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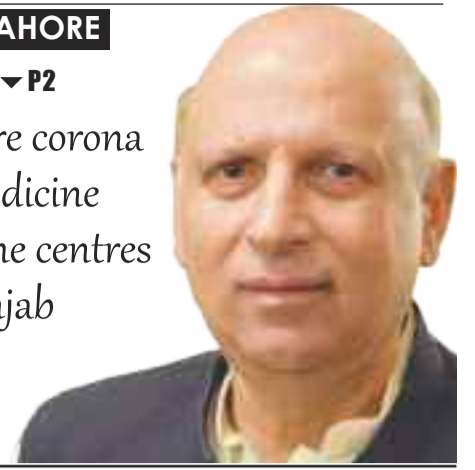
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SBP steps to soften coronavirus effects on banks

Pak GDP growth to slow down to 2-2.5pc: Moody's

ISLAMABAD: Moody's said on Thursday that measures taken by State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) for banking sector amid coronavirus pandemic will mitigate banks' asset-quality deterioration amid less business generation and loan growth in an economic slowdown; however, the rating agency expects Pakistan's real GDP growth to slow to 2.0 percent to 2.5 percent for fiscal 2020.

According to a press statement, Moody's said that on March 26, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) cut its policy rate 150 basis points to 11 percent, reduced banks' capital conservation buffers (CCB) 100 basis points to 1.5 percent, relaxed terms for new and existing loans and announced other forbearance measures to increase banks' cushion against the economic effects of coronavirus.

"We expect the measures to mitigate banks' asset-quality deterioration amid less business generation and loan growth in an economic slowdown.

Additionally, the Pakistani banks we rate - Habib Bank Limited (B3 stable, caa1), National Bank of Pakistan (B3 stable, caa1), United Bank Ltd (B3 stable, b3), MCB Bank Limited (B3 stable, b3) and Allied Bank Limited (B3 stable, b3) - benefit from high or very high levels of government support, which will shield their credit profiles from impairment of their standalone credit assessments," said the Moody's.

"We expect Pakistan's real GDP growth to slow to 2.0 percent-2.5 percent for fiscal 2020 (which ends 30 June

2020), lower than our earlier forecast of 2.9 percent, reflecting the impact of the coronavirus pandemic," it further said.

Consumption of services, which has underpinned growth in recent years, will be adversely affected by the movement restrictions. The textile sector, the country's key manufacturing sector which accounts for around 60 percent of exports, has also been hit by supply-chain disruptions and a decline or postponement of orders. Manufacturing loans (mainly to the textile and food sectors) accounted for 62 percent of private-sector loans as of 29 February 2020, said the statement.

"The policy rate reduction to 11 percent follows a 75-basis-point cut on 17 March and will help maintain credit growth, which we expect will remain below nominal GDP growth," it said. Lower interest rates on loans will also improve borrowers' repayment capacity. However, the lower rates will reduce net interest margins and diminish banks' earnings, the Moody's said.

Reducing the capital conservation buffer to 1.5 percent will free up PKR800 billion of capital, or 10 percent of outstanding loans, according to the SBP's estimate. The lower CCB will support banks' lending activities, but creates potential asset-quality pressure, said the statement. The SBP has offered cash-flow relief through loan refinancing schemes and loan payment holidays to borrowers such as exporters and manufacturers affected by the coronavirus disruptions. The central

bank is allowing delayed principal payments (but not interest) for up to one year at the discretion of the lender, but application for the delays must be by 30 June 2020. The grace period lowers the risk of asset impairment and supports the value of securitised assets over the longer term, it said.

The central bank is allowing banks to classify restructured loans as performing unless the borrower has taken no action for 180 days after the originally scheduled payment date. It has also postponed for two months until 30 August 2020 the preparation of pro forma accounts based on the International Financial Reporting Standard No. 9, requiring full implementation by 1 January 2021.

These measures will hide risks that, if prolonged, will reduce the transparency of loan underwriting and asset quality, concluded the statement.

Complete lockdown causing huge loss to traders: Atiq Mir

All Karachi Tajir Ittehad Chairman Atiq Mir has said that complete lockdown is causing huge losses to the traders.

