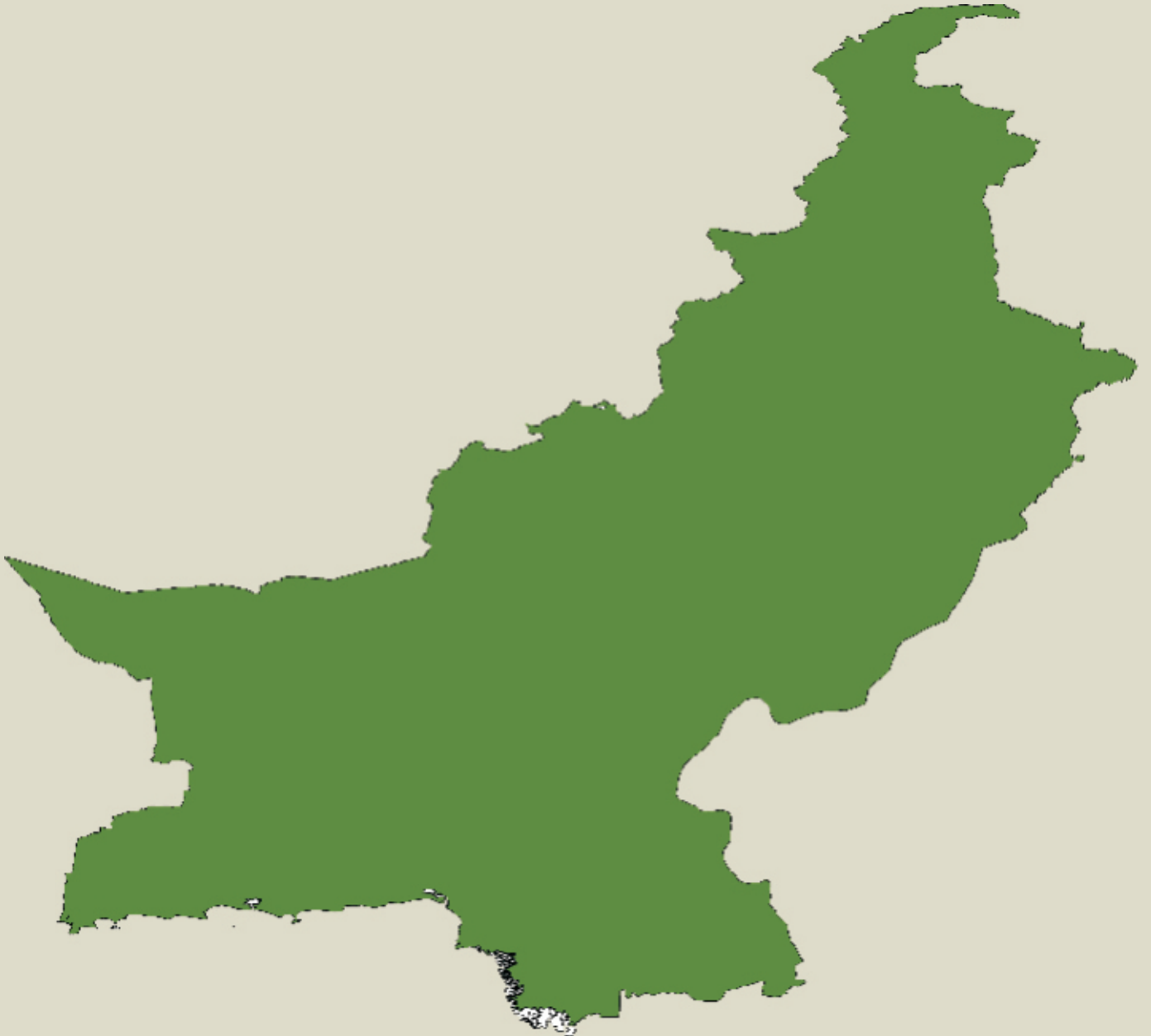


March 2020

# PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

*A Selected Summary of News, Views and Trends  
from Pakistani Media*



*Prepared by*

*Dr. Zainab Akhter*

*Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir*

*Dr. Mohammad Eisa*

*Dr. Ashok Behuria*



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर परिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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1-Development Enclave, Near USI  
Delhi Cantonment, New Delhi-110010



PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST, March 2020

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## POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### **Seeking Nawaz's Return, Editorial, Dawn, 05 March<sup>1</sup>**

The government's *decision to* approach the British authorities to seek the 'extradition' of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who is in London these days for the treatment of a reportedly complicated ailment, cannot be defended on any grounds. However, the move has not come as a surprise. *Many political observers were expecting the government to take such action, especially over the last few days since the Punjab cabinet turned down a request from the Sharif family to extend the 'medical bail' that had been granted to the ailing PML-N leader.* The provincial government tried to justify its decision, saying that the Sharif family had neither shared the "necessary medical reports and updates" with it, nor admitted the former prime minister to a UK hospital for treatment for his illness. But none of the doubts being raised by the government about Mr. Sharif's health justifies its letter asking for his 'deportation' by the British authorities. *The best strategy for the government would have been to approach the courts to instruct the family to provide whatever updates or reports it needed to extend his stay abroad.* The government, which actually facilitated his release on bail and his departure for treatment abroad as his condition deteriorated in prison here, is now using his extended stay in Britain for politicking purposes to discredit him in the eyes of the voters. Such tactics seldom work.

### **Back to era of side-switching drama, Editorial, Dawn, 12 March<sup>2</sup>**

*In recent days, PML-N leader Rana Sanaullah has been talking of in-house change, which would not have been possible without support of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf parliamentarians.* We have already seen the shameful demonstration of switching sides clandestinely in the no-confidence move against the Senate chairman, where despite having a clear majority the opposition could not stop the sellout of its members. Being in opposition in Pakistan needs a lot of guts and courage for politicians. A party like the PPP, which kept its face high during the devastating regime of Zia, faced defections en masse in 2002 when its six ace parliamentarians formed a "patriotic bloc" in the National Assembly. Even before that, the PML-N had experienced defections in droves before the 2002 elections. The tragic thing is that both the PPP and the PML-N accepted several of those infected with side-

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1538533/seeking-nawazs-return>

<sup>2</sup> <https://dailytimes.com.pk/574679/back-to-era-of-side-switching-drama/>

switch virus. *The fresh batch of the horse trading bloc say they support the government to get development funds. Imran Khan used to frown upon such funds, calling it a tool to enslave parliamentarians.* It is time to remind the prime minister of his own words.

