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Concrete steps required to mitigate the impact of Covid-19

Lifting of lockdown not end of virus

Virus to hit economy of 170 countries: IMF



Construction industry gets more relief

Tax on low cost housing units to be constructed under Naya Pakistan Housing Project has also been made zero rated; Cabinet decides to waive off various taxes on services relating to construction industry

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Cabinet has decided to waive off various taxes on services relating to construction industry. Briefing media about decisions taken by the cabinet in Islamabad on Tuesday, Prime Minister's Special Assistant said five percent tax on various services of the construction industry has been reduced from five percent to zero. She said the relief in construction industry will pro-

tect rights of daily wagers, plumbers, carpenters, developers and other stakeholders of this sector. Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan said the cabinet also approved reforms in Competition Commission of Pakistan to ensure effective implementation of anti-hoarding law and to protect rights of the common people. The Special Assistant said approval to reconstitute National Commission for Minorities was also granted in the meeting. She said the cabinet also

approved uniform policy regarding official residences of government employees, withdrawing all perks granted under 1991 Order. She said now a government employee can retain his official residence six months after reaching superannuation. The Special Assistant said Cabinet also approved export of Chloroquine to USA, Saudi Arabia, UK, Italy, Qatar, Turkey and Kazakhstan as Pakistan has additional stock of the drug. Later in another media briefing, Planning Minister

Asad Umar said that the cabinet has also decided to public a report relating to power projects in Pakistan. He said an independent Commission of Inquiry will be constituted to probe the issue pertaining to Independent Power Producers within ninety days. He said any person involved in irregularities and violation of law will be taken to task, but those investors, who invested in the power sector to generate electricity in Pakistan and did not violate any law, will be protected.



BEIJING: Ambassador Naghmana A. Hashmi receiving donation of medical supplies from Yao Wen, Deputy Director General, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lei Minghsan the Chairman of China Three Gorges Corporation and senior officials from Chinese government and corporate sector. – APP

Briefs

Faisal Edhi tests positive

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Faisal Edhi, the head of one of Pakistan's largest charity groups, the Edhi Foundation, has tested positive for coronavirus, reported Geo News on Tuesday. Edhi is in Islamabad at the moment and had insisted on being tested since he had been on the ground working with patients.

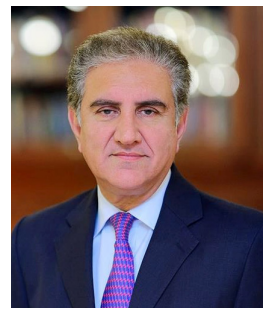
Rupee value jumps

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistani currency continued bullish trend on Tuesday and gained Rs 2.37 in the inter-bank against US dollar to close at Rs 161.12 against the last closing of Rs 163.49. However, according to Forex Association of Pakistan, the buying and selling rates of Dollar in open market were recorded at Rs 161 and Rs 163 respectively. – APP

Qureshi thanks UAE government

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi held a telephonic conversation with the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, today. The Foreign Minister thanked the UAE government for its support to Pakistan in combating covid-19 as well as for releasing 400 Pakistani prisoners, and their subsequent repatriation to



Pakistan. While exchanging views on the global outbreak of Covid-19, the two Foreign Ministers agreed on the importance of enhanced bilateral cooperation to jointly address the challenges. Foreign Minister Qureshi apprised his UAE counter-

part about the latest situation of the outbreak in Pakistan and the steps being taken by the Government for its containment. He also informed him of the efforts being made by the government for repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis from UAE to Pakistan. The Foreign Minister briefed Foreign Minister Abdullah about Prime Minister Imran Khan's call for a 'Global Initiative for Debt Relief,' underscoring the need to enable developing countries to save precious lives and shore up economies.

'Modi Govt has deprived Kashmiris of amenities'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Tuesday the international community can now understand the suffering of the people of India-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K) in the wake of demonstrations in various parts of the world against coronavirus lockdowns.

Taking to Twitter, the prime minister said: "Demonstrations in various parts of the world are now going on against lockdowns during a pandemic – despite provision of medical, financial, communication and food assistance." "Perhaps now international community can understand the suffering of Kashmiris in IOJK as they suffer brutal oppression

under an inhumane politico-military lockdown continuing for over 8 months now without any provision of medical, financial, communication or food assistance," he added. The prime minister said the "racist Hindutva Supremacist Modi Govt" has, in fact, ensured that the Kashmiris are deprived of all basic amenities during the lockdown.

WHO insists it hid nothing

GENEVA: The World Health Organization insisted Monday that it sounded the alarm on the novel coronavirus right from the very start and had hidden nothing from Washington about the deadly pandemic. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said there were no secrets at the UN agency after being blasted by the United States for allegedly downplaying the initial COVID-19 outbreak in China. "We have been warning from day one that this is a devil that everyone should fight," Tedros told a virtual briefing in Geneva. – Agencies

