and 213 countries, areas or territories with cases of the new coronavirus.

## G20 finance ministers

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia hosts G20 finance ministers and central bankers for virtual talks Wednesday amid warnings of a deep coronavirus-triggered recession and growing calls for debt relief for poor countries including in Africa. The meeting comes a day after their counterparts from Group of Seven (G7) nations expressed support for a temporary halt to debt payments from the world's poorest countries to help them weather the pandemic - if G20 governments agree. Ministers and bankers from 20 most advanced economies had pledged in their previous meeting last month to address the debt burden of low-income countries and deliver aid to emerging markets hit hard by the pandemic. G20 working groups are expected to outline details of the plan in the meeting on Wednesday. - APP

## Finland lifts blockade on capital

HELSINKI: Finland's prime minister lifted a blockade on the Helsinki region on Wednesday, but warned that the epidemic "is not yet under control" and other restrictions will remain. The government on March 28 shut roads and rail services into and out of Uusimaa county, which contains the capital, to all but essential travel in a bid to stop infections spreading to the rest of the country. But the growing number of cases outside Helsinki means that the blockade can no longer be justified under state of emergency legislation, Prime Minister Sanna Marin said. - APP

# GSS experts discuss recommendations for uplifting lockdown and aftermath

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS) has organized an "Online Interactive Session" on the topic "Suggestive Measures for Lifting the Lockdown: What can be the Phases", on Wednesday. The aim of the session was to discuss the recommendations that can be fruitful for uplifting the lockdown. The session was chaired by Mr. Nadeem ul Haq Vice Chancellor, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). He stated that this is a bigger war than 1965 and 1971 but unfortunately our response has been less than required. We have done nothing during the lockdown and has done no preparations. We do not have any specialists, we need epidemiologist, virologist and economists to devise a sound strategy with their input. Air Vice Marshal Saeed Khan (Retd) stated that Government must come up with certain does and don'ts which must be implemented immediately. We need long-term and mid-term policy while prioritizing our health sector. Innovation is

required that can be achieved through the specialists. Lieutenant General Masood Aslam (Retd), Member Advisory Board stated that we must ease the lockdown to continue the economic activities and any reaction from the religious and social activists must be dealt strictly otherwise it will prove to be counterproductive. Unnecessary movement must be controlled while ensuring strict official status. Other panelists of the session stated that the announcement by the Government regarding the extension of the lockdown on 14th April needs further clarification. It was opined that Government is incrementally opening certain sectors which are interrelated with other business, therefore, connected issues of downstream industries must also be addressed. A complete lockdown in our society is not possible, therefore Government must opt for smart lockdown approach by devising a 14 days plan keeping in view our organizational capabilities. The lockdown must be lifted in two phases, first phase requires identification and assessment of red zone and clear zone, so that



during the second phase, lockdown from the clear zones can be lifted. The use of masks and gloves must be made mandatory by the Government and must opt for mass production of safety gears including masks, gloves and sanitizers which must be distributed amongst the general public. We must also conduct more tests, as currently, we do not have denominators of actual infection rate.

There is not much information and data to devise a sound policy. It is about time that civil society must push for occupational health and safety standards in the factories. There is a lack of public obedience in our society, hence Government must strictly ensure the writ of the state. We need to mobilize our own production and reduce our exports. We have to mechanize our supply chain and wheels of the internal

market must kept spinning in a controlled manner. People are not in a lockdown instead the businesses are atlockdown, so certain sectors must be opened but with proper digital monitoring, tracking and testing. We are entering in the phase of community transmission, we must declare health emergency. This can become a National Security Risk if proper measures are not adopted. The Online Interactive Session was attended by 30 participants. The panelists included experts of different fields including the following:

1. Major General Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M), (Retd), President CGSS
2. Major General Farooq Ahmad Khan, Former DG NDMA
3. Brigadier Mansoor Saeed (Retd), Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS
4. Lieutenant General Asad-Durrani HJ, HI(M) (Retd), Senior Analyst
5. Mr. Amir Zafar Durrani, President Reenergiz
6. Brigadier Akhtar Nawaz Janjua (Retd), Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS
7. Dr. Basharat Hassan Bashir,

8. Specialist, Public Health Engineering & Member Advisory Board CGSS
9. Lieutenant Colonel Ather Sultan (Retd), Logistic Expert
10. Mr. Amir Ghauri, Editor The News International
11. Dr. Samia Altaf, Public Health Specialist
12. Dr. Durre Nayab, Joint Director Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)
13. Dr. Ashfaq Ahmad, Assistant Professor, IR Department University of Sargodha
14. Mr. Tauqeer Ahmad, Member Advisory Board CGSS
15. Mr. Mehmood-ul-Hassan, Member Advisory Board & Regional/Geopolitical Analyst
16. Brigadier Muhammad Aslam (Retd), Member Board of Advisors CGSS
17. Mr. Ashfaq Ahmad Gondal, Senior Member Board of Advisors
18. A.V. Azher Hassan (Retd), Member Board of Advisors CGSS
19. Mr. Shakeel Ramay, Member Board of Advisors CGSS & Director SDPI.

