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World is united against COVID-19 pandemic, says Germany envoy

FM Qureshi hopes to fight virus challenges



Azerbaijan able to handle epidemic: WHO



Briefs

69 COVID-19 cases in Attock

MUNIR FAISAL

ATTOCK: The District focal person for COVID-19 Dr. Asif Arbab Niazi confirmed registration of eight new more cases reported in the district on Tuesday have brought Attock's total to 69 and Three death. According to data updated and shared by the district Corona Cell DHA, Three Police persons reported positive for Covid-19. Two close contact of already Positive case in Tehsil Fateh Jang. Two known TB patients diagnosed COVID-19 Positive. One cross notified case from Islamabad. Dr Asif said that 4,666 people have been tested in the area so far. He said the number of suspected patients screened has reached 1,617, of which 1,373 have tested negative and the results of 175 people have not been received.

WHO to train Pak health workers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The World Health Organization will provide training to 100,000 Pakistani health workers to cope with coronavirus, the Radio Pakistan reported Tuesday. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the WHO and Pakistan in Islamabad. Later, PM's aide on health Dr Zafar Mirza confirmed that WHO representative Dr Palitha Gunarathna Mahipala signed the agreement to train Pakistani health workers. "Frontline paramedical staff and doctors are heroes of the nation and the government accords top priority to facilitate them," Dr Mirza said.

Appointment of heads

Cabinet to amend laws

Government has limited resources and infrastructure, and continuous lockdown was not possible under the prevailing conditions: Shibili Faraz

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Cabinet, which met in Islamabad, with Prime Minister Imran Khan in the chair, has decided to make amendments in existing laws for appointment of heads of various government's institutions in the country. This was stated by Minister for Information and Broadcasting Senator Shibili Faraz while briefing to newsmen about decisions taken by the Federal Cabinet in Islamabad this

evening. He said a committee has been constituted in this regard under the supervision of Advisor for Institutional Reforms Dr. Ishrat Hussain, which will present its recommendations within a week. He said Minister for Narcotics Control Azam Khan Swati presented 39 proposals to prime minister on electoral reforms, which the prime minister appreciated. The cabinet approved the names of the members of National Commission for Status of Women and National Bureau of

Statistics. It also approved decisions taken by the Cabinet's Committee on Energy and Economic Co-ordination Committee. Talking about ongoing Coronavirus, the minister said no country in the world can afford continuous lockdown and decision regarding ease in countrywide lockdown was taken in view of difficulties being faced by poor labour class. He said the government has limited resources and infrastructure, and continuous lockdown was not possible under the prevailing conditions.

'Azerbaijan able to eliminate epidemic'

"The fight against coronavirus will be very useful if everyone cooperates with the state"

DNA

BAKU: Despite the number of cases of coronavirus infection is decreasing in Western Europe per day, this indicator is still at the stage of growth in Eastern Europe and the CIS countries, but Azerbaijan is able to eliminate the epidemic, Head of the Country Office of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Azerbaijan Hande Harmanci said. Harmanci made the remark at the briefing of the

Operational Headquarters under the Azerbaijani Cabinet of Ministers, AzVision.az reports. Thanking President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev for the prompt and effective measures to combat coronavirus in Azerbaijan, the head of the country office of WHO in Azerbaijan stressed that while working in collaboration with WHO, Azerbaijan is distinguished in the fight against the pandemic at the international level. "Thus, the country twice

rendered humanitarian aid in the amount of \$5 million while the fight against infectious diseases is an important sphere in the country's social policy," Harmanci added. "The fight against coronavirus will be very useful if everyone cooperates with the state and at the stage of gradual softening of the tough quarantine regime will wear a medical mask and follow the social distance rules at least one meter," the head of the country office of WHO in Azerbaijan said.



RAWALPINDI: Ambassador of China Yao Jing in a meeting with Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: 2nd batch of Chinese military aid arrived on Tuesday. - DNA

Rupee falls against dollar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The exchange rate of Pakistani rupee declined by 38 paise in the interbank on Tuesday against US dollar to close at Rs160.45 compared to the last closing of Rs160.07. However, according to Forex Association of Pakistan, the buying and selling rates of Dollar in open market were recorded at Rs160 and Rs161 respectively.

Army chief thanks China

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Yao Jing, Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan called on General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff (COAS). During the meeting matters of mutual interest including regional security issues and COVID-19 were discussed. COAS expressed gratitude for China's support related to immediate medical supplies and all other assistance including visit of Chinese medical experts to help Pakistan fight the pandemic. Visiting dignitary also re-assured China's continued support for Pakistan at all forums.

FM hopes to fight virus challenges

Qureshi says the PM daily holds meetings and give directions to cope with the current situation; asks opposition parties not to do politics on the pandemic

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has expressed the optimism to collectively surmount the challenge posed by coronavirus. He made the remarks in the Senate on Tuesday which is holding discussion on the situation arising out of Covid-19. The Foreign Minister said the national strategy against the contagion has been chalked out after

taking inputs from all the federating units. He said it is a national emergency and all the stakeholders will have to work collectively to defeat the virus which has engulfed the whole world. He said the National Coor-

dination Committee and National Command and Operation Center have been established to accommodate the inputs of the provinces. Shah Mahmood Qureshi said the Prime Minister daily holds meetings and give directions to cope with the current situation. He asked the opposition parties not to do politics on the pandemic. The foreign minister said we have to protect the people from Coronavirus, poverty and starvation.



