



INTERNATIONAL

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US House approves historic \$2.2tr coronavirus bill, sends to Trump

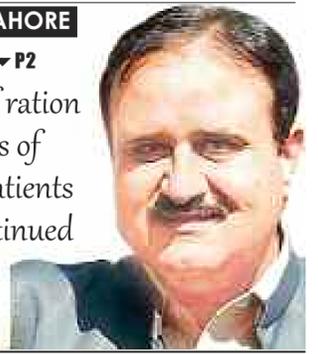
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LAHORE

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Supply of ration to families of corona patients to be continued



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Pakistan seeking assistance under RFI, says IMF chief

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has requested the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial assistance under the Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI), which will allow the government to address additional and urgent balance of payments needs and support social protection, daily-wage earners, and the healthcare system.

This was stated by Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the IMF, in a statement issued on Pakistan.

The International Monetary Fund official stated, "The authorities have continued their reform efforts to address Pakistan's economic challenges, but progress is being threatened by the devastating effects of the COVID-19 outbreak and the deterioration in global economic and financial conditions."

"Prime Minister Khan and his government have swiftly approved an economic stimulus package aimed at containing the spread of the virus and providing support to affected families and businesses. Similarly, the State Bank of Pakistan has adopted a timely set of measures, including a lowering of the policy rate, new refinancing facilities to support the flow of credit, and temporary regulatory relief measures."

"To support these efforts and ensure prompt and adequate relief to the people and the economy, the Government of Pakistan has requested financial assistance under the Fund's Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI). This emergency financing will allow the government to address additional and urgent balance of payments needs and support policies that would make it possible to direct funds swiftly to Pakistan's most affected sec-

tors, including social protection, daily wage earners, and the healthcare system. Our team is working expeditiously to respond to this request so that a proposal can be considered by the IMF's Executive Board as soon as possible.

"In parallel, the authorities have reaffirmed their commitment to the reform policies included in the current arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF). These reforms are crucial to boost Pakistan's growth potential to deliver broad based benefits for all Pakistanis, especially the most vulnerable segments of the population. "The Fund stands ready to continue to support the authorities' efforts to implement much-needed economic and structural reforms aimed at fostering strong and sustainable growth," Kristalina Georgieva added.

The IMF has announced \$50 billion through its rapid-disbursing emergency financing facilities for low-income and emerging market countries that could potentially seek support. Of this, \$10 billion is available at zero interest for the poorest members through the RCF.

Financial assistance provided under the RFI is subject to the same financing terms as the Stand-By Arrangement (interest rates are currently about 11/2 percent), and should be repaid within 31/4 to five years. Members have used this facility five times – for instance, in 2016, the IMF provided an RFI emergency loan to Ecuador after one of the strongest earthquakes in decades, according to information available on the IMF website.

FPCCI demands six months relaxation of CNIC condition

Saqib Fayyaz Magoon, Convener of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Com-

merce and Industry (FPCCI) standing committee on Sales Tax and Chairman Indenters Association of Pakistan (IAOP), has requested the Federal government to defer Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) condition for 6 months on sale of goods to unregistered persons in view of the current economic situation created after COVID-19 pandemic.

In a statement, Magoon said due to situation caused by the Coronavirus, all payments to exporters have been stopped and export orders canceled while and the economic activities in general slowdown. There had been a crisis of cash flow in the market, which called for deferment of condition of the CNIC. This would help improve the cash flow situation and escape another major financial crisis.

Saqib Fayyaz Magoon also requested for acceptance of sales tax returns without enforcing the condition of CNIC as in the current economic crisis, the business would depend largely on the local consumer industry, which was already facing problems due to CNIC condition.

He referring a statement adviser on commerce, Abdul Razzaq Dawood, in which he assured that cash flow would not be affected by the Coronavirus. Hence if he wants the cash flow not affected then CNIC Condition must defer for minimum 6 Months so that business activities can be restored as usual.

Magoon pointed to the difficulties facing the businessmen over the ban on courier companies due to the lockdown, said the original document of import shipment could not be reached in the banks. So as long as the lockdown is in place, the State Bank should issue clear instructions to the banks. —Agencies



WUHAN(China): Passengers arrive in Hankou Railway Station after the opening of the City.

