

## China and US must 'unite to fight virus': Xi

BEIJING: China and the United States should "unite to fight" the deadly coronavirus pandemic that has ravaged the globe, said President Xi Jinping in a call with his US counterpart on Friday, according to state media. The two countries have clashed in recent weeks over the virus, but Xi told President Donald Trump that China "wishes to continue sharing all information and experience with the US," said state broadcaster CCTV. The two leaders appeared to strike a conciliatory tone after Trump. —AFP

## Xinjiang sends medical supplies to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: China's Northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on Friday dispatched a truck-load of medical supplies to Pakistan via Khunjerab Pass to help the local health authorities fight the novel corona virus pandemic.

According to the regional government, a truck full of five ventilators, 2,000 safety apparel, 20,000 medical masks and 24,000 nucleic acid testing kits sailed from Khunjerab Pass to the Gilgit-Baltistan region, Chinese media reported.

The Khunjerab Pass remains open only from April 01 to November 30 every year. The government of Xinjiang has temporarily opened this pass and provided a green channel for the rapid delivery of medical supplies in Pakistan.

It may be mentioned here that Xinjiang has already donated 300,000 medical masks to eight countries, including Pakistan, to help fight the epidemic.

The masks were delivered to Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia and Algeria.

The Xinjiang regional government has organized local enterprises to increase production while Customs and China Post were coordinated to ensure the timely delivery of the materials. —TLTP

## CNG price in Islamabad, Punjab cut by Rs9

ISLAMABAD: All Pakistan Compressed Natural Gas Association (APCNGA) on Friday announced to decrease the CNG price by Rs 9 per liter in Islamabad and Punjab.

"New retail price will be at around Rs 84.50 per liter," APCNGA Central Chairman, Ghayas Abdullah Paracha, said in a press release. He said the price reduction decision has been taken in view of the prevailing situation in the country and the decline in oil prices at international level.

Paracha said pricing of Re-gasified Liquefied Natural Gas (RLNG) was based on three months average of the Brent crude, "which is to be transferred to us in April, but we have taken this step before time to facilitate the consumers." He hoped that the prices would be reduced on April 1, if the situation allowed. —Online

## Mufti Taqi asks people to follow govt orders

KARACHI: Renowned religious scholar Mufti Taqi Usmani on Friday urged people to respect the decision of the federal government to limit the number of people in congregational prayers at mosques around the country in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

In a message posted on social networking platform Twitter early on Friday morning, the religious scholar said that people should follow the directives of the government for Friday prayers and also try to follow them in their daily prayer routines. "Where people pray, they must also pray to the Almighty to rid the world of the pandemic," Mufti Usmani urged his fellow Muslims. The cleric further added that those not attending the Friday prayers should arrange to pray at their homes.

Religious scholar Tahirul Qadri on Friday also threw his weight behind the decision of the federal government to limit congregational prayers amid the spread of the coronavirus, affirming that the situation had turned into an emergency where saving lives must be the top priority.

"Coronavirus can be transmitted from one infected person to many other persons. The situation is now akin to war and when saving lives must be the top priority. The virus spread throughout the world because of travel and gatherings," the cleric said in a statement on Friday morning.

"Religious traditions also convey that no one must enter an area where an epidemic is raging and nor leave it," Qadri added. "Both directives actually mean save lives," he noted. Anyone who dies from a plague will be considered a martyr, according to tradition, he said.

"The purpose of staying at home is to avoid religious and social gatherings,"

# The Business

Lahore, Saturday, March 28, 2020 Shaban 03, 1441



JAMMU: Stranded passengers stand in designated areas to maintain social distancing as they wait for transportation.

## PCMA asks SBP to cut key interest rate to five percent

By Our Special Correspondent

LAHORE: Pakistan Chemical Manufacturers Association (PCMA) has demanded reduction of the key interest rate to five percent so that the industry can be able to survive and compete with the neighbouring countries.

Abrar Ahmad, Chairman PCMA, while commenting on the recent decrease in interest rate to 11 percent, said that the meagre current reduction in the interest rate would not be able to recover the ailing economy crippled with the growing uncertainty amid coronavirus pandemic. The business community was expecting significant cut in the interest rate in the current difficult time to be faced by the investors, but SBP has reduced policy rate by only 1.5 percent, which is not enough to revive the industry, he said and stressed that government should bring down policy interest rate to at least five percent that would provide significant relief to the business community in these difficult times.

He acknowledged that in the prevailing crisis, government of Pakistan was responding to the business community's suggestions very positively and the Advisor to Prime Minister on Commerce, Industry and Textile Razak Dawood was representing the case of industry in a very effective manner, who has assured to take up business community's demand with the government to consider fur-

ther reduction in the interest rate.

Chairman PCMA welcomed the stimulus package announced by the Prime Minister Imran Khan and also hailed the decision of reducing prices of petroleum products by Rs.15 per liter as it would provide good relief to the inflation-stricken people. He said that the government should also reduce the prices of gas and electricity for commercial and industrial consumers and allow them to pay these bills in instalments so that businesses could cope with the current crisis.