### **PML-N divisions, Editorial, Dawn, 16 March<sup>3</sup>**

There is trouble brewing within the PML-N. With Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif away in London for some months now, Maryam Nawaz in political hibernation — her recent brief appearance notwithstanding — and Hamza Shahbaz in jail, the family leadership of the party is practically inactive. *Now there are reports of disgruntlement within the rank and file about the lack of direction of the party.* By opting to vote in favour of the extension of the army chief, the PML-N leadership took a huge decision to change the strategic direction of its politics. The decision came as a surprise to almost every party leader and parliamentarian. If it wants to remain relevant the party would have to put its house in order. The most obvious step towards this end would be for the head of the party to do politics within the country, build a clear narrative and coordinate with other opposition leaders. *A leadership calling the shots from foreign shores will only dishearten party members at home, to the point where defections would not be surprising.* The PML-N may be going through a phase of self-reckoning but if this phase stretches for too long — which it is — it can easily lead to a loss of confidence, clarity and cohesion. Keeping the party guessing is never a good policy option whichever way one looks at it. *The top-tier leadership may want to make amends before the disgruntlement gets louder, while Mr Shahbaz Sharif might also want to consider the great injustice he is doing to his position as opposition leader in parliament by staying away.*

### **Crisis of Leadership, Zahid Hussain, Dawn, 18 March<sup>4</sup>**

The crisis of leadership in the country has once again been exposed this time on account of the coronavirus pandemic. *More needs to be done to reassure the nation in times of crises than just tweeting messages of comfort and calling for prayers.* The decision to hold cabinet meetings through video link only serves to trivialize an extremely serious situation that requires a far more prudent approach. Despite the fact that the warning signs were there for a long time, the federal government responded very slowly. It was only last

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1541270/pml-n-divisions>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1541750/crisis-of-leadership>

week that the National Security Council finally met to discuss the crisis. *And still there is no coherent policy to deal with the enormous challenges that lie ahead. It is not just about stopping the spread of the virus, but also the long-term economic and social impact of the crisis, one that has global dimensions.* The government must declare a state of emergency and also mobilize the armed forces. More importantly, the prime minister needs to show statesmanship in this time of national crisis and take all political forces along with him. *A national crisis requires a collective response. Will the prime minister transcend political differences and provide leadership at this critical time?*

### **Prime minister's address to the nation, Editorial, Daily Times, 19 March<sup>5</sup>**

Most of the prime minister's address focused on educating the public about the virus and the preventive measures. He vowed to follow the protocols which other countries had set to fight the unwelcome virus. *He, however, said that the government would take every step after viewing the public aspect, as the economic condition did not allow the country to come up with sweeping lockdown of the cities.* He has planned to approach the international monetary bodies and countries to get our loans written off or rescheduled. The prime minister spoke from his heart. *He, however, left out many important things, either deliberately or unintentionally. First, he did not acknowledge Sindh government's efforts for taking the leading in the war against corona virus.* No doubt the Pakistan People's Party government remained active and took proactive measures, which the National Security Committee recommended just last week. *The prime minister did not give an elaborate plan for the fight ahead either. One thing he should have announced is the diversion of all development funds towards fighting the virus.* Testing times in fact are the real test of leadership. The prime minister should lead the nation in the war on the virus.

### **Wake up! Najam Sethi, The Friday Times, 20 March<sup>6</sup>**

Pakistan's contiguous neighbours Iran and India are also moving swiftly to take serious large scale preventive measures to deal with the emergency at hand. *But what is the PTI government in Pakistan doing to protect our citizens who are most vulnerable for a host of reasons?* The situation in Pakistan can be summed up as follows. Wilful ignorance, denial, even dereliction of duty and callousness are evident in PTI corridors in Islamabad. Prime Minister Imran Khan is more concerned about imposing a "uniform"

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<sup>5</sup> <https://dailytimes.com.pk/578782/prime-ministers-address-to-the-nation/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/wake-up/>

education system in the country next year – “so that the sort of culturally diverse opinions expressed during the Aurat March are stifled” – while propagating the virtues of passion over education and professionalism. He is expending all his energies in grinding the media and political opposition to the ground instead coming to grips with a health emergency that is staring him in the face. Indeed, *This is the very moment that a charismatic leader like him can wake up and rouse the administration and masses to gird their loins to combat the most deadly disease to ever attack the country.*

**'No lockdown, period!' *Daily Times*, 23 March<sup>7</sup>**

In his second televised address to the nation after the country reported above 700 coronavirus cases, the prime minister said that they were not going for complete lockdown as the situation in Pakistan was different from the rest of the world. *It would create economic woes as 25 percent chunk of its population was living below the poverty line.* Noting a difference between the situation in Pakistan and those of US, UK, Italy and France after the COVID 19 pandemic, he said the complete lockdown would mean imposition of curfew across the country with the law enforcement agencies and armed forces on the streets to enforce it. “In case of such a scenario, what would become of the labourers, daily wagers and rickshaw and taxi drivers?” he said, adding they would have no resources to look after their families. Similarly, he said the government did not have the resources to cater to their needs. *The prime minister said China did it because it was the second richest country in the world with adequate system and abundant resources.*

**Lockdown, Editorial, *Daily Times*, 24 March<sup>8</sup>**

*The decision to deploy the army in provinces means that the hope that people would practice self-discipline and social distancing, so the country can keep working and daily-wagers are not compromised, was misplaced.* Now, even though military deployment still does not imply a curfew and limited movement will be allowed, no one can say for sure what will happen next. The government is trying to keep the economy afloat by preparing incentive and relief packages, but given its own financial limitations there's only so long any meaningful stimulus can last. *Unlike other countries, Pakistan just doesn't have the option of throwing large sums at the market to maintain liquidity.* The most that could be done was dilute the monetary policy somewhat by reducing the interest rate; but even in that department the state bank's 75 basis point cut disappointed the market very badly. Unfortunately it has come down to the military to force people to protect their own interests; since most people have just acted very irresponsibly so far. And it would be a

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<sup>7</sup> <https://dailytimes.com.pk/581305/no-lockdown-period/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://dailytimes.com.pk/581865/lockdown/>



grave tragedy indeed if army personnel are compromised because everybody took their own safety so casually. Pakistan must overcome this problem very quickly; far quicker than others, in fact. *That, primarily, is because we do not have the money to keep up the lockdown indefinitely.*