Gold eases, eyes biggest weekly gain since 2008

LONDON: Gold fell late Friday on caution ahead of the weekend, but prices were set to post their biggest weekly gain since 2008 as economic damage expected from the coronavirus boosted bullion's safe-haven appeal.

Platinum and palladium were on track for their biggest weekly gains on record on supply concerns arising from a lockdown in major producer South Africa. Spot gold fell 0.2 percent to \$1,625.16 per ounce as of 1:36 p.m. EDT (1736 GMT). US gold futures settled 1.5 percent lower at \$1,625.80 per ounce. "A sell-off in US equities has weighed in on all asset classes again leading to a series of margin call pressure on precious metals," said Phil Streible, chief market strategist at Blue Line Futures in Chicago.

Wall Street shares fell as fears about the economic damage from the pandemic returned. "Gold has tied itself with the equity markets," said Bob Haberkorn, senior market strategist at RJO Futures. "There are so many unknowns heading into the weekend, and though gold is a safety asset, there is just a reluctance to add risk-on."

Gold has gained more than 8 percent so far this week, supported by the biggest-ever jump in US weekly jobless claims, and the US Federal Reserve's unprecedented economic stimulus measures. Meanwhile, the US House of Representatives passed a \$2.2 trillion coronavirus aid bill.

"The market is looking to assess the impact of numerous lockdowns and business closures on the economy," Standard Chartered Bank analyst Suki Cooper said in a note. "Gold prices have gained further ground in anticipation of further stimulus and weaker data to come." "Price risks remain to the upside barring profit-taking and (we) expect prices to average \$1,725 per ounce in Q2-2020," she said.

Gold market participants also kept a close eye on physical supply as virus-led lockdowns stalled supply chains.

CME Group announced the initial listing of enhanced delivery gold futures that will be deliverable in 100-ounce bars, 400-ounce bars, or kilo bars, effective April 6. Physical gold dealers struggled to meet surging safe-haven demand this week, especially in Singapore, as the pandemic choked global supply chains, while massive discounts were offered in India amid a lockdown. Elsewhere, palladium fell 3.2 percent to \$2,255.81 per ounce, but has risen over 36 percent so far this week. —DNA

'Corona Relief Tiger Force' finalised

PM asks youth to help in emergency

ISLAMABAD: The mechanism of formation of the 'Corona Relief Tiger Force' announced by the Prime Minister has been finalised with special adviser to the Prime Minister on Youth Affairs Usman Dar being entrusted with critical responsibilities.

A meeting held on the issue of formation of Prime Minister 'Corona Relief Tiger Force', chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan, was attended by special adviser Usman Dar, Principal Secretary Azam Khan and Mirza Shahzad Akbar, Chairman Information Technology Board and members of the PM Citizen Portal team. During the meeting, the procedure for setting up the force was decided upon and the PM directed to take timely steps in view of the emergency situation.

The Prime Minister himself will record a special message for the youth of the Tiger Force. Healthy youths over the age of 18 will be able to register themselves for the force through the Citizen Portal from March 31 till April 10.

Registered volunteers from all over the country will work with the District Administration and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and will be facilitated by Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, Tehsil Municipal Officers and Members of Parliament. District and Tehsil administrations will also assign daily tasks to the volunteers. Corona Relief Tigers will assist the administration and police in ensuring implementation of the lockdowns. The administration and the police will take action on identification by the volunteers who will provide groceries to people in coordination with the NDMA.

The volunteers will also be involved in the management of quarantine centers located in various cities and villages and take care of people quarantined inside their homes. They will also be tasked with guiding people at hospitals and public places.

The Corona Relief Tigers will collect data of the unemployed as well as information about suspected coronavirus patients. Volunteers will also identify and point out hoarders and price-gouging businesses so that the administration can take necessary action against them. Volunteers will participate in announcements and arrangements for funerals.

Earlier, Prime Minister Imran Khan asked the youth to remain prepared to help in emergency concerning the coronavirus pandemic.

Imran Khan said the youths in China supplied food to people during the lockdown and hoped that the youths in Pakistan will also consider this as a national obligation and perform to the best of their abilities.

