

4.7 magnitude earthquake reported in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: Earthquake tremors jolted Islamabad and adjoining areas on Saturday afternoon. According to the initial reports, the intensity of the tremors was recorded 4.7 on the Richter scale. According to the National Seismic Monitoring Centre, the epic-center of the earthquake was Tajikistan Afghanistan border. It had a depth of 209 km, a private news channels reported. The tremors spread fear amongst locals. —Online

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Govt inclined to resolve daily wage workers, journalists issues: SAPM

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Media and Broadcasting, Firdous Ashiq Awan has said that battling the scourge of coronavirus is an obligation of each and every Pakistani. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Awan said on twitter that the government is very much inclined to resolve all the issues arising for journalists and wage workers in the wake of coronavirus. —Online

US Congress passes \$2 trillion virus package

WASHINGTON: The US House of Representatives passed a historic \$2 trillion rescue package that injects cash into the pockets of struggling Americans and fortifies an economy so ravaged by coronavirus that it is sliding toward recession.

After clearing the Senate earlier this week, and as the United States became the new global epicenter of the pandemic with 92,000 confirmed cases of infection, Republicans and Democrats united to green light the nation's largest-ever economic relief plan. It now goes to President Donald Trump, who has indicated he will quickly sign the measure into law, triggering millions of rebate checks of up to \$3,400 for an average American family of four.

"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 told colleagues shortly before the chamber passed the measure by a voice vote. The bill will pump \$100 billion into hospitals and health facilities in critical need of medical gear like personal protective equipment and ventilators, create a \$500 billion loan reserve for large corporations including airlines, and provide \$377 billion in grants to suffering small businesses. —DNA

Goods transporters for opening of workshops, hotels

ISLAMABAD: Goods transporters have demanded the government allow them to open workshops and hotels in certain areas, a day after Prime Minister Imran Khan lifted the ban on vehicles delivering goods across the country.

All interprovincial and intercity transport had been suspended in Pakistan to curb the spread of the coronavirus. So far, the virus has infected nearly 1,300 people across the country. The transporters have complained that the prime minister hasn't given other relaxations needed for smooth operation. "We cannot deliver food items and medicines unless labourers are allowed to work and truck bases are reopened," they said. —DNA



LAHORE: Police personnel return laborers to their homes at Shimla Phari Chowk during the fifth-day lockdown imposed by provincial government due to corona virus outbreak.

PIAF asks SBP to encourage exports

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has appreciated the SBP for announcing new measures to help boost exports, asking the central bank to also take steps to improve the ease of doing business environment for local industry, giving them more confidence for smooth production amidst slowdown triggered by the coronavirus fear.

PIAF Chairman Mian Nauman Kabir, in a joint statement along with senior vice chairman Nasir Hameed and vice chairman Javed Iqbal said that it is right step of the central bank for a further cut of 150 basis points in the policy rate on 24th March after reducing it by 75 basis points earlier on March 17.

However, there is also need of announcing some incentives for the local industry, as the steps for the exporters have not benefit in present scenario due to cancellation of orders by the foreign buyers. At this time the government should support the domestic industry so that demand and supply balance could remain intact in the country. Mian Nauman Kabir said that central banks all over the world are using various kinds of instruments to avoid recessionary tendencies and stimulate growth in their economies because of the spread of the devastating coronavirus.

There is no doubt that the new measures have been taken because Pakistani exporters are facing problems due to declining demand of their products in the international market and the difficulties in executing existing or-

ders due to rapid spread of coronavirus in the global markets. These measures will prevent liquidity problems and exporters will continue their operations, he added.

PIAF chairman said that the facilitation measures cover almost all aspects of export business and include relaxation in matching amounts under EFS, extension in time period to ship goods, relaxation in conditions for LTFF, realization of export proceeds and extension in the time period for import of goods. PIAF senior vice chairman Nasir Hameed said that realizing that Temporary Economic Refinance Facility was too little under the circumstances, the SB announced another package to support exporters affected due to the COVID-19 threat and avoid liquidity crisis in the export sector.

Govt to outline guidelines for workers, says Asad

ISLAMABAD: The government has decided to outline safety guidelines for the workers of those industries, which are required to be kept operational to ensure the supply of essential commodities.

