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NATO decides to cut troops in Afghanistan to 12000: Secy Gen
Envoy of Pakistan to France Moin condoles deaths
NAB chairman reviews cases in Lahore


Govt takes all steps to contain virus spread

Government has shared with the provinces comprehensive SOPs for the industries permitted by the government to be reopened in order to ensure the protection of the workforce: PM Imran

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan has expressed the government's determination to take all possible steps to contain the spread of coronavirus. Talking to Punjab's Minister for Industries Mian Aslam in Islamabad on Thursday, he said we are also cognizant of the woes of the low income groups including laborers and workers due to the closure

of business activities. He said the government has shared with the provinces comprehensive SOPs for the industries permitted by the government to be reopened in order to ensure the protection of the workforce. He directed the provincial minister to stay in constant contact with the business community to ensure implementation of these SOPs. Meanwhile, talking to Minister for National Food

Security Syed Fakhar Imam in Islamabad, Prime Minister Imran Khan said the government is committed to effective checking of smuggling of wheat and other edible items. He said an ordinance is being introduced to control hoarding and smuggling so that strict law could be enforced against the people involved in such activities. The Prime Minister directed the Minister to continuously monitor demand and supply of the essential

commodities so that timely decisions are made and shortage of food does not take place in any part of the country. Imran Khan said agriculture sector was ignored in the past. He said the present government is benefiting from friendly country China for promotion of technology and modern techniques in agriculture. The Prime Minister was briefed on measures taken for elimination of locust swarms.

TURKISH SUPPORT



ISLAMABAD: Tika has donated 50,000 masks that will be distributed to the hospitals and public institutions in Multan and nearby cities to fight against coronavirus in Pakistan. Ambassador of Turkey Mustafa Yurdakul handing over Masks and other things to Pakistani authorities. — DNA

Briefs

PM seeks Ulema cooperation

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday said the religious scholars' (Ulema) cooperation was required to contain the spread of coronavirus and he would soon meet their delegation in that regard. The prime minister was talking to the renowned religious scholar Maulana Tariq Jamil, who called on him at the PM Office. The prime minister lauded Maulana Tariq Jamil's public awareness campaign to contain the COVID-19.

SBP cuts key interest rate by 2 percent

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Thursday cut its key interest rate by two percent, bringing it down to 9 percent from 11 percent. In a statement on Thursday, the SBP Monetary Policy Committee announced that the decision was taken in light of reduction in growth and inflation expectations. — DNA

Azerbaijan Defence Ministry takes care of martyrs families

DNA

BAKU: The country's leadership and the Ministry of Defense constantly pay special attention and care to the families of shehids (martyrs) who sacrificed their lives for the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan and also periodically take steps to eliminate their problems. Taking into consideration the special quarantine regime in the country in connection with the prevention of the spread of coronavirus infection (COVID-19), under the in-



struction of the Minister of Defense, servicemen once again delivered targeted assistance to these families. Food products packaged in the Central Food Supply Depot of the Ministry

of Defense were delivered to the families of shehids (martyrs), veterans and war disabled servicemen. It should be pointed out that work is underway to identify and assist people in this category.

Taliban attack security outposts

DNA

KABUL The Taliban attacked security outposts in Logar province, killing at least nine Afghan soldiers, the Defense Ministry confirmed in a statement. The incident happened in the Qal-e-Dasht area in Charkh district of the province on Wednesday night. According to MoD's statement, the Afghan forces have imposed heavy casualties on the insurgents. "Taliban's dead bodies have remained in the battlefield as Afghan forces inflicted heavy casualties to the militants," the statement said.

Forex reserves up by \$252 mln

ISLAMABAD: The foreign exchange reserves held by State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) increased by US\$252 million during the week ending on April 10 to \$10.974 billion. According to figures issued by the SBP on Thursday, the forex reserves inched up due to official inflows. During the corresponding period, the net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were \$6.321 billion and the total reserves held by the country were recorded at \$17.295 billion.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The total number of coronavirus infections in Pakistan has reached 6,505 as the country recorded 520 new cases, whereas, 17 deaths were reported during the last 24 hours. According to the government's statistics, 1,645 patients have recovered from the disease, while the death toll stands at 124. Punjab's tally of coronavirus cases jumped to 3,217, 1,668 in Sindh, 912 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), 280 in Balochistan, 237 in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB),

145 in Islamabad and 46 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). 5,540 tests have been conducted as the overall detection tests stand at 78,979. In Pakistan, the government has started the implementation of lockdown measures besides reopening construction sector and also eases restrictions in some areas. The Sindh government granted conditional permission to specific industries to resume their operations amid coronavirus lockdown. The industrialists have been handed over standard operating procedures (SOPs) to be strict-

ly followed after opening their factories. However, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah announced that strict lockdown will continue across the province for another two weeks in order to control the spread of coronavirus cases. Gilgit Baltistan government has announced to begin phase-II of the COVID-19 lockdown after only 56 active cases of the virus remain in the region. In a positive development in the fight against coronavirus, the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) reported no COVID-19 case on Wednesday.

NAB chief reviews corruption cases

Chairman NAB paid much heed to the facts brought forth

DNA

LAHORE: Chairman National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Justice Javed Iqbal paid a visit to Regional Bureau here on Thursday and reviewed updates in ongoing investigations of mega corruption cases. Combined Investigation Teams (CITs) under the supervision of Director General (DG), NAB Lahore briefed the Chairman about all over the cases pertaining to money laundering and other high profile cases. The briefing was also attended by Deputy Prose-

cutor General Accountability (DPGA), Chaudhry Khaleeq-uz-Zaman and other senior officers of the Bureau. The Chairman NAB paid much heed to the facts brought forth by the Investigation teams and issued appropriate directives in this regard. During his visit, Justice Javed Iqbal particularly reviewed the performance of Prosecution Wing of NAB Lahore and advised the wing for keeping their efforts continue so that references in mega corruption scandals may be pursued as per law and the corrupt elements may be brought to justice.

