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Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

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**Amb. Furqat
appointed Dy FM
of Uzbekistan**
**SCO Secy Gen for
efforts to cope
with COVID-19**

**COVID-19:
UK provides
more support**


Briefs

Taliban's technical team in Kabul

DNA

KABUL: A Taliban technical team has arrived in Kabul to conduct verification for the Taliban prisoners.

The Taliban's political office in Qatar and the Office of National Security Council confirmed that the team had come to Kabul only to take care of some technical work on the releases of prisoners at both ends. Suhail Shaheen, the spokesperson for the Taliban's political office in Qatar, said that a five-member Taliban team had been sent to Kabul to verify and release the prisoners and that the team would address some technical problems. The Office National Security Council also confirmed that the Taliban and the government's technical delegation were working to ease the release of prisoners.

Cut in petrol price likely

ADNAN YOUSAF

ISLAMABAD: The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority, which regulates prices for petroleum products in the country, has proposed a Rs7 cut in petrol prices for June. The oil sector regulator has sent a summary to the government. If it is approved, the new petrol price will be Rs75.54. However, they proposed an increase of Rs5 per litre in the price of high speed diesel. Ogra also proposed to reduce the prices of kerosene oil by Rs11.88 and light diesel by Rs9.37. Unlike other commodities whose prices are determined by the market forces of demand and supply, oil prices are regulated by the government.

Inside...

Pakistan Nuclear Program is helping meet National Security

– Page 02

**Role of
Azerbaijani
Diasporas
in economic
development**

– Page 03

**SCO Secy Gen
for collective
efforts to cope
with COVID-19
pandemic**

– Back Page

Pak resumes Int'l flight operations

International flights from Pakistan will re-start from May 30. Non-scheduled and chartered flights will resume from midnight tonight

ANSAR BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has decided to resume international flight operations which were closed due to coronavirus epidemic. The flight operation will resume from tonight.

A statement issued by the spokesperson of the Civil Aviation said that in light of the decision of the federal

government, international flights from Pakistan will restart from May 30. It further stated that scheduled, non-scheduled and chartered flights will resume from midnight tonight.

The statement said that PIA and other international airlines would be allowed to operate flights from all international airports in Pakistan except Gwadar and Turbat but implementation of corona-

virus SOPs will be mandatory for operations.

It may be mentioned here that CAA had already resumed domestic flights albeit from selected airports. The CAA plans to open more cities for domestic flights for the convenience of passengers. The international flights operations will allow many Pakistanis stranded in various countries to come back.

Amb. Furqat appointed Dy FM of Uzbekistan



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Furkat Sidikov has been appointed as deputy for Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan. The President of Uzbekistan has is-

sued a decree of in this regard.

Ambassador Furqat spent an eventful tenure in Pakistan and during his tenure relations between the two countries were further strengthened. Ambassador Furqat will soon take charge of his new assignment in Tashkent.

Pakistan, Uzbekistan relations saw new heights during Mr.Furqat tenure. During his tenure he arranged a number of bilateral visits as well as exhibitions in order to promote Uzbekistan in Pakistan.

It was because of his untiring efforts that Uzbek air started operations from Pakistan due to which peoples of both countries had chance to visit each other. Resumption of flights also increased tourism.

PM Imran thanks Azerbaijani president

DNA

BAKU: Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Imran Khan has sent a letter of thanks to President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

“Excellency, I write to convey my gratitude for Azerbaijan's decision to allocate \$1 million as humanitarian aid for Pa-

kistan to strengthen our efforts in combating the deadly COVID-19 pandemic,” the letter said.

“This thoughtful gesture in these challenging times is a manifestation of our close and fraternal relationship,” the letter said. “The people of Pakistan will remember this act of kindness by their Azerbaijani brethren.”

“Allow me also to congrat-

ulate you on successfully convening the recently held online Summit-level meeting of the NAM Contact Group in response to COVID-19 global threat,” the letter said.

“This was a timely initiative. For an effective global response, we must all stand together and pursue a joint strategy with coordinated and unified implementation.”

DNA



ROME: Famous Trajan's Market Mercati Di Traiano in Rome illuminated with the colors of the national flag of Azerbaijan to celebrate the Republic Day of Azerbaijan. – DNA

NCC meets on June 1

A.M.BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Asad Umar has stressed the need for devising a mechanism of providing latest information about availability of beds and ventilators in the hospitals to facilitate COVID-19 patients. Chairing a meeting at National Command and Control Centre, he said that such information would facilitate the infected people to get admission in hospitals as per their own preference.

Asad Umar said that a special meeting of National Coordination Committee (NCC) on Coronavirus will be held on Monday to finalize the strategy regarding coronavirus for the month of June.

Shibli calls on PM

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Shibli Faraz called on Prime Minister Imran Khan here on Friday, PM Office said.

The matters related to overall situation in the country came under discussion.

COAS reiterates Pak commitment to peace

According to the UN, Pakistani troops are currently serving in seven UN operations, with the vast majority of them deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Darfur region of Sudan and the Central African Republic

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa has reiterated Pakistan's commitment to global peace as the world marks the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.

“Sense of purpose and commitment of Pakistan towards global peace under UN Charter remains unflinching,” Gen

Qamar was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Friday.

The DG ISPR tweeted that Pakistan commemorates the ‘spirit of sacrifice’ of its valiant peacekeepers, who continue to serve humanity in challenging and restive regions of the world.

Pakistan has a long history of sending its troops to various UN peacekeep-

ing missions and has also been recognised as one of the largest contributors of troops and police for decades.

Earlier this year, Pakistan's female peacekeepers, deployed with the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, were awarded a UN medal at a ceremony in Adikivu in South Kivu, one of the provinces of the central African country.

Japan envoy pays homage to Pak Army

Ambassador Matsuda appreciated the services of Pakistan army

ISLAMABAD: Matsuda Kuninori, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan has commended the services and contributions rendered by the Pakistan Army to the UN Peacekeeping operations over the past many decades.

The ambassador expressed these views on International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, commemorated on 29 May.

Ambassador Matsuda, in his letter to Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa, appreciated the services of Pakistan army.

