

Ambassador Stefano NATO's new senior rep in Afghanistan

FM Qureshi thanks Bahrain colleague



Sania lauds **NADRA** plans for needy people



Stefano NATO's new senior rep in Afghanistan

Ambassador Pontecorvo will take up his new position from June 1, 2020. He brings with him a long standing experience in the field of diplomacy including on Afghanistan and the broad regional context

Ansar M Bhatti

BRUSSELS / ISLAMABAD: The Secretary General of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Jens Stoltenberg has appointed senior diplomat and former Italian ambassador to Pakistan Stefano Pontecorvo as Senior Civilian Representative of NATO in Afghanistan.

In a communication addressed to Ambassador Stefano the NATO Secretary General said that he was glad to appoint you as the senior civilian representative of the Organisation in Afghanistan.

Briefs

India

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Director

General ISPR Major

General Babar Iftikhar

has warned that India's

unchecked violations

on the Line of Control

are worsening the situ-

In an interview with a

private news channel.

he said India through

this posture is trying to

externalize its internal

situation through media

rhetoric. He said situ-

ation has become very serious in view of the

Indian Army's behav-

ior and statements of

Indian leadership DG

ISPR termed the Indian

allegations of infiltration

as well as transporting

COVID-19 into India as

ridiculous. He said the

uprising in occupied

Kashmir is indigenous

and there is no reason of

any kind of infiltration.

He said international

community has appre-

ciated Pakistan's measures towards minorities' rights and the iconic

steps like opening up the Kartarpur border.

Inside.

Karandaaz

provides

financing for

COVID-19 Testing

- Page 02

ation in region.

Ambassador Pontecorvo will take up his new position from June 1, 2020.

He brings with him a long standing experience in the field of diplomacy including on Afghanistan and the broad regional context.

' I look forward to working closely with him at this critical juncture for Afghanistan's future where all actors need to come together in the interest of peace and to fight the COVID 19 pandemic.

The Secretary General also thanked the Italian government for strengthening the peace and security measures in Afghanistan so

NAM SUMMIT

Cuban president

lauds Azerbaijan

sume the NAM Chairman-

Due to its seriousness, I

must denounce the terror-

ist attack with an assault

rifle and over 30 rounds

that hit our embassy in

Washington on April 30

last and demand from the

United States government

a thorough and swift inves-

tigation, harsh sanctions

and security measures and

guarantees for our diplo-

matic missions in its territo-

ry, as it must do under the

1961 Vienna Convention on

Diplomatic Relations.

ship in the year of 2022.

that they can achieve sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

He said Italy was a framework nation in their resolute support mission contributing brace and highly skilled forces and country's economic development.

NATO allies and partners remain committed to Afghanistan's long term security which is important for own security, he added.

The Secretary General also thanked the services of the outgoing senior representative Sir Kav for his outstanding services to the cause of peace and security in Af-

That is attested by the

Communiqués that have

been adopted in support

of the World Health Or-

ganization and concerning

COVID-19 and which call

for global unity and in-

ternational solidarity and

cooperation and also for

putting aside political dif-

ferences and eliminating

unilateral coercive meas-

ures which violate Interna-

tional Law and the United

Nations Charter and limit

the capacity of States to

deal with the pandemic

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan chairs meeting of the Federal Cabinet is Islamabad. - DNA

Sino-Pak military-tomilitary ties strong

DNA

BEIJING: China firmly believes that its bilateral and military to military relations with Pakistan will embrace new and greater development through joint battle against COVID-19, a spokesperson of China Ministry of National Defense said.

"China and Pakistan are good friends, neighbors, partners, and brothers. Mutual help is a tradition between the two countries and the two militaries. As "iron brothers", we can achieve great things with the same mind,"f Senior Colonel Wu Qian said while commenting frequent interactions between the two countries and militaries since the COVID-19 outbreak to give each other support.

Kaghan road for traffic opened

DNA

KAGHAN: After seven months the National Highways Authority (NHA) restored Kaghan road for all sorts of traffic by cutting the glacier.

According to the details. this year Mansehra Naran Jalkhad road remained blocked for seven months huge glacier.

No proof from US about Wuhan lab claims: WHO for meat. Top US epidemi-

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said Monday that Washington had provided no evidence to support "speculative" claims by the US president that the new coronavirus originated in a Chinese lab. "We have not received any data or specific evidence from the United States government relating to the purported origin of the vi-- so from our perspective, this remains speculative," WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan told

a virtual briefing. Scientists believe the killer virus jumped from animals to humans, emerging in China late last year, possibly from a market in Wuhan selling exotic animals ologist Anthony Fauci echoed the WHO's statement in an interview published Monday evening by National Geographic.

"If you look at the evolution of the virus in bats and what's out there now, (the scientific evidence) is very, very strongly leaning toward this could not have been artificially or deliberately manipulated, told the magazine. "Everything about the step-

wise evolution over time strongly indicates that (this virus) evolved in nature and then jumped species," he said. US President Donald Trump, increasingly critical of China's management of the outbreak, claims to have

proof it started in a Wuhan laboratory.

And US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday said "enormous evidence" backed up that claim, although the US intelligence community last week said it would continue to study whether the outbreak stemmed from infected animal contact, or a lab accident. China has vehemently denied suggestions the lab was the source.

"Like any evidence-based organisation, we would be very willing to receive any information that purports to the origin of the virus," Ryan said, stressing that this was "a very important piece of public health information for future control. - APP

Cabinet agrees to further ease lockdown

Pakistan has reported 24 more fatalities from novel coronavirus

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal cabinet on Tuesday agreed to further ease lockdown restrictions.

The decision was made during a meeting of the cabinet presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan in Islamabad.

It was also decided that

the prime minister and his cabinet members, including all federal ministers, the premier's advisers and special assistants will donate their one month's salary to the PM's Corona Relief Fund.

Pakistan has reported 24 more fatalities from novel coronavirus as the death toll in the country has reached 486.

The nationwide tally of COVID-19 patients jumped to 21,501 while 1,315 cases were reported in 24 hours.

According to the latest figures by the National Command and Operation Center, Punjab remains the worst-hit province by the pandemic followed by Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

BEIJING: China said Tuesday it will

The rocket is expected to carry a next-generation spacecraft that is supposed to one day transport astronauts to a space station that China plans to complete by 2022 - and eventually to the Moon.

low-Earth orbit and deep space exploration - has enough room for six astroprevious model.