ANF seizes 3.449 metric tons drugs

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) Pakistan has seized 3.449 Metric Tons narcotics valuing US \$ 1340.215 million in international market, arrested eight culprits and impounded four vehicles while conducting 11 counter-narcotics strikes. According to an ANF spokesman, the seized drugs comprised of 1721 kg Heroin, 1020 kg Morphine, 395 kg Opium and 312.700 kg Hashish. As per details, in an intelligence based operation, ANF Quetta raided at Jungle general area of Tehsil Dalbandin, District Chaghi and recovered 1020 kg Heroin.

IMF resident rep calls on FM Qureshi

DNA

ISLAMABAD: "Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi held a meeting with the Resident Representative of International Monetary Fund (IMF) today. The discussion focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. While acknowledging the important role of the IMF, the Foreign Minis-

ter exchanged views with Resident Representative Dabanon the measures being taken by Pakistan to contain the pathogen and address the associated socio-economic challenges. Referring to the enormous challenges posed by COVID-19, the Foreign Minister highlighted Prime Minister Imran Khan's appeal for a "Global Initiative on Debt Relief" for developing countries to enable them fiscal space to com-

bat the disease, save precious lives, and shore up economies. The Foreign Minister welcomed announcements by the G20, IMF, World Bank and others on debt service suspension initiative for debt stressed countries. He underscored that any initiative for supporting the developing countries to combat COVID-19 ramifications should be inclusive and without onerous conditionalities.

Japanese envoy lauds Pakistan for hosting refugees

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Japanese Ambassador to Pakistan Mr. Kuninori Matsuda called on Minister for SAFRON & Narcotics Control Shehryar Afridi here and presented the contribution on behalf of the government and people of Japan. He said that the amount had been paid to the UNHCR and it would be used to help the Afghan refugees. He said the Japanese Government highly appreciates steps taken by Pakistan to fight the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. He said that the Japanese gov-

ernment wants to contribute to Pakistani airports to fight COVID-19. He said that Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees generously for 40 long years. He said that he had of late visited Afghan Refugees Camp in Peshawar and studied how Pakistan is generously hosting Afghans especially the children and streamlined them with Pakistani children. He also said that the Japanese government has been supporting the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government in economic development and it would like to help the federal government too. "We appreciate the peace pro-



cess in Afghanistan and Japanese would like to become a part of the development process in KP and Afghanistan," he added. He said that Japan would also like to collaborate with Pa-

kistan in the field of sports. Shehryar Afridi expressed gratitude to the government and people of Japan for helping out the Afghan refugees and said that this contribution would

go a long way in helping the Afghans affected by lockdown. We are grateful and expect that this contribution by Japan would send a strong message to the western countries to help the stranded Afghans," he added. He said that Japan's commitment to helping the suffering humanity has been exceptional and Japan has always helped people in calamity situations. Japan has led from the front and remembering those who are deprived. 2.8 million Afghan refugees and 32 percent are in camps. He said that Pakistan has provided equal opportunities to Afghans as enjoyed by our own

people and they have been mainstreamed in our society. "We are issuing 60,000 visas to Afghans every month without charging even a single penny besides providing a scholarship to 50,000 Afghan students," the minister added. He said that Prime Minister on his request had also written to UN Secretary-General to provide special assistance to Afghan refugees. "Even amid COVID-19 fight, we are helping the refugees. Why the Prosperous World is not coming to help. 85 percent of Afghans are daily wage earners for their families. We also need to provide the medical equipment for Afghans to help fight COVID-19,"

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Briefs

PM fund gets big response

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senator Faisal Javed Thursday said that an overwhelming response was being witnessed regarding donation for ‘PM Relief Fund for COVID-19’ to aid the government in the battle against ongoing health crisis in the country.

In first 15 days, around Rs 1.49 billion donation was contributed for ‘PM relief fund’ which was showing the credibility and trust of people for the Prime minister Imran Khan, he said.

Talking to private news channel, the PTI leader mentioned that PM Imran had also appealed to world leaders, heads of financial institutions, and the United Nations to “launch an initiative that will give debt relief to developing countries to combat the coronavirus”.

Govt to hold talks with clerics

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Noor-ul-Haq Qadri said on Thursday the government will hold consultations with religious scholars on the issue of restrictions on the five prayers, Friday prayer and Tarawih in mosques on April 18.

He in a statement slammed Chairman Ru-e-Hilal Committee Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman saying he didn’t even bother to take the government into confidence before going ahead with his declaration that the lockdown restrictions doesn’t apply to congregational prayers in mosques.

The minister said the government try to find a middle ground after giving audience to religious scholars.

He said Mufti Muneeb’s presser gave an impression that he took the decision regarding congregations in mosques on his own.

RCCI lauds lowering interest rate

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) laud the announcement of State Bank Of Pakistan for lowering interest rate to single digit. RCCI President Saboor Malik in a statement said that this is very good news and single digit interest will help the industry to boost amid Covid-19.

The business community was demanding this for a long time and we are happy to see the further reduction of 200 basis points from 11% to 9%. This will ease borrowing, reduce costs of business and also help government to maintain financial stability, added.



LALAMUSA: A view of Lalamusa railway station presenting a dreary look due to lockdown. – Khurshid Nadeem

Covid-19 clock ticking for Pakistan to learn from policy mistakes: Experts

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan still has a narrow window of opportunity to quickly learn from the experiences as well as errors of other countries in order to evolve innovative and comprehensive policy options for the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic is also an opportunity for the nation to become self-reliant in pharmaceuticals, biomedical engineering and public health management on war footings. This is not the time for a popularity contest and so some tough decisions, which could be politically costly, have to be taken to save lives and the economy, according to experts addressing the second session of a webinar series, ‘Covid-19: Global Challenge, National Response,’ organized by Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

Senior policy analyst Syed Muhammad Ali was the main speaker who covered different aspects of the pandemic challenges and presented viable policy recommendations. The event was jointly chaired by Dr Waqar Masood Khan, former federal finance secretary and member of IPS Academic Council, and Khalid Rahman, Executive President IPS.