The Ambassador also expressed his best wishes and hoped that Pakistan's flag continue to rise high in future in UN Peacekeeping Missions as the country has a long history with UN peacekeeping. – DNA

Arrest warrants of Nawaz issued

NEHAL MIRAJ

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court in Islamabad has issued arrest warrants for former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in the Toshakhana reference filed by the National Accountability Bureau after no one appeared on his behalf to represent him in Friday's hearing. The accountability court was hearing a reference filed against former prime ministers Yousuf Raza Gilani, Nawaz Sharif and ex-president Asif Ali Zardari.

During today's hearing, former prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani appeared before the court. However, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and ex-president Asif Ali Zardari did not appear despite the summons issued to them.

14 Afghan security men killed

KABUL: Taliban fighters stormed an Afghan border post Friday, killing at least 14 security force members, the insurgents and officials said, the latest in a series of attacks since the end of a brief ceasefire. Despite the clashes, Afghan authorities have vowed to press on with efforts to help reduce violence following the temporary pause in fighting. – APP

COVID-19: UK provides more support

UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women will provide support to nearly 10,000 women and children who face violence in their own home through, the Aawaz helplines staffed by men and women trained in the provision of psychosocial support and referral services

A.M.BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The United Kingdom is providing further assistance to Pakistan in the fight to stop the spread of the coronavirus and mitigate its impacts, by providing aid for the most vulnerable, and boosting wider public health communications. This latest £4.39m package of support includes: being the first donor to contribute to Pakistan's Humanitarian Pooled Fund (PHPF) UK aid support for PHPF will help provide comprehensive support to fight the coronavirus and help those impacted indirectly by the crisis. This includes supporting emergency response systems and providing assistance towards food security, sanitation and hygiene, mental

health and psychological support. Supporting Aawaz II, which aims to empower and protect women and children. This joint programme from UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women will provide support to nearly 10,000 women and children who face violence in their own home through, the Aawaz helplines staffed by men and women trained in the provision of psychosocial support and referral services. The Aawaz programme will also reach nearly 2 million people with messages fighting against stigma and discrimination as a result of coronavirus; Supporting the Khairkhwah information campaign The Khairkhwah campaign – which means Well Wisher – on TV and radio will reach up to 80 million people with messages on how to taking appropriate safety measures to



reduce the spread of coronavirus in communities, as well as tackling coronavirus misinformation. This campaign will reach those living in rural and semi-urban areas who may otherwise struggle to get the latest information.

Lord Ahmad, UK Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth said: “By supporting the poorest and most vulnerable people, especially those facing dis-

crimination and by spreading information on how to protect against coronavirus, we can save lives. The UK is proud to support Pakistan, and through our investment in international vaccine research and the Global Vaccine Alliance, we will help end this pandemic sooner and prevent future waves of infection. “The UK stands with you in these difficult times”. The British High Commissioner Dr Christian Turner CMG said: “Pakistan has shown international leadership in its response, balancing the need to keep healthy, with growing the economy and protecting the poorest. Friends must stand together at difficult times.

Although we are socially distancing, we are not apart.” Head of Office for the UK's Department for International Development in Paki-

stan, Annabel Gerry, said: “It is increasingly important that we work together to help those who are the most vulnerable. This is why I am proud that UK aid will be there for the women and children who face increased threats of violence and stigma in their own home and need access to these support services.” The UK is playing a leading role in the global effort to tackle coronavirus, including on vaccine development, strengthening health systems and support for the global economy. On 4 June the UK will host the Global Vaccine Summit, to raise money to ensure Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, can vaccinate 300 million more children against infectious diseases including in Pakistan. By working together as international partners to defeat this pandemic, we are all safer.

Briefs

COVID-19 not disastrous in Pakistan: Dr. Zafar

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Health Services, Dr. Zafar Mirza has said that the prevailing situation of the coronavirus in the country is not disastrous due to the government's effective measures. In an interview with PTV, he said the testing capacity of coronavirus patients has been increased and that is why more patients are being reported. Dr Zafar Mirza said the government is taking on board the provincial governments regarding all the decisions to contain COVID-19. He said the opposition parties instead of doing politics on the deadly virus should suggest measures to prevent its spread. The Special Assistant urged people to follow the Standard Operating Procedure, maintain social distancing, avoid shaking hands, wear masks and gloves to keep themselves safe from the coronavirus.

Ombudsman disposes off 7000

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Ombudsman has disposed off more than 7000 cases, and also registered 5248 cases during the month of Ramzan. It was informed during a meeting of the Investigating and Senior Officers of Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat (WMS)held here, said a press release on Friday. The meeting was Chaired by the Federal Ombudsman syed Thir Shahbaz which also attended by all investigating and senior officers, Secretary Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat(WMS) Dr. Jamal Nasir and other senior officers. Syed Tahir Shahbaz on the occasion has directed the Investigation Officers to decide every case within the time limit of 60 days. In the meeting, Tahir Shahbaz was also briefed that during the period of lock down, 34500 cases were registered and 32000 cases have been disposed off. He asked all the Investigation Officers to facilitate the complainants in all respects by observing complete safety measures against corona epidemic. He was informed that due to closure of Universities and lack of interest by the gas and electricity distribution companies during corona pandemic, proper replies are not being submitted due to which some cases have been affected the time limit. – APP

DC reviews prices of vegetables

RAWALPINDI: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi Capt. © Anwar ul Haq has visited vegetable and fruit market Islamabad to review the prices. The DC took round of various shops and checked rates of vegetables and fruits being auctioned there. He directed the officers concerned of the administration to prepare rate lists for the retailers keeping in view the wholesale rates of vegetable and fruits on daily basis. The move was aimed at discouraging undue profiteering by evolving a mechanism of determining the prices keeping in view wholesale rates, transportation charges of the shopkeepers and then fixing of retail prices with a just profit. He said the profiteers could not be allowed to charge for the daily use commodities as per their sweet will. He said that every shopkeeper had the right to earn due profit and those involved in overcharging and undue profiteering would be dealt under the law. – APP

Weekly inflation goes up

ISLAMABAD: The Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) based weekly inflation for the week ended on May 28, for the combined consumption group, witnessed nominal increase of 0.13 percent, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported Friday. The SPI for the week under review in the above mentioned group was recorded at 128.32 points against 128.15 points registered in the previous week, the data release by SBP revealed. The weekly SPI with base year 2015-16=100 is covering 17 urban centers and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The Sensitive Price Indicator for the lowest consumption group upto Rs 17,732, also witnessed an increase of 0.57 percent and went up from 134.06 points in last week to 134.20 points during the week under review. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 9.63 percent, while, for the lowest consumption group, it increased by 11.07 percent. – APP

