

ISLAMABAD: An empty view of Daman-e-Koh, due to lockdown aimed coronavirus outbreak. —Online

## Police standing in front line for protection to citizens

From Our Staff Correspondent

**ISLAMABAD:** The personnel of Islamabad police are serving the citizens with dedication in a bid to safeguard them from Coronavirus and standing on front line to ensure protection to their lives and property.

It was stated by Deputy Inspector General of Police (Operations) Waqar Uddin Syed while reviewing the performance of police teams constituted to create awareness among the citizens against COVID-19. Following the directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Muhammad Aamir Zulfiqar, he said that campaign had been launched in the city by the police for awareness among public as how to protect them against Coronavirus.

As per directions of IGP Islamabad, he said that officials of the police along with their teams are educating about precautionary measures against the pandemic like effective use of gloves and sanitizers. The DIG (Operations) said that citizens were also appreciating the role of policemen in this critical time while all SPs, SDPOs were ensuring full assistance to teams of district administration in their respective areas.

The DIG (Operations) was told that SP (Rural) Malik Naeem Iqbal, SP (City) Sarfaraz Ahmed Virk briefed the people at police pickets, shops of edible items and medical stores about precautionary measures. They also checked the situation in their areas after directions of lockdown and managed spray in offices and police stations in their areas. Likewise, ASP Kohsar Ms. Aqela Naqvi, ASPs Rana Abdul Wahab, Hamza Aman Ullah, Rana Hussain also

gave safety tips to the citizens against COVID-19 and distributed gloves and sanitizers among them.

Waqar Uddin Syed that each personnel of the force was committed to serve the humanity in this critical moment and their morale was very much high in accomplishing tasks assigned to them.

### PSQCA tests quality of sanitizers in local markets after complaints

Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) has collected random samples of sanitizers from the local markets of the federal capital to check their quality after receiving complaints from citizens about low quality.

Taking to Twitter, Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Chaudhry Fawad Hussain said he had directed PSQCA to check the quality of sanitizers being available in different local markets. "We have received several complaints by citizens of low quality sanitizers being sold in the market and directed PSQCA to take necessary action against those responsible", he said. PSQCA carried out open market sampling of the sanitizers of ten brands which would be tested in the laboratory. Action will be taken as per results of the tests by the authority.

### Fire erupts in multi-storey building

Fire erupted here on Saturday in a multi-storey building at Neelam market, Kashmir Road, Saddar. According to Rescue 1122, the fire incident occurred due to unknown reasons, however no casualties or injuries were reported. On information, the fire brigade teams of Rescue 1122 rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze.

## NDMA to recruit 100 lab technicians: Gen

From Our Staff Correspondent

**ISLAMABAD:** Chairman National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Lieutenant General Muhammad Afzal Saturday said the authority was going to recruit 100 lab technicians having expertise in molecular biology in BPS-14 to overcome shortage of skilled workforce in testing laboratories.

Addressing a media briefing with Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Health Dr Zafar Mirza and SAPM on National Security Division Moeed Yusuf, he said the National Institute of Health (NIH) had informed NDMA that there was shortage of trained workforce in testing laboratories. He added that on order to overcome this shortcoming, NDMA using its powers under an article of NDMA Act would float an advertisement in that regard.

"We will offer 4-6 months contract to these lab technicians and if this experiment goes successful then it will help overcome laboratories gaps for testing patients," he added.

He was briefing the media over initiatives made by NDMA for procuring medical equipments, testing system logistics and donations received to contain coronavirus outbreak. The chairman NDMA said NIH and NDMA were col-

lectively working out to boost number of labs existing in Pakistan. "In Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), we will final our plan to set up the facility as there were machines and relevant equipment available to fulfill the task."

Lieutenant General Afzal added that NDMA was going to provide testing kits and machines to three healthcare institutions in Karachi including SIUT, JPNC and Indus Hospital to set up testing labs. As Indus Hospital would primarily operate its testing facility in JPNC so two laboratories would be established at JPNC, he added.

While elaborating on the status of existing labs, he said there was one lab working in Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), one out of order machine was fixed and sent back to Mirpur whereas two more testing machines were handed over to AJK. He added that one testing lab would be established in Rawalakot and one more testing machine would be provided to Muzaffarabad for its reinforcement.

The chairman NDMA informed that one more testing lab was to be set up in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) as location for the lab would be selected between Abbottabad and Mansehra.

It would be established in collaboration with the KP government, he added.