Regarding strategic measures that the government should initiate, Ali said these can include a national strategic medical supplies stockpile or database, national and international collaboration in biomedical research, three levels of compulsory 14-day quarantine at international, inter-provincial and local levels, online crisis management training courses for quarantine center staff, initiation of a national crisis information management system, and monopoly of National Disaster Management Authority on all related information.

He said in these trying times it is critical that Pakistan should lobby with other developing nations to ask the international financial institutions for a review of their financial arrangements and assistance programs based on humanitarian concerns.

Ali said the government has submitted a report with the Supreme Court that it expects 50,000 positive cases of coronavirus by April 25. So if the situation worsens then the government should declare the food, healthcare, petroleum and banking sectors as critical and manage them directly, he added.

He stressed that ration distribution should be very effective in the areas that had been hit by insurgency in the past so that the anti-state elements are not able to exploit the crisis. Similarly, charity work and fund raising has to be legal, transparent and recorded to avoid serious consequences for Pakistan at Financial Action Task Force.

Ali said most of the strategic public sector organizations have more technical capacity than the private sector. As such the government has to decide which sectors can be used for crisis management. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry could review which goods can be produced locally by tailoring the production lines.

He was of the opinion that the large chain stores should create an app-based delivery system and collect payment through card swipe machines. The system could be extended to meat, poultry, milk, bakery and medical deliveries.

Speaking about the strategies adopted by countries with low infection rates, he said none of the Central Asian Republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – along with Azerbaijan have reported more than 1,000 cases but the approach they have adopted is an example for the rest of the world.

The lesson we can learn from their experience is that dealing with loss is not the actual problem, it is better implementation of precautionary measures that counts.

Insurance cover for industries demanded

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW) on Thursday said insurance cover is mandatory for reopened industries therefore this sector should also be allowed to serve so that risks can be mitigated.

Extension in lockdown is a good move as life of masses is important than livelihoods, it said. Reopening of industries will kick start the stalled economic activity, provide jobs to millions, and generate revenue, said Chairman Brig. (ret’d) Muhammad Aslam Khan.

AIOU students can pay fee in two installments

FIAZ CHAUDRHY

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has decided to facilitate its new and continuing students by giving them option to pay their semester fee in two installments.

The decision was taken by the University administration in a high-level meeting, chaired by the Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum due to crisis situation in wake of the COVID-19 in the country.

As per the decision, the new and continuing students of the University are being provided the optional facility to pay their fee for the admissions in MA, MSc, M.Ed, B.Ed, BS, BA, BBA, Associate Degree and Post Graduate Diplomas for semester Spring 2020 in two equal installments.

The date for first installment has been fixed as June 5, while the date of second installment will be July 17, 2020.

The installment facility will be open for the students who apply online through admission portal on the University website on or before the extended date of admissions June 5.

Addressing the meeting, the Vice Chancellor said that the University realizing its social responsibility is going to support its students who might be facing financial problems due to the country-wide spread of COVID-19.

“The students are our asset and the University will leave no space to facilitate them. They will continue its teaching practices through the use of Online educational technology,” he added.

Meanwhile, the University has extended the date of admission for the semester Spring 2020 for its Post-Graduate and Bachelors level programs up to June 5, 2020.

Telenor contributes Rs 1.6 bln for virus fund

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Telenor has stood by Pakistan, and is living up to its purpose of connecting people to what matters most, and now committing to more. As the current situation does not warrant business as usual, Telenor Pakistan and Telenor Microfinance Bank have gone over and beyond and pledged PKR 1.6 billion, in cash and kind, towards COVID-19 relief efforts. The in-kind contribution has commenced through provision of subsidised and free services and offers and addons for telecom and banking consumers.

As the entire country has been swept with fear, concern and uncertainty, Telenor’s cash contribution is intended to provide relief and support to those that are fighting against the Coronavirus on the front lines. In collaboration with Pakistan Red Crescent, Telenor is providing Personal Protective Equipment to the real heroes – the doctors, health workers and law enforcement professionals. Moreover, Telenor will channel part of this contribution towards COVID testing in the country. Telenor is making significant efforts towards e-learning by collaborating with Ministry of Information Technology and Virtual University of Pakistan under the DiGiSkills Program to provide affordable access to youth.

ICCI for opening construction businesses in capital

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Ahmed Waheed, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry has called upon the relevant authorities to issue notification for opening of all businesses related with construction industry including steel re-rolling and marble sectors.

In a statement Thursday, he said that on the instructions of Co-ordination Committee and Prime Minister of Pakistan, district administration had issued notification for opening of construction industry, but steel re-rolling, marble and some other industries were not covered in the said notification, which has created confusion in the businessmen of construction sector.

HEC to hold online boot camp

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE), Higher Education Commission (HEC) is organising the IPFP Online Boot Camp 2020, a four-week online learning programme for candidates of the Interim Placement of Fresh PhDs (IPFP) Programme (Phase II).

The purpose of this Boot Camp is to accelerate the transfer of essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes in three dimensions: teaching and learning, research management, and professional practice.

In this regard, NAHE held an introductory meeting with the first cohort of IPFP Online Boot Camp 2020 on Microsoft Teams. All NAHE team members and 42 participants of the first cohort attended the meeting.

Rector NAHE, Prof. Dr. Shaheen Sardar Ali welcomed the participants and gave a brief introduction, followed by introductions by the team members and participants.

FPCCI hails govt relief package

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The business community all over Pakistan welcomes the decision of Prime Minister of Pakistan to open export oriented industry and particularly the construction & allied industry which will help to overcome socio-economic crises due to Covid-19 lockdown situation, this was stated by Qaisar Khan Daudzai, Vice President FPCCI & Incharge Capital Office, Islamabad.

Speakers underpin need of inclusive decision-making

The speakers shared these views with the audience of the 16th episode of the Online Policy Dialogue Series titled ‘Covid-19 crisis: Impact on women’s health, domestic violence, and lost livelihoods’ organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) on Wednesday

SHAHEEN QURESHI

ISLAMABAD: Covid-19 has posed unprecedented challenges for the nations across the globe including the specific impacts on women’s health and socio-economic wellbeing.