**Pakistan seeks clarity about SAARC's Covid-19 fund, Baqir Sajjad Syed, Dawn, 25 March<sup>9</sup>**

All countries in the regional bloc, except Pakistan, have announced their pledges for the fund, which now cumulatively stands at \$18.8 million. Besides India, other pledged contributions include Sri Lanka's \$5m, Bangladesh's \$1.5m, Nepal and Afghanistan's \$1m each, the Maldives' \$0.2m and Bhutan's \$0.1m. *Mr. Qureshi has over the past few days spoken to his counterparts in Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The countries in Saarc whose foreign ministers Mr Qureshi is yet to call are Afghanistan and India.* The fund was discussed during Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi's telephonic conversation with his Bangladeshi counterpart A. K. Abdul Momen. *"Discussing the need to share resources, it was underlined that Saarc Covid-19 fund should be placed under the Secretary General of Saarc and modalities for its utilisation should be finalised through consultations at the earliest,"* the Foreign Office said in a statement. Mr Qureshi reiterated Pakistan's readiness to host *Saarc health ministers' conference to enhance cooperation among member countries and development partners in the health sector with particular focus on Covid-19.*

**Hard Times Ahead, Zahid Hussain, Dawn, 25 March<sup>10</sup>**

*The fight against the pandemic has also exposed the various fault lines. A broken healthcare system is now being tested for a crisis beyond its capacity. Despite the warning, we have been caught unprepared. It was either a state of deniability or false hope that the virus would die in the hot weather that prevented timely action. The lack of coordination between the federal and provincial government is pronounced and can worsen the situation.* The reasons for this are political and are also linked to the existing confusion over the distribution of power. But the issue could have easily been resolved had there been a show of greater political maturity on the part of Prime Minister Imran Khan. So far, a failure of leadership has been evident in this crisis. An impromptu address to the nation left a large section of the people confused as the idea of a lockdown to stop the spread of the virus was criticized. *It appeared that this criticism was directed at the Sindh government that had*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1543499/pakistan-seeks-clarity-about-saarc-covid-19-fund>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1543507/hard-times-ahead>

*already announced closing down the province.* But it seems that the prime minister did not recognize the emergency situation prevailing in the country's second most populated province, leading observers to note that this was because Sindh was being ruled by his opponents.

## ECONOMIC ISSUES

### **International economic condition and Pakistan, Editorial, Jang, 11 March<sup>11</sup>**

Coronas virus has claimed 3,000 lives in China and more than 500 in Europe and America together. Its target is going to be the world economy as well. *The oil prices have fallen lowest since 1991. This in turn has affected stock markets of the world countries and global economy has lost billions of dollars.* Governments across the have not been able to control the loss. Oil prices have fallen as the oil producing countries have refused to reduce their production. *Pakistan's stock market has also suffered. On Monday the stock fell 2300 points. Despite all the efforts to control it, the market came down 1,161 points and 184 billion rupees were lost.* The condition is not good for Pakistan's economy which is being sustained by the IMF loans. Because of the fall in the oil prices, the exchange rate will fall 6.3 percent which will make the value of rupee to go further down. In Pakistan threat of Corona is much less as compared to other countries. *In Sindh 13 affected people are recovering. However at the world level, the virus is seen as a threat. It can affect economy of the countries and can lead to unemployment.* Financial advisor to the Prime Minister has said that they are watching the situation closely. Prime Minister Khan has also said that there will be no more burdens put on the customers. *But the situation needs close monitoring. Since the oil process has come down, customers need to get some relief as well.* The governments along with the opposition need to come with some strategy to deal with the crisis.

### **Two glaring deficits, Umair Javed, Dawn, 23 March<sup>12</sup>**

Given the policy conversation so far, there are two points worth analyzing in detail here. Firstly, relying on people changing their behaviour has as its assumption the notion that people trust the state enough to listen to it. *Secondly, regardless of the success of this or any other strategy, the country is still facing significant economic disruption.* This means that beyond the daunting task of upgrading emergency healthcare provision, the government is still looking at a relief and welfare responsibility of an unprecedented scale.

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<sup>11</sup> [https://e.jang.com.pk/03-11-2020/lahore/pic.asp?picname=06\\_001.png](https://e.jang.com.pk/03-11-2020/lahore/pic.asp?picname=06_001.png)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1543048/two-glaring-deficits>

Beyond this democratic deficit, we're also facing a welfare deficit, which all preceding regimes have helped compound. Glaring examples include seven decades of the military prioritizing a national security state rather than allowing for the development of a functioning welfare system; or at a subnational level, chronic underfunding of public health and welfare provision in favour of vote-winning and rent-extracting physical infrastructure projects, such as by successive PML-N governments in Punjab. These deficits are now coming back to haunt the country at the worst possible time.

**Pakistan to seek \$3.7b more in loans to offset virus impact, Shahbaz Rana, *The Express Tribune*, 26 March<sup>13</sup>**

*Pakistan has decided to seek \$3.7 billion additional financing from three multilateral creditors including another loan of \$1.4 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to cope with the challenges being posed by the novel corona virus outbreak. In addition to the IMF loan, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank will extend loans of \$1 billion and \$1.25 billion respectively to the country, Adviser to the PM on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh said at a news conference. The step is aimed at soothing the markets that remained in panic despite Prime Minister Imran Khan announcing a Rs 1.2 trillion economic relief package a day earlier. Pakistan announced the decision on the same day the IMF and the WB made an appeal to all bilateral creditors to suspend debt repayments by countries that were eligible for loans from the WB's arm, the International Development Assistance (IDA). Pakistan also receives IDA loans but it is clubbed with blend countries that are eligible for both concessional and commercial terms loans from the WB.*

**Coronavirus – what now? Editorial, *Dawn*, 24 March<sup>14</sup>**

And for the longest time Pakistan's economy has been one disaster away from default. *In fact, had it not been for the latest IMF bailout, the \$6 billion Extended Fund Facility, we probably wouldn't even have needed an exogenous push to fall over the edge.* Yet such is the financial drain of the coronavirus that the government has calculated an initial aggregate loss to the tune of \$10 billion. Surely the Fund would have to understand this particular predicament and soften some of its terms going forward. *Otherwise, even if we survive the virus we might not be able to meet debt payments a few quarters down the road.* And since the wheel of the economy will turn very slowly indeed for the duration of the lockdown, compromising daily wagers