It was decided during a high-level videoconference chaired by Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Asad Umar on Saturday. The meeting discussed proposals for ensuring continued operation of various industries, especially those included in the food and medicine supply chains, during the COVID-19 emergency. The meeting reviewed the situation and considered proposals relating to the management of supply chains of essential commodities, during the partial or complete shutdown in place in various parts of the country.

Matters related to continued supply of electric power and petroleum products were also discussed. It was decided that detailed safety guidelines for the workers will be outlined for those industries, which are required to be kept operational to ensure the supply of essential commodities. The guidelines will be implemented in collaboration with the industry associations.

The meeting directed the Ministry of Industries to closely monitor any issues faced by the industries identified for continued operation and address them in a proactive manner.

The Ministry of Commerce was directed to make assessments for import requirement of such industries and remove the bottlenecks, if any. It was decided that the proposals finalised at the meeting will be shared with the provinces for their input, before submission to the National Coordination Committee, for final approval. Ministers for Power, National Food Security and EAD, Advisor on Commerce & Industries as well as senior officials participated in the videoconference. —TLTP

Govt improving its coronavirus strategy: Firdous

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) for Information and Broadcasting Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan has said that National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is closely working with all provinces. Government is improving its strategy to deal with coronavirus, she added.

Addressing a video conference, SAPM Dr Firdous said that National Coordination Committee (NCC) is reviewing measures to prevent spread of the virus. She added that NDMA is providing equipment to hospitals and other staff.

He also informed that three journalists from Punjab have contracted the deadly coronavirus. However, she assured that NDMA will provide protection kits to journalists and said that protection of journalists is government's top priority. Earlier, Dr Firdous said that taking precautions to prevent spread of coronavirus was responsibility of every person. —DNA

Zulfi to sue Asif over Taftan issue

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Sayed Zulfikar Abbas Bukhari Saturday said he would take a legal action against PML-N leader Khwaja Asif for levelling a false accusation that he was involved in allowing pilgrims to go to their homes without completing a 14-day quarantine at Taftan.

"It's a blatant lie and slander from the opposition leader and for this, I will take Khwaja Asif to the court," Zulfi Bukhari said while denying his reported role or influence in giving permission to the pilgrims who had recently returned from Iran via Taftan border. He made the remarks in an interview with Voice of America (Urdu), according to the transcript shared by the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development.

The special assistant said being an opposition representative, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader should not have given such an irresponsible statement before the media. His comments about the pilgrims from Iran had created an impression that 'Zulfi Bukhari' was the sole reason for spread of the coronavirus in the country. Such accusations against anyone could jeopardize the life of that person, and such an accuser in any other country would have landed in jail, he added. —Online

US lauds Pak's airport measures to check virus

NEW YORK: An American journalist returning from a private trip to Pakistan has praised the precautionary measures put in place at the Islamabad international airport to stop the spread of coronavirus, which has infected and killed thousands of people around the world.

At the same time, Vanessa Larson, a multiplatform editor at The Washington Post, expressed her shock in an article published in her newspaper that there were no covid-19 screening measures or advisories about quarantining when she and her husband flew back to New York's John F. Kennedy international airport last week, despite America's largest city being the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak.

"In fact, while we've decided to self-quarantine for two weeks out of concern about the covid-19 pandemic, no (US) government official ever told us to do so -- it just seemed like the right thing to do," Ms. Larson said in her piece, headlined: 'Pakistan screened us for coronavirus. Nobody checked us when we got back to JFK.' "The disconnect between the illness's mounting human toll and this seemingly lax approach to incoming international air passengers has opened our eyes to the federal government's insufficient response to the coronavirus and caused us to ask why our country, with its vast resources, seemingly can't or won't take the coronavirus as seriously as it should," she wrote.

"When we arrived in Pakistan on March 13, we each underwent a temperature scan at the Islamabad airport. We also had to fill out a form asking if we'd been in China or Iran, two countries hit hard by covid-19, during the previous 14 days. We were asked to check boxes indicating if we had a fever,

cough or shortness of breath. Though 2 a.m. was probably a low-traffic arrival time, it was a painless, organized process, not a major inconvenience."

Ms. Larson and her husband, who had gone to Pakistan to attend a friend's wedding, spent 8 days in the country. On their return to New York, she wrote, "We simply got off the plane and proceeded to the U.S. citizens' line, as if returning from any normal overseas trip."