However, in developing countries like Pakistan, the women and girls have to bear the extra brunt of the situation because of their lack of access to support and safeguarding mechanisms.

The speakers shared these views with the audience of the 16th episode of the Online Policy Dialogue Series titled ‘Covid-19 crisis: Impact on women’s health, domestic violence, and lost livelihoods’ organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) on Wednesday.

H.E. Wendy Gilmour, High Commissioner of Canada to Pakistan, said that the pandemic has hit various countries quite hard including Canada.

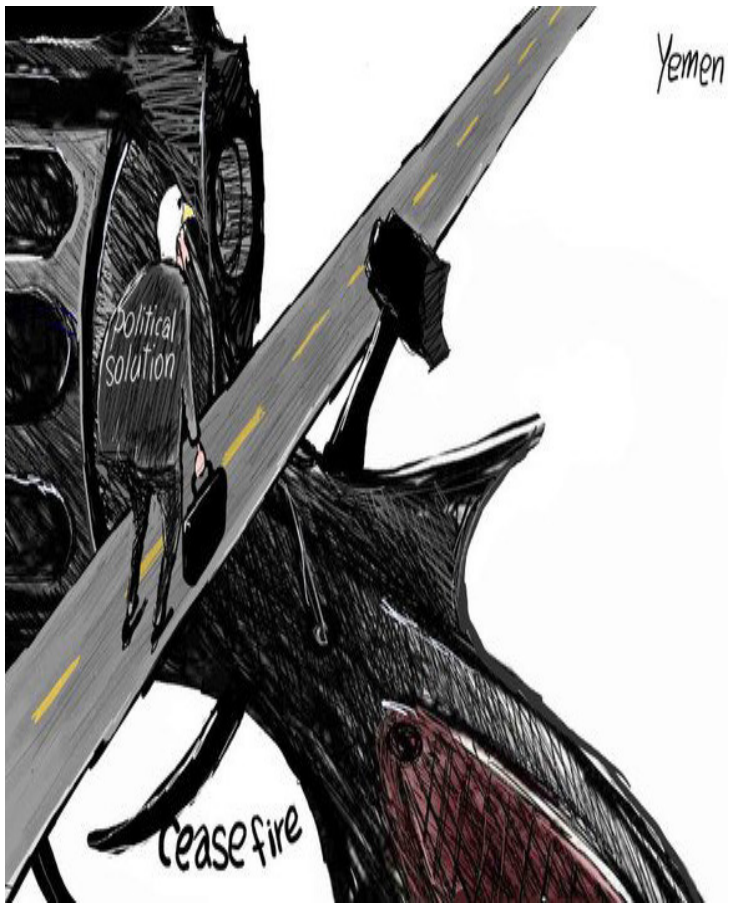
However, with the help of a number of spaces such as tax relief and other support mechanisms, we have been able to respond to the urgent needs of our population. She said the nature of impacts in developing countries like Pakistan is different and the lack of resources in the situation of lockdown is having the worst impact on vulnerable segments of society including women. She said that the institutions that are at the forefront while responding to the pandemic are coherently male-dominated and thus, the women’s voices are excluded from the key decision-making on the response side.

She said that drastic measures are required to ensure the access of women to healthcare and other essential services through inclusive decision-making.

Earlier, Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director SDPI, noted that evaluating the impacts of the global pandemic on already marginalized segments including the women, is a pressing need of the hour. He said that the cash grants to most vulnerable families have been a positive step on the part of the government; however, “I would urge the authorities, especially the district administrations to disseminate the grant among the women while respecting their dignity and ensuring safe social distancing,” he emphasized,

For whom the consensus?

IN the midst of what could well prove to be the worst crisis our country – indeed, the world – has ever faced, we apparently finally have a political consensus on how to cope. The demand that the federal government lay down a coherent strategy had come after consistent critique on Sindh for imposing a lockdown. But even after the combined strategy has been announced, we stand at a loss to figure it out. Under the new plan, there has been an easing of the ‘lockdown’ in place, although the government says it has extended the lockdown for another two weeks. Industries such as construction, pharmaceuticals and other selected sectors will open. This has been announced with the caveat that checks will be maintained to ensure physical distancing and any factory/plant/workplace with a Covid-19 patient be closed down temporarily. While this sounds good in principle, we wonder how this will be implemented since it has been almost impossible to maintain even lockdown discipline. And do we have the state infrastructure to enforce the detailed SOPs laid down? Among the peculiar is the decision to allow laundries to operate. Perhaps the businesses that seem to be at the centre of the strategy require their suits pressed and shirts starched. From the very beginning, the federal government – the prime minister, in particular – had looked at the lockdown option with suspicion. This led to the most unfortunate mixed messaging from the government. Drawing a binary between ‘poverty and starvation’ and ‘lockdowns’ was a defeatist approach from the get go. Now, with the lockdown effectively eased by a large percent – despite the federal and provincial governments claiming it is ‘stricter’ than before – who does this new strategy benefit? It seems to centre around Big Business whose owners already live in ivory towers, safe from the teeming masses that will trudge to work in the midst of a pandemic. Of course, we know that traders and smaller entrepreneurs have been suffering already from the lockdown imposed two weeks ago. And there is no doubt that the economy – which was already in a bad place – will have taken a serious hit due to the lockdown and the global recession. What we have at the moment is doctors getting infected, government(s) still unsure about how to enforce social distancing and workers who live in the worst possible conditions going out to work and coming back home to spaces that cannot possibly ensure ‘distance’. When lives and livelihoods both are at stake, there is no doubt that both must be taken care of at the same time. Failure to do that is the state just giving up on its people.