China to launch new rocket

DNA

HAVANA: The President

of Cuba Miguel Díaz-Canel

Bermúdez, president of the

Republic of Cuba has laud-

ed Azerbaijan, the Chair-

man of the Non-Aligned

Movement, for calling to

this meeting to exchange

on the urgent and needed

efforts which allow us to

In his message on the occa-

sion he said, I avail myself

of this occasion to congratu-

late Uganda, which shall as-

face COVID-19.

launch a new rocket at 6pm (1000 GMT), in a test of its ambitions to operate a permanent space station and send astronauts to the Moon.

March 5B – is expected to lift off from

the Wenchang launch site in the southern island of Hainan, the China Manned Space Agency said in a statement.

efficiently.

The prototype vessel - designed for

and NHA had opened it A new large carrier rocket - Long nauts, compared to three seats in the till Naran by cutting a

COVID 19: Pakistan President lauds NAM role

Dr. Arif Alvi, represented Pakistan at the Special Online Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement convened by the Chair, Azerbaijan. Pakistan will remain engaged with NAM initiative of strengthening international response to COVID-19 pandemic

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi, represented Pakistan at the Special Online Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement convened by the Chair, Azerbaijan on the theme of "United against COVID-19".

Addressing the Summit, President gave Pakistan's perspective on measures taken at national level to mitigate and respond to COVID-19 and socio-economic challenges arising from the pandemic. He said as an active member of the Movement, Pakistan will remain engaged with NAM initiative of strengthening international response to COVID-19 pandemic.

Pakistan's national response includes targeted approach of containment, strengthening health system and financial support to the vulnerable individuals and small businesses.

Stressing that the crisis should be converted into opportunity, the President underscored the importance of a holistic response to COVID-19 with broader development dimensions taken along with addressing the health system challenges. The President stated "the crisis triggered by the pandemic is also a stark reminder that no country can overcome such threats alone". A global challenge requires a global response, he added.

The President also highlighted Pakistan's generosity in providing health access to Afghans refugees, despite immense pressure on Pakistan's health infrastructure.

He called upon the UN, UNHCR and IOM to come forward in helping and assisting both the documented and undocumented Afghan Refugees.



Highlighting unprecedented challenge to developing countries' economies, the President reiterated the Prime Minister Imran Khan's call to the in-

ternational community for a "Global Initiative on Debt Relief" The President underscored that the

efforts must be focused toward the

Security Council resolutions. Noting that the sufferings of the Kash-

livelihoods.

miris were further compounded due to communication restrictions and lack of unfettered access to medical and other essential supplies, the President underscored that incarceration of Kashmiri leaders and youth also made them vulnerable to the pandemic.

most vulnerable countries in the world

for relief and revival of economies and

The President underlined the impor-

tance of fighting COVID-19 pandemic

without politicization and pursuit of

narrow agendas. The President also

rejected deplorable attempts to dis-

criminate against and demonize Mus-

lims in the context of COVID-19. The

President highlighted the plight of the

Kashmiri people who continue to suf-

fer under Indian occupation against all

norms of international law and the UN

Cultural integration and

regional trade prospects Page 03

Uzbek govt allocates 100 billion soums for population

UNESCO, EU mark World Press **Freedom Day**

- Back Page

Briefs

Park Enclave facilities improved

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Capital

Development Authority

is adding into civic amenities at Park Enclave with every passing day. In a latest development, Capital Development Authority has installed state of the art security system at main entry gate of Park Enclave I. The security system includes digital security cameras, security barriers and monitoring system. The newly installed security system will maintain complete record of entry and exit at Park Enclave-I. Chairman Capital Development Authority has directed concerned officials to arrange deployment of security guards also at the earliest. Alongwith installation of security system, sanitation and horticulture related development activities are also in full swing at Park enclave I. In this regard garbage trolleys have also reached Park Enclave I for further installation at various locations. Consistent addition in civic amenities at Park Enclave I reflect high priority CDA administra-

PTCL officials distribute ration

tion gives to development works at Park Enclave-I.

KOHAT: Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTCL) on Tuesday distributed food packages among deserving people affected by lockdown at a ceremony held at Deputy Commissioner Office Kohat. Adviser to Chief Minister on Science and Information Technology, Ziaullah Bangash was present on this occasion and acknowledged the efforts of PTCL for helping and distributing ration among deserving families and daily wagers due to lockdown after

coronavirus outbreak. Speaking on the occasion, he said that Emergency Response Unit has distributed ration among 2500 needy families effected by lockdown due to coronavirus. He said the emergency unit would provide ration to daily wagers and poor people in current situation after coronavirus outbreak. The emergency supply unit comprised NGO workers, social activists, political parties representatives and oth-

Woman dies in road accident

er local elders. - APP

ISLAMABAD: An aged woman died on the spot after being hit by a car near Koral bus stop at Islamabad Expressway on Tuesday.

The ill-fated incident took place when the victim, identified as Zubaida Mustafa (65) wife of Ghulam Mustafa, attempted to cross the expressway and became target of a speeding car - Suzuki Mehran, a police spokesman told APP.

He said the women died on the spot while her seven-year grand daughter received injuries. The police shifted the dead body and injured to the hospital. while heirs of the dead refused to initiate any legal proceeding against the vehicle owner. -APP

Karandaaz provides financing for COVID-19 Testing

FIAZ CHAUDRHY

ISLAMABAD: Tuesday, 05 May 2020: Karandaaz Pakistanis providing financing to Excel Labs to initiate COVID-19 testing. With this funding, Excel Labs is buildingits capacity to carry out an estimated 500 tests daily and more than 10,000 tests a month.

This emergency response will help the country build critical testing capacity to test, track and controlthe spread of COV-ID-19. At present, Pakistan is administering less than 1,000 tests per one million citizens, compared to more than 18,000in the US, 12,000 in the UK, 113,000in the UAE, 30,000 in Germany, and 5,000 tests per one million people in Iran. In addition to the financ-

ing at zero percent mark-up, a grant by Karandaaz will also be provided to Excel Labs for subsidising around 4,000 tests. Subsidized tests will be available to vulnerable categories, including those above 65 years of age, doctors and nurses exposed to the Corona virus, and poor individuals who cannot afford the test.