In Dera Ismail Khan (D.I. Khan), evaluation for setting up lab was underway so that a coordinated network of testing labs in Peshawar, Abbottabad, Mansehra, D.I. Khan, Karak or Banu could be established in KP, he mentioned. In Punjab, he said testing lab at Rawalpindi Medical University (RMU) was in process and would be made functional in the coming two to three days.

Meanwhile, he said NDMA was carrying out a feasibility study to establish testing labs in Gujranwala and Gujrat and areas having no lab facility within next 15-20 days.

The number of testing labs would be beefed up from existing 14 to 24 after installing new equipment received from China. "We will persistently increase the number of labs from 35 to 40 and ultimately 50 in the next 15-20 days," he added.

### Woman, son injured in roof collapse

A woman and her son were injured when a house roof collapsed in Basti Islamabad on Toba Road near here Saturday. Rescue-1122 sources said that dilapidated roof of a Veranda (Baramda) of a house collapsed due to rains.

Forty-five-year old Aziz Mai and her 20-year-old son Shahid Imran were in-

## COVID-19 test capacity increase to 500 patients per day in KP: Ajmal

From Our Staff Correspondent

**PESHAWAR:** Khyber Pakhtunkhwa spokesperson Ajmal Wazir on Friday said that total capacity of COVID-19 test has been increased to 500 patients per day across the province.

Addressing a press briefing to give update on measures to stop spread of coronavirus, he said that all essential medical equipments and kits have been provided to hospitals.

The spokesperson said that provincial government had announced package of Rs. 32 billion to deal with the pandemic under which relief aid would be provided to 1.9 million families across the province.

Under the package, Rs 8 billion have been release to make sure availability of equipments for doctors and paramedic staff in hospitals, he said.

Ajmal Wazir said that government would also give tax

relief of Rs 5 billion on various heads.

He said that COVID-19 tests were being conducted in Bannu and D.I Khan with the help of Pakistan Army, acknowledging the efforts of doctors, paramedical staff and security officials who were performing duties round the clock.

The spokesman said that the provincial government had decided to start strict against profiteers and hoarders during lockdown, adding plenty of food supply was available in the province.

He informed that a woman who recently returned after performing Umrah had died and tested confirmed COVID patient. As precautionary measure, the entire locality has been quarantined.

He called on people to adopt precautionary measures to help in containment of the disease, adding positive result were being witnessed from lock down.

## Quick Read

### Britain, US working with Saudi to repatriate citizens

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabian Airlines will begin exceptional commercial flights this week to bring British nationals and their families back to the United Kingdom, and similar flights are being arranged for US citizens to return home, both countries said.

Flights to London Heathrow will begin from Riyadh and later in the week from Jeddah and Dammam, according to a British Embassy e-mail sent late on Friday. A second Riyadh flight is also expected.

The US Embassy said in a consular e-mail on Saturday it was working with the Saudi authorities to arrange repatriation flights on a commercial airline, but no flights had been confirmed yet.

Saudi Arabia suspended all international passenger flights in and out of the country for two weeks starting March 14 to try to contain the spread of the coronavirus around the globe, but there is no indication normal travel will resume on Sunday.

The kingdom has recorded more than 1,100 coronavirus infections - the most in the Gulf Arab region - and three fatalities.

Britain has recorded more than 14,500 cases, including Prime Minister Boris Johnson and heir to the throne Prince Charles, with 759 deaths. More than 1,500 Americans have been killed among over 100,000 reported infections, the most of any country. The British Embassy in the United Arab Emirates said on Twitter that 32 Britons had departed on Saturday morning on a flydubai flight with a connection to London, and that it was working with UAE authorities and airlines to arrange more flights amid similar travel restrictions there. —Reuters

### 4 passengers die on cruise ship grappling with coronavirus off Panama

**PANAMA CITY:** Four passengers have died on a cruise ship off the Pacific coast of Panama with more than 130 others aboard suffering from influenza-like symptoms, at least two of whom have coronavirus, the vessel's operator said.

Holland America Line said in a statement the MS Zaandam, previously on a South American cruise, was trying to transit the Panama Canal and make its way to Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

But Panama's government has denied it access to the canal for sanitary reasons, leaving passengers and crew wondering when they will get home. Ian Rae, a London-based Scotsman on the ship with his wife, said most passengers were coping "pretty well" despite being in self-isolation since last Sunday. "It's probably not an awful lot worse than the people back in the UK or anywhere else in the world at the moment," Rae, a 73-year-old grandfather of four, told Reuters by telephone. A ship official told passengers on Friday morning via a public address system that one guest died several days ago, followed by two deaths on Thursday and another overnight, according to a recording heard by Reuters. The four dead were "older guests," the operator said.