State Bank Act

THE State Bank is a central pillar of Pakistan's economic management, and any reform of its constitutive law, especially if the reform is to touch on the core mission of the bank, must be carefully deliberated. At the moment, the State Bank Act endows the central bank with two core missions. First is to ensure price stability and second is to support growth. There is nothing inherently unusual in this since many central banks around the world do have a mission to safeguard growth in addition to price stability. The problem comes in when these two missions pull in opposite directions and the central bank leadership has to make a choice. Powerful political forces are unleashed in these times and the governor finds himself or herself in the centre of a policy storm which can get quite intense. In the past, for example, the State Bank under the leadership of Ishrat Husain leaned too far in the direction of a permissive monetary policy to support the growth process ushered in by the Musharraf regime, thereby laying the groundwork for an inflationary spiral that began in 2005 and engulfed the entire economy by 2008. Similarly, Shamshad Akhtar, his successor, found herself in the midst of a political storm when it became her job to put out the inflationary fire and safeguard the health of the financial system under the massive imbalances that had accumulated during the short-lived growth spurt that the Musharraf regime bequeathed to us. Today, this history has gained new relevance because the State Bank Act is being amended under the ongoing IMF programme, and pressure from the Fund is to refocus the central bank's attention purely on the mission of ensuring price stability. In an ideal world, this might sound like a good idea, since it has the virtue of ensuring that the monetary mistakes made in the Musharraf regime do not happen again. But at the same time, it is important to understand that the State Bank cannot be a stand-alone entity altogether, and whatever amendments are made in its constitutive legislation carry the assent of the political leadership in Islamabad, along with the opposition. The State Bank must, therefore, engage productively with the political leadership in helping draft these amendments, but it is the latter that will decide the limits of the possible in this case. In the meantime, the central bank clearly has a difficult balancing act to perform.

COVID-19 overpowered SDGs?

Dr M Ali Hamza



What Covid-19 means for SDGs? What are the impact of COVID-19 on the set SDGs and the pace of their implementation? Let us have a quick review over it. The deadly virus has jammed the economic activities throughout the globe. Even after recovering from the corona attack it will take the businesses an ample time to recover and another unprecedentedly severe global financial crunch is well anticipated

A JOURNEY that started from United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), also known as Rio+20, finally set 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including 169 supplementary targets, to address the multifaceted and complicated needs of our global society ranging from climate change, extreme poverty, global education to of course health, in 2015 at United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). SDGs stress on ending poverty and deprivations, reduce inequality, improve health and education, and spur economic growth, while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests, therefore all member nations adhered to accomplish these SDGs by year 2030. Pakistan has also, for example, ensured that the UN SDGs are taken seriously throughout domestic policy as well as framing the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, placing education, environment and healthcare at the forefront. In a sense, SDGs have become the cornerstone of global governance at all levels, even at the most micro-level of an institutional governance set-up. But once the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 as a global pandemic, the entire ball game has changed. The pandemic Covid-19 does not just come in the way of the SDGs, but calls for a rethinking of the timeline. What Covid-19 means for SDGs? What are the impact of COVID-19 on the set SDGs and the pace of their implementation? Let us have a quick review over it. The deadly virus has jammed the economic activities throughout the globe. Even after recovering from the corona attack it will take the businesses an ample time to recover and another unprecedentedly severe global financial crunch is well anticipated. The UNDP report states that due to COVID-19 income losses are expected to exceed \$220 billion in developing countries with an estimated 55% of the global population having no access to basic food security and nutrition. This is going to directly hit the SDG1 (no poverty) and SDG2 (zero hunger), it seems that instead of alleviation, the poverty and hunger are most likely to experience elevation. This economic turmoil is associated and will gravely hit SDG8 (decent work

and economic growth) and SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) too. The impacts in the short-run are expected to be highly worrisome, because one very vital element to stimulate SDG8 and 9 is human capital that is under substantial strike. Moreover, the reliance on digital connectivity is a part of our life today and there is a possibility that digital or IT sector may grow faster in coming days, but consequently we got to ready to witness simultaneous crash and closures of traditional businesses. The developed countries may not have this situation as devastating, but as far as developing and under developed countries it is going to be dreadful. The reason is simple, a large part of the business sector in the developing world remains unorganized and does not have significant share in the digital space; causes include deficient human, physical and structural capacity. This incapability or insufficiency of being accommodated in digital spaces will lead to more poverty, hunger, and inequalities thus obstructing achievements of SDGs 1, 2 and 10 (reduce inequality) respectively. These are also the challenges to the equity dimension of holistic development by the pandemic and severely affecting SDG3 (good health and well-being). A recent report by UNESCO explicitly says that the COVID-19 pandemic is causing more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 161 countries and impacting over 91% of the world's enrolled students. The crisis crystallizes the dilemma for educational policymakers particularly of developing countries whether to completely suspend education or adapt to online learning systems. Developing countries like Pakistan is frankly not well equipped for traditional education even, and not at all ready for the hybrid educational mechanism, which means that the fundamental educational system is introuble already, therefore SDG4 (quality education) presents a dream at a far distance from turning into a reality. SDG16 is about Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. And under COVID-19 crises many developing and underdeveloped world believes and views this pandemic as one spread and imported by the privileged class through international travels and free mixing in the western ways

of life. They feel dejected and demotivated for almost no fault of theirs, and a probable demand for compensation by those responsible to cause them disease or hamper their economic activity, cannot be stated as unjustified. The relevant questions appear: can the global justice system uphold such demand? can global and local institution put their foot down and let the peace prevail through justice by the strong institutions? is SDG16 still pragmatic and doable? Though current focus is on the alarming spread of Covid-19, but the developed world should focus on ultimate impacts on poorest and most vulnerable in social, economic and environmental terms, living in developing and underdeveloped countries, to leave no one behind, and that refers to SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals). SDG17 restates a commitment of global partnership to realize the remaining 16 goals, and COVID-19 can be a decisively indicative test for this. If economic giants particularly of the west do not offer a patronage and do not wholeheartedly assist the countries with huge population but weak financial settings, if financially settled countries remain blind to the miseries of people from underprivileged world during and due to COVID-19 crises, then fulfilling SDG17 was never a true and sincere intention. Though UN working to fight COVID-19 but simultaneously the global community has to unite, learn lessons from each other and use this time to reset and to look at existing frameworks for some clarity including the SDGs. Our priority must be to inspire and enable the new dialogue for reform; how do we actually build the global and unified system that can deliver on the aspiration of the UN SDGs? Now more than ever the SDGs have reinforced the fact that how critical it is to have engagement of all sectors and industries, an approach that has been noticeably lacking in many areas including global public health. In context of Pakistan, pragmatically speaking, apparently COVID-19 has almost overpowered the majority, nearly all of SDGs and their detention seems not to finish soon, therefore Mr. Prime Minister must not overlook the matter and should assign the cabinet a task to find way-out for SDGs from the shackles of COVID-19.