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<sup>13</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2184413/2-pakistan-seek-3-7b-loans-offset-virus-impact/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://dailymtimes.com.pk/582093/coronavirus-what-now/>

more than anybody just as the federal government feared all along, this will either succeed or fail quickly; simply because the economy can be held up without any activity for a very short period of time. *Nobody doubts the government's intentions, but it has been a little slow off the mark in terms of preparedness, and also caused much confusion on the matter of lockdown. Going forward, though, it will have to be on the top of its game or risk a bigger disaster just ahead.*

**China's Mask Diplomacy, Umair Pervez Khan, *The Daily Times*, 25 March<sup>15</sup>**

*China is using this opportunity to build a soft image in global arena whereas America is busy tackling the virus at home while China is forwarding its agenda through facemask diplomacy.* It is making use of Joseph Nye's soft power to build the trust and image of the country as a responsible global power. It has remained successful to get the support and appreciation of two important world forums – the WHO and the United Nations. The WHO in its report, published in late February, appreciated the swift response of China and declared Chinese model as an effective strategy to fight against the disease. Earlier, the UN official had stamped its effort in a statement. *China's facemask diplomacy will have a long-lasting effect for it as far as the world of international relations is concerned. Europe is all set to focus on the intricate relation with China this year; it will help China to have a softer image in the eyes of the European countries. Already the public opinion is swinging in China's favor in Europe. Secondly, with the Panda diplomacy already on the market, and now introducing the facemask diplomacy, this blend will help China to project it as a peace loving philanthropic country. Ancient China has been leading the strip of the Asia through cultural power now the modern China under the leadership of President Xi is blending the political and strong institutional taste in it. It has a great potential to carry forward the vision of peaceful economic rise of China with global inter-connectivity. This is the new challenge that America will be facing in the aftermath of this COVID-19 virus.*

**Govt. seems helpless in front of IMF, Editorial, *Ummat*, 29 March<sup>16</sup>**

After many failures, the recent decisions and some policies of Imran Khan led government are satisfactory. *More such steps may ensure Imran Khan to complete his remaining years as Prime Minister. In a cabinet meeting recently, Imran Khan took decisions to reduce gas and oil prices in the country.* Prime Minister Khan also announced special fund for creating Corona Relief Tiger Force (CRTF) that will be used in delivering ration to the

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<sup>15</sup> <https://dailytimes.com.pk/582732/chinas-mask-diplomacy-daily-times/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ummat.net/2020/03/29/news.php?p=idr1.gif>

poor and for other facilities. Though the people were expecting more reduction in prices of petroleum products, the reduction was not that much. The announcement of creating CRTF is a good decision. But more often such announcements have never seen implementation on the ground. *In a recent incident, the government seemed to be unhappy from journalists. Subsequently, the government stopped giving government advertisements to many newspapers, making thousands of journalists jobless.* This is a way to curb freedom of media. Governments that fail to deliver see any critique as an attack on itself. All the same, the decision to allow essential services continue is welcome. *However, the government does not seem to have changed much. Special advisor to the Prime Minister, Firdous Ashiq Awan has said that the price hike should be put on hold for some time. That means Corona virus has compelled the government delay the hike for some time.* It seems every economic policy of the government is designed by the IMF: The government seems helpless in front of the IMF.

## SECURITY SITUATION

**Doha deal, Editorial, Dawn, 01 March<sup>17</sup>**

America's envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad and the Taliban's representative Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar were all smiles while signing the deal in the Qatari capital. *But the days ahead will show whether these cordialities are genuine, or if the once-bitter foes return to face each other on the battlefield.* There are quite a few unanswered questions emerging from the Doha process, as well as some lessons that should be learnt by all sides. If everything goes according to plan, Afghanistan's long nightmare may indeed soon give way to a more peaceful future. However, knowing that country's history, it is too early to celebrate, though one should remain optimistic considering that the alternative to dialogue is relentless war. On paper these are all positive developments, though it will be up to the stakeholders — primarily all Afghan factions, the Americans, as well as neighbouring states — to help this difficult but doable peace process succeed. One of the main lessons that should be learnt from the Afghan imbroglio is the failure of nation-building projects by foreign forces. *The fact is that unless Afghans trust each other and work together, no foreign-backed peace initiative will succeed, as the Mujahedeen infighting after the Soviet withdrawal showed. And the Taliban must also pledge to respect the political process and work within democratic norms if they wish to see peace prevail in their homeland.*

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1537546/doha-deal>

### **The Victorious Islamic Republic of the Taliban, Muhammad Aslam Khan, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 03 March<sup>18</sup>**

There is change in Afghanistan. Prospects for peace seem increasing. The philosophy of Gen. Hamid Gul has emerged as victorious. *However, there are some "thinkers" who are worried that the Taliban is triumphant.* The head of the Taliban Mawlawi Hibattullah Akhundzada has announced amnesty to all Afghans who had fought against the Taliban in the past. *After the 20 years of war, the result has been same what then Soviet Union General had said when the Soviets had attacked Afghanistan in 1979: "It is easy to come to Afghanistan but it is difficult to leave the country." It took some time the Americans to sink in these wise words of the Soviet general. Taliban has won the war and there is possibility of peace in Afghanistan. But President Ashraf Ghani does not seem to like it.* The deal increased significance of the Taliban. Most of the attendees present at the venue of signing the agreement and the media persons were chasing the Taliban leaders rather than the Americans. The agreement has four parts. First is about surety that the territory of Afghanistan will not be used by terrorists against America. Second is withdrawal of the American troops from the Afghan soil. Third is that the Taliban will talk to other Afghan groups. And the fourth is that there will be permanent ceasefire in Afghanistan. *America has promised that it would withdraw its troops in 14 months' time. It has also promised that all prisoners will be released.* By 10 March 2020 over 15,000 prisoners will be released. Out of this number, 5,000 are Taliban members.