Expressing his views, during a chat with a private television channel, he said, the traders are not against the government's decision of lockdown, but they should be allowed to work two or three days at least a week. "We are concerned about situation of daily-wage labourers. Mir said, the traders are very much aware of the current situation amid coronavirus spread and added that they want to see country prosper. —DNA

Qatar supports Pakistan call for debt relief, restructuring

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Qatar Thursday discussed the issue of debt relief and restructuring of loans of developing and poor countries to enable these states to free up resources to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and shore up economies.

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi held a telephone conversation with Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and discussed the situation resulting from the rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, and ways to mitigate the crisis.

The foreign minister apprised his Qatari counterpart about Prime Minister Imran Khan's call for debt relief and restructuring to enable the developing countries to free up resources to combat the disease and shore up economies. Shah Mahmood Qureshi said Pakistan is deploying all available resources to curtail the spread of Covid-19 and reduce its impact. Appreciating the timely measures taken by the Qatari government, he noted with satisfaction that these steps had helped contain the disease in Qatar.

He also appreciated the role played by the State of Qatar in facilitating the peace process in Afghanistan. The foreign minister expressed deep concern over the situation in the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, where the coronavirus has spread and fatalities are being reported. He called for immediate lifting of all restrictions to allow dissemination of information and unfettered supply of medicines, and other essentials.

The Qatari Deputy Prime Minister underscored the importance of learning from the experience of the countries which have managed to control the disease successfully.

He described Pakistan's call for debt restructuring for developing countries as an important and timely initiative and stated that Qatar is supportive of it.

The two ministers underscored the need for joint efforts to deal with the current challenges and agreed to stay closely engaged on all issues of common interest. —TLTP

'Saving poor people, economy top priority'

■ Pay gas, electricity bills after 3 months: Hafeez

ISLAMABAD: Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue, Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh said Thursday that the government was taking all possible measures to save the people from negative effects of Covid-19 and cope with its negative impact on country's economy.

Addressing the tax-refund cheque distribution ceremony here, the adviser said that the Rs1200 billion relief package, announced by the government, was particularly focused on achieving three objectives including provision of security, food and cash to deserving people to fulfill their requirements. He said that the Prime Minister had already inaugurated the Rs150 billion programme under which

12 million families across the country would be given cash, adding that each family would be given Rs12000.

Another report adds: The federal government has decided to extend the deadline for gas and electricity bills by three months because of the countrywide lockdown to stop the spread of coronavirus.

"People don't have to pay their gas and electricity bills immediately," announced Adviser to PM on Finance Hafeez Shaikh on Thursday. The government has set aside Rs1 billion to incur these losses, he added. Shaikh, while speaking to the media at PM House, said that the govt will spend Rs70 billion to make up for the decrease in petrol and diesel prices. —DNA



ISLAMABAD: SAPM on Overseas Pakistanis & Human Resource Development, Zulfiqar Bukhari chairs a meeting against coronavirus.

Pak reports 32 COVID-19 deaths, cases climb to 2,386

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani authorities on Thursday have reported 31 deaths from novel coronavirus while the total number of cases has surged to 2,386.

According to details, 922 patients have been tested positive for the epidemic in Punjab, 761 in Sindh, 276 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 187 in Gilgit-Baltistan, 169 in Balochistan, 62 in Islamabad and nine in Azad Kashmir.

So far, 107 patients have recovered in the country while 9 are in critical condition. Pakistan decided for extending its lockdown till April 14 to curb the spread of COVID-19 besides finalising a solid strategy to cope with the impact of the pandemic. The decisions were taken in a session of National Coordination Committee held under the chair of PM Imran Khan to review the current situation of coronavirus pandemic in Pakistan. It is decided to extend lockdown till April 14 besides finalising to hold consultations on April 5 to relax the restrictions in phases across the country.

The session was attended by COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa, chief ministers, federal

minister, special assistants and other high-level officers via video link. It is pertinent to mention here that PM Khan has summoned NCC meeting again on Thursday to review the further measures for containing the virus. A six-week-old baby died of COVID-19 and global agencies warned of food shortages as coronavirus infections around the world neared one million.