Pakistan-Bahrain bilateral relations: new dimensions

Dr Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan



Bahraini businesses are involved in halal products, one of the fastest growing industries in the world, has a great potential at hand by collaborating with Pakistani food businesses. Close liaison between chambers of commerce may widen prospects of higher trade volumes between the two countries. Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) and the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) should also contributory role to double bilateral trade in the days to come

PAKISTAN and the Kingdom of Bahrain share the most cordial brotherly relations that are firmly rooted in history. Both countries share the same faith, social values and cultural fabric too. Bahraini people term Pakistan as their second home and state that Pakistan is the country which is held in the highest esteem by the leadership and the people of Bahrain. Visit of H.E King of Bahrain, Sheikh Hamad Bin AL Khalifa in March 2014 was a paradigm shift in the history of bilateral relations of Pakistan and Kingdom of Bahrain. For the further strengthening of bilateral relations and fostering of bilateral trade volumes 17 agreements were inked signed during the state visit of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in March 2014, which also included a Bilateral Investment Treaty. Afterwards, there have been various spells of meeting to boost defense and security cooperation. Pakistan had helped Bahrain set up its naval forces and 18 percent of the Gulf States' Air Force comprises of Pakistani personnel. Moreover, there are over 400 companies currently operating in Bahrain, which are either jointly or wholly owned by Pakistani investors. The Board of Investment (BOI) and the Economic Development Board (EDB) of Bahrain also played important role to promote business. It is now hoped that BOI and EDB will facilitate business meetings and exchange of delegations of the two countries in addition to bilateral visits, organization of road shows, exhibitions and business forums. It is hoped that mutual cooperation would be extended in various areas including agriculture, agro machinery, processed food, dry fruits, fresh fruits, cotton, milk and its by-products and leather to be processed at the earliest. The business community of Pakistan urged the government to promote bilateral trade with Muslim countries particularly Halal food to earn maximum foreign exchange especially, with Bahrain. Being prominent regional expert of Kingdom of Bahrain it is suggested that the bilateral relations between the two brotherly nations may be further increased by initiating a number of diversified but integrated steps from both sides. Military cooperation between the two countries should be further increased and should not be taken as a regional security threat to any country. Pakistan may assist Bahrain in sophisticated defense and security equipment and military training and resources including non-combatant equipment. In my personal opinion Small and Medium Enterprises

(SMEs) cooperation and trade and export may be further increased in areas such as textile, food and hospitality, which are found to have substantial scope for Pakistan. Telecommunications, tourism, infrastructural development and real estate development sectors are developing rapidly and offer attractive investment opportunities for Bahrain in Pakistan. Foreign investors are allowed to have 100 per cent ownership of their business, with no restrictions placed on capital repatriation, currency exchange and transfer of dividends in Bahrain. So, extended volumes of investments would bring desired dividends of greater economic integration, socio-economic prosperity and regional conflict resolution between the two countries in the days to come. Being prominent regional expert of Kingdom of Bahrain it is strongly suggested that translating the political goodwill and fraternal bonds existing Pakistan and Kingdom of Bahrain into a strong economic and trade partnership to the mutual benefit of the people of the two countries private sectors of both the countries should play a leading role. The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) said that Pakistan is experiencing a new dawn of economic revival and Bahrain should partner with it for mutual benefits. Bahrain should look into the unmatched business opportunities in Pakistan with a special focus on the project-based financing and Islamic banking. Currently, almost 400 Pakistani companies are working in Bahrain and the number is on the rise. Bahrain has central location in the Gulf with a highly diversified economy and enhanced linkages will boost flow of investments. Pakistan can learn from Bahrain's economic diversification and expertise in the energy sector. An early trade treaty between the two countries will benefit each other, as Pakistani textiles should find place in the US market due to Bahrain's free trade agreement (FTA) with the US and Manama can explore markets in Pakistan. i. Proper exploitation of geographical proximity. ii. Export of potential products along with perishable and halal food items. iii. Exploiting high purchasing power of the Bahraini people preference towards value added and branded products, ensuring premium quality. iv. Formulation of comprehensive marketing strategy to promote potential products in Bahrain. v. Rigorous participation of international trade exhibitions in Bahrain, as presently there is no participation in those exhibi-

tions. Potential investors from Pakistan may attend in Hospitality & Restaurant Expo and Gulf construction Expo. vi. Contributory role of Pakistani Diasporas in Bahrain which can be used as a bridge to improve bilateral trade volume especially, in the emerging industries of the country such as tourism and restaurant business. vii. Business & investment friendly policies to provide incentives to the investor that desires to invest in halal food that will compliment Pakistan's export basket. Finalization of bilateral trade & investment treaty may be useful to enhance bilateral trade in the days to come. viii. Persuasion of constructive trade agreements as currently, there is no trade agreement between the two countries, whereas, Bahrain only has PTA with Singapore and FTA with USA, though it is suggested that preferential trade agreement can be beneficial in the long run for bilateral trade. ix. Enhanced business-to-business contacts x. Meaningful participation of private sectors of both the countries. Pakistan should devise a knowledge sharing mechanism with Bahrain so, that it can benefit from its well-established financial system. xi. Formulation of product specific strategy to facilitate exporter in terms of incentives, subsidies and duty drawbacks schemes to gain comparative advantage over our competitors. xii. Instrumental Role of TDAP is the need of the hour which must arrange a single country exhibition in which different Pakistani products can be exhibits to further benefit from the potential Bahraini market. xiii. Formation of E-commerce business models, appropriate marketing strategies artificial intelligence (IA) technologies. The Kingdom of Bahrain aspires to shift from a macro-economy built on oil resources to a smarter, greener, productive, globally competitive economy, shaped by the government and driven by a sustainable private sector in the days to come. It desires to build an economy that raises a broad middle class of Bahrainis who enjoy good living standards through increased productivity and high-wage jobs. It is hoped that Bahraini society and its government will follow the principles of sustainability, competitiveness and fairness to ensure that every Bahraini has the means to live a secure and fulfilling life and reach their full potential. In this way, prospects and potentials are very bright to further increase the bilateral relations and trade volumes between the two countries in the days to come.