5000 expectant mothers request for repatriation

DNA

DUBAI: Officials at the Consulate General in Dubai on Tuesday confirmed that 5000 expectant Pakistani mothers have made a special request for urgent repatriation from Dubai in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. According to the officials, hundreds of people gather around the consulate in Dubai every day and are seen pleading for

their evacuation. However, diplomatic officials inform the troubled expats of their constraints and urge them to be patient regarding the matter. An estimated 2,000 people who are ill have also requested for immediate repatriation from the emirates. As per the consulate, an estimated 63,000 Pakistanis in Dubai want to be repatriated to Pakistan following the outbreak of the virus.

Virus cases in Pakistan 32,081

ISLAMABAD: The nationwide tally of coronavirus has soared to 32,081 with 1,140 new cases reported during the last twenty-four hours. 11,869 cases have so far been detected in Punjab, 12,017 in Sindh, 4,875 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2,061 in Balochistan, 457 in Gilgit Baltistan, 716 in Islamabad and 86 in Azad Kashmir. 8,555 patients have so far recovered from the virus whilst the death toll stands at 706 with 39 new deaths reported during the last twenty-four hours. - DNA

German humanitarian aid in context of COVID-19

German Federal Foreign Office is providing 300 million euros for COVID-19-related humanitarian assistance worldwide; Ambassador Bernhard Schlagheck says world is united; Germany stands with Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: While in Germany cautious hope is growing that the curve of COVID-19 infections is gradually flattening, other countries like Pakistan are still facing rising numbers of cases. As the virus knows no borders, global solidarity is required which implies working on joint solutions as well as strengthening multilateralism. Germany is therefore offering humanitarian assistance to countries like Pakistan, both on a multilateral and bilateral level. Hence, the German Fed-

eral Foreign Office is providing 300 million euros for COVID-19-related humanitarian assistance worldwide. Germany is thus making a substantial contribution in response to the global humanitarian appeals from the United Nations and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. These funds will contribute to global relief measures in countries already facing a humanitarian crisis. Additionally, Germany as part of Team Europe has pledged 525 million euros for the Global Response Initiative to fight COVID-19. Most of Germany's COV-

ID-19-related financial support is realized through multilateral institutions like the World Bank or Asian Development Bank. However, in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis funds for bilateral projects in Paki-

stan have been partially reallocated - especially in the field of humanitarian aid. Thus, the German government financially supports humanitarian organizations like Malteser International or the German Red Cross

which is closely cooperating with the Pakistan Red Crescent Society to provide the Pakistani people with access to emergency food assistance, hygiene knowledge and material as well as preventive health care ser-

vices, particularly in Sindh. Moreover, the German Embassy is supporting Pakistani organizations to offer food rations and hygiene kits to vulnerable parts of the Pakistani population as well as education about physical and mental health. Ambassador Bernhard Schlagheck underlined: "These days the world is united in the face of the necessity to put a halt to the spread of COVID-19. Only in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation will we be able to address this common challenge. Many Pakistani families are hit hard by the loss of loved ones due to the pandemic.

My sincere condolences are with all of them. The joint fight against the novel virus and its socio-economic consequences is yet another - a new - facet of the many-sided trustful cooperation between Germany and Pakistan. Let us try together to overcome economic hardships and bring relief to the vulnerable. With German financial support in the framework of multilateral organizations as well as bilateral support to fight COVID-19 in Pakistan, Germany would like to underline that it stands side by side with the Pakistani people in these trying times."



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Pak companies to participate in China Expo

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Briefs

People urged not to visit markets

ISLAMABAD: Emphasizing on the need to follow physical distancing measures, medical expert Tuesday said that the public should stop gathering in places associated with Eid activities while visiting shops for containing the further spread of coronavirus. Talking to PTV news, a Microbiologist Dr Mumtaz Ahmad said the general public must follow the guidelines of the government properly and observe social distancing to stay safe. — APP

Khusro appreciates ADB

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Makhdom Khusro Bakhtyar on Tuesday appreciated the support being provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the efforts of the Government of Pakistan to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s Country Director for Pakistan, Mrs Xiaohong Yang, called on the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Makhdom Khusro Bakhtyar in his office, said a press release issued by Ministry of Economic Affairs here.

CDA introduces innovative project

ISLAMABAD: Capital Development Authority (CDA) is in process of developing an innovative project management system for effective monitoring of ongoing development projects in Islamabad. Technology based project monitoring system will enable CDA Administration to monitor real time physical progress of the project. The purpose of introduction of project management system is to ensure timely completion of all ongoing development projects in Islamabad. — APP

India using COVID-19 as an iron curtain genocide in H. Kashmir

DNA
 ISLAMABAD: India using COVID-19 as an iron curtain for its policy of genocide in Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and for reinforcing its August 5, 2019 lockdown. While Pakistan seeks peace with its neighbor, we should emphasize on India and the rest of the world that we will not tolerate and stand by genocide in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK). There are no cost free and risk-free options to stop genocide in IOJK, save Kashmir, and avoid war with India. Pakistan's nuclear deterrent is meant to deter war not pursue war. But, if the people of the Valley are threatened with genocide, as indeed they are, Pakistan must take bold measures. Aug 5, 2019 has transformed Kashmir from a

longer-term diplomatic challenge to an existential challenge for Pakistan. Modi's 'Anschluss' does not allow for incremental strategies. Pakistan must now do whatever it takes to ensure that it no longer remains an irresolute and self-imprisoned soft state that surrenders its raison d'etre. Pakistan must strengthen its credibility. If that happens, India will, sooner or later, have to accept the reality that it can neither permanently crush the Kashmir liberation struggle nor successfully blame Pakistan for its inability to do so. Pakistan must develop options and take risks to ensure freedom and justice for Kashmir and to chart a course for peaceful coexistence with India. These were the views shared by Ambassador (R) Ashraf Jahangir Qazi, Former Pakistan High Commissioner to India and