IRSA releases 266,200 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 266,200 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 267,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in the Indus River at Tarbela Dam was 1443.35 feet, which was 57.35 feet higher than its dead level 1386 feet. Water inflow in the dam was recorded as 103,400 cusecs and outflow as 90,000 cusecs. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1212.60 feet, which was 172.60 feet higher than its dead level of 1040 feet whereas the inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 57,700 cusecs and 70,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa and Sukkur was recorded as 142,500, 120,400 and 31,400 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from the Kabul River a total of 66,600 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 18,100 cusecs released from the Chenab River at Marala. – APP

Pakistan Nuclear Program is helping meet National Security

Pakistan can be compared with any developed country in terms of its nuclear expertise, knowledge and capabilities, and is completely qualified to become an active and productive member of the strategic export control regime of the world

FIAZ CHAUDRHY

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's nuclear programme has not only ensured its national security and regional peace but also helped pursue 12 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promote socio-economic development. Pakistan is one of only 13 countries that are effectively using nuclear technology to meet a variety of their own socio-development needs but are also capable of sharing its nuclear knowledge and expertise with other countries for peaceful purposes. These thoughts were shared at a webinar titled 'Yum-e-Takbeer 2020' organized by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad to mark the 22nd anniversary of Pakistan's nuclear tests that were conducted on May 28, 1998. The guest speakers include Dr Naeem Salik, Senior Fellow CISS and former director of ACDA, Strategic Plans Division (SPD), Dr Ansar Pervez, former Chairman, Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC), and Mr. Kamran Akhtar, Director General, Arms Control & Disarmament (ACDIS), Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Khalid Rahman, Executive President, IPS, chaired the event which was moderated by Syed Muhammad Ali, Senior Research Fellow, IPS. Other participants included security analyst Brig. (Retd) Said Nazeer Mohmand, Air Commodore (Retd) Khalid Iqbal, Cdr (Retd) Dr Azhar Ahmad, HoD, Humanities & Social Sciences, Bahria University, Islamabad, and IPS Associate and former AJ&K Minister Ms. Farzana Yaqoob. Kamran Akhtar, Director General Arms Control & Disarmament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the huge Indian defence acquisitions and developments in the areas of artificial intelligence, cyber security and space militarization are destabilizing for the region and the international community must exercise care and caution in sharing its advanced nuclear and other related technologies with India which is emerging as an extremist and anti-status quo State. He further emphasized that the international community has a collective responsibility to dissuade India from engaging in any misadventure as any such India step will lead to grave consequences that will not remain limited to this region but will impact the entire world. He further stated that Pakistan can be compared with any developed country in terms of its nuclear expertise, knowledge and capabilities, and is completely qualified to become an active and productive member of the strategic export control regime of the world. Dr Ansar Pervez, former Chairman Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) said that the nuclear technology was being used for peaceful purposes all over the world in diverse sectors including medicine, health, agriculture, industry, pollution control, water resources management, safe and sustainable electricity production. The nuclear technology, for instance, has allowed Pakistan to develop 100 new crop varieties, which have added Rs 1200 billion to our national exchequer, whereas Eight hundred thousand cancer patients are treated every year by hospitals using nuclear radiation. The speakers maintained that the whole country is really proud of its scientists and engineers who have played the central role in the development of Pakistan's nuclear programme. Khalid Rahman, Executive President IPS said in his concluding remarks that the unparalleled success of Pakistan's nuclear program is an evidence that whenever the Pakistani nation and its leadership have resolved and consistently pursued any goal with strong commitment, then we can achieve it despite all hurdles and against heavy odds. This aspect of the nature of the Pakistani nation provides us with a guiding principle to follow in policymaking to address various issues of national significance as well. If we understand this principles and pursue our other national goals with similar zeal, spirit, determination, consistency and unity, then we can effectively meet all other challenges that our nation faces.



ISLAMABAD: Mayor Islamabad Sheikh Anser Aziz visiting weekly bazaar to review safety measures against COVID-19. – DNA

Info Group pays tributes to Zubidullah

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Information Group Officers Association (IGOA) in a meeting held here today passed a resolution expressing solidarity with the family of Shaheed Zubaidullah Khan who was martyred in a terrorist attack in North Waziristan where he had gone to celebrate Eid with his family in his home town Information Group Officers Association joins family of the

Shaheed in their demand for a thorough probe into this tragic incident and award of exemplary punishment to the assailants who committed this heinous crime. The Information Group Officers Association expresses the hope that as an FIR about the incident has already been registered, all out efforts will be made by quarters concerned to speedily carry out the investigations so that justice to the bereaved family is not delayed.

NDMA completes fumes spray

ISLAMABAD: National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has completed the poisonous fumes spray of over 4,400 hectare and survey of 313,000 hectare locust swarm hit area of the country in the last 24 hours. According to spokesman, 1,150 teams were engaged in locust control operation in effects districts of the country. Both ariel and ground spray of various districts was being continued right now. The spraying of 1,700 hectare area of Balochistan and 1,000 hectare area of Punjab have been completed in the last 24 hours. – APP

OGRA seeks fuel stock details

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has asked Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to furnish a three-month data regarding depot-wise sales and stocks of petrol and high speed diesel by June 1. "You [OMCs] are directed to provide depot-wise sales and stocks data in respect of MS [Petrol] and HSD [High Speed Diesel], as per the prescribed format, for the past three months (March, April and May) through return fax or email by 5 p.m. on June 1. In case of failure to provide the above information within the stipulated time, legal action as per law shall be initiated," the authority said in a letter written to Chief Executives of 33 OMCs operating in the country, a copy of which was available with APP. OGRA also advised the OMCs to ensure smooth supply of petroleum products at their retail outlets. Meanwhile, the authority asked the Hydrocarbon Development Institute of Pakistan (HDIP) physically check and confirm the availability of MS and HSD with all OMCs depots, retail outlets and refinery storages.