Briefs

Body
formed to
facilitate
retail sector

ADNAN YOUSAF

ISLAMABAD: Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Dr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh has constituted a five-member committee including senior officials from Finance Division and the FBR to sit with representatives of the retail sector and finalise proposals for providing relief to the retail sector, in the wake of prevailing situation. The Adviser made this decision while chairing a video conference arranged at the Finance Division with the representatives and office-bearers of Retail Association of Pakistan to discuss the problems faced by the sector and their possible solutions. The Association representatives said that the retail sector in Pakistan was contributing 18 per cent to the GDP besides employing 16 per cent of the labour force. They said that due to prevailing circumstances they are foreseeing negative growth in current year, hence it was imperative to provide relief, particularly in taxes, to the retail sector, especially the integrated sector.

FPCCI
finalizes
proposals
for Budget

NEHAL MIRAJ

ISLAMABAD: "The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) has successfully completed the exercise of preparing its proposals on the ensuing Federal Budget 2020-21 keeping in view of the objectives of (i) Revamping Taxation System (ii) Documentation of Economy (iii) Employment generation through Industrialization (iv) Promoting a responsive and equitable Taxation System (v) Infrastructure Development (vi) Trickle-down effect of the fiscal space to the grass root level etc., and would be submitted to the concerned quarters within fortnight". This was stated by Mian Anjum Nisar, President, FPCCI and Zakaria Usman, Convener of the FPCCI Budget Advisory Council.

Pakistan
producing
90% of
edibles
items

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for National Food Security Syed Fakhar Imam says Pakistan is producing 90 per cent of edibles items except cooking oil. Talking to state-run Pakistan Television, he said the government has allocated 50 billion rupees just for Ramazan package to facilitate the people. He said the Federal government announced a huge economic financial assistance package for the poor and needy people and it happened first time in the history of the country.

Experts appreciate Pak govt
for containing virus spread

DNA / STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad organized an "Online International Conference" on the topic "Measures Being Taken by Countries Around the Globe Against COVID-19". The session aimed to discuss the effective steps taken by various countries all around the globe to combat COVID-19. The Online International Conference was attended by experts from China, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. Lieutenant Colonel Khalid Taimur Akram (Retd), Executive Director CGSS moderated the event. Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M) (Retd) welcomed the participants and briefed them about the aim of the online conference and explained the current global COVID-19 situation. Brigadier Mansoor Saeed (Retd), Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS briefly explained about the preventive measures taken by the Pakistan government. He further appreciated the active role played by the National Disaster Management Authority and other stakeholders in the effective implementation of preventive plans. Professor Xu Wenhong, Deputy Secretary-General of the Belt & Road Center, CASS and Associate Professor China Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China highlighted the measures taken by China which proved to be effective in not only limiting the spread but also overcoming the coronavirus. Further, he mentioned that future policies, plans, and programs initiated by countries will be aligned with the post-COVID-19 global scenario. Ms. Belgin Coskum, Specialist Infectious Diseases & Clinical Microbiology, Ankara City Hospital, Turkey stressed upon the importance of social distancing and highlighted Turkey's efforts in ensuring its practice. She further mentioned that for the effective implementation of quarantine, people have started working from home. Admiral JSK Colombage, Former Chief of Navy of Sri Lanka (from Colombo) appreciated the active role played by the health care sector of Pakistan. He highlighted a few of the significant steps taken by the Sri Lankan government



which included the forming of an Action Committee, the timely establishment of quarantine centers, and imposing of curfew to limit the mobility of people. Mr. Amir Ghauri, Editor- The News International explained the significant role played by the Pakistani media in raising awareness amongst the

general public regarding the novel coronavirus. He further explained the importance of media in forming a bridge between the government and the general public to collectively fight the virus. Professor Gusev Leonid, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Moscow, Russia briefed the panelists regarding the financial support provided to the small and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, the coronavirus patients are required to wear tracking bands in Russia. He also shared that the Russian government has exempted rents for the next six months to facilitate people with financial difficulties. General Sursait Thanadtag (Retd), Director Thai-Chinese Strategic Research Center, Bangkok, Thailand explained the measures taken by the Thailand government to facilitate the most vulnerable sections of the society. He also informed the panelists about the health systems adopted in Thailand. He appreciated the Thai medical services for

prompt and effective implementation of a health emergency. Mr. Babak Huseynli, Head of Great Azerbaijan Public Union Institute, Baku, Azerbaijan by presenting the figures of the coronavirus cases, briefed about the controlled situation of coronavirus in Azerbaijan. He further highlighted the nationwide quarantine being practiced in Azerbaijan and all the international borders are closed. Dr. Mehmood-ul-Hassan Khan, Member Board of Experts CGSS & Regional Geopolitical Analyst appreciated the humanitarian efforts by China. He further congratulated China on providing financial assistance to the affected countries. A total of 25 experts attended the event and a comprehensive interactive session was also carried out. The international experts from eight countries also thanked CGSS for organizing this event and appreciated the efforts done by the Pakistan government in containing the spread of the coronavirus.

Dr. Mehmood-ul-Hassan Khan, Member Board of Experts CGSS & Regional Geopolitical Analyst appreciated the humanitarian efforts by China. He further congratulated China on providing financial assistance to the affected countries. A total of 25 experts attended the event and a comprehensive interactive session was also carried out. The international experts from eight countries also thanked CGSS for organizing this event and appreciated the efforts done by the Pakistan government in containing the spread of the coronavirus.