Ambassador to US and China in an eloquent and thought-provoking webinar on "Humanitarian Assistance amid the COVID-19 Lockdown in Indian-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK): International Response to the Clampdown." Ambassador Qazi highlighted that it is not an exaggeration to define life in IOJK as purgatory exacerbated by COVID-19. For Modi and his retinue, the pandemic provides the ideal opportunity to further execute their Hindutva designs of "absorb and annex" in the Valley — turning the Muslim majority into a minority. The situation in IOJK is desolate and spells terror as the Valley experiences not only acute shortage of manpower as well as inadequate infrastructure and personal protective equipment (PPE) but also internet facilities to access WHO guidelines on how to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. Discussing the recent US Commission on International Religious Freedom report that designated India as a "country of particular concern" over its maltreatment of religious minorities mainly by "non-state actors", Ambassador Qazi said that even Genocide Watch has issued a Genocide Alert for India Occupied Kashmir and called upon the United Nations and its members to warn India not to commit genocide in the territory. Genocide Watch has issued a Genocide Watch for Assam State, India, where millions of Bengali Muslims face losing citizenship status. However, he warned that India has not budged, and it will not until the Nazi-inspired Hindu state is blacklisted for institutionalized saffronizing of its minorities and the denizens of Kashmir. The exclusionary extremist narrative cannot be held accountable let alone defeated through issuing reports and merely showing "concerns", he warned. "Pakistani response must operate on two tracks mak-

ing the world see that first, Pakistan is working on all fronts to engage with India to discuss and resolve all outstanding issues, including climate change for peaceful co-existence; and second, that we do not seek zero sum solutions; and also at the same time categorically state that genocide will not be accepted in IOJK. Ambassador Qazi lamented that for the inhabitants of the occupied territory, it is a case of triple whammy — military occupation, constitutional onslaught to alter the demographics and the emergence of an invisible enemy in the shape of COVID-19. As for BJP, the pandemic has become fitting pretext to justify communication blackout, restriction of internet services, confinement to homes ensuing deprivation of livelihood, and ultimately loss of identity for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Smart lockdown to ease common man: Kanwal

DNA
 ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf MNA Kanwal Shauzab Tuesday said that the federal government's decision regarding gradually easing the lockdown is linked to ease the poor segment of the country as since the day first PTI had decided to support the low-income class besides strengthen the national economy. Talking to PTV news she said every one knows PTI is a public party and it is proving practically too, PTT's government would not leave any stone unturned to save masses. She further said many people had lost their jobs and unemployment increased as the country was under lockdown for over one and half months. The government has limited resources and cannot provide relief to people for a long period of time, she added.

RCCI lauds SBP for holding info session



SAIFULLAH ANSAR
 RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) president Saboor Malik, has lauded State Bank of Pakistan for organizing an information session on recent loan schemes via video conference. Many members, traders and consumers were missing infor-

mation of these schemes, and had many questions on their minds. Hopefully such sessions will be regular. During an informative video session on the SBP's Temporary Financial Refinance Scheme and Workers' Salary Payment Scheme, he said that Islamic financing, bank guarantee; application form, term, procedure and role of commercial banks came under discussion and expressed hope that this will help them to get answers to many questions about the schemes scope and diversity. Saboor Malik said that due to lack of awareness, information could not reach the general public in time.



ISLAMABAD: Nurses cutting cake to celebrate Nurses Day. — DNA

AIOU to receive assignments till 13th

MAHNOOR ANSAR
 ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has set May 13 (Wednesday) as last day for receiving academic assignments for post-graduate programs. Earlier, the last date for the submission of assignments was April 27. However, the students were given extra time for accomplishing this academic work in view of the current

situation of country-wide lockdown in wake of COVID-19. Students of BA/BS/ B.Ed, MA/MSc and other post-graduate programs have been advised to submit their due assignments for autumn 2019 semester, till May 13. It has also been notified that all regional heads of the University are required to ensure collection of completed punched results before May 20, said Director Admissions Mian Muhammad Riaz.

Karandaaz starts design program

FIAZ CHAUDHRY
 ISLAMABAD: Karandaaz has announced the launch of a new programme to subsidize design thinking services for Digital Financial Service (DFS) providers offering products and services through mobile and web-based platforms. Karandaaz aims to promote digital financial products and services that address the needs of the customers; create more valuable, appealing, and user-friendly solutions; and expand financial inclusion in the country.

Covid-19 leads to digitalization

ISLAMABAD: The COVID-19 outbreak has led to the introduction of innovative digital applications in a number of business sectors. Real-estate firms, for example, are now showing properties to customers through virtual tours, while all transactions are being carried out electronically. Due to social-distancing measures, global production has declined drastically, with many sectors taking steps to adapt to "the new normal." The real-estate industry has responded to the crisis by

conducting sales and rentals through virtual tours. In a statement issued here, Chairman Antalya Homes, a real estate company, Bayram Tekçe said, within the last month, the organization preferred by foreigners wishing to buy property in Turkey through remote property selling methodology Tele Property, amid rising demand from European countries, has successfully sold 12 properties worth a total of \$1 million. The exchange rates have also created a perfect opportunity to buy real

estate in Turkey as upon the pandemic, foreign currencies have gained 15% against the Turkish lira in a month's time, he added. The chairman said, "We have adapted to new conditions by developing innovative solutions for those who want to buy property in Turkey. Tele Property lets us provide customers with all property details, such as title deed information, floor plans, prices, availability, and licensing. Customers can also take online viewing tours to examine properties in detail."