We did our customs declaration (Are you bringing in any food?) at an electronic kiosk. The US Customs and Border Protection officer who scanned our passports (and who was wearing gloves) asked us a couple of questions about where we'd been and what we'd done in Pakistan. Another report adds: Registration for PM Imran Khan's 'Corona Relief Tigers' youth team will start from March 31, the Youth Affairs Ministry announced on Saturday.

According to the ministry, citizens would be able to volunteer for the force through the Prime Minister Office portal by filling out a digital form. "Those interested will have to provide their name, age, phone number and union council on the form to register for the force. Only those above the age of 18 can register for the force," the ministry said, adding that registration for the force will end on April 10. The ministry further said volunteers from each union council would be tasked with delivering food to the homes of the most vulnerable segments of society. "Members of any party can register to volunteer. These volunteers will work under the deputy commissioners of each district. In case of a lockdown, the force will distribute food and also identify those hoarding," the ministry said. —DNA

Virus cases in Pak rise to 1,415

Continued from front page

Ghulam Muhammadabad Hospital in Faisalabad. Confirming the news, the Faisalabad deputy commissioner in a tweet said the victim had been tested positive. Muhammad Zeeshan, a resident of Kamalpur, became the youngest in Pakistan to die because of the coronavirus, after which the death toll in the country reached 10. On Friday, 70-year-old Muhammad Hanif — a resident of Sheikhupura — died in a washroom of Mayo Hospital, Lahore, in a tragic manner, which raised many questions about the preparations made by the government to tackle the crisis.

Separately, a news report claimed a doctor, who was checking the coronavirus patients without any safety kits at Aziz Bhatti Shaheed Hospital at Gujrat, has been tested positive for the virus. Punjab now tops the list both in terms

of the reported cases and deaths with 490 and five respectively.

Punjab govt releasing 20,000 prisoners

To contain spread of coronavirus in prisons, Punjab government's home department will be releasing 20,000 prisoners out of 46,000 from 41 jails across the province, The News has learnt.

Sources shared that the jails' superintendents have reached out to the courts for the bails of prisoners who were convicted for less than seven years.

According to sources, this decision was taken on special instructions after a prisoner contracted corona and was admitted to a hospital. It was thought that coronavirus could spread in other prisoners. Bail applications or requests were also filed for prisoners who had committed petty crimes. Additionally, the bail applications have been filed for the elderly criminals or criminals over

60 years of age, the sources added. Furthermore, those with sentences ranging from seven to 25 years were being determined on a case-by-case basis. The sources also shared that the jails were overcrowded in Punjab.

Virus fear: Rana Sanaulah skipped court appearance

PML-N Rana Sanaulah skipped Saturday's hearing amid coronavirus fear. Rana Sanaulah was asked to appear before an anti-narcotics court today for the indictment in drugs case.

ANC Judge Shakir Hassan heard the case, in which PML-N leader submitted exemption plea from the court appearance owing to COVID-19 spread. The plea was accepted by the judge and the lawyers were asked to appear on April 25 for the proceedings of the case. In the last hearing, an anti-narcotics court had deferred indictment of Rana Sanaulah in drugs case, till March 28. —Agencies

AN APPEAL TO THE PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN TO ANNOUNCE A FIVE-POINT RELIEF PACKAGE FOR THE SURVIVAL OF A FREE PRINT MEDIA

Your government announced an economic relief package on March 25 and has assured further reliefs to businesses which are critically affected by the present situation caused by the Coronavirus pandemic.

We, as the representative body of the print media, invite your kind attention to the national emergency faced by the free press, which is the fourth pillar of Pakistani democracy.

We therefore feel it imperative to request you to announce a speedy 5 point bailout package for the print media:

- The Federal Ministry of Information & Broadcasting should make special monthly allocations of Rs 1 billion per month for the next 3 months for print advertising that highlights public health awareness about the coronavirus and hardens our national resolve to defeat it.
- The federal and provincial governments of Punjab and KPK should be instructed to immediately clear pending payments on account of the long outstanding advertising dues owed by the government to the print media - so that these may be disbursed by us against outstanding wage payments due to newspaper employees.
- Increase the government's advertising rates by 100%. This overdue increase would still place government advertising rates at less than half of those paid by commercial advertisers.
- Reduce NEPRA's tariff for the provision of electricity to newspaper premises and presses by 50%.
- The FBR should be advised to exempt the 1.5% withholding tax on newspapers for the current fiscal year.

We believe that the above package of relief measures would help the print media to withstand this unprecedented crisis.