Virus to hit 170 states GDP: IMF

ISTANBUL: Some 170 countries will face narrowing in their GDP this year due to the novel coronavirus' impact on the economy, the directing manager of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said late Monday. "Only months ago we were projecting 160 economies to register positive per capita income growth," Kristalina Georgieva stressed. The pandemic is a "crisis like no other," she stressed, noting that the global crisis, which caused succes-

sive effects on health and economy, is more complex and uncertain. "The outlook is dire. We expect global economic activity to decline on a scale we have not seen since the Great Depression," Georgieva highlighted. Referring to countries' actions to tackle the virus, the IMF chief said: "Fiscal measures so far have amounted to about \$8 trillion and central banks have undertaken massive liquidity injections." She added that the IMF maximized its lending ca-

capacity to provide financial resources rapidly for its members. After originating in Wuhan, China last December, COVID-19 has spread to at least 185 countries and regions worldwide, with Europe and the U.S. the worst-hit regions. There are more than 2.47 million cases worldwide and nearly 170,400 deaths. Over 652,000 have recovered from the virus, according to data compiled by U.S.-based Johns Hopkins University. – APP

Pakistan Stock Exchange plunges

DNA

KARACHI: Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Tuesday witnessed bearish trend as KSE-100 index lost 1146 points. The benchmark KSE-100 index closed at 32,353 points with a negative change of 1146 points. The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Friday saw a return of the bulls as the benchmark KSE-100 Index gained over 1400 points. Since trading resumed at 11:55 am, the market has continued to increase its gains. The benchmark index also touched the level of 33,000 points during the trading. The KSE-100 index gained 1498 points on the last

working day and closed at 32,832. The confidence was prevailed among the investors as the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Thursday further slashed its key interest rate by two per cent (200 basis points) to nine per cent in wake of the worsening outlook for global and domestic economic activity due to the coronavirus pandemic. Over the past one month, the central bank's key interest rate has seen a cumulative reduction of 4.25 per cent. Meanwhile, US crude prices bounced back into positive territory Tuesday, a day after crashing below \$0.00 for the first time owing to crippled demand and a storage glut, while the commodity rout sent Asian equities sharply lower.

Virus cases soar to 9,216

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the country has soared to 9,216. According to National Command and Operation Centre, 4,195 cases have so far been detected in Punjab, 2,764 in Sindh, 1,276 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 465 in Balochistan, 281 in Gilgit-Baltistan, 185 in Islamabad Capital Territory and 50 in Azad Kashmir. The Center said that 2,066 patients have so far recovered while the death toll from the virus stands at 192 with 16 new deaths reported during the last twenty four hours. 796 new cases were reported during the last 24 hours.

Doctors at risk

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The number of coronavirus cases have increased with each passing day in Pakistan. Due to the unavailability of the personal protective equipment, doctors are at high risk of getting infected by the patients they are treating. The Young Doctors Association said that non availability of protective gear puts them in mental stress.

China to consult poor borrowers on debt standstill

So far, China has donated \$20 million dollars to the World Health Organization (WHO); designated \$10 million dollars under the China Poverty Reduction and Regional Cooperation Fund in ADB

STAFF REPORT

BEIJING: Chinese Ministry of Finance that China will carry out specific work through bilateral consultations at the request of relevant poor borrowers in accordance with the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative. China Economic Net (CEN) quoting a Ministry's official stated that China has put forward a systematic proposition on the debt service suspension based on the consensus reached by G20 leaders when participating in the discussion

of Debt Service Suspension Initiative for Poorest at the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting. Many countries have echoed such a proposition presented as follows: The proposition suggests a closely coordinated approach be adopted by multilateral, bilateral creditors and official and private creditors when implementing the debt service suspension for least developed countries. It advocates relevant parties re-spond promptly to the request of the poorest countries in their battle against the COVID-19 ep-

idemic, and provide efficient and provisional support distinct from traditional rescheduling. It emphasized abidance by the rules. As international financing is a market behavior that complies with certain rules, debt suspension should also conform with the rule of law, the rational spirit of contract, and be consistent with international practice. That will help maintain the order of the international financial market. It appeals to the balance of interests. When implementing the debt service suspension initiative, the concerns of cred-

itors and debtors should be equally respected based on the basic conditions of the countries involved so as to avoid moral hazard. It welcomes efforts to promote the development of the poorest countries. Through economic growth, the borrowers' debt burden can be alleviated, and the financing capacity in the international market safeguarded, and hence attain sustainable development. With the efforts of China, all parties eventually reached a consensus on the participation of multilateral, bilateral official creditors and private creditors

in the initiative through corresponding ways. At the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting on April 15, all parties applauded the impact of the initiative in alleviating short-term liquidity difficulties of the poorest countries and centralizing resources to counter the COVID-19 epidemic. To ensure effective implementation of the initiative, China calls on multilateral and private creditors to take appropriate actions as soon as possible to help the poorest countries overcome the difficulties. Meanwhile, China has actively

provided support to the international community through multilateral and bilateral platforms. So far, China has donated \$20 million dollars to the World Health Organization (WHO); designated \$10 million dollars under the China Poverty Reduction and Regional Cooperation Fund in ADB exclusively for regional projects to fight against the pandemic, etc. And China will continue to provide assistance within its capacity to developing countries under the framework of South-South cooperation, CEN's report added.

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Briefs

Violation of lockdown in capital's market

ISLAMABAD: Despite sharp increase in the number of coronavirus cases in the country, huge rush of people was witnessed at different markets of the federal capital.

The people are violating the lockdown and same violation is being done by the shopkeepers as there is no proper measures for social distancing.

Similarly motorists was witnessed on various roads of the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad in violation of lockdown imposed by the administration to control spread of the COVID-19.

The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Administration and the Punjab government imposed lockdown on March 23 in the wake of spread of coronavirus to restrict people to their homes and also asked people not to come out of their homes unnecessarily. — APP

Romeo Weds Heer Heads

FIYAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: The 2018 rom-com hit Romeo Weds Heer, is now available for viewers on Amazon Prime.