### **U.S.-Afghan agreement- expectations and apprehensions, Editorial, *Roznama Express*, 03 March<sup>19</sup>**

America and the Taliban have reached to a historical agreement. It is being seen as a ray of hope amidst the bleak situation in Afghanistan. *Others have casted their doubts on the success of the deal after President Ashraf Ghani's statement that America cannot decide whether to release the Taliban prisoners or not. It is Kabul's prerogative.* At the same time, Ghani said that he would set up a group of members to participate in the inter-Afghan talks with the Taliban. Iran also has criticized the deal saying that the U.S. has no right to sign a deal. The right belongs only to the Afghans. *President Trump on the other hand is going to use the deal in his election campaign to get re-elected. He said in the White House that if the deal does not work, he would send such a large number of troops to Afghanistan which has never been*

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-03-03/page-10/detail-8>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx?newsID=1107236262&Issue=NP\\_KHI&Date=20200303](https://www.express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx?newsID=1107236262&Issue=NP_KHI&Date=20200303)

*seen. After the deal there will be hopefully new political activities will be taken by political leaders to stabilize the country. It will be hard for Afghanistan to leave behind the horrible past and move towards new and stable country. Some argue that America has given too much leverage to the Taliban. Despite all this, the inter-Afghan talks will play crucial role in shaping the future of the country.* Pakistan has played heavy price in the war on terror and in the Talibanization in the region. Thousands of Pakistanis soldiers and civilians were martyred and thousands injured. *The people of Pakistan pray for peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. All hopes depend on the inter-Afghan dialogue.* It is necessary that the Afghan soil is not used against anyone. The Taliban and the Afghan Government should take steps that are in interest of their country and the region.

### **Threats to Qatar peace deal, Muhammad Qasim, Ummat, 05 March<sup>20</sup>**

America has attacked Taliban hideouts in Nahr-e-Saraj and killed many Taliban fighters. *The attack has created chances of ending the recently signed peace deal. At the same time, the Bigram Base has started biometrics for Haqqani prisoners to release them.* On the other hand, details of the telephoning conversation between President Trump and Maulvi Abdul Gani Baradar have also come out. *The attack at the Taliban hideouts was carried out after there was a fight between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in Helmand.* According to some reports, Taliban reacted to an attack by the Afghan security forces. The Taliban fighters had thought that the U.S. would not attack them as according to the deal the Taliban fighters will not target the American troops. *America violated the agreement and did serious bombing on the Taliban hideouts. Meanwhile, Ummat received a brief from the Taliban in Deri which says that President Ghani had written to the emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad al Thani to update him about Taliban attacks. Ghani asked al Thani to facilitate talks between the Taliban and the Kabul Government.* Meanwhile, according to some reports, the Taliban has attacked in Kondozi and killed 19 soldiers after the U.S. attack in Helmand. These developments have signaled that the peace deal may end soon. *According some reports first time Mullah Baradar talked to President Trump on phone. The talk went on for 35 minutes in which Baradar said to Trump that he hopes that the U.S. would act on the agreement.* He said that America should play positive role in keeping external powers at bay from Afghanistan and in restoring peace and stability in the country. *Baradar said that the Taliban will establish contacts with Ashraf Ghani soon so that inter-Afghan talks will take place. Trump said that the U.S. will implement the agreement.* According to a Taliban source, Trump has promised the Taliban

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<sup>20</sup> <http://ummat.net/2020/03/05/news.php?p=story2.gif>

that he would do a larger agreement and participate actively in re-building Afghanistan if he is re-elected as the President of the U.S.

**Militant attacks, Editorial, Dawn, 23 March<sup>21</sup>**

*A Troubling uptick in small-scale militant attacks in the tribal areas has become evident. There is good reason to be concerned.* On Wednesday night, two constables laid down their lives in the line of duty when armed men attacked a police station, also manned by Frontier Corps personnel, in the Orakzai tribal district. The assailants escaped after the assault. In the early hours of the same day, an army officer and three soldiers were martyred during an intelligence-based operation against a terrorists' hideout in Dattakhel in North Waziristan. *Seven terrorists were also killed.* About two weeks ago, on March 10, a colonel was martyred in the course of another IBO in Tank district bordering South Waziristan. *Local residents for several months have been warning that militants have been trickling back into their areas, perhaps attempting to establish a foothold in their old stomping grounds.* The increasing number of small-scale attacks in Pakistan indicates either they are still managing to slip across the border, or that sleeper cells on this side have become more active. *The gravity of the situation is further enhanced by the growing crisis in Pakistan on account of the Covid-19 pandemic.* If the number of infections rise exponentially, it is conceivable that the government may have to impose a lockdown in some parts of the country. As in other countries, the measure may require the army to be called out to enforce it strictly, stretching the security forces' resources further.

**Al Azhar fatwa must be heeded, Editorial, Dawn, 27 March<sup>22</sup>**

One of Islam's premier seats of learning, Al Azhar in Egypt, is considered by most Muslims to be the gold standard where matters of faith are concerned. *One would have hoped, therefore, that the fatwa by the institution permitting suspension of congregational prayers in Pakistan to control the spread of the coronavirus would have been heeded.* However, it seems that President Alvi's meeting yesterday with religious scholars across the country to discuss that possibility has not changed their stance. *The outcome, according to the government, is that prayers will be 'restricted' and the elderly and the sick advised to pray at home. Such half-baked measures will cost us dearly.* Other Muslim countries — Saudi Arabia and Iran among them — have already suspended congregational prayers, even while members of Pakistan's clergy refused to countenance a measure that will save lives. *Not surprisingly, perhaps, given the kind of influence the religious lobby wields in*

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1543045/militant-attacks>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1544048/al-azhar-fatwa-must-be-heeded>



*Pakistan, the federal and provincial governments have been dithering over the issue.* However, Sindh, which has been the most proactive in handling the crisis, yesterday decided to discard its hitherto tentative approach and take the responsible step of temporarily banning all congregational prayers in the province.