RCB confiscates goods

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB) has confiscated three truckload goods from different markets in its operation against encroachments. According to RCB spokesman, the enforcement wing on the directives of the Cantonment Executive Officer (CEO) had accelerated operation against encroachments and striving to clear different commercial areas. He said, the operation was being conducted on daily basis while permanent and temporary encroachments were being removed. — APP

Chinese company distributes food

DNA
 ISLAMABAD: A total of 1,000 deserving families in Golarchi, Sindh and Pakpattan, Punjab recently have received food packages donated by a Chinese seed industry enterprise Longping High-tech and its partner. According to Gwadar Pro, each of the food package consists of 20 kilograms of wheat powder, 10 kilograms of rice, 5 kilograms of white granulated sugar and 3 litres of cooking oil. An official of Longping High-tech told Gwadar Pro, many agricultural practi-

tioners and daily wagers have lost source of income amid the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To tide them over the difficult time, Longping High-tech and its local partner Guard Agricultural Research and Services company jointly purchased a batch of supplies worth over Rs. 3 million to distribute to them, which include 20 tons of wheat powder and 10 tons of rice. On behalf of the Golarchi government and local residents, Mr. Abdul Sallam Arain received these donations and expressed sincere thanks to Longping High-tech and Guard. He said, Longping High-tech is the best hybrid rice seed company in Pakistan and it gives a new opportunity to the country's agriculture. Yuan Longping High-tech Agriculture Co., Ltd. (Longping High-tech) has been conducting research and promotion of hybrid rice seed in Pakistan since 2000. So far, Longping High-tech's hybrid rice seed has become the first choice of rice growers in the country and its cultivated area has surpassed 2 million hectares.



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Health concerns

IMAGINE hospitals in which patients lie in beds, perhaps even attached to monitoring devices and oxygen masks, with no one to offer them the care they so urgently need. As we end the lockdown in the country at a time when there are over 31,600 cases and almost 700 deaths, we also have 11 health professionals who have so far lost their lives to the deadly virus in Pakistan. In total, 440 doctors, 215 paramedics and 111 nurses have been infected so far. The last 257 cases of confirmed infections among medical staff came between May 5 and May 9.

Nurses, who mark International Nurses Day today, are like other medical staff naturally terrified. Nurses are central to care at hospitals across the world, and Pakistan's ratio of 0.5 nurses or less to every 1,000 people is insufficient in the first place. We need to give the profession of nursing far greater respect. As their organisations have pointed out, they have appealed repeatedly for better and more protective gear and also opposed the end of the lockdown, with senior doctors representing various organisations including the PMA making their opinions well known since the decision to reopen was announced by the prime minister.

Hospital officials fear that at specialized care facilities, there will soon be a severe shortage of trained staff. The fact that doctors, nurses and paramedics are also putting themselves into self-isolation after coming into contact with someone who tests positive for coronavirus adds further to the shortfall. Some specialized centres caring for other conditions are already facing possible closure after staff members have tested positive. Most health workers are contracting the infection at critical care facilities where they must work closely with Covid-19 patients. One healthcare provider is on life support at present, and there are dozens others waiting for test results. All four provinces as well as Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK have been affected, with 186 healthcare providers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 184 in Punjab positive for the virus.

This is hardly surprising, given that while doctors may have now received PPEs which some say are of inferior quality, nurses and paramedics have largely been ignored. Obviously, if healthcare providers land up in hospital beds themselves, patients will suffer. We wonder if the government has plans to tackle this crisis. After all, no one can stand in for doctors.

This is not a matter of calling in volunteers. Health workers suggest a larger-scale awareness campaign. But it is unlikely that this would work, with major cities now already set to be engaged in pre-Eid shopping, given the opening up of market places. This can only speed the spread of the virus, create a scenario where our poorly maintained healthcare system collapses and we lose the lives of more professionals who are attempting to save citizens from possible death.



Jaidi's journey

ATHAR Shah Khan's Jaidi entertained many, and his entertainment was not confined to comedy alone. In him we have lost an actor, poet, and an accomplished writer. His life journey began in 1943 and ended on May 10, 2020. Of these 77 years, at least 50 years he devoted to his creative pursuits that brought smiles and laughter to millions of listeners and viewers in Pakistan. In comedy, he had his distinct style that combined his humorous lines with a peculiar tone of voice that was amusing in itself. As an actor his most famous character was his own creation – Jaidi, an adult who acted with childlike innocence and delivered lines with utmost ease without a trace of artificialness. He created Jaidi and played him in multiple TV serials such as 'Intizar Farmaiye' in the 1970s. With its enviable success, he repeated his act in other subsequent plays across decades on the PTV.

For the generation that grew up in the dark days of General Zia's military dictatorship, Jaidi was a comic relief from the stressful environment surrounding them. Jaidi became a legend in the history of Pakistan Television so much so that both young and older people frequently imitated him in everyday conversations at home. He entered the creative world after completing his Master's degree in journalism from the University of Punjab but instead of becoming a pen pusher in the somewhat serious and somber field of editing or reporting, he opted for writing for Radio and TV. His serials elicited viewers' admiration from the first episode. His writings for Radio Pakistan number in hundreds and his most popular radio programme was 'Jaidi ke Sung', which became one of the hit radio serials in the history of Radio Pakistan. His success on TV was no less impressive and memorable. Starting with the phenomenal popularity of 'Intizar Farmaiye', Athar Shah Khan appeared in 'Hello Hello', 'Lakhon Mein Teen', 'Ba Adab ba Mulahiza Hoshiyar', 'Haye Jaidi', 'Burger Family', 'Jaidi in Trouble', 'Problem House' and many others. His acting and writing skills flourished with time and he left an indelible mark on all those who admired him.

He was equally at ease with writing dialogues and stories for films, many of which became popular such as 'Baazi', 'Maan Bani Dulhan', 'Goonj uthi Shehna', and 'Manji Kithay Dhanwan' in Punjabi. He also tried his hand at column writing for an Urdu newspaper but his short stories were more impressive. In addition to humorous poetry, he also penned serious ghazals and poems which found space in many literary magazines. With him we have lost a remarkable creative personality who will be remembered for long. In today's world where high-class humour is difficult to come by, we will miss him as someone who embodied an educated and well-read actor, comedian, poet and writer.