Karandaaz's existing investment in Excel Labs, a laboratory and diagnostic service provider in Pakistan, hasalready enabled it to expand its service by three times, and created 735 new jobs including almost 700 for women and youth. Excel Labs has a presence at

more than 104 locations across Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir.

The Lab currently offer a total



of 727 types of tests; with this concessional financing from Karandaaz, Excel Labs will be able to expand its diagnostic tests portfolio to identify carriers and patients of the corona virus. The samples collected by Excel Labs will be tested in a WHO standard Lab.

Speaking about the significance of this investment, Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Chairperson Karandaaz said, "

The novel coronavirus has thrown up unprecedented challenges for every country. In this global fight against the pandemic, it is imperative for each and every country to substantially build its testing capacity to mitigate the spread of this disease through test, trace & quarantine strategy. I am pleased that Karandaaz has been able to

mobilize capital to enable Excel Labs to initiate COVID-19 testing as per WHO standards. Initiatives like these, coupled with the support provided by the Government of Pakistan and the private sector is what will enable Pakistan to contain and overcome this crisis."

Mr. Ali Sarfraz, CEO Karandaaz

said"The investment in Excel Labs network will enable it to quickly increase its capacity to perform COVID-19 diagnostic tests. We are happy to extend this additional financing to our investee as it will help the country's capacity to undertake many more diagnostic tests to curb the COVID-19 epidemic. In line with the WHO's recommendation to test, test and test, the investment in Excel Labs through Karandaaz will help Pakistan enhance its ca-

pacity to conduct more tests, currently estimated at less than 1,000 tests per million to identify patients and carriers of the COVID-19 virus."

Speaking about the investment, CEO Excel Labs, Dr Naseer Ahmad said, "Our partnership with Karandaaz has been really fruitful as it enabled us to have access to growth capital and expand our operations, creating more jobs and offering a wider range of diagnostic services in Pakistan.

This new commitment from Karandaaz will help us gear up to deal with this novel virus and offer the much-needed tests to thousands across the country at a concessional rate. We hope that with this test, Excel Labs can play a role in significantly boost the country's overall response to the pandemic."



ISLAMABAD: Yao Jing, Ambassador, Embassy of China in Islamabad called on Mr. Atif R. Bokhari, MOS / Chairman, Board of Investment at BOI Islamabad. - DNA

Matching price of petrol, gas damaging CNG sector

en Shopping Spree" where every

women can buy anything from the

The lockdown has undoubtedly af-

He said that crisis either breaks

something down or creates unity

so in challenging time we can sup-

comfort of their own homes.

fected everyone economically.

SHAHEEN QURESHI

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan CNG Association (APCNGA) on Tuesday said the compressed natural gas sector is at the verge of destruction due to parity between the price of petrol and local

The price of gas should have been reduced after decreasing the price of

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Connected Women

Pakistan has arranged a week long

live online exhibition to support

The exhibition titled "Virtual Wom-

women owned small businesses.

petrol to keep the troubled business of CNG viable, said Ghivas Abdullah Paracha, Central Chairman APCNGA.

He said that CNG sector

is crumbling due to costly natural gas, unbearable burden of taxes, and indifference of the government which will leave thousands dealers bankrupt, around four hundred thousand people unemployed while wasting an investment od Rs400 billion. Ghiyas Paracha said that there are some five hundred thousand vehicles in the country which cannot be run on the petrol which will be halted resulting in a nightmare for many.

He said that some favourite sectors are addicted to subsidies since long while the burden of their gas subsidies is shifted to the CNG sector which makes the fuel costly.

Now the CNG sector is unable to bear the burden of blue-eved sectors, therefore the government should reduce subsidies to make natural gas economical for the CNG sector, he demanded.

He said that gas tariff should be reduced, taxation should be relaxed and GIDC should be abolished to keep CNG stations in

national athletes were set Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhto participate in the race. wa and Baluchistan viable. "Next year's Tour de Khanjerab will only be held if the Online Women Shopping" exhibition from 9th conditions improve," he said. He said that as the Inport our small businesses by buyternational Cycling Union ing from them. He said that small (UCI) had cancelled all its businesses are important to the events due to the prevailing economic and social fabric of our situation, triggered by corosociety, and we all can play a part navirus, the involvement of in their survival so book stall now international teams had

Cycling race

cancelled

ISLAMABAD: The third

edition of International Tour

de Khanjerab cycle race has

been cancelled due to the

global coronavirus, Pakistan

Cycling Federation (PCF)

said on Tuesday. "The event

was scheduled to be held

from June 18 to 21 in collab-

oration with the government

of Gilgit-Baltistan," Syed

Azhar Ali Shah the President

According to Shah several

foreign teams as well as top

become doubtful in Tour de

Khanjerab.

of PCF told APP.

Govt releases Rs 7.5 bln

ISLAMABAD: The Federal government has so far authorized to release Rs 7595.950 million for various ongoing and new projects of Finance Division under its Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) 2019-20, as against its total allocation of Rs 9930.749 million. Out of the total, all allocated amount of Rs 1000 million have been author-

ized to be released for Construction of Sibbi Rakhni Road, according to the latest data released by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives.

eted amount of Rs 1000 million have been authorized for release to carry out work on Gwadar Development Authority for which Rs1000 whereas an amount of Rs 800 been authorized for release for necessary facilities of fresh water treatment, water supply and distribution Gwadar, for which Rs1000 million were earmarked.

The ministry also provided authorization for release of Rs 640 to complete the dualization of road from GT Road (Samma) to Gujrat whereas Rs 408.199 million were released for Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Mother and Child Health Care Centre, Nawabshah City.

The government also released Rs 400 million for Sea Water Desalination Plant at Gwadar (CPEC), Rs 400 for Construction/Upgradation of Dirgi Shabozai Road, Balochistan (Federal Share 60%) and Rs 240 million for Evno Center Pechawar

It is pertinent to mention here that the federal government has so far authorized release of Rs 533.33 billion for various ongoing and new social sector uplift projects under its Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) 2019-20, as against the total allocation of Rs 701 billion. – APP

COMSTECH arranging virtual seminar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: COMS-TECH is arranging an online seminar on COVID-19 epidemiology and its ramification for wider public health and health sciences particularly for the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states on May 6 (Wednesday). Prof Dr Saad B Omer will conduct the seminar and will give insights of COVID-19 epidemiology globally with prospects of vaccine development.