UNHCR rolls out emergency cash assistance in Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, last week began the first disbursements of emergency cash assistance to the most vulnerable refugee families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan. This assistance is being carried out in close collaboration with the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) of the Government of Pakistan and with the Pakistan Post. Pakistan hosts approximately 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, approximately 68 per cent of whom live in urban and semi-urban areas alongside Pakistani host communities. At least half live hand-to-mouth; most of those who had employment before the outbreak of COVID-19 were daily wage earners. The refugees eligible for UNHCR's emergency assistance programme include those with disabilities or serious medical



conditions, single parents, as well as daily wage earners. UNHCR's Representative in Pakistan, Noriko Yoshida, visited a local post office in Islamabad last week. She and key officials from the Pakistani Government helped to distribute the cash assistance to refugees, which is being delivered by UNHCR through the Pakistan Post. The following day, UNHCR's

cash programme that will continue over the coming months. Together with the Government of Pakistan, we must make sure that we 'leave no one behind' during these difficult times." In Peshawar, Inkoom also noted: "Refugees have been suffering from the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, mainly due to an extended period of lockdown and slowdown of the economy. This assistance will help those most affected by the economic shocks to get back on their feet." The emergency cash assistance of 12,000 Pakistani rupees (approximately 77 US dollars) will help to ensure that refugees are able to meet their urgent needs during the pandemic. The programme will benefit the initial 36,000 families. "We are pleased to witness the very first disbursements of the cash assistance provided to our brothers and sisters from Afghanistan," noted Sahabzada Mehboob Sultan, the Federal Minister for SAFRON.

Mayor visits weekly bazaar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Mayor Islamabad Sheikh Anser Aziz said that weekly bazaar has been re-opened and made functional for public ease and facilitation. Mayor Islamabad however directed observance of all COVID-19 safety SOP'S, strictly by the shopkeepers & all bazaar administration. The Bazaar administration revealed that 12 walkthru sanitising gates have also been Installed on all entry/exit points of BAZAAR in the interest of citizens. Mayor Islamabad further stated that BAZAAR shall remain functional unless otherwise ordered to be closed by the GOP. The ED Bazaar and other officials accompanied the Mayor Islamabad during the visit . Mayor Islamabad desired continuity of citywide caloline spray campaign, specially within WEEKLY BAZAAR , for maximum safety of the residents in the prevailling COVID19 scenario.

Man hurls acid at fiancée

DNA

JARANWALWA: In a shocking incident, a man hurled acid at his fiancée over her family's refusal to marry her off to him in Jaranwala city in Faisalabad on Friday. Rescue officials said the victim suffered burn injuries as a result of the acid attack and has been referred to a Faisalabad hospital for treatment due to her critical condition. The parents of the girl had broken off their daughter's engagement with the accused who insisted on marrying her and upon their refusal poured acid on her.

PHC to be functional from June 1

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court and its benches will be fully functional from first June 2020. All sort of official business will be carried out in best public interest with due observance of all SOPs issued by this court from time to time , said a press release. – APP

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Sugar report

IT has been over a week now that the sugar report was made public. In the meantime, we have had Eid holidays and a plane-crash tragedy so the absence of an immediate action following the report could be excused. But now there is a need to move forward from where we left before Eid. The report has clearly and with evidence held millers responsible for a price hike, manipulating the market, underreporting their sales, and committing fraud. The report has also highlighted the tendency of sugar-mill owners to exploit farmers resulting in huge losses for the farmers and undeserved financial gains for the millers. Moreover, the millers have also been found using distorted figures in their accounts, and deliberately created a demand-supply gap and manipulated markets to affect sugar prices. The federal cabinet has already approved the report so there is no hitch to move forward and take steps. Now, there are certain measures that need consideration. Reportedly, the Sugar Inquiry Commission did not mention the National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) at the federal level, whereas provincial governments also failed to take any action against sugar millers. The culprits, as pointed out by the report, earned enormous profits amounting to over Rs40 billion just by the price hike in the domestic markets. The NPMC must also be held accountable for its failure to do its job properly, and the provincial governments, especially in Punjab – as this was the province with the most manipulations and subsidies given – must come clean and explain its position. Punjab CM Usman Buzdar has been repeatedly highlighted as the person responsible for awarding undue subsidies without any convincing justifications. Then comes the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) whose chairman is the prime minister himself. This consultative forum also did not perform its duty to apprise properly the PM concerning economic matters such as this. In the absence of a full-time finance minister, this forum has failed to fulfil its responsibilities effectively. The ECC is the body that makes executive authorization on key economic policies. Since the ECC granted approval for exports of sugar, its concerned members who made these recommendations must be taken to task. The ECC had also mandated an interprovincial committee to oversee the prices of sugar in the domestic markets and suggest remedial measures if needed, such as reversal of exports in case of escalating prices. But this appears to have never materialized. It is true that the millers garnered the most profits, and primarily they are the ones who should be punished, but the other facilitators and players in this game must not be let off the hook so easily. Responsibilities must be fixed and actions initiated, further delay in action under one pretext or another is not at all acceptable.



IMF review

THE IMF is reported to have resumed discussions with Pakistan to complete the second review of the country's extended fund facility (EFF) programme. This review was deferred last month as the Covid-19 pandemic reached Pakistan and with it new challenges for the economy surfaced. The six-billion-dollar deal with the IMF gave the PTI-led government some fiscal space so that the immediate danger of an economic meltdown could be avoided. The agreement covers a period of over three years and during this time the balance of payment crisis could be averted till the time Pakistan's economy is stabilized, if ever. In the past two years we have seen unprecedented levels of high inflation, reduced GDP growth rates, and a shrinking economy with over 50 billion dollars' reduction in the volume of GDP. All this was compounded by declining foreign exchange reserves barely enough to cover two months' import bills. Though the IMF had reached a staff-level agreement with Pakistan in February 2020, the policies and reforms needed to complete the second review were still under discussion when the coronavirus struck. That staff-level agreement was subject to approval by the IMF management and consideration by the executive board. This step was supposed to be complete in April but again due to unexpected lockdowns and other emergency measures, the process could not reach its logical conclusion. The review would have enabled Pakistan to receive another 450 million dollars in the next tranche of the extended fund facility. Before that review in February, Pakistan had already received two tranches under the loan programme but the third one was put on hold after the virus crisis. Despite this delay, the EFF is in place while other rapid financing instruments are being negotiated. These instruments would help the country in combating Covid-19. This rapid financing amounts to another 1.4 billion dollars in emergency response. For Pakistan the options are limited and the corona crisis is not going to last forever, nor will there be repeated emergency help coming from the G20 or other multilateral organizations such as the IMF or the World Bank. The most important thing for Pakistan is to achieve a certain creditworthiness and that can be done only if we manage to repay debt without fail. The G20 debt suspension is temporary and even in that, details are still to be worked out. We cannot count on the largesse of rich countries beyond the pandemic. Pakistan needs an efficient economic team that the present government appears to be lacking. There is no federal minister for finance and the FBR has seen multiple changes in a short period. The State Bank of Pakistan itself has been struggling with the monetary policy and interest rates. All this calls for a thorough review of the entire economic management in the country; for the time being the government seems to have left it to the side.