Produced by the dynamic duo Abdullah Kadwani and Asad Qureshi, the drama serial managed to break records with its ratings and became a chart-buster during the time of its airing on Geo Entertainment. Penned down by Muhammad Younis Butt and directed by Anjum Shehzad, this 7th Sky Entertainment Production united the Khaani famed duo Feroze Khan and Sana Javed.

The story revolved around the two lovebirds as they faced life, love, and some hilarious set-backs with their shenanigans.

The story was a breath of fresh air with a light-hearted storyline and funny interactions that kept the audiences hooked and garnered critical acclaim for the serial as well.

IRSA's DWP meeting held

ISLAMABAD: The meeting of Development Working Party (DWP) of Indus River System Authority will be held on April 30 for the consideration and approval of PC-1 for installing telemetry system at seven key sites. Earlier, the meeting was scheduled to be held here on Tuesday. However, now the meeting has been rescheduled for April 30, sources told APP here. The meeting was convened to accord approval to PC-1 of the telemetry system for ensuring water distribution among the provinces in transparent manner, they said. — APP



LALAMUSA: Vendors selling vegetables in Lalamusa Sabzi Mandi. — Khurshid Nadeem

AIOU gets 10 acres State land to set up Study Center

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has been allotted 10 acres State land in Baluchistan to set up a Model Study Center at Kharan to meet the educational needs of the local people. According to the University's Director Regional Services Inamullah Sheikh, the Board of Revenue, Baluchistan leased out the land to the University free of cost, with the approval of the

provincial government. The land is situated in the premises of Municipal Committee, Kharan. It will enable the University to establish the Center in its own building. Earlier, the Study Centre was set up in a house donated by the Chief Justice of Federal Shariat Court (FSC), honourable Justice Muhammad Noor Meskanzai, who wanted to expand the educational facilities in the province. He had appreciated the AIOU's distance learning system to achieve the objective.

The Centre was inaugurated on temporary basis in July last year by the Vice

Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum while he was on a tour to Baluchistan for

exploring further avenues of strengthening educational network in the province. The Study Centre is a part of the Allama Iqbal Open University's consistent efforts to upgrade the educational facilities particularly in the country's far-flung regions. On the instructions of the Vice Chancellor, the number of regional offices and the study centers is being increased to bring the education at the door-step of the people, particularly for those living in remote areas.

These offices and centers have been empowered to provide best possible service to its around 1.4 million students across the country. It may be mentioned here that the University is providing free Matric-level education to the students from Baluchistan, besides other financial support under its various scholarships' schemes. It was also the part of the University's policy taking care of marginalized sections as well as less-developed regions.



CM for action against hoarders

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkwa Chief Minister Mahood Khan on Tuesday directed district administration to take strict action against hoarders and profiteers across the province. He issued these directive during video-link conference with commissioners, deputy commissioners, regional police officers and MPAs of all districts. "I also impressed upon the admin that hoarders and profiteers should not be spared especially during the upcoming Ramazan. I will monitor the situation regularly", chief minister said in a Tweet.

The chief minister appreciated the efforts and timely steps taken by district administration and all stakeholders in the fight against COVID-19. — APP

Sherry Asks if govt has applied for Debt Relaxation?

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Leader in Senate, Senator Sherry Rehman, questioned the Federal government for spreading misinformation and not applying for the G20 debt relief programme. She questioned, "Why has Pakistan failed to formally ask G-20 for debt relief? It is alarming that the Federal government was misleading the public, especially during these testing times." Contrary to claims made by Federal government about securing a substantial debt relief, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) resident representative, Teresa Sanchez, said that Islamabad has not made an official request to G20 countries for payment relaxation. "Pakistan should have officially requested G-20 na-

tions for debt relief. It is important to point out that only those countries could avail debt relief that had made official requests to the G-20. In Pakistan's case, this never happened", the Senator added. "When no official request was made to the G-20 nations for debt relief, then why was misleading news circulating in the media that Pakistan would secure \$12 billion worth of relief? This will not only cause chaos and confusion inside Pakistan but is also embarrassing in the eyes of the international community", the Senator questioned.



4500 kites confiscated

MUNIR FAISAL

ATTOCK: Police conducted an operation and confiscated 4500 kites, strings rolls and material used for kite flying besides rounded up a kite sellers here on Tuesday. According to police spokesman, Attock Police while acting on a tip off raided and confiscated 4500 kites, 141 strings rolls and material used for kite flying besides arrested a kite seller identified as Akhbar Khan, Mehmood ul Hussein and Zain ul Abdin. Separate cases have been registered against all the accused and started further investigation. The spokesman said, district police on the special directive of District Police Officer (DPO), Khalid Hamdani conducting raids and netting kite sellers and kite flying ban violators.

Chinese entrepreneur distributes ration

DNA

ISLAMABAD: MS TANG TIANRU a businesswoman and head of Chinese company working in Pakistan has dispatched ration packs for a needy family living in the outskirts of Islamabad. Ms. Tang staff delivered rations bags and other necessary household items to the family of Babar Masih, father of five children. The same Chinese company had earlier helped Babar send his children to school

because he could not afford to send them to schools because of want of financial resources. Ms. Tang's company has arranged similar food packets for other needy people also. She resolved to continue this humanitarian gesture for the needy people of Pakistan.