Prof Omer is the founding director of the Yale Institute for Global Health and a professor of medicine and epidemiology at the Yale University, School of Medicine and Public Health, USA, said a news release on Tuesday.

He has conducted studies in the United States, Guatemala, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, South Africa and other OIC states. The intending participants can register at http://www.comstech. org/seminar-covid-19.asp.

PM's idea of easing lockdown supported

by filling this form: https://forms.

gle/ZjiTrUzhonbxj6n29

Dr Choudry mentioned that Pakistan needs to analyze the Swedish model as they never lockdown the whole country but educated the masses how to protect themselves from the dangerous virus. "They are doing well as compare to many other countries, restaurants always remained open to public, while schools never closed"

DNA

ISLAMABAD / WASHINGTON: Renowned cardiologist in Washington D.C Dr Mubashar Choudry has supported the idea of Prime Minister Imran Khan to gradually ease lockdown to save economy. Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced relaxation in lockdown due to economic situation of the country and problems being faced by common people. Prime Minister also said that "Tiger Force" will help district administrations in providing relief to the people, implementing SOPs and monitoring food stock.

Dr Mubashar Choudry in an exclusive talk said "The corona family of viruses travels through South Asia many times in a year and most probably people in Pakistan have developed immunity "herd" in large scale that is why our infection and death rate is very low" as compare to the Europe and North America. "Prevalence of coronavirus infection is exceptionally low in Pakistan, he added.

Dr Mubashar Choudry said relaxation in lockdown is a must due to economic situation of Pakistan. Dr Choudry mentioned that Pakistan needs to analyze the Swedish model as they never lockdown the whole country but educated the masses how to protect themselves from the dangerous virus. "They are doing well as compare to many other countries, restaurants always remained open to public, while schools never closed". "Sweden took a very practical approach towards social distancing", Dr Choudry remarked.

To a question the renowned cardiologist urged to raise public awareness in Pakistan through print, electronic and social media. "The Government needs to educate the people about this virus, make them responsible for taking precautions". "Economy

of Pakistan cannot survive in a such lockdowns when millions of people are already living below the poverty line", he noted.

"I must say there is a need of implementing the guidelines like social distancing, using masks, gloves and free testing in the government hospitals but at the same time keep educating the nation instead of forcing the lockdown

Dr Mubashar said that there were number of complaints against private hospitals in Pakistan, refusing patients for treatments without having Corona tests. "Private hospitals should be mandated to admit any patient coming to their door with the symptoms of shortness of breath".

To a question about the approval of the use of experimental drug remdesivir to treat COVID 19 patients in United States, Dr Choudry was of the view that members of White House Corona Task Force Dr Debrorah Birx and Dr Anthony Fauci have spoken publicly about the potential of remdesivir helping treat people sickened with COVID_19. "United States is willing to provide this drug to other countries too so I think Pakistani Government should make efforts to get remdesivir to treat Coronavirus patients.

Virus cases soar to 21,501

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Twenty four deaths caused by Coronavirus and 1,315 new infections have been reported in country during the past 24 hours. The total confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country have soared to 21,501. Of these, 7,882 were reported in Sindh, 8,103 in Punjab, 3,288 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 1,321 in Balochistan, 464 in Islamabad Capital Territory, 372 in Gilgit-Baltistan, and 71 in Azad Kashmir. Over five thousand seven hundred patients have recovered in the country.

Threatened workers

HE Covid-19 epidemic, which experts now say could remain with us at least for the rest of this year, has had a devastating impact not only on health but also on livelihood and the ability to earn it. According to the ILO, nearly half of the total workforce around the globe is in danger of having their means of earning destroyed by the pandemic. This number rises to billions. The ILO has said the risk is greatest on those workers who formed a part of the informal economy and three quarters of them, in other words some 1.6 billion people, face enormous risks. In Pakistan too, there is a looming cloud of unemployment over the heads of as many as 18 million people in the country. This likely outcome will emerge from an impending closure of an estimated one million small entities that will be shut for good. Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar has made this startling but not entirely unexpected revelation, warning our economic planners that between 20 million and 70 million people may see a downward slide into extreme poverty, meaning they wouldn't know where their next meal would come from. This is a grim picture that unfortunately is going to unfold in the coming months. In all likelihood, Pakistan is going to experience the highest unemployment rate in decades. The government will also be in deep trouble as revenue collection has dropped by nearly Rs120 billion in just one month.

On an average, nearly two dozen people are already losing their lives daily in Pakistan, and as the government is planning to ease the lockdown restriction across the country in the coming days, there may be an unprecedented spiral in daily deaths and new infections. The government needs to take a few measures before the situation gets out of hand in a whirlwind manner. First, small entities must be supported financially so that the impact of unemployment can be minimized. The more entities we manage to rescue economically the more jobs will remain in place, at least for the time being. Second, there must be a mechanism in place to provide unemployment allowance and

benefits to the people who are going to be jobless in the coming months. That means in the upcoming budget-making exercise, there must be a separate head for these allowances other than the already running safety nets in the country. There will be a need to regularly update the data of poverty stricken people and for that you need a functioning local-government system in the country. The other three provincial governments have abolished them on the pretext of establishing yet another new system. Economically marginalized people do not have access to cyberspace where they can get registered online. A locally based transparent system of registering the needy must be initiated through local institutions and NGOs. So, in short we must have a three-pronged strategy: support small entities to keep floating, engage civil society organization, and reactivate local bodies to fulfil their functions.

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Division of Yemen

Separatist group in southern Yemen has declared self-rule in the southern part of the country and announced an interim seat of government at Aden. The separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) issued the declaration on April 26, practically asserting the north-south divide once again, and threatening new conflicts with other warring factions not only within the country but also in the region involving Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The northern part of Yemen is currently held by the Iran-aligned Houthi movement that overthrew the internationally recognized government from power in the capital, Sanaa, in late 2014. The STC signed a power-sharing deal with the internationally-recognized government in November 2019. Interestingly, Saudi Arabia which was initially supporting the southern groups against the northern outfits, has described the STC announcement as an 'escalatory action'. This development is even more puzzling at a time when the region is also battling the novel coronavirus, just like the rest of the world.