Rae said the announcement was the first time he had been made aware of the deaths on the 238m vessel.

The Zaandam departed Argentina on Mar 7 and had been scheduled to end its journey in San Antonio, Chile on Mar 21. Nobody has disembarked from the ship since it docked in Punta Arenas on the southern coast of Chile nearly two weeks ago. On board are 1,243 guests and 586 crew, as well as four doctors and four nurses, the cruise operator said.

The ship official said a number of patients were tested on Thursday after the ship received virus testing kits. "We are still seeing both guests and crew with symptoms report to the medical center, and the situation continues to grow more challenging each day," the official said.

"It's terrifying that no plan has been made for them and there are British nationals on this ship who need help," Hayley Johnson, granddaughter of a 90-year-old man and 75-year-old woman on board, wrote on Twitter. Johnson said she was especially worried about her grandmother, a Type 1 diabetic.

Rae, who said he and others had informed the UK government of their predicament via email, said he understood 229 British passengers were on board. Other guests included Americans, Canadians and Australians as well as Germans, Italians, French, Spanish and New Zealanders, he said. All ports along the Zaandam's South American route were

## More than 600,000 coronavirus cases recorded globally

**PARIS:** More than 600,000 cases of the COVID-19 have been officially recorded around the world since the outbreak of the epidemic, according to an AFP tally.

There were 605,010 cases of infection with 27,982 deaths in 183 countries and territories.

The United States had 104,837 cases of which 1,711 were fatal. Italy had the highest number of deaths at 9,134 and a total of 86,498 cases. In Spain, the death toll surged to 5,690 on Saturday after a record 832 people died in 24 hours, and the number of infections soared to 72,248, the government said. China, the epicentre of the outbreak, had 81,394 cases and 3,295 deaths. Brunei reported its first coronavirus death on Saturday - a 64-year-old man who was the country's 25th confirmed COVID-19 case.

The man had travelled to Cambodia and Kuala Lumpur but did not take part in a huge Islamic gathering in the Malaysian capital last month that has been linked to infections across the region, authorities said. It came as Malaysia, which has recorded 2,320 cases, received tens of thousands of virus test kits, masks and items of protective clothing from China, and 200 ventilators.

The COVID-19 figures represent only a fraction of the number of infections as many countries only carry out tests on suspected cases if they are hospitalised.

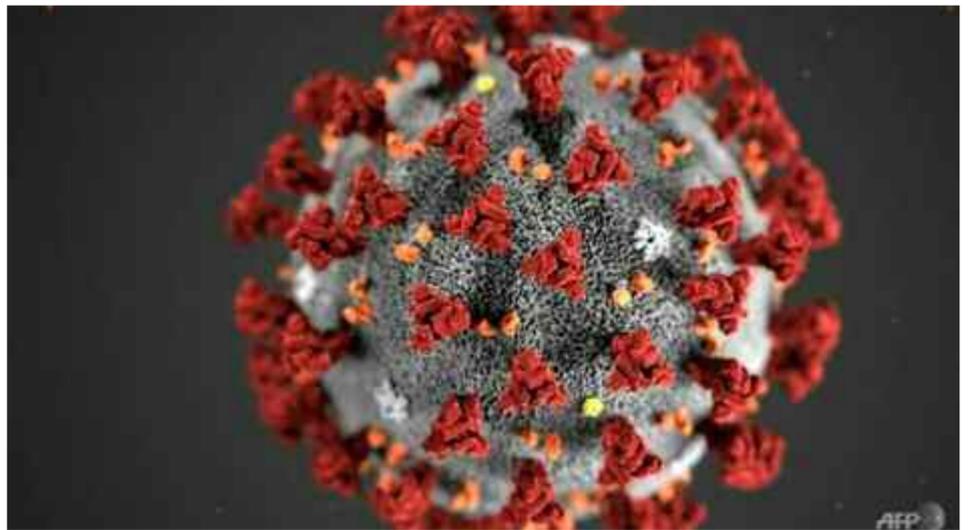
Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the coronavirus first emerged last year, partly reopened on Saturday after more than two months of near total isolation for its population of 11 million.

People are now allowed to enter the city but not leave. AFP saw crowds of passengers arriving at Wuhan railway station on Saturday, most wheeling suitcases alongside them. The metropolis in Hubei province was placed under lockdown in January with its outskirts ring-fenced by roadblocks and drastic restrictions on daily life. A top Asian security conference that gathers defence ministers - including from the US and China - and senior military officials was cancelled due to the pandemic. The Shangri-La Dialogue, held annually since 2002, had been scheduled for early June in Singapore with more than 40 countries set to participate.