Police distribute rations among needy

MUNIR FAISAL

ATTOCK: District Police Officer (DPO) Khalid Hamdani said on Tuesday that police distributed food items to 452 deserving families of the district through contribution from cops in Police Relief Fund for Coronavirus, which food items

for one month was distributed among the families. District Police Officer (DPO) Khalid Hamdani said that applications were invited from the poor people especially daily wagers from across the district who were effected through lockdown, 452 families were selected and provided free food for one month.

He said that contributions were made from the officials of district police through Police Relief Fund for Coronavirus. Hamdani said Attock police were well aware of its social responsibilities of helping the poor affected citizens during lock down therefore all force filled with spirit of public service had taken active role.

PR upgrades 620 coaches

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has upgraded around 620 coaches from its own resources to increase revenue of the department and facilitate its passengers during the last three years.

Giving year wise breakup of the upgraded coaches, the official in the Ministry of Railways told APP that 168 coaches were upgraded in 2016-17, 192 in 2017-18 and 260 coaches in 2018-19.

Regarding the availability of coaches, he said that at present around 472 coaches were out of service or non-functional, which needed heavy or light repair. Giving detail about the repair, the official said that 39 coaches of Pakistan Railways under survey of condemnations being over-aged and beyond economical repair. — APP

Prevention best strategy to tackle virus: experts

The experts and practitioners from the health sector shared this views with the audience at online policy dialogue titled 'COVID -19 Pandemic: Challenges of Health care system of Pakistan' organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) here on Monday

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The prevention is the key to deal with the global healthcare crisis effectively. The existing healthcare structures, especially in the developing countries like Pakistan cannot bear the burden of the influx of infected patients of coronavirus beyond a certain limit and hence, prevention must be considered as a most crucial priority for fighting the global pandemic.

The experts and practitioners from the health sector shared this views with the audience at online policy dialogue titled 'COVID -19 Pandemic: Challenges of Health care system of Pakistan' organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) here on Monday. The representatives from healthcare departments, NGOs and supply chain markets attended the dialogue. Dr Samreen Sarfraz, representing Indus Hospital Karachi, said that the healthcare professionals that are at

the forefront of the pandemic are lacking the personal protective equipment. The health workers are working in double shifts and are highly vulnerable to the disease. She said that it's unfortunate that social distancing is being violated and religious congregations are being allowed that could be a receipt of the huge disaster. Dr Majid Shafiq, from Harvard Medical School USA, said that even the hospitals in the developed countries are facing the situation

of the short of staff. He said that the extraordinary situation demands extraordinary measure and thus human exposure must be minimized at every level. He says religious communities including Muslim prayer leaders in U.A. are fully cooperating with the authorities to ensure social distancing. Ms Sadiya Razzaq, health sector expert, said that the healthcare services in Pakistan are insufficient even in the pre-Covid-19 situation. She said that besides prevention, pre-

paredness should be a key leering of the crisis and challenge we are facing today. Dr Sundas Younis, PIMS Islamabad and Dr Faraz from Multan also shared the situation of the respective cities and highlighted the importance of effective social distancing to stop the spread of the pandemic. Dr Hina Aslam, SDPI, earlier presented an outlook of healthcare sector in Pakistan in terms of capacity to deal with the crisis and the issues being faced by the health workers.

Circular debt

ONCE again, the inefficiency of our power sector has come to light in a recent report on power-sector audit. Earlier, a disagreement between two major stakeholders in the power sector had hit newspaper headlines. The two stakeholders are the power division and the regulator, who disagreed over the size of circular debt and the rate of its monthly growth.

The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) disputes the data presented and used by the power division which showed a drop in the circular debt. Though some attempts have been made to reconcile the data, there has not been much success in this matter.

The power division and Nepra both have been insisting that their data should be accepted as accurate and validated by third parties. These parties include international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and World Bank. There have also been some reports about certain mafias within the power companies that report incorrect numbers to Nepra because the power division allegedly puts pressure on them to check power theft to improve recoveries.

There have also been questions regarding the mandate of the power regulator over the circular debt. Now, the latest report has disclosed that the country has sustained over 4.8 trillion rupees in losses due to circular debt in the past 13 years. These losses have been ascribed to the power sector's inefficiencies which caused an annual loss of Rs370 billion. This report was prepared by a nine-member committee on power-sector audit. It deals with circular debt and also suggests a way forward.

This calls for a major overhaul of the entire power sector. First we also need to take care of the high cost of generation that is reportedly highest in the region. Second, both distribution and transmission mechanisms need to be fixed, as this has long been delayed by successive governments in the past 20 years resulting in huge losses to the exchequer.

All governments have tried to control or sustain the circular debt without addressing the fundamentals of high generation costs and distribution. A major hurdle in this overhaul are the DISCOs themselves that resist any major changes in the system.

Then there are fiscal and regulatory problems that have beset the system for long. It is about time the government took this matter seriously and, rather than making some cosmetic changes, got to the root of the problem and rectified it. We have seen many reports in the past gathering dust without being implemented. Let's hope that this time around the present government goes beyond circular debt management to some substantive changes.

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It's weird the way that whenever you reuse old newspapers, the articles in them suddenly become fascinating



Poor signals

THE Higher Education Commission has quickly switched to online learning for the millions of students enrolled at private and public-sector universities around the country.