Coronavirus: Don't Create Controversy Over 18th Amendment

Sajjad Shaukat



Nonetheless, taking cognizance of rapidly spread of coronavirus, the leaders of opposition parties are suggested that instead of doing politics over this sensitive issue, they must not create controversy over 18th Amendment. War against this deadly virus demands selfless national unity which must be shown practically by all the political parties, including every segment of society, while displaying solidarity with the armed forces. Such a selfless unity will help in implementing the civil-military comprehensive plan to contain this virus and ultimately to eliminate it

WHILE coronavirus pandemic, also known as COVID-19 is rapidly spreading in Pakistan, some political entities are creating obstacles by creating controversy over 18th Amendment. Regrettably, they are doing politics over this sensitive issue.

In this regard, on April 28, this year, the leader of the opposition parties, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, president PML-N Shahbaz Sharif and JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman once again warned the PTI government against any move to change the 18th Amendment in the Constitution or the clauses dealing with the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award. They decided to adopt a joint stance in to resist any such a move.

Earlier, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi made it clear: "The government has no intention of revoking the 18th Amendment; the situation arising out of the coronavirus outbreak requires a thorough review of the constitutional amendment...the importance of 18th Amendment vis a vis the provincial autonomy could not be denied...if the provinces' practice of looking towards the Centre despite getting enhanced share in national resources...continued...all the stakeholders should sit together to discuss and review the distribution of resources before a new NFC Award...there is no problem between the federal and Sindh governments except the difference of opinion on the issue of lockdown". However, the government has already taking appropriate measures to combat the coronavirus outbreak.

It is mentionable that the National Command Centre (NCC) and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), consisting of military and civil personnel have been established, which is monitoring the situation and taking necessary measures on a daily basis in relation to the COVID-19. The NDMA is leading the operations and coordinating with the provincial and district authorities for the necessary implementation of the preventive and curative actions.

Notably, DG Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Maj-Gen. Babar Iftikhar pointed out in a tweet on April 7, this year: "Pakistan Army is dispatching emergency supplies of medical equipment including Personal Protective Equipment to Quetta on orders of the Army Chief to help the medical staff effectively fight COVID-19...Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa said—Doctors and paramedics are the frontline soldiers in this war against coronavirus. Most advanced nations and governments are finding it extremely difficult to fight this pandemic. Pakistan government is striving hard to acquire and supply the required resources".

In this connection, addressing a press conference on

March 23, 2020, Maj-Gen Babar Iftikhar stated: "Coronavirus is a danger...but the Pakistan Army is fully aware of its duty and would counter the pandemic with the nation's help". It is worth-mentioning that the Sindh Government has imposed complete lockdown in some cities. But, Federal Government did not interfere. Despite it, Sindh's Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and top officials of his government are targeting the anti-coronavirus campaign of the central government. It is lamentable that opposition parties and some entities are criticizing the prime minister's campaign against the threat of COVID-19.

In this respect, Chairman of PPP Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and leader of Nawaz (PML-N) Shahbaz Sharif had favoured complete lockdown in the country to cope with the COVID-19 endemic, while the ruling party was not in support of it, as it could result into unemployment and hunger for the lowest class. Afterwards, both the leaders changed their statements, asking the government to ease the lockdown which has been conditionally eased on Saturday (May 9). They also opposed the Pakistanis' contributions to the "Ehsaas Programme", and targeted the Corona Relief Youth Tiger Force. In fact, at this crucial hour, these parties, including some entities who have politicized the coronavirus outbreak are opposing the PTI-government for the sake of opposition and hostility for the sake of hostility and thus, creating obstacles in the way of the government's efforts to combat this deadly virus. Such a negative approach is likely to impact NCC and NDMA whose personnel are serving the people at this sensitive hour. Particularly, it may demoralise country's armed forces, especially Pak Army's efforts regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here, question arises, if Shahbaz Sharif and Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari have political differences with Imran Khan, as to why, they and their parties do not create some charitable organization, also asking the members of their parties to send donations to cope with this deadly virus. Even, they, themselves, can donate money directly to the poor persons who have been affected by the virus. Now, COVID-19 has become a matter of life and death for the people, so, even if 18th Amendment is reviewed, it should not be opposed, as extra-ordinary situation has arisen. And constitution is made for people and people are not made for the constitution.

It is noteworthy that 18th Amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan was carried out to allow more provincial autonomy to the provinces, give them bigger share in the finances and facilitate law making, thus improving governance. Spirit of the amendment was appreciable; however, the execution seems problematic.

So, lack of coordination between Federal Government and the provincial Government in Sindh has been noticed with concern by sincere citizens. Discussions on food supply chain, law and order, provision/availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and essential medical equipment, provision of financials and food aid to the poor and needy have worried citizens. The discussions and media war on whether to impose or not to impose the lockdown and when to soften or lift it have also muddied the otherwise murkier waters. This gap has also sent ill signals about national response to a collective challenge. Therefore, irrespective of the opposition's thinking about 18th Amendment, all political and governance actors do understand that there are identified gaps in the 7th NFC award, allowing 57% of financial share to the provinces. Response capacity and performance of the Sindh Government reflected a huge gap, while focusing mainly on the perception management through media tricks.

Recently, the PTI government has reconstituted the commission for the 9th NFC Award, the discussion has surfaced over rebalancing the resources among the four provinces. The Federal Government is performing large number of functions which are otherwise the responsibility of the Provincial Governments. This includes matters relating to Public health, drugs, dams, education, public projects in provinces, labour, environment, locusts and many other trans-provincial activities which are obligations of the provinces, but have to be performed by Federal Government. All these activities cost a huge sum. Likewise, the Constitution though requires financing and functioning of Local Governments, yet they have no funds available directly. The NFC Award should reflect these important aspects.