**Iran coronavirus death toll tops 2,500**  
Iran announced that 139 more people had died from the novel coronavirus, raising the official death toll to 2,517 in one of the world's worst-affected countries.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told a news conference that 3,076 more cases had been confirmed in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of infections to 35,408.

"The condition of 3,026 of those hospitalised is critical in one way or another," he said, adding that 11,679 patients have recovered and been discharged from hospital. Jahanpour said that 57 million Iranians had been screened for the virus.



He said the data received had been "significant" and had helped with early detection and intervention.

Iran has imposed strict new containment measures, after weeks of public appeals largely failed to deter hundreds of thousands taking to the roads to visit family for the Persian New Year holidays. They include a ban on intercity travel by road and fining and impounding violators' cars. The restrictions, which will remain in force at least until Apr 8, include a ban on all intercity travel by road.

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

The US House of Representatives approved a \$2.2 trillion aid package - the largest in American history - to help people and businesses cope with the economic downturn inflicted by the coronavirus pandemic.

The massive bill also rushes billions of dollars to medical providers on the front lines of the outbreak. Republican President Donald Trump is expected to sign it promptly into law. "Our nation faces an economic and health emergency of historic proportions due to the coronavirus pandemic, the worst pandemic in over 100 years," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said at the close of a three-hour debate on the House floor. "Whatever we do next, right now we're going to pass this legislation."

House Speaker Pelosi speaks to news reporters ahead of a vote on relief for the coronavirus (COVID-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) speaks to news reporters while walking to the House Chamber floor, ahead of a vote on relief for the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease on Capitol Hill in Washington, US, Mar 27, 2020.

Democrats and Republicans in the Democratic-led House approved the package on

a voice vote, turning back a procedural challenge from Republican Representative Thomas Massie, who had sought to force a formal, recorded vote.

Massie, an independent-minded Republican who has repeatedly defied party leaders, wrote on Twitter that he thought the bill contained too much extraneous spending and gave too much power to the Federal Reserve. His fellow lawmakers overruled his request.

On Twitter, Trump called Massie a "third rate Grandstander" and said he should be thrown out of the Republican Party. "He just wants the publicity," wrote Trump, who last week began pushing for urgent action on coronavirus after long downplaying the risk. Democratic and Republican leaders asked members to return to Washington to ensure there would be enough present to head off Massie's gambit. Lawmakers from as far away as California were present for the debate. The session was held under special rules to limit the spread of the disease among members, who used hand sanitizer and in at least one case wore protective gloves.

A staff member carries boxes of hand sanitizer towards the House Chamber floor. A staff member carries boxes of hand sanitizer towards the House Chamber floor.

### 'Clear we have entered recession': IMF chief

The coronavirus pandemic has driven the global economy into a downturn that will require massive funding to help developing nations, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said. "It is clear that we have entered a recession" that will be worse than in 2009 following the global financial crisis, she said in an online press briefing.

With the worldwide economic "sudden stop," Georgieva said the fund's estimate

"for the overall financial needs of emerging markets is US\$2.5 trillion."

But she warned that estimate "is on the lower end." Governments in emerging markets, which have suffered an exodus of capital of more than US\$83 billion in recent weeks, can cover much of that, but "clearly the domestic resources are insufficient" and many already have high debt loads. Over 80 countries, mostly of low incomes, have already have requested emergency aid from the International Monetary Fund, she said.

"We do know that their own reserves and domestic resources will not be sufficient," Georgieva said, adding that the fund is aiming to beef up its response "to do more, do it better, do it faster than ever before." She also welcomed the US\$2.2 trillion economic package approved by the US Senate, saying "it is absolutely necessary to cushion the world's largest economy against an abrupt drop the economic activities." The US package also is important because it accelerated Washington's approximately US\$16 billion contribution to the IMF's lending capacity. "The US decision to speed up approval of its substantial new contributions to the IMF is a powerful message to the international community and helps solidify the IMF's (overall) US\$1 trillion lending capacity," Georgieva said in a statement after the House of Representatives approved the massive rescue package. It provides direct cash payments to Americans, a huge expansion of unemployment benefits, and grants and loans to businesses to help them weather the economic shutdown. The IMF chief spoke to reporters following a virtual meeting with the Washington-based lender's steering committee, when she also requested an increase in the fund's fast-deploying emergency facilities from their current level of around \$50 billion. —AFP