On paper, this seems like a sensible plan given the Covid-19 pandemic and the havoc it has caused around the world, forcing places of work, universities, colleges and businesses to shut down.

However, it has become obvious during the first month or so of the online system going into effect that a very large number of students are simply not able to keep up with classes.

These include the many who have no access to high-speed internet, those who live in areas of the country including parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan where wi-fi services are virtually non-existent and also the many who suffer from the periodic power shutdowns that have already begun with the arrival of the first signs of summer.

Students have complained that when power disappears at random intervals, they are forced to switch to their mobile phones and data services, sometimes ripping through thousands of rupees within an hour.

It should be noted that like their peers in urban centres who are better equipped for online learning, these students are expected to pay full fees for their semesters.

HEC Chairman Dr Tariq Banuri has said that his organisation is attempting to find solutions but has suggested that pupils who cannot manage with the online learning simply drop their semester.

This of course would set them back by huge steps in their process of learning and delay them from obtaining the degrees they need to move on with lives.

We need a less callous approach. Not every student in the country has the same facilities, and there are many who do not own laptops or computers. Without university computer labs, they cannot be expected to deal with lessons and then exams from their underdeveloped home areas.

This has also exposed development in the country and the dichotomy within it. And it is not a problem restricted to Pakistan. Students are also deprived of the facilities and opportunities that come with study on an organised, well-equipped campus.

The problem is an enormous one. Educators fear it could spill over beyond the summer break and at least for Pakistani students we hope the HEC will find some means to allow them to continue their education even when they are not equipped with the same level of technology as their peers

Euro-Asian structural reforms against COVID-19

Dr Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan



Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan have announced and implemented various "interconnected holistic policies" to combat density of dangerous and infectious disease of COVID-19 which has drastically changed the cycles of life, processes of human survival and production channels of this planet. These countries followed their own "models" and "modules" to minimize the "collateral damages" of COVID-19 in their societies and economies alike

zakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan have been using and implementing as "balancing act" to delay surges of patients, maintaining easy and smooth supply chains of medical staff, stuff, hospital beds and last but not least safeguarding the most "vulnerable" segment of societies from infectious disease of COVID-19 in their respective social setups.

Western media also tried to maneuver issue of transparency of data, state response and coordinated efforts of all the regional countries as slow and weak. On the contrary, Euro-Asian policy measures and structural reforms were based on their "nation risk assessment" due to which these were "real", "gradual" and "systematic" in their nature and implementation. Strategic "political wisdom" and unity of "command" of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan paved the way towards sustainable socio-economic policies and their timely implementations during ongoing mega human health crisis of COVID-19.

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan have announced and implemented various "interconnected holistic policies" to combat density of dangerous and infectious disease of COVID-19 which has drastically changed the cycles of life, processes of human survival and production channels of this planet. These countries followed their own "models" and "modules" to minimize the "collateral damages" of COVID-19 in their societies and economies alike.

Government's spending on public health (AzN 8.3 million) has been increased and created a CV Response Fund, to which it has transferred AzN 20 million manat, with additional contributions from the public and private sectors. They have also announced support to the affected businesses in the amount of AzN 2.5 billion (3 percent of GDP). Azerbaijan's government has provided \$5 million to the COVID-19 Fund as part of the WHO's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan.

The CBA did not change the refinancing rate". State guaranteed public deposits until December 4, 2020. The guarantee covered all manat (foreign currency) deposits within a 10 (2) percent interest rate cap. The CBA, with the participation of the State Oil Fund, has conducted scheduled and extraordinary foreign exchange auctions, and has satisfied all demands for foreign currency at the announced 1.7 AzN/US\$ rate. Kazakhstan President Tokayev announced a significant anti-crisis package of \$13 billion or 9 percent of GDP in late March.

Various supportive measures have been taken including some trade restrictions and regulated prices for socially important goods, cash transfers to vulnerable households, access to medical care by uninsured from April 1 to July 2, and targeted assistance to affected sectors of the national economy mainly construction, agriculture, agriculture and services. The biggest bail-out package included cash payments

to the unemployed i.e. \$95 per month per person, a 10 percent increase in pension and social benefits, and additional spending to strengthen the health sector e.g. wage increase, procurement of medical equipment and support employment and business.

Subsidized lending will be provided under the state program "Economy of Simple Things", KZT 1 trillion, along with coordinated measures to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) finance their working capital KZT 600 billion. An additional KZT 1.8 trillion will be allocated to support employment under an "Employment Roadmap" program. SMEs and individual entrepreneurs are also eligible for new tax incentives.

The central government of Russia increased compensation for medical staff as well as for health and safety inspectors up to 3-4 times, individuals under quarantine to receive sick leave benefits, interest rate subsidies for SMEs; all children up to 3 years of age in families eligible for maternity capital to receive an additional lumpsum benefit for 3 months, starting in April, and all families with children to get an additional lumpsum benefit for each child if parents lose jobs, sick leave pay to equal at least the minimum wage until the end of 2020, tax deferrals for most affected companies on most taxes excluding VAT and social contributions, deferrals on social contributions for SMEs in affected sectors for 6 months, social contributions by SMEs on wages in excess of the minimum wage permanently reduced from 30 to 15 percent, zero import duties for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies and equipment and guaranteed loans to SMEs and affected industries.