**On the Front with Kamran Shahid, Pakistan Army Joins hands with civil government in the fight against Corona, *Dunya News*, 19 March<sup>23</sup>**

The main points are: *First*, the army has joined the civil government in combating the virus. *"The Army is in full swing to tackle the corona virus alongside the civil governments,"* said DG ISPR Major General Babar Iftikhar at a press conference alongside Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Dr Zafar Mirza and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan regarding the ongoing efforts against Covid-19. The host underlines that it is a good news that army has finally joined in the efforts officially to fight the virus. *Second*, the two guests on the show from the opposition party criticizes the PTI governments in action and asks what it has been doing if they had known about the virus from last two to three months. They blame the release of the pilgrims of from Iran from the Qaftan border on the government's negligence and say that the government is now trying to suppress the number of cases. Despite the large number of the cases in the border region, the lack of facilities, health service and essential commodities and basis cleanliness is further putting a question mark on the government's readiness to fight the virus. *Third, there is a complete lack of vision and leadership in the country, the opposition leaders on the show argues and blames the PTI government for not extending hands to opposition for cooperation.* They ask where the dam fund, collected in the name of dam building is. Where is the money collected by wheat and sugar mafias and where is the money given in loan? All these money should be now diverted to Corona fund. The kits which were donated by China are diverted to Showkat Khanum Hospital (*headed by Imran Khan*) and they charge money for all kinds of test, they blame. *Fourth*, recently in a press conference of the PPP, Bilalwal talked about the need to ease towards lock down and social distancing in order to fight the corona virus which is in contrast to what PM Imran Khan said in his address to nation, that Pakistan cannot afford a complete lockdown.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OL11gvchQvk>

## Sindh

**Sindh response to Covid-19 turns tables on PPP critics, Imran Ayub, Dawn, 27 March<sup>24</sup>**

*The pandemic, brought to light the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) performance in Sindh where Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah is capitalizing everyday on his actions by reconnecting with the people and winning applause from every segment of society.* "What emerged from this crisis is the personality of CM Sindh and his leadership qualities," says Mubashir Zaidi, a senior journalist. CM Shah's proactive approach in the present time of crisis came as a surprise for many of his political opponents as well. The record maintained by the CM House shows how vigorously he has been pursuing the strategy that his cabinet has devised, leaving no space for anyone to show sluggishness. *Setting the trend of battle across the country against the coronavirus with lockdown after his announcement followed by other provinces, CM Shah without much fanfare is opening new venues for his future as leader and his party, which has lost so much ground over the years amid charges of corruption and bad governance.* It is a quirk of the situation or a blessing in disguise for the PPP that its Sindh government which was until recently being criticized for failing in controlling cases of rabies due to dog bites and dengue is now praised for its administration for the pandemic that has brought some of the world's greatest economies to the knees.

**Let the government of Sind solve other issues, Editorial, Jasarat, March 24<sup>25</sup>**

It is wrong to believe that Pakistan was issueless before Corona; the reality is that Pakistan is full with issues and particularly Sind is epicenter of problems. This time government of Sind seems to be more active on Corona and it has left other issues unsolved in the name of Corona. Those issues did not disappear due to Corona but their severity increased manifold. For example sewerages were leaking, now these leakages increased many time and municipal personnel got excuse of Corona. Crises of drinking water became more sever. Mr. Syed Murad Ali Shah you must try to understand that Corona may be natural calamity but not the natural help with the ability to solve other issues of state. You have been representing Sind since long so you must hold yourself accountable for administrative malpractices. China

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<sup>24</sup><https://www.dawn.com/news/1544066/sindh-response-to-covid-19-turns-tables-on-ppp-critics>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.jasarat.com/2020/03/24/200324-03-3/>

Cutting was started under your leadership. Sind Building Control Authority has allowed illegal construction after receiving bribes. Now the same Sind Building Control Authority is demolishing those illegal buildings. *If anyone asks municipal minister to lay down waterline in some area, he asks for his share on ground that he has to handover a huge sum of amount to Bilalwal house every month what he received as bribe.* Before outbreak of Corona Murad Ali Shah was worst performing Chief Ministers and Sind as a worst province of Pakistan. But after Corona he emerged as hero as all his previous records and failures vanished and day to day issues of Sind have been wrapped in envelop of Corona. Now he is frightening people in the name of Corona. Nobody can question him about genuine issues. *From street crime, law and order issue, hygiene situation, failure of administrative machinery to increase in bribery these are some gifts from PPP to the people of Sind.* If Syed Murad Ali Shah pays some attention toward hospitals of the province and convert them in to standard hospitals because of Corona it will be positive affect of Corona.

## Punjab

**Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, The Junabi (South) Punjab Bill by PTI, Geo News, 11 March<sup>26</sup>**

Guest on the show is, Farrukh Habib-PTI, Mian Javed Latif-PML-N and Iftikhar Ahmed Khan Babar of the PPP. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan and senior leader of PTI announced that the PTI will soon present the *Janubi (South) Punjab bill in the parliament which will result in the formation of a separate district of South Punjab.* In this episode the host discusses this important development with the guests. Also Shah Mehmood Qureshi joins in the discussion live and answers few questions related to the announcement. The main points are, *First*, Farrukh Habib of the PTI stresses that first they will try to build a consensus on the issue and then only the Junabi Punjab bill will be introduced in the Parliament. He also adds that since the other two parties PML-N and PPP has for a long time talked about a spate south Punjab district, 'we hope they support the bill as we are of the view that people of Punjab should get their rights'. *Second*, Javid Latif of the PML-N says that although we support the bill but the question is why the PTI did not support it when the PML-N brought it in the assembly. He stresses that they are bringing the bill now just for the political point scoring and underlines that the PTI wants to hide the mafia scams in Punjab and therefore they are putting up a show by talking about this bill. *Third*, Khan Babar of the PPP questions why the PTI took such a long time to introduce the bill as they

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzXrYIS-BvY>

knew the demand was always there for a separate district. He says that even now there is no clarity about a separate district as there is lots of confusion. They are talking about two secretariats in Bawalpur and Multan. Also there has also been a demand for a separate Bawalpur district, what about it, he asks. *Hamid Mir: Why the announcement of the Janubi Punjab bill was made by you and not the PM? Will the opposition cooperate? Shah Mehmood Qureshi:* In addition to a Minister in the government, I am also the vice chairman of the PTI party. There are two things, first a political decision and announcing the bill was a political action. Then there is the administrative action, according to which by April two officers one additional chief secretary south and additional IG Police south will be appointed and they will be responsible for the preparations for the transition. By July two secretariats will function one in Bawalpur and one in Multan and the two officers will be posted in them to head the affairs.