Nonetheless, taking cognizance of rapidly spread of coronavirus, the leaders of opposition parties are suggested that instead of doing politics over this sensitive issue, they must not create controversy over 18th Amendment. War against this deadly virus demands selfless national unity which must be shown practically by all the political parties, including every segment of society, while displaying solidarity with the armed forces. Such a selfless unity will help in implementing the civil-military comprehensive plan to contain this virus and ultimately to eliminate it.

Sajjad Shaukat writes on international affairs and is author of the book: US vs Islamic Militants, Invisible Balance of Power: Dangerous Shift in International Relations. Email: sajjad_logic@yahoo.com

Putin turns against Assad and Iran

Baria Alamuddin



US President Donald Trump may perceive a Russian coup in Syria as a two-pronged gift: Removing a blood-drenched anti-US dictator, while kicking thousands of Iranian advisers and Hezbollah hoodlums out of Damascus. For Putin – in the unlikely event that such a transition was pulled off flawlessly – it would be an unforgettable display of Russian regional supremacy

AS CONTACT of mine with senior Moscow connections has spent the past nine years vigorously reminding me that "(Bashar) Assad isn't going anywhere." Last week, she phoned me to say: "Guess what? Assad is going." My source isn't the only one predicting that Russia is close to engineering Assad's departure. Pro-Moscow media outlets have been attacking him personally. And Syrian politicians reacted angrily to semi-official comments, such as former diplomat Alexander Shumilin, head of the Kremlin-funded Europe-Middle East Center, stating: "The Kremlin must rid itself of the Syrian headache. The problem is with one person – Assad – and his entourage."

Meanwhile, after months of internal tensions, Assad's cousin and regime financier Rami Makhlof very publicly went rogue, claiming that the government was ransacking his businesses and "attacking people's freedoms." Given the tight, familial nature of the regime, this marks a serious fracturing of Assad's inner circle, with the Russians gleefully exacerbating these tensions.

There is particular enmity toward the influence wielded by Asma Assad, both from Makhlof and the Russians, who leaked a damaging (possibly untrue) report about her alleged \$30 million purchase of renowned David Hockney painting "The Splash" to decorate her palace. Much of this anti-Assad kompromat emerged through media outlets controlled by the Kremlin's master of black arts, Yevgeny Prigozhin (aka Putin's cook). This includes evidence that, during 2019, the Assad regime lied to citizens about chronic power cuts because it was profiteering by selling electricity to Lebanon. Russian news agencies like TASS simultaneously attacked Iran for having "no interest in achieving stability in the region because it considers it a battlefield with Washington." The Russia-Iran-Assad axis was previously mutually beneficial as they sought to reconquer much of Syria. However, Assad's rampant corruption, brutality and in-

competence have become too toxic even for Vladimir Putin, who wants to see a stable Syria enjoying international rehabilitation. Putin resents Damascus' 2018 deal granting Tehran exclusivity over postwar agreements – particularly because promoting Syria as a Moscow-sponsored reconstruction success story could open doors for lucrative mega-projects in oil-rich Libya and Iraq. Close allies Benjamin Netanyahu and Putin have watched Iran's intensifying stranglehold on Damascus in horror. "We have moved from blocking Iran's entrenchment in Syria to forcing it out of there, and we will not stop," Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennett recently declared. Russia discreetly condones unceasing Israeli air raids against Iran-affiliated targets (such as those that killed 14 Iranian assets last week), which have escalated in parallel with Russia's campaign against Assad.

Throughout 2019, Moscow cracked down on criminal militias controlled by regime kingpins like Mahir Assad, resulting in deadly clashes (one January 2019 incident left 70 fighters dead). Operating between Latakia on the Mediterranean coast and Abu Kamal on the Iraqi border, these entities have collaborated with Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies to control the foremost narcotics routes into Europe and the Arab world. Some \$660 million of amphetamines, shipped from Latakia, was impounded in Greece in a record haul in July 2019.

Moscow fears that Iran's acquisition of Latakia port and its construction of a railroad straddling Syria and Iraq will cut off its principal base at Hmeimim and facilitate the delivery of arms to Iran-backed militias, inhibiting Russia's ability to control Syrian affairs. Putin could perhaps compel Assad to resign. It is less clear whether Russia could sustainably impose a preferred replacement. My source, however, suggested there is active consideration of presidential candidates from outside regime and Alawite circles. But a botched coup attempt could engulf Damascus in new parox-

ysms of civil conflict. Tehran would rather burn everything to the ground than passively watch Moscow eject its puppet from the presidential palace. Syria's intelligence services and military operate symbiotically with Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps interlocutors, yet much of the regime is frustrated at being shackled to an overbearing Persian agenda. Iranian largess has purchased resentment, not loyalty.

US President Donald Trump may perceive a Russian coup in Syria as a two-pronged gift: Removing a blood-drenched anti-US dictator, while kicking thousands of Iranian advisers and Hezbollah hoodlums out of Damascus. For Putin – in the unlikely event that such a transition was pulled off flawlessly – it would be an unforgettable display of Russian regional supremacy. Hamstrung by US sanctions, Tehran is in dire financial straits and experiencing acute regional paramilitary overstretch. Given that the November presidential election may bring a less anti-Iran administration, Israel and Moscow may never have a better moment to summarily cut Iran down to size. However, Assad has survived nine years against often impossible odds, so this isn't over until the Assads board a plane for ignominious exile.