The people of Yemen have been suffering under the double scourge of a raging civil war and a surging Covid-19 pandemic. Precisely at a time when the warring factions should be trying to alleviate the sufferings of the Yemenis during the month of Ramazan, and support peace efforts initiated by the UN, the declaration further complicates the situation. The STC declaration of self-rule has threatened efforts to revive talks between the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels. This is an entirely unilateral action that will promote instability rather than bring some semblance of peace. Now, there is an even more challenging situation for the UN special envoy for the region. It will require much more to revive political negotiations between the government and the Houthi rebels. There is only one solution to this imbroglio and that is re-engaging in the political process – otherwise Yemen will remain mired in conflict for many years to come. It has been over five years now that a coalition led by Saudis intervened in March 2015 against the Houthis who have been in control of Sanaa since 2014.

Houthis also control most big cities and towns in the southern part of Yemen. Despite the repeated efforts by the UN, the northern and southern parts of Yemen have remained separate for all practical purposes for five years now, so the declaration only tries to formalize what has already been there. It is a sad fact that Yemen has lost, according to some estimates, as many as one hundred thousand people in the past five years. Another million or so have been either displaced or pushed to the brink of famine and starvation. Neighbouring Muslim countries such as Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have a lot to answer for in this tragedy. And so is the so-called alliance of the 40 odd Muslim countries. Nobody knows what that united force is doing if it is unable to restore peace in such a small country as Yemen.

Cultural integration and regional trade prospects

A case study of Pakistan and Central Asia

Lt. Col. Khalid Taimur Akram (Retd)



Turkmenistan is largely a desert country with intensive agriculture in irrigatedoases and sizeable gas and oil resources. Much of the benefits can be reaped to increase thetrade between the two countries. In 2017, Pakistan's goods import from Turkmenistan stood at \$ 16.81Mn. Both countries had signed five agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to boost cooperation in the fields of trade, energy, media, and culture back in November 2011

TENTRAL Asian region assumes greater impor-

tance for Pakistan, not for a single reason of historical linkages but many factorspersuade Pakistan to keep Central Asia as a priority area in its foreign policy credentials. Since the independence of CARs, various strategic and economic interests have become a significant impetus of Pakistan's policy particularly in the field of energy. For landlocked Central Asia also, Pakistan's importance is for several reasons. Along with historical and cultural ties that bring both the regions closer, the potential relationship in the future can benefit them greatly. Both Central Asia and Pakistan hold great importance for each other, the changed geopolitical and strategic position has enhanced this significance immensely. In this context, increased cultural integration would be beneficial for regional trade prospects. Central Asia extends from the Caspian Sea in the west to central China in the east, and from Russia in the north to northern India in the south. Acting as a crossroad for the movement of goods, and people for a long time in the past, modern Central Asia consists of five Central Asian Republics i.e. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Similarly, Pakistan is strategically located at the juncture of Central Asia, South Asia, and West Asia and is separated from Central Asia by Wakhan Strip of Afghanistan. The emergence of Central Asian Republics has created a new phase of the relationship between Pakistan and this Central Asian region. The changing regional and global strategic environment has made it more important for Pakistan to compete and

The history of this connection can be traced back to the 2nd century B.C up to 17th and 18th century, when the nomads in both the areas established economic, cultural and religious links with each other and the Indus civilization now comprising Pakistan, was part of the dynasties in Central Asia. Central Asia witnessed the rule of different empires that established their hold in the area extending from the Caspian Sea to the Arabian Sea including Pakistan's territory in the past.

maintain stronger ties with Central Asia. Concerning the

great historical and cultural associations, Pakistan and

Central Asia can boost their potentials and the coopera-

tion can be a model in the region as well as in the globe

but still, few constraints haunt this affiliation to be estab-

lished on a sound basis.

The present strategic ties between Pakistan and Central Asia are and can be of enormous stimulus because both sides can gain momentous from the economic potentials of each other and can boost their social and cultural cooperation as they are blessed with natural and geographic potentials. As far as Central Asia is concerned, Pakistan's geostrategic position is of great importance. The most noteworthy and near route for Central Asia to the sea can be provided by Pakistan and Afghanistan. The economic interests of Central Asia can be boosted through Pakistan as the trade can be increased by air and by road networks.

Pakistan -Serving the World asa Significant **Trade Route**

Located in the heart of Asia, Pakistan serves as a gateway to the energy-rich Central Asian States, the financially liquid Gulf States and progressive Far Eastern Countries. This strategic advantage are cognition as having three seaports; in fact, the Karachi Port (KPT) is one of the busiest ports in the whole Arabian Sea. Most of the overseas trade of Pakistan and the landlocked Central Asian countries transit through Karachi's two ports. These ports along with newly developed Gwadar port hold bright prospects for Pakistan becoming a regional transit trading hub for land-locked Central Asian countries, while additionally creating opportunities for re-exports of goods.

Currently, Pakistan's trade volume with the region stands at \$58.4 million. During 2018, Pakistan exported goods and services valued at \$50.7 million to the Central Asian countries while its imports from the region stood at \$7.718 million, according to the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) data.

Pakistan's largest trading partner in the region is Kazakhstan, to which Pakistan exported goods worth \$36.8 million during the period, followed by Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Uzbekistan: Building Bridges to Enhance **Bilateral Ties**

In the 2018-2019, the trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Pakistan rose three times and amounted to \$100 million. This year, the economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Pakistan reached the highest levels. Uzbekistan has become one of the main trade-economical partners of Pakistan in Central Asia. Uzbekistan is keen to continue to develop bilateral relations in 2020. to achieve more effective results for the sake of the benefits of the two countries. At the same time by the initiative of Uzbekistan's President both the countries have started to develop relationships in the field of Ziarat Tourism for foreign pilgrims. This direction of tourism rapidly took its development and created the most favorable conditions for tourists.

In general, both entities have opened doors for religious tourism. Uzbekistan is the land of great Islamic scholars and thinkers like Al- Khorazmiv, Al-Beruniv, Imom Al - Bukhari, BahouddinNaqshbandiy, Al - Motrudiy, At -Termiziy and others. Pilgrims from all over the world are visiting their graves to make Ziarat and give them respect. In order to create the most favorable conditions for attracting foreign investments, in Uzbekistan have been created more than 20 free economic zones. By opening their companies in Uzbekistan, the Pakistani textile companies will get direct access to highest quality Uzbek cotton, employees with high literacy and free export regime to the countries of Central Asia and Commonwealth of independent states that comprises 300 million population.