Role of Azerbaijan Diasporas in economic development

Dr Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan



China, Korea, and India are among countries which have shown that Diaspora contributions can significantly help to transform economies. These countries underlined comprehensive policies, administrative structures and incentives to foster an enabling environment for mobilizing Diaspora resources (expertise, investments, entrepreneurship and corporate affiliations) around critical growth pillars

WE live in a globalized world where Diasporas act as one of the main actors of economic development and national building. Azerbaijan Diasporas have been playing miraculous role in the economic development of their country since long. Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev appreciates "the unity and solidarity of the Azerbaijanis of the world, their love towards the statehood of Azerbaijan, respect for the national and spiritual values, feelings and ideas related to belonging to the Azerbaijani people, attachment to a historical homeland. Being prominent regional expert of Azerbaijan and CIS I consider Azerbaijan Diasporas as the cultural ambassadors-at-large to their motherland in foreign countries. They plough seeds of trust, harmony, peace, and human utility, concept of co-existence, cooperation, coordination and collaboration. They are the social bearers of their motherland to break the barriers of misconceptions and misperceptions out of hatred, genocide, bigotry, and prejudice. they are conveyors of bilateral trade, better political understanding and cultural diplomacy. They are real motivators of commercial diplomacy too. They are the living bridges, and engine of geopolitics of humans and humanity. They are the frontline soldiers of Azerbaijan, the country of origin to counter propaganda of Armenia government, its pressure groups and of course Armenia Diasporas around the globe. Economics of Diaspora has become a hot topic in all the international organization dealing with issues of immigration, labour mobility, and transcontinental conflicts. the government of Azerbaijan appreciates their contributory role in terms of economic development, promotion of trade and foreign direct investment, creation of businesses ties, people to people reliable linkages, establishment of entrepreneurship, and transfer new knowledge and skills. China, Korea, and India are among countries which have shown that Diaspora contributions can significantly help to transform economies. These countries underlined comprehensive policies, administrative structures and incentives to foster an enabling environment for mobilizing Diaspora resources (expertise, investments, entrepreneurship and corporate affiliations) around critical growth pillars. The government of Azerbaijan has a structured mechanism to explore the real socio-economic and geopolitical potential of its Diasporas.

The state committee of Azerbaijan is also working very hard to integrate human capital/potential, political economy, investments, entrepreneurship and financial skills and resources of Azerbaijan Diasporas living in more than 175 countries around the globe. The state committee provides national unity, unification of all the Azerbaijanis in the world around common interests. Wellbeing of Azerbaijan Diasporas has been one of the strategic priorities of its foreign policy due to which the Azerbaijanis of the entire world accept the republic of Azerbaijan as the offspring of national-historical progress, the symbol of national ambition and the motherland. Continuity of the state and national interests was a kind of revolution in social consciousness after the soviet period and a new stage of the national progress. The state committee on work with Diaspora of the republic of Azerbaijan is a governmental agency within the cabinet of Azerbaijan in charge of establishing and maintaining contacts with the Azerbaijani Diaspora abroad and support the Azerbaijanis around the world in their efforts for national unity. the ministry is headed by Fuad Muradov. The committee tries to unite Azerbaijanis living in different countries in communities and associations, and subsequently to involve these communities and associations in a single organization. 462 Azerbaijani Diaspora organizations operate abroad. the main functions of the committee are to help Azerbaijanis living abroad to preserve and develop their national identity, study and popularize their native language, create favorable conditions for Azerbaijanis living abroad to create and develop close ties with state bodies and NGOs in Azerbaijan. The anti-Muslim and anti-Turk policy of tsarist Russia in the Caucasus was aimed at a deliberate weakening of the dominant position of the Azerbaijani population in the region. The policy of genocide, ethnic cleansing carried out by the Armenians in 1905-1906, 1918 was the result of such insidious strategic intentions. Although the theme of 'motherland and abroad' has been one of the most popular themes in Azerbaijan folk literature but Heydar Aliyev was the first one to realize the utility and strategic importance of Azerbaijan diasporas in the economic deployment and national building and transmitted its role in the foreign policy. he geared up the concept of national-cultural unification of Azerbaijan diasporas. He termed them as an organised force to be

used for widespread of soft power image, promotion of bilateral relations, and of course lobbyism. He pursued a successful national policy to further strengthening the relations of countrymen all over the world with the republic of Azerbaijan, to provide unity and solidarity of the world Azerbaijanis, strengthening and relating the activities of Azerbaijani communities, societies and the unions. Heydar Aliyev knew the importance of creating the unity of world Azerbaijanis announced December 31 as the solidarity day of world Azerbaijanis. Later by the decree of the president of the republic of Azerbaijan 31st December was confirmed as the day of solidarity of world Azerbaijanis. On may 23, 2001 by decree of president of the Azerbaijan republic Heydar Aliyev first congress of world Azerbaijanis held in Nov 9-10 of 2001 in Baku city. Moreover, many research studies indicate that Azerbaijan diasporas played a decisive role in the signing of contract of the century, recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Khojaly massacre in united nations security council, the council of Europe and many. And today the Azerbaijani Diaspora is not just compatriots but it is a powerful social and political force capable of doing a lot in the places of residence and take care about vested interest of its country. Azerbaijan Diasporas are strategic assets, precious human capital, icon of cultural diplomacy, pioneer of ethnic diversity, source of inflows of FDI, JVCs and charities. They use to mitigate falsified propaganda of Armenia in the world. They are the representatives of Azerbaijan national narrative especially about Nagorno-Karabakh unresolved conflict. To conclude I would like to suggest that there should be joint Pak-Azerbaijan Diaspora cooperation in terms of culture, economy, politics and greater regional connectivity. Exchange of scholars, experts and students would further strengthen the scope and utility of bilateral relations in the days to come. A joint Pak-Azerbaijan Diaspora State Committee about Kashmir & Nagorno-Karabakh would be a giant step towards more consolidation and solidarity of bilateral relations. In this connection, the CGSS, Pakistan being a prominent think tank about Euro-Asia would play an important role to integrate mutual befitting propositions to mitigate disseminated falsified media campaigns of India and Armenia on different issues.