Russia contextualizes its Syrian policy within the 2017 Astana process (with Turkey and Iran), which symbolized the moment when Western and Arab parties were ignobly ousted from the Syrian arena. We would all rejoice at the ejection of the ayatollahs and Assads from Damascus. However, any transition must be the starting point for an internationally brokered democratic process that restores Syria to its place in the Arab fold, with Syrians obtaining the opportunity for justice and the resources to return to their homes and rebuild their lives.

**Baria Alamuddin is an award-winning journalist and broadcaster in the Middle East and the UK. She is editor of the Media Services Syndicate and has interviewed numerous heads of state. – (Courtesy Arab News)*

Briefs

Gunmen attack hospital in Kabul

KABUL: Gunmen stormed a hospital Tuesday in an ongoing attack in the Afghan capital Kabul, a government official and a fleeing doctor said. "Our special forces are in the area," said Marwa Amini, a spokeswoman for the Interior Ministry. A pediatrician who fled the hospital told AFP he heard a loud explosion at the entrance of the building. "The hospital was full of patients and doctors; there was total panic inside," he said, asking not to be named. The hospital is in western Kabul, which is home to the capital's minority Shiite Hazara community - a frequent target of Islamic State (IS) militants. The humanitarian organisation Doctors Without Borders (MSF) supports maternity services at the hospital. The attack comes just a day after four roadside bombs detonated in a northern district Kabul, wounding four civilians including a child. - APP

China cuts Australian beef imports

SYDNEY: China suspended imports from four major Australian beef suppliers Tuesday, just weeks after Beijing's ambassador warned of a consumer boycott in retaliation for Canberra's push to probe the origins of the coronavirus. Analysts said the move raised concerns of a possible standoff between Australia and its most important trading partner that could spill over into other crucial sectors as it struggles to navigate the disease-induced economic crisis. Federal Trade Minister Simon Birmingham said shipments of meat from four abattoirs had been suspended over "minor technical" breaches related to Chinese health and labelling certificate requirements. We are concerned that the suspensions appear to be based on highly technical issues, which in some cases date back more than a year," he added. - APP

27 more COVID-19 cases in Korea

SEOUL: South Korea reported 27 more cases of the COVID-19 compared to 24 hours ago as of 0:00 a.m. Tuesday local time, raising the total number of infections to 10,936. After hitting the bottom at two on May 6, the daily caseload continued to rise to 12 on Friday, 18 on Saturday, 34 on Sunday and 35 on Monday respectively. It came as a cluster infection was found from clubs and bars at a multicultural neighborhood of Itaewon in Seoul. Of the new cases, five were imported from overseas, lifting the combined figure to 1,138. Two more deaths were confirmed, leaving the death toll at 258. The total fatality rate stood at 2.36 percent. - APP

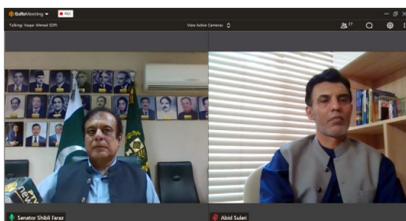


LALAMUSA: An aerial view of GT Road Lalamusa where hustle and bustle is seen after easing of lockdown. - Khurshid Nadeem

Collective efforts only way to respond to COVID-19

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ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Senator Shibli Faraz has said that the government is not only closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation but also trying to respond it through national policies and collective efforts which is the only way to combat the challenge. The National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) evaluates the spread of pandemic on daily basis and responds the situation by the measures and decisions taken after reaching at a consensus by all the federating units. He was speaking at an online policy dialogue titled: 'COVID-19, Government Responses and Role of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting' organized

by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) here on Monday. The information minister said that despite the resources constraint, the Federal Government, following the vision of the Prime Minister, has taken several initiatives to support business and industry. "This includes the deferred payment of the utility bills, especially by the low-income groups through the cash grants and subsidized food items at utility stores." Likewise, he said, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has taken up the task to ensure the provision of personal protection equipment (PPE), for doctors especially for those who are the front-line fighters against the pandemic besides other medical supplies across Pakistan. "Neither the Federal government nor the provinces



could tackle this unprecedented challenge alone," the minister said, adding that unnecessary controversy should be avoided after every one reach at a consensus on the strategy to overcome the pandemic. He said that the Federal Government has to tread on a tight rope while taking measures to stop the spread of the disease and save the economy from a total collapse. The minister said that Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is fully aware

of the importance of its role in mass sensitization and awareness-raising on social distancing and other preventive measures. Therefore, the Ministry and all of its associated organs are playing vital role by sharing timely information and public service messages. However, he added, collaboration with think tanks such as SDPI could strengthen the much-needed research and effective outreach to diverse target audience. Appreciating the role of SDPI, the minister said that think tanks

like SDPI can help curb disinformation through their evidence-based knowledge generation. Talking about Lockdown, Shibli Faraz said that due to Pakistan's particular socio-economic and religious context, a strict lockdown has not been deemed as the right option. The government has finalized at a 20-point SOPs package with religious scholars, and people are expected to take precautions and social distancing. This cooperation would be a key for the success of the smart lockdown, otherwise the government would have to opt for the strict lockdown, if situation gets worse, he added. In response to a question, he said that the Ministry of Information is taking several measures to build the capacity of the national institutions, including PTV and Ra-

dio Pakistan to enable them strengthen our national narrative at global level. To another question, he said that efforts are also being made to release the payment of media organizations before Eid-ul-Fitr, but the benefit should also go to journalists and their salaries should be released accordingly. Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, SDPI, earlier highlighted the importance of the flow of the right information, especially during the crisis situation such as the situation posed by COVID-19. He said that it's important for masses and other stakeholders to remain updated on the decisions such as how should a balance be created between saving the lives from the pandemic and protecting the livelihood means of people while enforcing or relaxing lockdown.