Screening of 1,327 suspected patients completed in Jhelum

Screening of 1,327 suspected patients of the novel coronavirus has been completed in Jhelum, said the deputy commissioner (DC) on Thursday. According to the DC Jhelum, as many as 28 were found positive out of 1,327 suspects and rest were declared safe from the virus.

He said currently 153 patients are in eight quarantine facilities of the district and added that 80 new isolation wards have been established in the District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ) Jhelum to keep coronavirus patients. Yesterday, a 1,000-bed field hospital was completed at Expo Centre Lahore for coronavirus patients. The field hospital at Lahore Expo Centre for COVID-19

patients had been established within nine days.

The hospital is meant to isolate and treat confirmed patients of the coronavirus in a safe and secure environment. Pakistan's coronavirus patients number has surged to 2,104 while 82 patients recovered from COVID-19 pandemic, according to the national dashboard.

Coronavirus claims another life in Sindh, provincial tally rises to 10

Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Pechuho has confirmed another death from novel coronavirus in Sindh, raising the provincial death tally to 10.

The 65-year-old patient was a resident of Tando Muhammad Khan and was brought to a hospital in Hyderabad on March 28. He had a history of acute respiratory distress syndrome.

With 34 new cases of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in Sindh on Thursday, the total number of cases stands at 743, confirmed provincial health department. According to the latest statistics released by the Sindh's health ministry, as many as 34 new cases of coronavirus were reported in the province, during the last 24 hours, out of which 17 were reported in Karachi, nine in

Hyderabad, six cases were reported in Shaheed Benazirabad and two cases in Jamshoro.

First virus patient dies at LU hospital

The first coronavirus affected patient passed away here at COVID-19 isolation ward of Liaquat University Hospital Hyderabad as number of coronavirus patients surges to 137 in the district.

According to report, a 63-year-old Manzoor Memon of Tando Muhammad Khan succumbed to coronavirus here at isolation ward of LU Hospital Hyderabad. As per report received here on Thursday morning, 6 more persons were tested coronavirus positive in Hyderabad and taking the tally to 137 in the district.

Confirmed COVID-19 cases in Punjab rise to 922

The number of confirmed COVID-19 (coronavirus) cases rose to 922 in the province after 40 more people tested positive on Wednesday.

As per the updated statistics of the Punjab Primary and Secondary Health Department here on Wednesday, 207 pilgrims in Dera Ghazi Khan and 91 pilgrims in Multan have tested positive, 41 patients have tested positive in Raiwind Quar-



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

Asad for timely completion of Bhasha Dam

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Asad Umar Thursday directed the relevant officials to make sure that work on Diamer Bhasha Dam Project progresses as per the timelines.

Asad Umar chaired a meeting here to review the status of progress on the dam project. The minister was informed that work on the project is underway and an expenditure of Rs 99,238 billion has been incurred on the project till February 2020. This amount includes Rs 93.9 billion for land acquisition for the project.

It was further informed that Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) intends to award the contract for the Main Dam & Allied Structures within the next few weeks, to start the construction activities within the current financial year.

Further expenditure of around Rs 61 billion is planned during the current financial year. This includes Rs 22 billion on resettlement and Rs 39 billion on construction related activities. The project is divided into 6 major components, for which separate contracts will be awarded in a phased manner. —TLTP

Bulls at PSX, index climbs 1,254 points

By Our Staff Correspondent

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a continuation of bullish activity on Thursday with the benchmark KSE-100 Index gaining 1254 points—4.25 percent in the first trading session and was trading at 30,764 points.

It is pertinent to mention here that bears extended their control on the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) in March with the indices nosediving right from word go, triggering a 45-minute 'market halt' for the eight times in the previous month. Bulls had emerged as winner in a volatile session at the PSX on Wednesday, with the indices recovering losses accumulated in early trade to close in the green.