Emirates conducts
on-site COVID-19 tests

DNA

KARACHI: Emirates in coordination with Dubai Health Authority (DHA) will be introducing additional precautions. Passengers on today's flight to Tunisia were all tested for COVID-19 before departing from Dubai. Emirates is the first airline to conduct on-site rapid COVID-19 tests for passengers. The quick blood test was conducted by the Dubai Health Authority (DHA) and results were available within 10 minutes. This test was conveniently done at the Group Check-in area of Dubai International Airport Terminal 3. Adel Al Redha, Emirates Chief Operating Officer said: "The testing process has gone smoothly and we would like to take this opportunity to thank the Dubai Health Authority for their initiatives



and innovative solutions. This would have not been possible without the support of Dubai Airport and other government authorities. We are working on plans to scale up testing capabilities in the future and extend it to other flights, this will enable us to conduct on-site tests and provide immediate confirmation for Emirates passengers travelling to countries that require COVID-19 test certificates. The health and safety of staff and passengers at the airport remain of paramount importance."

Humaid Al Qutami, Director-General of the Dubai Health Authority (DHA), said: We are glad to work with Emirates on the successful implementation of rapid COVID-19 testing at the airport for departing travellers. To tackle COVID-19, we have been proactively working with various governmental organisations and the private health sector and we have implemented all necessary measures from public health protection to provision of high-quality health services in line with the latest international guidelines.

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Saudi Arabia Nawaf Saeed Al Maliky called on President Arif Alvi. – DNA

Envoy of Pakistan to
France condoles

MUBASHAR BHATTI

PARIS: Ambassador of Pakistan to France Mr. Moin ul Haque sent a video message to the Pakistani community of France in Paris today. In his message, the Ambassador condoled the death of Pakistanis who lost their lives due to COVID 19. He also prayed for the early recovery of those who are confirmed positive of COVID 19. He assured the community that the Embassy is aware of the problems faced by the community in burying of dead bodies and their transportation to Pakistan. He said that the Em-



bassy would extend all possible help to the bereaved families. He said that the Embassy is also aware of the problem faced by jobless Pakistani community members, elders and handicapped who are facing hardships due to COVID 19 lockdown. He said that the Embassy was providing essential food items to them to mitigate their problems in these difficult times.

Ambassador said that the Embassy of Pakistan is also aware of the hardships faced by the stranded Pakistanis. He requested that stranded Pakistanis to get themselves registered with the Embassy to enable it to take up their case with the relevant authorities. The Ambassador said that the government of Pakistan and its people are also fighting COVID 19 in Pakistan and national resources are employed to deal with this huge crisis. He appealed the well off expatriate Pakistanis to come forward and contribute generously in the Prime Minister's Relief Fund of COVID 19.

Lockdown
extended to
save lives:
Murad

DNA

SUKKUR: Chief Minister of Sindh Murad Ali Shah on Thursday has said that the provincial authorities have extended the lockdown to save the lives of people from deadly coronavirus. Addressing a press conference during his Sukkur visit, the Chief Minister said that cases have dropped due to low frequency of coronavirus tests. Food items for majority of ration bags were taken from utility stores, he told. Earlier, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah had ordered to further tighten the coronavirus lockdown in the province.

Mehriban Aliyeva
thanks Turkey

DNA

BAKU: First Vice-President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mehriban Aliyeva has made an Instagram post expressing her gratitude to Turkey for Atakule in Ankara was illuminated in colors of Azerbaijan's flag. In a post on her official Instagram page, Mehriban Aliyeva said: "I express my deep gratitude to fraternal Turkey. Our countries always stand by each



other - both in joy and on difficult days. This is our unity, our strength. I wish our peoples the best of health, and our countries peace and prosperity. May Almighty God bless our world! "

Tajikistan ratifies accord on supporting
families living in CASA 1000 area

Total Project cost is reportedly US\$ 26 million, including a \$24 million grant provided by IDA and \$2 million allocated from the CASA1000 Multi Donor Trust Fund (MDTF)

MEMBERS of Tajikistan's lower house (Majlisi Namoyandagon) have unanimously voted for ratification of two agreements between Tajikistan and the World Bank on supporting communities located in the CASA 1000 Project area. A regular sitting of the Majlisi Namoyandagon, presided over by its head, Muhammadtoir Zokirzoda, was held on April 15. Recall, one of agreement was signed between Barqi Tojik (Tajikistan's national integrated power company) and the World Bank and another one was signed between the National Social Investment Fund of Tajikistan

(NSIFT) and the World Bank. The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved the CASA 1000 Community Support Project for Tajikistan on March 21, 2019. Total Project cost is reportedly US\$ 26 million, including a \$24 million grant provided by the International Development Association (IDA) and \$2 million allocated from the CASA1000 Multi Donor Trust Fund (MDTF). The objective of the CASA1000 Community Support Project for Tajikistan is to increase the quality of, and access to, energy, social and economic infrastructure services, and to contribute to the strengthening

of local governance in communities in the project area. There are four components to the project, the first component being rural electricity supply improvements. Component one focuses on improving the quality of electricity supply in two target areas of the country: 1) the estimated 60 villages that lie within the CoI in the northern, central and southern segments of the Transmission Line as it passes through Tajikistan; and 2) selected villages in the district of Isfara of Tajikistan, located near the Transmission Line as it passes through the Batken oblast in Kyrgyzstan. This component includes three com-

ponents: village electricity supply improvements in the corridor of impact; Isfara-1 substation and village electricity supply improvements in border areas; and energy-related project management, monitoring and evaluation, and communications. The second component is the community-led Investments in socio-economic infrastructure. This component includes two subcomponents: subgrants to communities in the corridor of impact, and subgrants to communities in border areas. The third component is the community mobilization, capacity building and local governance. This component includes four subcomponents:

community mobilization, youth engagement and capacity building, support for social accountability and transparency, and capacity building for improved local governance. Finally, the fourth component is the project management. This component includes three sub-components: project management and coordination, monitoring and evaluation, and communications. In all, more than 130,000 people living in 60 villages and 24 jamoats in Sughd and Khatlon provinces as well as districts subordinate to the center are expected to get benefits from implementation of the CASA 1000 Community Support Project.