## Turkish Institute launches scientific electronic platform

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: The Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Institute in Istanbul has launched a scientific electronic platform in both Turkish and English languages to find a viable treatment for COVID-19. The platform 'COVID-19 Hub' which is available at covid19.tabipacademy.com, is part of the Academic and Scientific Cooperation project in Turkey (TABIP) which was implemented

under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey. It allows all researchers who are working hard to find a safe and effective treatment for the coronavirus enabling them to follow the latest scientific studies and technological developments from the reliable sources. The platform also provides researchers with hundreds of free articles and analyzes under different titles. On the other hand, the Yunus Institute for Turkish Affairs

contributes to the accelerated scientific and technological efforts to curb coronavirus through this comprehensive platform. It publishes the latest developments, data and results from the main official sources, making it accessible to scientists, doctors, researchers, medical equipment manufacturers and all relevant research groups, who are racing against time to fight the outbreak of coronavirus, and save the lives of thousands of patients.



ISLAMABAD: DG ISI Lt. General Faiz Hamid called om PM Imran Khan. - DNA

## PM briefed about virus situation in Sindh

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) Vice President Haleem Adil Sheikh has briefed the Prime Minister, Imran Khan, about the coronavirus-related situation of Sindh, with an emphasis on problems being faced by the poor masses. As per details, Haleem Adil who is also parliamentary party leader in Sindh Assembly called on the Prime Minister and briefed him about the overall coronavirus-related situation in Sindh province and the issues being confronted by the masses. He said that at this difficult time, the people of Sindh province are thankful to the federal government for timely held under the Ehsaas Cash Emergency Program.

## PFC donates Rs 1 mln for COVID-19 fund

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) Chief Executive Mian Kashif Ashfaq Wednesday donated Rs. 1 million to Prime Minister Imran Khan's special COVID-19 fund and pledged extending maximum cooperation to the government in its endeavours to eradicate coronavirus pandemic across the country.

In a statement issued here today, Mian Kashif Ashfaq said furniture producers and exporters are supporting government's efforts aimed at complete stamping out deadly pandemic from day one. "We have contributed our share in the corona relief fund of Prime Minister Imran Khan and will continue to stand with the government in this hour of difficulty and distress,"

he resolved. He urged the philanthropists and affluent people to extend maximum help and assistance to the people striving for their bread and butter in the prevailing situation. Mian Kashif Ashfaq also demanded of the government for resuming trade activities and reopening of shops including furniture outlets across the country by adopting precautionary measures and SOPs.

## All Pakistanis to be brought back from UAE: Zulfi

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Sayed Zulfiqar Abbas Bukhari has vowed to bring back all the stranded Pakistanis from

the United Arab Emirates (UAE) after April 18. "First flight will come from the UAE on April 18 after which a new flight schedule will be created. All those Pakistanis who are stuck in transit, having expired visas or lost their jobs in the UAE will be given top priority," said

Zulfiqar Bukhari in a video message released by his ministry on Wednesday. The special assistant said his government, in collaboration with the UAE government, would start repatriating stranded Pakistanis after April 18 via the PIA's charter flights and others.

# China's success serves as source of inspiration: envoy

"The current situation, therefore, calls for a greater international coordination and cooperation among the global community for curbing and comprehensively eliminating this menace," she added.

DNA

BEIJING: Pakistan Ambassador to China, Naghmana Hashmi on Wednesday said that China's success served as a source of inspiration and hope for all countries battling Covid-19 and called for a greater coordination and cooperation among the global community for curbing and comprehensively eliminating the crisis. China has displayed openness, transparency and willingness to cooperate with all parties to confront the novel coronavirus outbreak on international

front, she said in an interview with China.org.cn. Terming the Covid-19 pandemic as the most serious challenge, the global community was confronted with since the World War II, she said that this crisis could deal a debilitating blow to international economic growth, regional integration and onward march of globalisation, thereby undoing major achievements humankind had made so far. "The current situation, therefore, calls for a greater international coordination and cooperation among the global community for curbing and compre-



hensively eliminating this menace," she added. Ambassador Hashmi said that while the developed countries were also struggling to marshal resources for mitigating the economic impacts of this pandemic, there were the developing nations of Asia, Latin America and Africa which would be adversely affected by the looming global recession. International financial institutions, with coordination of developed countries, needed to offer emergency grant and soft-loans to shield them from impingement impacts of ensuing

economic crisis. "This crisis should be a moment of reflection for us to revisit and review our previous concepts about issues of transnational health, environment, and economics and reform them in the light of emergent realities for benefit of the entire humanity," she added. Ambassador Hashmi said, "Perhaps, this crisis, colossal as it may be, reaffirms our resolve in multilateralism and bestow world leaders with clarity and courage to shun isolationism for good, and renew faith in joint efforts for a shared and prosperous future for all."