Foreign investors closed the previous session (last of March) as net sellers, registering a net outflow of \$44.06 million. "The CPI (inflation) release for March 2020 matched street consensus at 10.2pc, which gave confidence to the investors that the upcoming number would be even lower, and raised their hopes that yield on fixed instruments, particularly Treasury Bills and Pakistan Investment Bonds, will dip further," said an analyst at Arif Habib Ltd. "Today's trading session saw profit booking as well, which kept the overall market range-bound.

List of industries to be opened amid virus framed

Big package for construction industry: PM

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that a massive package for the construction industry will be announced on Friday to maintain the economic activity amid coronavirus challenge.

The Prime Minister was addressing a ceremony in connection with distribution of Rs 100 billion tax refunds amongst the businessmen here on Thursday. He said, "We have decided to open up the construction industry and give it the necessary incentives in order to provide job opportunities to the people." He added this will also uplift the industries allied with the construction.

He said that the construction of road infrastructure does not entail the danger of the spread of coronavirus. He said necessary SOPs will also be developed to ensure the safety of the workers at the workplace.

Imran Khan said the Commerce Ministry has also framed a list of industries which can be opened in the current situation. The Prime Minister expressed satisfaction that trajectory of coronavirus in Pakistan is not like that has been witnessed in other countries. He was confident that Pakistan will be able to overcome this problem.

He stressed that the people should avoid going to the gatherings and adopt precautionary measures to stem the pandemic. Imran Khan said promoting industries and giving incentives to the businesses is important to take forward the country. The refund of one hundred billion rupees to the business community is part of that process. "It is our utmost effort to ensure timely refunds to the business community so that they do not face any liquidity issue," said the PM.

The Prime Minister said the Ministry of Commerce and Industries is in constant touch with the business community "as to how together we can overcome the challenge posed by coronavirus." Imran Khan said our weaker segments of the society are at greater risk owing to the pandemic. He said, "We are trying to reach out to them under Ehsaas program." He said a cash grant of Rs 12,000 each will be given to 12 million poor families to protect them from the negative impacts of coronavirus.

Speaking on the occasion, Adviser on Finance Hafeez Sheikh said the tax refunds will be paid in a week time. He said it is a historic step of the present government that it is clearing the outstanding sales tax refunds. He said, "Apart from the packages for business

community, we have earmarked Rs 200 billion for the procurement of wheat in order to support the agriculture sector and the farmers." Adviser on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood said the government fully stands by the business community and is preparing a Rs 200 billion package for it which will soon be announced. He said, "We will collectively overcome the coronavirus challenge."

PM for resolution of energy issues by removing hurdles

Prime Minister Imran Khan Thursday directed the ministry concerned to accelerate reforms in the energy sector by removing the systemic hurdles and effectively utilising the limited resources for ensuring relief to the common man.

The problems in the energy sector were directly related to the people's lives, which necessitated their accelerated solution, he observed.

The PM was chairing a meeting on the reforms process in the gas sector. Minister for Energy Omar Ayub, Planning Minister Asad Umar, Finance Advisor Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, Commerce Advisor Abdul Razzak Dawood, Special Assistant to the PM on Petroleum Nadeem Babar and senior officers of ministries attended the meeting, a PM Office press release said. Briefing the prime minister in detail on the reforms process in the gas sector and availability of the petroleum products, Nadeem Babar said a sufficient stock of the products was available in the country. —TLTP

NCC to open work on CPEC projects

ISLAMABAD: The National Coordination Committee on Thursday decided to open work on CPEC projects. The meeting held with Prime Minister Imran Khan in chair reviewed overall situation of coronavirus in the country.

The PM was apprised about the health condition of pilgrims who had returned from Taftan.

He was informed that many of those who contracted the disease have recovered. Following the decision to open work on CPEC projects, the construction industry will be opened from April 3, while PM will also announce a massive package for the construction industry to deal with the coronavirus challenge. —DNA

CORONAVIRUS IN PAKISTAN	
Confirmed cases:	2,386
ICT:	62
Punjab:	922
Sindh:	761
KP:	276
Balochistan:	169
AJK:	09
GB:	187
Recovered:	107
Deaths:	32