Unpredictability reigns as China seeks greater influence

Khaled Abou Zahr



These global relations have always directly impacted the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the energy-rich Middle East

A Former Lebanese president once described the country's relationship with the US as an elevator ride. He would say that together they decided to take an elevator to the 25th floor of a building. Everybody gets in and the button for the 25th floor is pressed. The elevator starts moving but, when it reaches the 12th floor, the US team presses the button for the 19th floor. The elevator opens on 19 and the US team gets out. So you are left with a very short period of time to ask yourself: What should I do? Follow them or continue to the 25th floor as previously agreed? This was a way of describing President Richard Nixon's foreign policy strategy and what Henry Kissinger referred to as the great powers' central tenet of being unpredictable. This unpredictability was clear when Nixon applied the original "pivot to Asia" and made a breakthrough in relations with

China, which was initially aimed at counterbalancing the Soviet Union during the Cold War. However, these ties lasted well beyond the end of the Cold War and China has now become an integral part of the world economy, as well as a competing and strong global economic power. Despite its many changes and phases, there is one point of US foreign policy that has never been unpredictable: Total commitment to Israel's security and friendship. But now, for the first time, mainstream voices – mainly in Democratic Party circles and think tanks – are calling for a review of this relationship and even a downgrade. This comes at a time when China is, through programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative, playing an increased role in infrastructure projects and the economy in the Middle East, including Israel. Tel Aviv has been trying to balance the interests of both China and the US, but the latest tender for the Sorek 2 desalination plant prompted a bump in the road with the Trump administration, which supports Israeli security unconditionally. In short, the increased tensions between China and the US forced Israel to disregard a Chinese firm's bid for the Sorek 2 contract. As Beijing and Washington start facing off more directly, especially in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and during a US election year, it seems Israel is unsure on how to act, as it wishes to maintain a balance for now. These global relations have always directly impacted the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the energy-rich Middle East. During the Cold War, the world resembled a chessboard, leaving little opportunity for a US-Soviet agreement in order to impose a peace deal. After the USSR's collapse, the Oslo peace initiative was launched under a new world order. This was a fantastic window of opportunity, but the details prevented an agreement. The world we see today is much changed and these differences have been accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a return to the Middle East chessboard, involving stronger and more affirmative regional powers as well as the usual international powers – namely the US, Russia and China. Yet, for now, the regional powers are trying to avoid taking sides and are instead attempting to maintain balance with a case-by-case approach.

Although many analysts will say President Donald Trump's policies are responsible for these changes, the Middle East felt a change of strategy from the US during Barack Obama's presidency. His new "pivot to Asia" signaled a disengagement from the region to focus on and counter China. This was translated into a focus on the Iran nuclear deal, as well as a tougher approach toward Arab countries and greater questioning of Israel. I believe it was at this moment that most countries in the region started taking more decisions independently of the US. Basically, they took the attitude of asking the US for forgiveness rather than permission for their actions. This was not only seen in Israel, where there was an expansion of illegal settlement building for electoral purposes, but also in the defense contracts of countries such as Egypt, which increased its purchases from France. This period also saw the return of Russian military interventionism in the region, mainly in Syria but also now in Libya, both of which have an important impact on the Mediterranean and European security. Unlike Russia, China seems to be in a geopolitical observation mode for now, staying mostly neutral with a noninterventionist policy whenever its interests are not impacted, and instead focusing on infrastructure projects. Beijing often uses debt and financing as a development tool in this process. However, its interests will grow necessarily as most of the oil in the region is now flowing east toward its terminals, making it dependent on energy from the Middle East. At the same time, the US' share of the region's oil has continuously declined since President George W. Bush's energy initiative, signaling a similar decline in its involvement and interests. Trump reassured of his commitment to the Middle East and has proved it, but this energy and trade trend is bound to create more links and potential for cooperation with China, both for Israel and the wider region. I must admit my bias. I believe in the US and I believe its role – despite this unpredictability – has been largely positive for the region and the world. However, friendship with the US demands efforts. It is not an easy friendship, especially nowadays; some might even prefer being a "tolerated enemy." From Congress to pressure groups or even social

media uproar, these are points that one needs to consider and work with in order to keep a balanced relationship with the US. It is a challenging friendship that demands shows of strength and the ability to deliver on key files. In this regard, it seems that Israel and its current leader Benjamin Netanyahu have lost much of their exceptionalism. The Israeli government has, in fact, become a true Middle Eastern regime involved in corruption and the disregard of societal institutions. Its inability to deliver on important files puts a strain on the relationship between the US and Israel. So could we get to a point where Israel is labeled an apartheid state by US policymakers? Although this seems highly improbable, it is now being suggested by a growing and mainstream movement. The shift toward socialist policies in the US is also an unpredictable point that Israel will surely have to consider. As China's interests grow, it remains focused on business and economy, but one may ask when will it take on a more active geopolitical role in the region? Will we witness a Chinese peace process? Will China become more aggressive if it is systematically disregarded for infrastructure projects like the Israeli desalination plant? What policies would it implement for the security of the Middle East and to maintain energy supplies? Will it consider leveraging the debt it holds and its project for direct geopolitical gains? Will there be an alliance between China and Russia to counter US interests? Despite all these unknowns, I still believe there is a need to rebalance relations with China and ultimately a consensus will be found that acknowledges Beijing's new status, and that it will adapt and commit positively to the current international order. But, in this US election year and amid the COVID-19 pandemic, if relations between China and the US keep worsening and slide into indirect confrontation, then the Middle East, Israel included, will most probably align in the same way it did during the Cold War. International relations will once again look like a chessboard, but this time with stronger regional powers. It seems that unpredictability will not only be on the US side, but everywhere.