It is pertinent here to mention that PM Imran Khan had on Friday announced to resume the locomotion of goods transport across the country and directed all provincial governments to ensure the provision of all essential items to people.

The premier had also announced that all industries associated with food products will also be allowed to continue their production.

Qureshi, British counterpart discuss coronavirus situation

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi held a telephonic conversation with British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Dominic Raab today to discuss matters related to the global outbreak of Coronavirus and prospects of enhanced bilateral cooperation to jointly tackle the pandemic.

He conveyed deep condolences over the tragic loss of innocent lives in the UK due to Covid-19. He informed Foreign Secretary Raab about the latest situation of outbreak in Pakistan and the steps taken by the government for its containment.

Shah Mahmood Qureshi underscored that the pandemic is one of the greatest challenges to confront humanity in the century. He expressed concerns over the continuing communication blackout in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, which is depriving eight million Kashmiris of critical information and essential medical supplies needed to effectively contain the

Full facilities being provided to patients: Dr Zafar

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant on National Health Services Dr. Zafar Mirza visited isolation center for coronavirus patients at PIMS Islamabad today and expressed satisfaction over the arrangements there.

Talking to media after his visit, the Special Assistant said appropriate facilities are being provided to the patients, who also were satisfied with the facilities.

He said the number of isolation rooms has been increased from ten to thirty at PIMS and with every passing day facilities are being enhanced. Expressing solidarity with doctors, nurses and paramedics, Dr. Zafar Mirza said the fight against the pandemic can only be won with efficient working of medical staff and govt's cooperation. He assured the medical staff that every possible measure will be taken for their personal safety. —DNA

Chinese city of Wuhan reopens

ISLAMABAD: Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus epidemic started first, was partially reopened on Saturday, after more than two months of almost total isolation.

Wuhan was placed under lockdown in January with residents forbidden to leave with roadblocks on the city's outskirts and drastic restrictions on daily life.

The state media showed the first officially sanctioned passenger train arriving back into the city just after last midnight. People are now allowed to enter the city but not to leave. There are crowds of passengers arriving at Wuhan station on Saturday, most wheeling suitcases alongside them. Some had managed to slip back into the city a day earlier on rail services that were stopping in Wuhan — but nominally banned passengers from disembarking — as enforcement of the travel ban began to ease. Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, saw more than 50,000 coronavirus cases. At least 3,000 people in Hubei died of the disease. —TLTP

Another Chinese plane carrying relief, doctors arrives

ISLAMABAD: A team of eight Chinese doctors has arrived in Pakistan to review government's steps taken to check spread of coronavirus and provide technical support. The Chinese doctors will remain in Pakistan for two weeks and advise healthcare specialists of Pakistan in the light of their experience and success in battling Covid-19 in China.

Executive Director of National Institute of Health (NIH) Major General Amir Ikram, who received the guests, will also brief them today (Sunday) about coronavirus situation in the country. Dr Zafar Mirza, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister has said that China is helping Pakistan in these testing times and the government will fully benefit from the experiences of the Chinese doctors.

Earlier, a special Chinese flight carrying relief assistance landed at Islamabad International Airport to support Pakistan in its efforts to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. The plane carried over 10,000 test kits, 10,000 N95 masks, 100,000 disposable medical masks, 5,000 medical protective clothes, five ventilators, 11 defibrillator monitors and 62,000 sets of drugs for treating COVID-19.

Talking to media persons at the airport Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood

Qureshi thanked the Chinese leadership for sending the medical team to share their experiences with Pakistani counterparts to fight the pandemic.

"Chinese have once again shown to the world that they are friends of Pakistan. They care for us. We stand with each other in difficult times. This is a unique relationship and such testing times tell us how close we are to each other," he remarked. Another report adds: Special Chinese plane carrying relief assistance and a team of doctors to fight Coronavirus arrived in Islamabad on Saturday. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, NDMA Chairman Lt. General Muhammad Afzal, Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood, and Chinese Ambassador Yao Jing received the assistance.