Pak- Kyrgyz Strengthening Economic Bonds

Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan are co-operating with each other in various fields for the promotion of trade and economic association. Several Pakistan nationals have established their businesses in the fields of hoteling, pharmaceutical industry, and tourism in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Kyrgyzstan's exports to Pakistan stood at \$ 0.39Mn in 2018 as compared to \$ 0.17Mn in 2017, depicting an increase of 129.4%. On the other hand, its imports from Pakistan amounted to \$ 4.96Mn in 2018, 14.8% up from \$ 4.32Mn in 2017. The trade balance in 2018 was in favor of Pakistan at \$4.57Mn as against \$4.15Mn in 2017, an increase of 10.1%. Moreover, The Belt and Road Initiative will have a positive outcome for the economic stability of the Kyrgyz Republic as well as for the trade linkages between Bishkek and Islamabad.

Tajikistan's Accelerating Interest in Bilateral Trade Advancement

Tajikistan investors and businessmen have expressed interest in the trade advancement to \$500 million per annum. Both countries have a huge potential to enhance trade, joint ventures and investment in different fields. Pakistan could export many products to Tajikistan including furniture, sugar, textile, and cement, etc. Both countries are keen to focus on developing road, railway, and air links to further enhance bilateral trade and investment activities. The "CASA- 1,000" project is paving way for two-way trade of electricity. Under the new scenario, Pakistan is now surplus in electricity and wants to export it to the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan in the winter season by using the same structure of

Turkmenistan-Pakistan Trade Relations

Turkmenistan is largely a desert country with intensive agriculture in irrigatedoases and sizeable gas and oil resources. There is an immense potential of trade between the two countries as BIT isoperational since 1994. Much of the benefits can be reaped to increase thetrade between the two countries. In 2017, Pakistan's goods import from Turkmenistan stood at \$ 16.81Mn. Both countries had signed five agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to boost cooperation in the fields of trade, energy, media, and culture back in November 2011. Moreover, the Bilateral InvestmentTreaty (BIT) had also been signed between the two states. Similarly, both countries have inked the Double Taxation

Kazakhstan-Pakistan Economic Association

Kazakhstan is keen to boost trade ties and enhance the mutual trade volume between the two countries. Kazakhstan is keen to increase economic cooperation and boost mutual trade ties with Pakistan. A conducive business environment exists in both the entities for foreign investors. Moreover, Pakistani industrialists should take benefit of the trade-centric environment, through land routes and optimized trade agreements both the countries can unleash the immense potential that would be mutually beneficial. Pakistan is also keen to strengthen ties with Kazakhstan through the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other connectivity projects which would ensure regional development and prosperity. On the other hand, Pakistani ports offer the shortest land route to Kazakhstan for access to the Arabian Sea which can be advantageous for both countries.

Pakistan: A Strategic Regional Player

Most of the Central Asian capitals such as Tashkent, Dushanbe, Ashkhabad, Almaty, and Bishkek can use the Karachi seaport as the nearest one. The future regional economic stability and cooperation can be increased with strong ties between Pakistan and Central Asia. Pakistan has also concentrated on realistic and shared approaches that Central Asian republics tried to become active in an "extended neighborhood" beyond South Asia. Pakistan has emphasized the revival of Muslim sociocultural and trade links with central Asia. Economically, Pakistan is interested in the massive prospective of trade connections with a great and newly accessible market and of energy partnerships with oil- and gas-rich Central Asian states. At first, Pakistan needs to exploit a bilateral approach centered on its trade links to boost its economic priorities. New links based on transportation, trade, and energy among the States of Central Asia and Pakistan can bring long-term constancy and prosperity to the people of these regions and reinstate the commercially and culturally crossing. Economic prosperity, growth, stability, development, and freedom come by possessing several outlets in terms of having different transport and economic corridors, bilateral trading partners and multiple pipelines.

Central Asia, without a doubt, is a storehouse of energy, but unfortunately landlocked geographically. The major exciting prospects for the CARs are mostly viewed in terms of energy resources. The mineral resources present in abundance in Central Asia is a source of attraction for one and all, particularly for regional countries such as Pakistan, that otherwise have high deficits in these resources. The region's oil and gas reserves are estimated as the second-largest in the world. Vast mineral reserves and rich agriculture activities, when combined with a skilled population, imply that there are ample chances for this region to surface as one of the most dynamic regions in the entire world.

On the other hand, Pakistan is an energy deficit country but fortunately well-placed strategically. Such a complex situation makes either region deficit in one aspect but at the same time rich in the other. The geostrategic and geopolitical location of Pakistan is extremely significant for the reason that it can provide the energy-rich but landlocked CARs the shortest energy corridor for the global export of its oil and gas reserves through the Gwadar and Karachi ports.

Being at the crossroads between Central and South Asia, it is encouraging for Pakistan to play a bridge state role, linking various regions and providing easy passage to the landlocked CARs. The Gwadar port, recently becoming partially-functional, could serve this purpose effectively as is evident from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Moreover, the longstandingand multifaceted cultural. historical and ethnic bonds coupled with the common Muslim identity are other favorable signs for establishing comprehensive and strong bilateral relations with all the CARs that encompass political, defense, and particularly economic aspirations. In this regard, the setting up of a national agenda, fixing the country's priorities and notwithstanding political or other affiliations, can serve its interests greatly.

Pakistan must establish cordial cultural and economic relations with each Central Asian republic as

each of them follow a distinct foreign policy. Despite facing irritants and challenges in Central Asia, Pakistan must go for initiating more economic and trade-related agreements with the Central Asian re-

In order to benefit from this resource-rich region, Pakistan must look for multi-dimensional prospects for development. Cooperation and constructive engagement should be the cornerstone of Pakistan's approach

Pakistan must use regional and international forums to develop trust in Pakistan and enhance economic and political cooperation. It should also establish various research centers to facilitate economic progress and trade prospects.