He further said that many industrial units have made required payments of imported raw material, but due to restrictions on transportation, their raw material was lying at ports while they have to pay banks mark-up and demurrage charges. Chairman PCMA demanded that government should order deferring the receipt of banks mark-up and demurrages for at least six months so that businesses could be able to sail through the current difficult situation. He said that in the prevailing conditions, it was difficult for businesses to meet the domestic orders.

The cut in the utility charges for commercial and industrial consumers would reduce their problems to some extent, he said, adding that business community and chemical industry in particular were standing with the government in this tough time and would be able to sustain investment in case the key interest rate is brought down to 5-6 percent.

Rupee depreciation to further dent economy: ICCI

The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) has shown great concerns over the sharp fall in the value of rupee against dollar as it would create more problems for business and industry apart from further weakening the economy.

President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry Muhammad Ahmed Waheed said that Prime Minister Imran Khan has provided a good relief to people by announcing Rs.15/litre cut in the price of POL products, but sharp drop of more than Rs.8 against dollar would nullify this benefit to the people and bring more inflation for them.

He said that some industries are importing 70 percent raw material for their manufacturing activities and sharp rise in dollar would further push up production cost making the industry and exports more uncompetitive in the international market. He said that due to coronavirus issue, trade and industrial activities are already suffering badly and further fall in the value of rupee against dollar would jeopardise the survival of businesses. The ICCI president said that already 25 percent population of the country is below the poverty line and devaluation of currency would push more people towards poverty.

He said that the main cause of currency devaluation is sudden shortage of dollar from the market as people have started.

## 'Fight against COVID-19 demands persistent efforts'

ISLAMABAD: The government has established a Command and Control Center to ensure effective coordination among the federal and provincial governments on control of COVID-19 pandemic.

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said this on Friday, adding the facility would work under National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). "The provinces have been asked to nominate their representatives so that they can work in tandem through a standardized mechanism," the foreign minister further said.

He said the National Coordination Committee also decided to put in place protective measures for health worker who remained a front-line defence during the challenge of Coronavirus. The decisions in this regard include improvement in testing facility and purchase of new PCR machines — also known as thermal cycler most commonly used to amplify segments of DNA via the polymerase chain reaction. He said keeping a balance between lockdown and

provision of basic necessities of life to public was stressed in the meeting.

Qureshi said issuing mere notifications barring congregational Friday prayers at mosques is not enough, rather convincing public to maintain social distancing is more important. He pointed out that when the Sindh government last Friday put a ban on gathering at mosques, the people instead assembled at roads to offer prayers.

He said the Saudi government had sent a letter to Pakistan's Ministry for Religious Affairs, urging halt of arrangements for Hajj in view of spike in coronavirus, though a final decision on Hajj is yet to be taken. Earlier, chairing a high-level meeting on COVID-19 here at Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Friday, Shah Mehmood Qureshi said fight against coronavirus needed a persistent approach to stop its spread in the country. Qureshi said the number of infected cases has increased despite the government beefed up protective measures, which required continuous efforts.

The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan, PM's Special Assistant on Health Dr Zafar Mirza, Special Assistant on Overseas Zulfikar Bukhari, Special Assistant on National Security Dr Moeed Yousaf, Chairman National Disaster Management Authority Lt Gen Muhammad Afzal, Executive Director National Institute of Health Gen Amir Ikram, Foreign Secretary Sohail Mehmood and CEO Shaukat Khanum Hospital Dr Faisal Sultan.

The meeting discussed the situation after resumption of international flight operation which was halted until April 4 and the ways and means to bring back stranded Pakistanis abroad. The minister said flight operations in many countries are currently suspended due to lockdown caused by coronavirus pandemic. Dr Zafar Mirza briefed the meeting on risk assessment of the contagious disease of coronavirus. The chairman NDMA gave an update on testing and quarantine facilities for passengers at the airports. —TLTP

## Weekly inflation goes down by 1.25 percent

ISLAMABAD: The Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) based weekly inflation report ended on March 26, for the combined consumption group, witnessed a decrease by 1.25 percent as compared to the previous week. According to the latest data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) for the week under review in the above mentioned group was recorded at 128.10 points against 129.72 points registered in the previous week. —Online

## HBL official runs away with Rs 70.5m cash

By M Jahangir Hayat

LAHORE: Habib Bank Limited (HBL) Patoki MTO has stolen over Rs 70.5 million cash which was to be uploaded in nearby ATMs and is at large, officials sources told Daily The Business on Friday.

Sources said that the HBL MTO Fiaz Ahmad slipped away with the cash of over Rs 70.5 million which was to be uploaded in three ATMs, including Nishat Mills Ganga under the HBL Pattoki Branch Phol Nagar.

As per the area operation manager Usman Sattar said that he had instructed all the operation managers not to load more than Rs 5 million in an ATM other than the ATM of Pattoki Branch but Operation Manager Muhammad Arshad handed over Rs 70.5 million to the cash van for three ATMs.