China exempts more US goods from tariffs

BEIJING: China on Tuesday released a list of 79 items from the United States that will be exempted from trade war tariffs, a day after the US ruled out renegotiating their earlier trade deal. The list of goods, posted online by the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council, includes medical disinfectant, rare-earth metal ores, and some silicon wafers used in the electronics industry. They will be exempted from retaliatory tariffs for a year from May 19, and tariffs that have been levied can be returned, the council said. It did not say how much of these products were imported by China last year. China had earlier announced one-year exemptions beginning on February 28 involving 65 products from the United States, including aircraft parts and medical equipment. - APP

Ali Zaidi meets Hafeez

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ISLAMABAD: Minister for Maritime Affairs, Syed Ali Haider Zaidi, called on the Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Dr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh here at the Ministry of Finance. The Minister for Maritime Affairs discussed with the Adviser Finance the Financial requirements of the Ministry for various ongoing projects at the Ministry of Maritime Affairs for which the financial assistance will be required in the next financial year. He also discussed the financial requirements of the Ministry to contest the Elections for International Maritime Organization (IMO) Council for the term 2022-2023, the elections shall be held in December 2021.

More than 1000 positive cases in Pindi

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RAWALPINDI: Around 4242 coronavirus suspected patients so far have been brought to the quarantine facilities of the district, out of which 1068 cases were tested positive who were provided the required treatment and 257 discharged after recovery. According to daily situation report issued by Directorate of Public Relations (DPR) Punjab, 376 COVID-19 confirmed patients were admitted in different hospitals of the city including 145 belonged to Rawal Town, 70 Potahar Town, 91 Rawalpindi Cantt, 25 Gujar Khan, 32 Taxila, 5 Kahuta, 3 Kalar Syedan and 5 from Murree," he said. "The result of 2623 sus-

pects were tested negative while reports of 656 still awaited," he added. The DPR said that 380 patients were quarantined in isolation at homes while 257 discharged after recovery. "55 coronavirus patients died in the district," he added. The residents were advised not to visit Kalyam Awan tehsil Gujarkhan, Dheri Hassanabad, Dhoke Paracha, Dhoke Ratta, Dhoke Mangtal, Ammar Pura, Zafar ul Haq Road, Satellite Town and Wah Cantt areas as number of positive cases were reported from these areas. Meanwhile Chief Executive Officer Health Dr Sohail Chaudhry informed APP that disinfection was being carried out in different areas of the district especially where suspected cases were reported.

Political speeches of time, says Fawad

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ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Chaudhry Fawad Hussain Wednesday said he has written a letter to Deputy Speaker, Qasim Suri conveying that the political speeches in the Assembly session are just a waste of time. In his tweets, the federal minister stated that "only political speeches in the assembly session is a waste of time and this could have been done by holding a press conference". He said if the members have gathered, they should first be briefed by scientists and virologists on what exactly Coronavirus is, why is it spreading, at what stage is the research, how long can the world discover a cure and what research conducted.

Sherry asks why the PM is missing

A.M.BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Addressing the Senate, PPP Parliamentary Leader in the Senate, Senator Sherry Rehman said, "This is the first time in Pakistan's history that we are fighting a pandemic of this nature but PM's words of unity and healing are missing along with his presence in the Parliament. What is keeping him so busy that he cannot attend the sessions? Is the Parliament irrelevant, because this is the message he is giving? Who is running the country if he is missing? Why has the CCI not met yet? Like the missing person, there is a missing policy. He needs to be here sharing his plan of action because what is more important than forging unity for your people".



She said, "Provinces have been told to fend for themselves. Even though they are self-sufficient, they are not the state. The need of the hour is to come together and form a uniform strategy to tackle this situation as it is not possible for a province alone to tackle an issue of this magnitude alone. Provinces should not be feeling isolated and left on their own. 18th Amendment is being used to hide Federal government's in-

competency and provinces are being told to do their own thing. Rehman said, "This situation is worse than war. Our healthcare system is collapsing. We have 6 beds per 10,000 people. Healthcare professionals are constantly saying that our resources will exhaust. Since there is no policy, there is a chance of losing 10 lac people to this virus. Is that acceptable to us? There must be a single message and policy".

Pakistan companies to participate in China Expo

By end of April, more than 1,000 companies from all over the world had signed up for the show, including 200 Fortune 500 companies. The planned exhibition area measures 360,000 square meters, with 60 percent of it booked so far, according to official sources

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BEIJING: A number of Pakistani companies will participate in the third edition of China International Import Expo (CIIE) to be held in Shanghai as per scheduled from November

5 to 10, this year. By end of April, more than 1,000 companies from all over the world had signed up for the show, including 200 Fortune 500 companies. The planned exhibition area measures 360,000 square meters, with 60 percent of

it booked so far, according to official sources. A public health and epidemic prevention exhibition area will be set for this year's Expo. Pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, elderly care, rehabilitation and nutrition companies will be featured the thematic exhibition

area. Nearly 60 Fortune 500 pharmaceutical and medical companies have registered for this year's CIIE, with the purpose of showcasing their latest ventilators, infrared thermometers and facial masks. Over 35 Pakistani entrepreneurs participated in the

second expo held last year in Shanghai and showcased their products including the top textile, leather, sports goods, surgical equipment, home furnishing and other products. Pakistan had also participated in the first expo during which many Pakistani

businessmen and companies displayed their products. Pakistan had been invited to the expo as a 'Guest of Honour'. This year too, the Chinese authorities expect Pakistan's participation in the forthcoming expo in a big way. According to analysts,

the forthcoming expo will provide a great opportunity for the Pakistani businessmen to explore the Chinese market and enhance their export to China as both the friendly countries have signed the second phase of Free Trade Agreement.