At present, people to people contacts are not developed which is much needed to fulfill the maximum economic interests of Pakistan in Central Asia. There should be frequent exchanges of scholars, cultural representatives, and government officials to develop better mutual understanding and people-to-people contact. Pakistan can also enhance relations by offering scholarships to Central Asian students in various fields. Exchange of research scholars, teachers and professors could be another avenue for cooperation. On return to their countries, these individuals could be goodwill ambassadors and facilitate further expansion in relations. Central Asia has now become a significant region, having immense trade potential. Together with religious, political, cultural and ethnic ties, the two regions can also strengthen commercial ties or trading networks. The importance of Central Asia with regard to its enormous potential and the future greater possibility of cooperation in various fields make it an important aspect of Pakistan's foreign policy. Moreover, the geographical location of CARs also gives that region a significant place in Pakistan's strategic motives. Serious consideration, focused planning, implementation mechanism, is required for boosting economic, strategic and socio-cultural ties Between CARs and Pakistan.

Exports to Central Asian countries (in dollars)

Kazaknstan	36.8 million
Kyrgyzstan	0.469 million
Turkmenistan	3.3 million
Tajikistan	6.6 million
Uzbekistan	3.4 million
Total	50.7 million

Imports from Central Asian countries (in dollars)

Kazakhstan	0.364 million
Kyrgyzstan	0
Turkmenistan	.1.94 million
Tajikistan	.5.138 million
Uzbekistan	0.276 million
Total	.7.718 million

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WEDNESDAY, MAY 06, 2020 | WWW.ISLAMABADPOST.COM.PK

Briefs

Financing plan by ADB reviewed

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A meeting of the Concept Clearance Committee discussed the financing plan being offered by the ADB in the efforts to support the Covid-19 emergency relief services under the title "Emergency Assistance for Fighting against Covid-19 Pandemic" worth USD 305 Million was presented and was subsequently approved.

The meeting was chaired by Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Muhammad Jahanzeb Khan which was attended by a delegation of Asian Development Bank led by the Country Director Ms. Xiaohong Yang. ADB will provide USD 200 Million for social protection for the poor and vulnerable and USD 105 Million for public health emergency preparedness.

Trains to start operation

DNA

KARACHI: In a major development, the Pakistan Railways on Tuesday decided to partially resume its operation across the country from May 10. According to details, the Pakistan Railways has finalized all preparations in this regard and will seek Prime Minister mran Khan's approval on May 8 for the restoration of train operation. Initially, 24 trains, including Tezgam, Awam Express, Khyber Mail, Green Line, Jaffer Express, Allama Iqbal and Sukkur Express, Millat Express, and Pak-Business will operate by maintaining the distance between passengers.

Passengers and railways staff have been asked to maintain social distancing during the travel, while sixty percent booking of tickets will be made through an online system.

Sania lauds **NADRA** plans

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Protection Dr. Sania Nishtar on Tuesday has expressed satisfaction over the arrangements made by National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) to facilitate the visitors and the services for Ehsaas Programme beneficiaries. She expressed these views during her visit to NADRA Mega Center in Islamabad. Dr Sania Nishtar said opening offices of National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) is vital for beneficiaries of Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme facing biometric verifica-

She appreciated NADRA for decreasing processing time for issuance of death certificates from seven days to just twenty four hours, which is a great service to the cash recipients. The special assistant also thanked NADRA Chairman for resolving the issue of bio metric verification of Ehsaas Programme beneficiaries by opening NADRA centers.

tion problems.

FLOODS IN SARDOBA DISTRICT

Uzbek govt allocates 100 billion soums for population

DNA

TASHKENT: Flooding after the dam breakthrough of the Sardoba reservoir in the Syrdarya region caused serious damage to residential settlements, real estate objects, social facilities and agricultural crops on the territory of Yurtdosh, Dustlik, Kurgontepa mahallas of the Sardoba district, Sakhovat, Akhillik and Shodlik mahallas of the Mirzaabad district, as well as Mirzachul, Hakikat and Navbakhor mahallas of the Akaltyn district. According to First Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction

Akmalkhon Ortikov, a government commission, established in accordance with the presidential decree of May 1, determines the scale and magnitude of losses in all directions. In particular, the amount of damaged housing and non-residential premises of the population is



ultimately determined and evaluated.

"Financial assistance is being provided to eliminate the consequences of the emergency situation, including those who are affected by the incident. The first 100 billion soums from the republican budget have already been allocated for these purposes," Ortikov said.

It is noted that based on the needs of the pop-



ulation, the Ministry of Construction has begun to select land plots and design estimates for the construction of multi-storey buildings in Sardoba, Mirzaabad and Akaltyn districts.

"The infrastructure of the social sphere (kindergarten, school, healthcare institution, culture and other institutions) and the market (minimarket, bakery, sewing workshop, dry cleaning, bath-



house, car service, etc.) will be fully present in modern settlements," the deputy minister added. In addition, engineering and transport communications will be restored in these new settlements. According to the information service of the Samarkand regional administration, 5 billion soums were allocated from the regional budget to help victims of the incident in Syrdarya.

Record 19 mln children displaced: UNICEF

UNITED NATIONS: An estimated 19 million children more than ever before were living in displacement within their own countries due to conflict and violence in 2019 some of them for years, UNICEF said in a new report.

The report, 'Lost at Home', looks at the risks and challenges internally displaced children face, and the urgent actions needed to protect them. As coronavirus continues to spread around the world, these children are among the most vulnerable to its direct and indirect impacts, the UN children agency said. "Millions of displaced children around the world are already going without proper care and protection," UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said in a statement. When new crises emerge, like the COVID-19 pandemic, these children are especially vulnerable. - APP

CPEC a boon for Pak, says Muneer Kamal

DNA

BEIJING: "COVID-19 pandemic has caused a major, dramatic disruption in the global economy and Pakistan will also face severe consequences of an economic slowdown.

With this abrupt change in the economic environment, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is even more crucial for Pakistan's development than it was prior to the advent of COV-ID-19 early this year," CEO of Karachi Education Initiative (KEI) Muneer Kamal said while talking to China Economic Net. Muneer who is also former

Chairman of Karachi Stock Exchange further said, "Given a gloomy global

economic environment in the foreseeable future, it would be difficult for Pakistan to attract foreign direct investment to develop its economic infrastructure. In this very challenging environment, It is fortunate that large CPEC projects have and will continue to be implemented. The continuation of CPEC will counter some of the negaronment", Kamal said. "The relationship with China has been and will remain unique and special for Pakistan. The importance of CPEC is magnified if we see regional dynamics and their impact on Pakistan's economy", Kamal added.