According to the Area Manager, he ordered the Operation Manager to redeposit the cash of over Rs 5 million. He said, as per the Operation Manager Arshad, the cash van was near the Pattoki Branch when Arshad passed the information to the area manager but at about 3pm it was communicated to the area manager that Fiaz Ahmad who was sent to recollect the additional cash from the van was at large with the cash to some unidentified place.

The Area Manager said that the cash van officials, branch Operation Manager Arshad, cashier Muhammad Ahmad and Fiaz Ahmad are involved in the incident.

The Police Station Sadler Phol Nagar, District Kasur has registered an FIR and initiated investigation.



## SBP implements Regulatory Approval System for EDB

By Our Special Correspondent

LAHORE: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has launched a Regulatory Approval System (RAS) for submission of cases related to foreign exchange policy and operations dealt by its Exchange Policy Department (EPD), SBP and Foreign Exchange Operations Department (FEOD), SBP-BSC respectively. SBP RAS, which has become operational from March 24th, 2020, provides an online platform to banks to interact with the SBP/SBP-BSC for submission of cases and receiving regulatory decisions.

Bringing ease of doing business, a key feature of the system is to keep the business customers updated about the status of their requests routed through banks from the day it is received at SBP. Customers will receive system-generated update status reports, at their email address provided by bank, from the time of case submission till completion.

Customers will also be able to check out the updated status of their cases on SBP's website anytime. Using SBP RAS, banks will electronically submit foreign exchange operations related cases to the Foreign Exchange Operations Department (FEOD). The paper based submission of cases by Authorized Dealers to FEOD has been abolished forthwith.

Similarly, foreign exchange policy related cases pertaining to Exchange Policy Department (EPD) will also be submitted electronically through SBP RAS. However, for EPD, in addition to electronic submission, manual submission of cases through surface mail will continue, for the time being, till further instructions. SBP RAS is expected to conserve resources and bring efficiency by allowing timely FX-regulatory approvals and replacing the paper based submissions that are prone to logistic and storage issues and unnecessary delays. SBP RAS is a step towards digitalization intended to leverage technology for improving public service and promoting ease of doing business in the country.

The initiative is a part of SBP's Vision 2020 under which a Knowledge Management Project was initiated aiming to implement a modern framework for the retention and sharing of information and knowledge.

## Mosques not to be closed, says Qadri

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Religious Affairs and Inter-faith Harmony Dr Noor-ul-Haq Qadri has said that mosques in the country would not be closed.

However, the worshippers would have to keep their number at minimum level in congregation prayers as a precautionary measure against coronavirus, he added.

Briefing the media after a video conference of ulema chaired by President Dr. Arif Alvi here at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Friday, he said it was agreed in the meeting that children and faithful of over 50 years age, besides the sick ones, should be barred from offering daily and Friday prayers in the mosques.

He said various religious decrees have already been issued for halting large gatherings in the mosques as Islam stresses on protecting the lives of the worshippers. The minister said the ulema authorized President Dr Arif Alvi to take precautionary measures and necessary decisions to contain the spread of coronavirus. The meeting urged the Ulema to inform people about the negative impacts of the spread of coronavirus. Regarding the Hajj arrangements this year, the minister said the Saudi Arabian government. —Online

## Virus tightens grip on Pakistan

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### Punjab govt bans Friday, Five-time prayers in mosques

The Punjab government has issued a notification that only three to five people would be allowed to offer Juma and five-time prayers in mosques across the province. A day after the Sindh and Balochistan government's decision, the PTI run Punjab government, in an effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus, has barred the general public from offering mass Juma prayers in the province. According to the notification, only three to five people including the imam and the muezzin would be allowed to pray in mosques, while the remaining public will offer their prayers at their respective homes.

Johnson tests positive for coronavirus, goes into self-isolation

has tested positive for coronavirus and is self isolating but will still lead the government's response to the outbreak.

"Over the last 24 hours I have developed mild symptoms and tested positive for coronavirus," Johnson said. "I am now self-isolating, but I will continue to lead the government's response via video-conference as we fight this virus." A Downing Street spokesman said Johnson, 55, experienced mild symptoms on Thursday — a day after he answered at the prime minister's weekly question-and-answer session in the chamber of the House of Commons. "The prime minister was tested for coronavirus on the personal advice of England's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty," the spokesman said.

"The test was carried out in No 10 by NHS staff and the result of the test was positive," the spokesman said. On

Wednesday, 71-year-old Prince Charles had also tested positive for the disease. "The Prince of Wales has tested positive for Coronavirus," Clarence House had said in a statement. "He has been displaying mild symptoms but otherwise remains in good health and has been working from home throughout the last few days as usual.

### Govt to provide ration to deserving people: Sania

Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation Dr Sania Nishtar Friday said that the government will provide ration to the deserving people amid coronavirus outbreak across the country.

She urged people to adopt social distancing to avoid spread of the pandemic. The special assistant appreciated President Dr Arif Alvi for his initiatives for public awareness regarding coronavirus.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning Asad Umar chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Energy.