The Chinese doctors will remain in Pakistan for two weeks and advise health care specialists of Pakistan in the light of their experience and success in battling Covid-19 in China. Chinese assistance to Pakistan so far includes 12,000 test kits, three million masks, 10,000 protective suits and \$ four million to build an isolation hospital. Xinjiang govt has also provided 50,000 masks each to the Federal Capital as well as to Sindh govt. Talking to media after receiving the medical equipment at the airport. —Online

Coronavirus cases in Pakistan rise to 1,415

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has reported 11 deaths from novel coronavirus while the total number of cases have surged to 1415 as 457 patients have been tested positive for the epidemic in Sindh, 133 in Balochistan, 490 in Punjab, 180 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 107 in Gilgit-Baltistan, 39 in Islamabad and two in Azad Kashmir.

According to details, total number of patients who have recovered is 25. National Coordination Committee (NCC) under the supervision of Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan has decided to limit the congregational prayers in mosques.

Following the orders, all the provinces have banned congregational prayers in mosques. The Friday prayers have also been limited as only healthy people will be allowed to offer prayers in the mosques. In wake of the spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic across the globe, the Saudi Arabian government halted signing of Hajj agreement with Pakistan. The Saudi government has stopped Pakistan not to make Hajj 2020 agreement. The letter further stated that the agreement will not be made until the situation in country gets better.

Murad hints at complete lockdown, restrictions in Punjab tightened further

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah

has on Saturday hinted at complete lockdown in the province whereas restrictions in Punjab have been tightened further, media reported.

Murad Ali Shah has stressed that the coronavirus pandemic cannot be controlled without implementing strict strictures. While expressing concerns over increasing number of local cases, he ordered the authorities to not let people come out on streets unnecessarily. Furthermore, the Sindh government has decided to close all shops at 05:00 PM instead of 08:00 PM.

On the other hand, Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar has ordered that general and grocery stores will remain open from 08:00 AM to 08:00 PM. The rule applies on all shops of essential items. The CM said, "The rule will be implemented from Saturday (today) and no one will be allowed to violate it. The locomotion of goods transport has been allowed on the directions of Prime Minister Imran Khan. Movement of passenger transport will remain halted."

Usman Buzdar directed the officials to tighten scrutiny in hotspot places across the province including Lahore, limit the movement after identifying the most sensitive areas regarding coronavirus and implement the standard operating procedures (SOPs).

He instructed the authorities to ensure the availability of flour and other essential items and to finalize the arrangements to provide ration to the poor. "The Punjab government is preparing an economic package for the most deserving people," he said while adding, "the standing committee headed by finance minister will give a briefing in this regard today."

"The availability of testing kits in the province and personal protection equipment for doctors, nurses and paramedical staff will be ensured."

The Punjab Home Department said in a notification that petrol pumps, LPG shops, medical stores, wheat grinding (aata Chakki) shops and tandoors are allowed to remain open after 08:00 PM. Meat shops, bakeries, auto workshops, departmental and grocery stores, and milk shops will remain open from 08:00 AM to 08:00 PM, the notification read.

Mardan's Manga tops list with 79 coronavirus patients

The Manga Union Council of Mardan has become the top locality in terms of concentration of the coronavirus patients, as the figures released by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health DG show that 79 people had so far been infected by the virus. Saturday is the tenth consecutive day of

a complete lockdown in the area which got the attention after the country's first coronavirus death was recorded in this village.

More than 200 policemen are deployed to enforce the lockdown, who have been provided with a special uniform. On the other hand, the Mardan police are using their mobile vehicles regularly to advise the citizens to stay indoors, as 364 people have so far been arrested for violating Section 144. Moreover, a control room has also been established at the DPO office.

Lower Dir village sealed after deceased woman tests positive

A village in Lower Dir has been completely sealed over fears of the spread of the novel coronavirus. Village Ziarat Talash was sealed Saturday after a resident who recently died tested positive for the virus. On March 25 a 60-year-old woman from the village passed away at the Hayatabad Medical Complex in Peshawar. She had recently returned to the country after performing umrah in Saudi Arabia. —Online

22-year-old dies in Faisalabad

Punjab recorded its fifth death due to the coronavirus after a 22-year-old patient died at the

CORONAVIRUS IN PAKISTAN	
Confirmed cases:	1415
ICT:	39
Punjab:	490
Sindh:	457
KP:	180
Balochistan:	133
AJK:	02
GB:	107
Recovered:	29
Deaths:	12