The government of Uzbekistan allocated substantial funds for its national health system which has now tremendously, improved its country-wide health infrastructure. A special salary supplement for medical employees, increase the number of low-income families receiving social benefits, provide assistance to affected businesses via interest subsidies, finance public works in different regions to improve infrastructure and support employment.

The government also announced the temporary reduction of social contributions for individual entrepreneurs, postponing surcharges on tourism, property tax, and land tax, extending the moratorium on tax audits, and delaying tax declarations for 2019 income taxes until August 2020. The government also instructed local governments to reduce taxes by 30 percent and provide a 6-month grace period on paying property tax.

1. There is an urgent need to pursue and implement Turkic Health Vision 2040.
2. Implementation of Baku 2020 Declaration in its true letters and spirits.
3. Overhauling of prevailing national system is the need of the hour including re-organization of patient administration system, appropriate

technical infrastructure, data quality and coding improvement, birth and death system, clinical information system, surveillance system and registries, routine health information system, human and organizational development and last but not least data analysis and presentations.

4. Institutionalization of "e-health" system should be implemented immediately.
5. Greater political integration and socio-economic connectivity is the need of the hour to cope and neutralize the bad effects of COVID-19 in Central Asian and South Caucasus countries mainly Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan.
6. Waiving of trade barriers may provide push-forward missing link for achieving greater regional connectivity among the regional countries.
7. Solid mechanism of humanitarian assistance among the regional countries. In this regard, Azerbaijan has already dispatched humanitarian assistance to many regional countries. Uzbekistan pledged humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and Belarus, Russia extended financial assistance as well as medical facilities to many regional countries and international communities. Last but not least, Kazakhstan provided necessary humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan Republic.
8. Institutionalization of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) among all the regional countries.
9. Formation of a Regional Health Bank which can provide necessary financial loans to any needy regional country in the time of national crisis relating to health pandemic in the days to come.
10. Creation of Regional Health Fund for health educational university, production, infection preventive and control mechanism in the days to come.
11. Subject of Health Security should be included at every level of learning in all the regional countries.
12. Formation of a supra health committee consisting of all the regional countries for a befitting response to all kinds of diseases in the days to come.
13. Constant sharing of information relating to social indicators including health facilities should be mantra of all the regional countries.
14. Systemic persuasions to Kazakhstan's initiative Russia-US-China-EU dialogue" may be started as soon as possible. Because it can play crucial role in tackling global pandemics. titled "When we are united -we are invincible".
15. Coordinated efforts towards optimal utilization of all the regional organizations including SCO, Euro-Asian Economic Union and Turkic Speaking States etc.
16. Formation of smarter and innovated health systems based on advanced artificial intelligence technologies in all the regional countries.

Contagion COVIDF 19 can spread like fire

Dr. Aamir Hanif



Studies show that social transformation of fear is more robust in animals including human beings trying to protect their genes from vanishing

AS cases of COVID-19 proliferate, there is a pandemic of fear spreading at the same time and at a much faster pace. Due to easy reach of media, fear contagion spreads like a fire.

Watching someone close to you fearing about something will activate automatic fear in you without even knowing the cause of the fear.

Mass media coverage on Covid-19 spreading and people suffering and dying only add to their misery and push an automatic panic button, leads to unbearable mental stress, anxiety, hoarding food stuff unnecessarily.

Animal studies show that fear contagion sparks in animals.g a herd of antelopes sense a stalking lion suddenly freeze, then quickly sets off the alarm call and runs away from the predator and suddenly other antelopes follow.

Same fear phenomenon operates in human beings.

Our brain is hardwired to respond to threats in

environment, deeply embedded in our brain is an area called Amygdala is a key to responding to threats. It detects stimuli associated with danger.

After receiving the dangerous signals, it passes the signals to other parts of the brain, including hypothalamus and brain stem area to coordinate a specific defense response.

The responses are in the form of fright, freeze, flight or fight.

Human beings are exquisitely tuned to other people's survival reactions and one person panicked, can spread this fear to other member of the community, triggering the same or even worse fear reaction.

Experiments have shown another area in the brain called "Anterior Cingulate Cortex" plays a vital role in this behavior response.

It senses danger signals and passes on to Amygdala where the defense response is set off.

Studies show that social transformation of fear

is more robust in animals including human beings trying to protect their genes from vanishing.

Oncethe fear alarm is triggered it is very hard to control as there is hardly any time to verify the source of terror and this can result in mass tragedies.

Although, it is difficult to prevent fear reaction among humans especially when modern world 24 hours media keeps feeding the frightening and horrible display of images and videos on their screens.

However there are ways to mitigate this reaction. Since it is a social phenomenon many rules that govern social behavior apply.

For example, fear can be mitigated in the presence of calm and confident leader who can, with his behavior give confidence, sense of responsibility, courage and practical measures to adapt a comprehensive approach towards the fearful stimulus.

Turkish Presidency to organize concert on 23rd

In the concert to be broadcast on the YouTube channel of the Directorate of Communications, a call for love and unity will be made to the whole world from the skies of Istanbul.

A.M.BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey will organize a concert with the slogan "From 7 hills to 7 continents" on April 23, National Sovereignty and Children's Day.

In the concert to be broadcast on the YouTube channel of the Directorate of Communications, a call for love and unity will be made to the whole world from the skies of Istanbul.

In the concert, which will start with Yunus Emre's words, "The world is my true nation, and its people are my nation", a message of solidarity will be given

to the whole world with the performances of our valuable artists at seven different locations in Istanbul during this tough period due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to providing medical supplies to many countries battling the pandemic, the Presidency will emphasize the awareness of unity and integrity by bringing hearts together in Istanbul, where the continents meet.