He explained that Pakistan's trade and investment opportunities are limited with its immediate neighbors except for China. The current environment does not allow a healthy economic interaction with India, and sanctions imposed on Iran limit Pakistan's trade with the Iranian market.

Over 134,000 deaths expected in US by early August

tive global investment envi-

WASHINGTON: An influential COVID-19 model produced by the University of Washington revised its projections on Monday, estimating over 134,000 COV-ID-19 deaths in the United States through August. The model, from Institute for Health Metrics and Eval-

uation (IHME), projected

134,475 COVID-19 deaths by August 4, with a range of 95.092 to 242.890.

"These projections are considerably higher than previous estimates, representing the combined effects of death model updates and formally incorporating the effect of changes in mobility and social distancing policies

into transmission dynamics," said the IHME in a release. The revised projections reflect rising mobility in most US states as well as the easing of social distancing measures expected in 31 states by May 11, indicating that growing contacts among people will promote transmission of the coronavirus. - APP

2 more virus deaths in Israel

JERUSALEM: Health Ministry confirmed two more fatalities from the novel coronavirus on Monday, bringing the nationwide death toll to 237. A ministry statement said 22 new cases were registered in the country over the past 24 hours, raising the total to 16,268.

According to the ministry, 89 patients remain in critical condition, while at least 10,223 have recovered and been discharged from hospitals so far. - APP

3 more quarantine centres established

ISLAMABAD: Three more quarantine centres comprising 1,200 rooms with attached washrooms have been established at Torkham, Taftan and Chaman borders for providing timely health facilities to the patients affected by coronavirus pandemic. National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) spokesman. in a statement. - APP

REPATRIATION OF PAKISTANIS

FM Qureshi thanks Bahrain colleague

NEHAL MIRAJ

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi held a telephonic conversation with Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain Dr. Adullatif bin Rashid Alzayani, to discuss matters related to the Covid-19 Pandemic, and enhancing bilateral cooperation to jointly address the situation.

Foreign Minister thanked Bahrain for repatriation of Pakistanis. Lauding the timely measures taken by the Bahraini authorities to control the spread of the outbreak, he briefed Foreign Minister Alzayani about the latest situation in Pakistan, and the steps being taken by the Government for containment of the disease.

Underscoring the need to create fiscal space to shore up economies and save precious

lives, Foreign Minister Qureshi briefed his Bahraini counterpart about Prime Minister Imran Khan's Global Initiative for Debt Relief for developing countries. In this context, he also highlighted the need for closer economic cooperation between Pakistan and Bahrain to mitigate the impact of the economic slowdown.

Foreign Minister Qureshi expressed deep concerns over continuous restrictions on movement and communication in the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir which were depriving 8 million Kashmiris of means to combat the disease. He called for lifting of restrictions on dissemination of information, and allow unfettered supply of medicines and other essentials.

He also called for raising voice against campaign by India to demonize Muslims in the context of the Covid-19 spread.

LoC violations: protest lodged with India

NEHAL MIRAJ

ISLAMABAD: A senior Indian diplomat was summoned to register Pakistan's strong protest over the ceasefire violations by the Indian occupation forces along the Line of Control (LoC) in Bagsar Sector, on 4th May 2020, resulting in serious injuries to six innocent civilians.

Due to indiscriminate and unprovoked firing by the Indian occupation forces. 45 years old, Waheed, 55 years old, Nazima Bibi, and 12 years old, Ageel, residents of Khaulian village; 50 years old, Zareena Begum, and 30 years old, Shaheen Begum, residents of Penga village; and

45 years old, Jamil, resident of Bandala village, sustained serious injuries. The Indian occupation forces along the LoC and the Working Boundary (WB) have continuously been targeting civilian populated areas with artillery fire, heavy-caliber mortars and automatic weapons. In 2020, India has so far committed 957 ceasefire violations.

Condemning the deplorable targeting of innocent civilians by the Indian occupation forces, it was underscored that such senseless acts are in clear violation of the 2003 Ceasefire Understanding, and are also against all established humanitarian norms and professional military conduct.

UNESCO, EU mark World Press Freedom Day

Adnan Yousaf

ISLAMABAD: The webinar on "Press Freedom and Journalism During Crisis" was held in partnership with the European Union Delegation to Pakistan, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Embassy of Sweden in Pakistan and Media Matters for Democracy.

The webinar was attended by more than 50 participants from civil society, media professionals, academia, international organizations and diplomatic

During the Covid19 pandemic, as well as other situations of crisis, it is critical for people to be informed with facts to make well-informed decisions, to avoid patterns of paranoia, fear, and negatively stigmatising others. Noting this, the UN Secretary General António Guterres has called for "countering the scourge of misinformation - a poison putting more lives at risk."[1] Taking stock of the situation the webinar explored

the crucial role of media in

providing credible information,

the subsequent emerging challenges faced by journalists in fulfilling their tasks.

Patricia McPhillips, UNESCO Representative Pakistan, welcomed the participants and emphasised that, "A free and independent press is essential at all times, but is particularly important during a health and economic crisis such as the one we are currently experiencing". Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to Pakistan Ms. Androulla Kaminara reiterated that, "Journalists are essential workers, especially during the Covid19 crisis: They provide the information that people need to act responsibly and appropriately to stay safe. They stimulate the public debate about the best way to address challenges and provide accountability that is crucial for any democratic society".

Mr. Asad Hashim from Al Iazeera discussed the factors impeding press freedom in Pakistan especially in light of the current health crisis. He also stressed upon the need to provide safeguards to journalists

facing multifarious threats due to the corona virus.

While discussing the 'misinfodemic'. Ms. Ramsha Jahangir (DAWN) highlighted the vital need for providing credible and fact based information by news media to counter misinformation. Mr. Tavvab Afridi representing Tribal News Network analysed the coverage of COV-ID-19 related news in remote and far flung areas. Mr. Shabbir Anwar (Pakistan Peace Collection, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) described various initiatives launched to

zens about corona virus and shared the lessons learnt.

In his concluding remarks. Ambassador of Netherlands to Pakistan Mr. Wouter Plomp stated, "In these times of COV-ID-19 crisis, journalists have the vital task of disseminating reliable information, keeping people informed and holding governments accountable.

To recognise the importance of a free press. I would like to say to journalists that you are here to protect our freedoms. It's our duty to protect yours".