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Briefs

Three Iran guards killed

TEHRAN: Three Iranian border guards were killed in a clash with "armed insurgents" in the northwestern province of West Azerbaijan on Friday, ISNA news agency reported. The "border guards faced armed insurgents in a clash during their patrol, with some of the insurgents killed and three of the guards martyred," the news agency said. The clash broke out near the town of Sardasht, it added, without naming the rebel group involved. For much of the past 40 years, Iran has been battling Kurdish militants who use bases in neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan to mount cross-border attacks against Iranian government targets. — APP

Hurricanes expected in Arab Sea

DNA

KARACHI: The low air pressure is expected to turn into a depression by tonight and will likely turn towards Mumbai and Indian Gujarat. According to the Meteorological Department, there are fears of two simultaneous hurricanes in the Arabian Sea as low air pressure is becoming noticeable in the western mid of Arabian Sea near Yemen and Oman. The low air pressure can turn into depression by tonight and is likely to move northwest and then southwest. The second low pressure will form in the Arabian Sea on May 31. By June 3, low air pressure will turn into depression and it is expected to head towards Mumbai and Indian Gujarat. So far, there is no threat to Pakistan's coastline.

'Number of cases and deaths may increase'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant on National Health Services Dr. Zafar Mirza has urged people not to let their guard down against coronavirus, as the number of cases and deaths could increase in the country in coming days. Giving media briefing in Islamabad, he said situation regarding availability of ventilators and beds across the country is under control. The Special Assistant said 18 to 20 percent out of total number of ventilators are in use at the moment. He said National Command and Operation Centre is closely watching the situation and will adopt strategy accordingly in consultation with various stakeholders. Dr. Zafar Mirza said people could not grasp the situation regarding lockdown. He said a new instruction guide has been issued for the people who die of corona. The Special Assistant said there has been no evidence so far of transmission of coronavirus from dead body. He said persons handling the dead body should adopt all precautionary measures, including use of personal protective equipment.

SCO Secy Gen for collective efforts to cope with COVID-19 pandemic

DNA

BEIJING: SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov has said all our countries are facing the threat of the Coronavirus pandemic, which has become a serious challenge for the entire world community, threatening the safety of life and health of people, as well as has had a negative impact on the socio-economic development of countries. According to the report of the International Monetary Fund, the world economy will shrink by 6.3% by the end of this year.

According to the World Trade Organization, the decline in the volume of world trade this year could reach more than 30%.

He expressed these views while participating in a webinar 'Digital solutions for entrepreneurs in the era of COVID-19: Key lessons from Alibaba'. He further said, in this challenging environment, governments have to make difficult choices between protecting and strengthening of public health and rebuilding their economies.

In this context, the SCO countries show a high level of solidarity and cooperation; contacts are maintained on a regular basis at the highest levels; cooperation is also carried out through ministries and departments, between medical professionals, scientists and specialized experts. The member States not only share their epidemiological and organizational experience, but also provide each other with financial, economic, food and humanitarian assistance. "I am confident that through joint efforts, the SCO countries will stand the test with dignity and overcome the situation with a stronger spirit".

However in the midst of the epidemic, we are seeing a clear increase in demand for digital services everywhere. In many countries, for example, in China and other SCO member States, information and communication technologies have become more actively introduced into the spheres of health, trade, education and finance. Thanks to innovative thinking and a visionary



approach, the company has been able to quickly implement new technologies and modern solutions to prevent the spread of the virus, assist the public and protect medical personnel.

A special Fund of one billion yuan and an online platform for direct purchases of medicines on the global market, created by the company, allowed timely meeting the urgent demand in the regions most affected by the pandemic.

The Alibaba DAMO Academy has developed COVID-19 rapid diagnostic system using artificial intelligence. Online consultations through the Alibaba Health app have helped millions of people, and the DingTalk program has enabled online learning in 140 thousand educational institutions for 120 million students.

In this time of Coronavirus pandemic, Mr. Jack Ma and Alibaba group provided humanitarian assistance to many countries around the world, including "SCO family".

In the context of the pandemic, the Alibaba Group also actively encouraged small and medium-sized enterprises to switch to the company's

online platform at no cost and helped them not lose their business.

It is also worth mentioning that this company has created over 46 million jobs in recent years, and more than 110 million companies and entrepreneurs are involved in its platform. Alibaba Group plans to create 100 million more new jobs by 2036. Under the leadership of the Vice President of Alibaba group, Mr. Brian Alan Wong, Alibaba Global Initiatives has issued a guide under the title: "Digital Solutions for Entrepreneurs in the COVID-19 Era: Key Lessons from Alibaba," which is an important source to learn from the company's experience in fighting the threat of the Coronavirus pandemic using digital technology, innovative solutions and mobile applications, and supporting small and medium businesses to withstand the crisis caused by COVID-19.

Thanks to the efforts of the SCO Youth Platform - SCOLAR Network, the handbook posted on the Alibaba Global Initiatives website was translated into Russian in the form of brochures and sent to all SCO countries.

These brochures in English and Russian will also be sent to all participants in the webinar.

Today Mr. Brian has kindly agreed to reveal the content of the enormous work that Alibaba groups have done in the context of the pandemic and will answer all questions from the participants of the webinar. The SCO region covering almost half of the world's population is a huge market for implementing joint innovative projects in IT and digital economy.

The SCO Secretariat strives to work closely with the Alibaba Group and other companies in the field of digital economy to help young people in the SCO countries, whose total number exceeds 800 million, to make extensive use of information and communication technologies, to develop digital entrepreneurship and electronic commerce.

The young generation is the most progressive and advanced part of any society, creators of new ideas. Unfortunately, today more than 1.5 billion young people all over the world are in isolation under quarantine, and such events should help to direct them in a creative and constructive direction. We must make efforts to ensure that every young person around the world has access to modern information technology in order to participate fully in the new digital future that is now emerging.

In this regard, the Spring thunder 2020 initiative, announced by the Chairman of the Alibaba Group, Mr. Daniel Zhang, deserves special attention and support. The success history of the creators of Alibaba proves that neither a modest childhood, nor the lack of connections and start-up capital can become an obstacle to achieving goals. We are glad that more than 400 young people from the SCO countries, as well as the ASEAN, Africa, Europe and America, have confirmed their participation in the webinar.