Our pianist Idil Biret, one of the world's leading performers of the 9th Symphony of Ludwig van Beethoven's piano compositions made by Franz Liszt, will perform this immortal work of art, also known as the

'Symphony of Humanity', in the Bosphorus. Harpist Şirin Pancaroglu and vocal artist Bora Uymaz will perform Yunus Emre's cantus "Ben Yürürem Yane Yane" at the Maiden's Tower.

Ney performer Yavuz Akalin will perform "Segah Pesrev" (Yusuf Pasha) at Hagia Sophia, lute player Murat Bagdatli will perform "Kürdilihicazkar Longa" (Kemani Sebuh) at Topkapi Palace, flute artist Elif Yurdakul Baykurt will perform "Syrinx" (Claude Debussy) at Galata Tower, tanbur player Özer Özel and kemancha player Aslihan Özel will perform "Nihavend Saz Semai" (Mesut Cemil Bey) at Dolmabahçe Pal-

ace and the qanun player Serkan Mesut Halili will perform "Şehnaz Longa" (Santuri Ethem Bey) at Pierre Loti Hill.

During the concert, which will be held with wonderful scenes of Istanbul in the background, works from both Classical Turkish Music and Classical Western Music will be performed, while the music will be accompanied by messages of love and unity belonging to important thinkers of the Eastern and Western world ranging from Yunus Emre, Mevlana, Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli and Pir Sultan Abdal to Immanuel Kant, Thomas Aquinas, and Alphonse de Lamartine.



ISLAMABAD: Justice Mr. Javed Iqbal, Chairman NAB chairing Executive Board Meeting of NA at NAB Headquarters. - DNA

NAB to probe sugar, wheat crisis

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Justice (ret'd) Javed Iqbal on Tuesday gave the green signal to start an investigation into the wheat and sugar scandal. According to a statement, the approval was given by the NAB chairman in a meeting of the executive board held in Islamabad today.

"NAB will thoroughly investigate the scandal worth billions of rupees. Smuggling, an increase of prices and wheat and sugar subsidies will also be investigated," the statement said. The statement added that the executive board also gave the approval to close the inquiry against former attorney general Malik Qayyum due to a lack of evidence along with the closure of inquiry against the officers and staff of the Privatization Commission and the managing committee of the Interior Employees Housing Society.

KCCI office timings

ATHAR SUFI

KARACHI: The Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI) has announced its Office Timings during the holy month of Ramadan-ul-Mubarak. The Karachi Chamber will observe the following timings during Ramadan-ul-Mubarak 1441 A.H. For all working days except Friday, the office hours at KCCI will commence from 9:00AM to 2:00PM while on Friday, the Office timings will be from 9:00AM to 12:00PM, said a KCCI press release issued on Tuesday.

Trump to suspend immigration to US

NEW YORK: President Donald Trump tweeted late Monday night that he was suspending immigration into the United States because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens," Trump wrote on Twitter, "I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States!" The president's announcement signals his most wide-ranging attempt yet

to seal the country off from the rest of the world. A formal order temporarily barring the provision of new green cards and work visas could come as early as the next few days, according to The New York Times, citing "several people familiar with the plan."

Under such an executive order, the Trump administration would no longer approve any applications from foreigners to live and work in the United States for an undetermined period of time, effectively shutting down the legal

immigration system in the same way the president has long advocated closing the borders to illegal immigration.

It was not immediately clear what legal basis Trump would claim to justify shutting down most immigration.

Workers who have for years received visas to perform specialized jobs in the United States would also be denied permission to arrive, though some workers in some industries deemed critical could be exempted from the ban, the Times said. - APP

Council of Europe doesn't recognize elections in Nagorno-Karabakh

DNA

BAKU: The Council of Europe doesn't recognize the so-called "elections" held in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

Responding to the question of the Paris-based correspondent of the "Report" Agency, the Directorate of Communications of the Council of Europe stated that the Council of Europe

doesn't recognize the so-called "elections" held in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

The Council of Europe has, on numerous occasions, reiterated its full commitment to the respect of the principle of territorial integrity and sovereignty of all its member states, including Azerbaijan, as outlined in relevant decisions and documents of the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. It is the principled and well-known

position of the Council of Europe that any elections held in contradiction or outside of the constitutional order of a member state have no legal effects and should not be recognized/considered as such. The same holds concerning the recent so-called elections held in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Council of Europe fully supports the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs for the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Chinese aid for Palestine

BEIJING: China has air-lifted emergency medical supplies including medicines, quick medical test equipments and ventilators to help Palestine to fight COVID-19. Chinese Ambassador to Palestine Guo Wei delivered the medical supplies to Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah to strengthen health services for Palestinian patients, local media reported on Tuesday.