## URDU MEDIA

### **NAB way and basic rights, Editorial, Jang, 09 March<sup>27</sup>**

Islamabad High Court (IHC) has declared the issuing of arrest orders by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) without any supervision as unbridled use of power and against basic rights. *The judgement said that the powers of NAB need to be used cautiously. The bench based on Chief Justice Athar Minallah, Justice Miangul Aurangzeb raised questions on the arrest warrant of Abdul Samad, former director of Pakistan Telecom Authority, in 4-G license case.* While saying that corruption needs to be fought, the bench said that evidences should be provided for arrest warrants. Otherwise, such actions can have negative impact on investment in the country. *While identifying flaws in the investigation of the case, the bench said that it is hoped in order to make accountability effective, free and fair, the federal government and MNA will take appropriate steps to reform the NAB. ...* The statement read that misuse of authority cannot legitimize depriving basic rights of any accused. Arrests cannot be used arbitrarily. *The issues highlighted by IHC have been pointed out not only by the opposition but by some section in the government as well. The other day President Arif Alvi expressed his concerns over NAB.* The parliament needs to act immediately to address the issues raised on the working of NAB so that accountability of corrupt will be free and fair.

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<sup>27</sup> [https://e.jang.com.pk/03-09-2020/lahore/pic.asp?picname=06\\_001.png](https://e.jang.com.pk/03-09-2020/lahore/pic.asp?picname=06_001.png)

**America's plan to withdraw from Afghanistan, Gen. (R) Mirza Aslam Beg, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 06 March<sup>28</sup>**

The agreement signed by the U.S. and the Afghan Taliban on 29 February 2020 should have been signed in 2012 when Washington had reached to the same conclusion that it has in 2020. *Washington had appointed Richard Armitage for talks with the Taliban in 2012. He met me and we appointed our representatives to talk to the Taliban. But the Pentagon sabotaged the process.* Even now it is not too late. The deal signed the last month has few negative and positive aspects. *Negative aspects*, US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan has worried India. Therefore, NDS and RAW will try to carryout terror attacks to defame the Taliban. Internally, Ashraf Ghani, warlords and small groups will oppose Taliban government in Afghanistan. They will try to sabotage the inter-Afghan dialogue because if the latter succeeds that will provide a strong and stable government. America will try to stop Islamic government coming to power in Afghanistan. No government official has signed the deal, making any U-turn possible. To set 18 months' time for the withdrawal is a well thought out plan. That is why Iran has rejected the deal. Same countries that had opposed an Islamic government in Afghanistan In 1989-90, are opposing establishing the one this time as well.

*Positive aspects:* Positive aspects are stronger than the negatives ones, giving hope that they will prevail at the end. America is exhausted and has lost the war. To save the face, it has asked for 18 months' time for troops' withdrawal. Too much is demanded from the Taliban. But its power and organization is fragmented. The 18 months' time is given to help the Taliban to strengthen its organization and overcome factors that try to spoil the peace agreement. The Taliban has used time and space quite well and outsmarted the advanced military technology of the U.S. In 1989-90, the Taliban had seven commanders and two patrons, the ISI and CIA. This time, it has only one commander and same is their patron. They have already system in place in the areas that they control. The fighters of the Taliban are mostly young, who were born in last forty years. They are brave, strong and followers of Mullah Umar.

**Government of Iran pushed back 70,000 pilgrims to Pakistan, Report, *Ummat*, 24 March<sup>29</sup>**

Government of Islamic Republic of Iran not only pushed Pakistani pilgrims to Pakistan but it also did not allow Indian pilgrims from Lucknow and other places to continue their stay in Iran. One of the institutes of national security

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-03-06/page-10/detail-7>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ummat.net/2020/03/24/news.php?p=story1.gif>

prepared a report in backdrop of Taftan crisis which documented the agony and pain of pilgrims and senselessness of Irani officials. *Report says more people were pushed back inside Pakistan than what is officially being quoted.* Of seventy thousand pilgrims who entered the Pakistan through Taftan border only five thousands have been screened. To tackle the sea of people pushed to Pakistan border by Iran, Baluchistan government contacted federal as well as foreign ministry to ask Iran for primary screening after outbreak of Corona. However federal government as well as ministry of foreign office did not pay any attention to this alert. Government of Balochistan even asked Iranian ambassador to Pakistan that Government of Iran should take care of this human aspect. If it considers pilgrims as burden and doesn't want to their stay then they should be screened before they cross the border. But Iranian ambassador did not show any interest. *At the time of this crises Non-Muslim country like China took care of these Pakistanis as their own citizen and provided them with healthcare. But attitude of brotherly country like Iran with these innocent pilgrims was regrettable.* Despite the fact these pilgrims send *Khums* (a particular amount on Zakat) to the government of Iran out of love and affection towards them. Even this passion of love and affection did not force Iran to console with them in this time of tragedy. *There are officers in security and management of border who sympathized with these pilgrims. Because of these sympathizer officers these pilgrims could enter Pakistan without screening and quarantine. This was one of the reasons that Corona spread so fast in Pakistan. This report recommended introducing some changes on Pak-Iran border management so that such tragedy should not happen again.* As per sources when these helpless pilgrims were being forced to leave Iran most of them requested to get screened on their own account. If they tested positive they should be quarantined as an Iranian citizen and if result is negative they themselves will go to Pakistan. But no one heard them and they forced inside Pakistan. Even some rich pilgrims who got admitted in hospitals on their own expenditure were forced to leave the country. It is worthy to mention here that Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmad also referred to Taftan border in one of his remarks about outbreak of Corona inside Pakistan.

**Reconstruction of Afghanistan is USA's responsibility, Editorial, Jasarat, 26 March<sup>30</sup>**

USA has cut its aid to Afghanistan in the name of disagreement between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. Trump has said that aid could only be restored when both presidential candidates reach to an agreement. USA is directly responsible for the current conditions in Afghanistan. *It has*

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.jasarat.com/2020/03/26/200326-03-3/>

*experimented all kind of weapons from Daisy Cutter bombs to mother of all bombs there, which converted Afghanistan in to ruins. It is sad that USA doesn't learn from its previous mistakes and now it does want to keep Afghans slaves through its agents. Since USA is responsible for Afghanistan's current condition so it's USA's responsibility to reconstruct it. Not only reconstruction will suffice but it should compensate Afghans for destruction of the country and ruining of their generations. USA's reconstruction should not restrict to Afghanistan but it should compensate all the other countries got affected with this fake war on terror. Pakistan was among countries which bore more losses both in property and lives due to this war with Afghanistan. USA used almost all the infrastructure of Pakistan which resulted in to ruining of roads and other key infrastructure. But till today this destruction was not compensated. NATO did not fee dues incurred for using airspace of Pakistan. This is the same USA which kept F16 after receiving all due and later Pakistan was forced to pay heavy parking bills. This issue should have risen with USA before facilitation of talks with Taliban and receive its entire bill with penalty.*