"I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the leadership of the SCO Youth and Business Council for active participation in this event", he concluded.

India putting peace at stake: FM

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on Friday said India with its aggressive designs was putting the peace and stability of the region at stake.

In a meeting with Prime Minister's Special Assistant for National Security Division Dr Moeed Yousaf here at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qureshi discussed India's recent actions based on expansionist strategy in the region against other coun-

tries. Qureshi called upon the international community to take urgent notice of India's increasing belligerence. The meeting also discussed steps and progress on return of stranded Pakistanis in the wake of coronavirus pandemic.

Chinese Varsities to adopt strict criteria for Int'l students

BEIJING: Universities in China should not blindly pursue internationalization or expand the enrollment of international students. Rather, they should focus on the quality of international education and attract more talented youth from around the world to study at Chinese universities, the Chinese Ministry of Education said in a recent notice. Universities should adopt strict enrollment criteria and management systems for international students, improve educational resources for these students

and build model projects for international education, local media reported on Friday. They should put more effort into teaching international students about Chinese laws, regulations, cultures and customs to increase their understanding of China's development and tell the world what they have observed, it said. The country remains committed to promoting international education exchanges and cooperation and opening up the education sector, the notice said.

The notice came as President Xi Jinping extended a welcome to excellent students worldwide to study in China in his reply to a letter from Pakistani students studying at the University of Science and Technology Beijing on May 17. In his letter, Xi encouraged the students to communicate more with their Chinese peers and join hands with youth from all countries to contribute to promoting people-to-people connectivity and building a community with a shared future for humanity. — APP

Renault to cut 15,000 jobs

"In a context of uncertainty and complexity, this project is vital to guarantee a solid and sustainable performance"

PARIS: Renault said Friday it will cut nearly 15,000 jobs, including 4,600 at its core French operations, as it tries to regain its footing in the wake of plummeting car sales and the shift to electric vehicles. "In a context of uncertainty and complexity, this project is vital to guarantee a solid and sustainable performance," interim CEO Clotilde Delbos said in a statement. The cost-cutting plan, which was unveiled to labour representatives Thursday, aims to reduce overheads by two billion euros (\$2.2 billion) over

the next three years. Four production sites in France could be closed or restructured, the automaker said, and its hulking factory at Flins northwest of Paris will stop making the Zoe electric hatchback from 2024. An additional 10,000 jobs will be cut outside France, with expansion plans now halted in Morocco and Romania, and under review in Russia. Overall, Renault's production capacity will shrink to 3.3 million vehicles over the next four years, from four million currently. — APP

S. Korea limits school numbers

SEOUL: South Korea on Friday imposed limits on the number of pupils going to schools in and around Seoul as officials scramble to tackle fresh coronavirus cases that threaten the country's success in containing the epidemic. Only one in three pupils at kindergartens, elementary and middle schools in the Seoul metropolitan area — home to half the population — will be allowed to physically attend school each day, authorities said, with the others remote learning. And a total of 502 schools near locations linked to cases in the capital area will remain closed to all pupils, a ministry official told AFP. — APP

Logical end of sugar case priority: Gill

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Political Communication Dr Shahbaz Gill Friday said that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led government believe in corruption-free Pakistan and logical conclusion of sugar Mafia top most priority of Prime Minister Imran's government. Talking to a private news channel, Shahbaz Gill said that previous corrupt political leaderships lacked the courage to release such information due to their "vested interests and compromises".

He said almost 99% of Sindh Sugar Mills are owned by Zardari family and their front-man and government would take stern action in the light of an inquiry report against the elements involved in the sugar scandal. He said that the credit for the report goes to the PTI government, who probed the scam, collected the evidence, made the report public and was now all-set to take corrective measures. Such elements did not deserve any mercy and they would have to face accountability, he added.

Gill further said Imran Khan's government will not stop here. We will expose the rest of the mafia too and bring the entire matter to a logical conclusion. He said that those who looted the national exchequer cannot escape from accountability, adding, we have to root out corruption from the country once and for all. PM Imran Khan is a only ray of hope for the nation to put the country on the road to progress. We will never compromise on national interest, he added. — APP

Indonesia rolls out public shaming for virus violators

BENGKULU: Indonesian officials are forcing social distancing violators to recite Koran verses, stay in "haunted" houses and submit to public shaming on social media as the country battles to contain surging coronavirus infections. The Southeast Asian archipelago began deploying around 340,000 troops across two dozen cities to oversee enforcement of measures aimed at halting transmission of the disease, such as wearing facemasks in public. But provincial leaders are butressing these efforts with their own zealous campaigns to fight the virus. Police in western Bengkulu

province have assembled a 40-person squad to find lockdown scofflaws and force them to wear placards with promises to wear masks and keep their distance from others in future. Pictures of the perpetrators are then uploaded to social media for maximum shaming effect, according to an official. "People in Bengkulu still aren't aware of the importance of following the rules, especially when it comes to wearing masks and not gathering" in big groups, said Martinah, Bengkulu's public order agency chief, who goes by one name. "This is for the sake of themselves and

their families," he added. Some of those singled out by police have bristled at the punishment, including fisherman Firmansyah, who was punished for failing to abide by the mask rule while alone on his boat. "It's silly to wear a mask when I'm out at sea," he said, after he was nabbed returning to shore. "There's no regulation to wear a mask in the water. If there was I'd comply with it." Farther north in conservative Aceh province, those flouting public health regulations have been forced to atone by reading passages from the Koran. — APP

146 stranded Pakistanis arrive

MULTAN: As many as 146 stranded passengers reached Multan from Abu Dhabi in a special Flight landed at Multan International Airport. Sub-Registrar City Kamran Bukhari welcomed the passengers. The reorganisation process of all passengers was completed at the airport. According to district administration, the 146 passengers were reached in PK-8264 flight from which 131 were shifted to Quarantine center situated at Vehari and 15 shifted to local hotels in Multan for accommodation. — APP

Russia reports new virus deaths

MOSCOW: Russia reported a record increase of 232 coronavirus deaths on Friday as Moscow authorities released mortality figures to dispel allegations they were being manipulated. Health officials reported a total of 4,374 deaths and 387,623 cases, the third-highest number of infections in the world after the United States and Brazil. — APP