He said Beijing would continue to support the Palestinians in their fight against COVID-19 and provide them with all necessary medical equipments and devices to strengthen their resilience, stressing that the Chinese government chartered a private plane in order to facilitate the arrival of aid to Palestine under the air embargo. Palestinian Minister for Health Mai Kila, who received the shipment, expressed her gratitude to the Chinese people, and said the medical supplies were not available in the domestic and regional markets, therefore the Chinese government was extending its support which was of a great importance. - APP

Lifting lockdown not end of virus: WHO

ISLAMABAD: The World Health Organization (WHO) has reaffirmed its stance on the lifting of lockdown measures aimed at protecting the public against the spread of coronavirus. "We want to re-emphasize that easing restrictions is not the end of the epidemic in any country," WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Monday, during his regular briefing to journalists. Tedros said ending the disease will require a sustained effort from individuals, communities and Governments to continue suppressing and controlling the deadly new



coronavirus. "So-called lockdown can help to take the heat out of a country's epidemic, but they cannot end it alone," he added. "Countries must now ensure they can detect, test, isolate and care for every case, and trace every contact." WHO said it has repeatedly prioritized the ramping up of production and distribution of COVID-19

tests. Tedros reported on efforts to identify and validate five diagnostic tests together with partners the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) and the Clinton Health Access Initiative. WHO will order 30 million tests over the next four months, with the first shipments starting next week through the recently established UN Supply Chain. The agency has also welcomed the accelerated development and validation of tests to detect COVID-19 antibodies which are helping experts to understand the extent of coronavirus infection in the population. - APP

Poland medical team at work in Bishkek

BISHKEK: A medical team from Poland started its work at the Republican Clinical Infectious Disease Hospital (RCIDH) in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. Yesterday, April 19, 2020, a group of medical specialists from Poland

consisting of 8 people has arrived in the Kyrgyz Republic through the World Health Organization. Polish doctors will assist domestic medical workers in the fight against coronavirus infection in Bishkek, Osh and Dzhahal-Abad cities. - DNA



Pakistan rejects irresponsible Indian remarks

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Responding to media query on remarks made by the Official Spokesperson of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on 19 April 2020 relating to comments of Pakistani leadership, the Spokesperson said: We reject the Indian MEA Spokesperson's irresponsible and completely ill-founded remarks, which are reflective of India's perennial

state of denial with regard to the rights of minorities, particularly Muslims, in India. The treatment of minorities in India is a matter of serious concern not only for the Indian minorities and the neighbouring countries but also for the international community. It is deeply disconcerting that the discriminatory and anti-Muslim policies and practices of the RSS-inspired BJP Government persist even as the Covid-19 pandemic unfolds.

Online shopping gaining popularity

ISLAMABAD: The trend of online shopping especially Eid clothes and garments was gaining popularity in twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi amid risk of COVID-19. Various popular garments brands have started sale through online portals to facilitate its customers. Head of Sakafat Cultural Forum Momina Khayal said that coronavirus pandemic had completely changed the dynamics of shopping world over. - APP

Pak-Iran committed to strengthen cooperation

DNA

QUETTA: The Consul-General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Pakistan's southwestern city of Quetta while expressing his country's readiness to enhance cooperation with Pakistan in all areas, especially the border trade, said that cooperation between the two countries would be further strengthened in post-COVID19 era. Mohammad Rafiei said this during a meeting with Chief Minister of Balochistan province Jam Kamal Khan. During the meeting, both sides discussed promotion of Pakistan-Iran relations and cooperation between

the two brotherly Islamic countries, especially between neighboring provinces of Sistan and Baluchestan and Balochistan. During the meeting, which coincided with the end of the four-year tenure of the Iranian Consul-General in Quetta, the two sides discussed a wide range of cooperation, border exchanges, developments related to the coronavirus, border trade and economic relations between the two provinces and some of the problems being faced by the business community of the two countries after the closure of the common border. Consul-General apprised the Chief Minister of Balochistan about his performance in Quet-

ta during the last 4 years. Consul-General emphasized the need for promotion of border trade and said that border trade would bring economic prosperity in the region. He appreciated the efforts of the Chief Minister of Balochistan to control coronavirus in the province. He also praised the Balochistan government's efforts to develop effective programs to facilitate the movement of Pakistani pilgrims across the border and to screen them for the coronavirus. He said that the Iranian government has issued a health certificate to all travelers under the mandatory screening process as per the directions of President

Hassan Rouhani so that if any Pakistani traveler is tested positive he could be treated in Iran. In the meeting, Mohammad Rafiei extended an invitation from Governor of Sistan and Baluchestan province Ahmad Ali Mohebbati, to Chief Minister Jamal Khan to visit Iran. Chief Minister Balochistan said that both countries will continue their efforts to further strengthen bilateral relations. He expressed deep sorrow over the loss of lives in Iran in the wake of the situation, created by the coronavirus. "A false impression regarding the spread of the coronavirus was given, that pilgrims were the reason for the spread of

corona. We have placed all the people returning from Iran on an emergency basis in quarantine on an emergency basis. Travelers, including pilgrims, were kept for several days in Taftan and Quetta and were handed over to their provinces," Jam Kamal said. The Chief Minister expressed his best wishes for the Consul-General and said that after the eradication of coronavirus, the relations between the two countries will find a new dimension in all fields. He assured that Pakistan would soon resume border trade with Iran in accordance with health standards. During the meeting, Rafiei announced the readiness

of Iran to develop technical engineering cooperation with Pakistan, including the repair of roads and railways between Taftan and Quetta, as well as the development of urban services with the state government. He added the government of Sistan and Baluchestan is ready to sign a health protocol to continue trade between the two countries within the context of coronavirus which the Pakistani side promised to pursue the case. "Having CDC staff means there is nothing hidden from the US, from day one. Because these are Americans working with us. It just comes naturally and they tell what they are doing," said Tedros.