**Corona crisis- national and international, Editorial, Jang, 30 March<sup>31</sup>**

Corona virus is spreading fast and shows no signs of retrieving. In Pakistan also, the number of COVID-19 infected people is increasing. The number has gone up to 1,500. *Fortunately, the death rate is much less than the other countries.* Medical experts and doctors across the world are trying hard to find antidote for the virus. Over 150,000 Covid-19 patients have recovered. Even if the pandemic is brought under control in coming few months, like in China it has been, by that time it would have already cost heavily to the global economy. Its negative impact will be felt for longer time. Socially and politically also, it is going to have deep impact. *According to the IMF head, because of the Corona virus, global economy is in crisis. Because of the world lockdown, industries, manufacturing factories, airlines, trade and lack of diplomacy have led to bigger crisis than the 2008 financial crisis.* The federal government and provincial governments in Pakistan are also trying cope with the Corona crisis. The eastern and western borders have been closed for two more weeks. Prime Minster Imran Khan has also taken some decisions to help the needy people during the lockdown. *However, it is responsibility of the government to take steps to ensure that these decisions are implemented properly and benefits reach to the needy people. Like in many previous cases, China has again come to our help.* Now it is responsibility of the government to rise to the occasion and help to the country to come out of the crisis. After

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<sup>31</sup> <https://jang.com.pk/news/751673>

seeing that how closely the world is connected, would it not be better for the developed world to help the developing countries and help them. Only by moving together and working for whole humanity will the world be able to achieve new goals.

**The post-Corona world, Muhammad Aslam Khan, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 31 March<sup>32</sup>**

Corona virus has shaken the world. Russia, China and Iran are sure that the virus is not natural but devilish creation of the U.S. However, this cannot be proven. In the 1990s, Saddam Hussain had accused the U.S. that the latter was planning to use Corona virus on Iraq to destroy the country. *China is being targeted for creating Corona virus and is being alienated. President Donald Trump accused that since the virus came from China, it was "Chinese virus"*. All the same, Corona virus has changed the whole human history. Now, comparisons will be made between the pre-Corona world and the post-Corona world. Post-Corona world analysis has already begun. It is said that 1000,000 people will die in the U.S. alone because of COVID-19. *People across will be put in prison-like places and some will be incarcerated in their homes. In these circumstances, 5G will be used for surveillance of humans which will meet the requirements of the post-Corona world.* The global economy is in crisis. *Time of notes as currency seems ending and it is going to be replaced by bit coins, crypto and digital currencies.* Experts say that Corona will end the dominance of the current economic system and its centre, Washington DC. In the new system, puppets will be rewarded for their obedience. World is waiting for vaccine that can be used to treat Corona virus. In the "new world", it seems people would blindly take the medicine. *Earlier they were reluctant of such vaccines like for polio. Scientists will invent a vaccine that would introduce non-human features in the people and they would not able to differentiate between likes, dislikes, taste and others. In short a human will be such a slave who will operate at the orders of its masters. This will be "Radio Frequency Identification" (RFID) system.* It will be working as if a "chip", inserted in humans, makes their identification possible. Every detail of humans will be stored in it.

## ELECTRONIC MEDIA

**Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, Will Nawaz Sharif come back to Pakistan, Hamid Mir, *Geo News*, 03 March<sup>33</sup>**

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/islamabad/2020-03-31/page-4/detail-7>



*Guests:* Waseem Akhtar, Mayor Karachi, Ali Nawaz Awan, PTI and Javid Latif of the PML-N. *Waseem Akhtar:* Why this government has suddenly awoken to the fact that Nawaz Sharif is not coming back to Pakistan and he has exhausted the stipulated time for his treatment in London. For me right now the issue is of Karachi and I will appeal the government and court to do their jobs regarding Nawaz Sharif and many others who have left the country. *Ali Nawaz Awan:* It is more than ninety days and still Nawaz Sharif is not admitted in hospital in London for his treatment. Actually the PML-N is beautifully doing its media management by twisting and turning the events related to Nawaz Sharif. If Nawaz Sharif is not planning to get treatment in London then he should come back to Pakistan. *Javid Latif:* The medical reports of Nawaz Sharif was made by doctors recommended by the PTI government and its not hidden that Dr Yasmeen Rashid of the PTI has said openly that Nawaz Sharif needs treatment and he should be allowed to travel outside. By saying that they will write a letter to the UK government to extradite Nawaz Sharif the PTI government is doubting its own institutions, hospitals and media and calling them all party to “the fixed match” to send Nawaz Sharif out of the country. *Syed Ghani:* If they are writing letters to bring Nawaz Sharif back then why not they are taking any action to bring back Pervez Musharraf? On the contrary this government showing full support to Musharraf and trying to stop the proceeding of the case. Nawaz Sharif has not escaped the country on his own but this government has given permission on the basis of the medical report.

**Off the record with Kashif Abbasi, PM’s address to nation: What wrong, ARY News, 18 March<sup>34</sup>**

Talking about the PM address to the nation, the host lists certain points where Pakistan is failing to fight with corona virus. These are: *First*, He underlines that PM said his government is studying how the other countries are gearing up to fight with the pandemic but the host underlines that it is wrong to think that things will not go out of hand in Pakistan like other countries. *Second*, he underlines that it is not a health issue but a bigger issue therefore it will not work when Pakistan is putting a doctor to head the fight against the virus. He believes that the PM or the PM house should lead the fight against the corona. *Third*, Pakistan should employ an active policy not a reactive one and use diplomacy to bring necessary kits and medicines into the country. He strongly believes that army should be involved in the efforts. So far China has donated 4 million dollars to Pakistan to buy necessary kits. *Fourth*, CM Sindh is the only person who is active but still there is no field hospital in Taftan. *Shah*

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04cbD1SJ0vU>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uxQ6sdBWtk>

*Mehmood Qureshi on this show talking about the government's response and says government is looking for help from China as china has more experience and is bringing the numbers down with coordinated efforts.* We have asked for immediate help from China, asked for testing kits, ventilators. Qureshi underlines that China is satisfied with two things: first that Pakistan did not bring its students back from China when the world was doing so and second, it was the first country to send the message of cooperation with China in wake of the corona virus.

**Najam Sethi Show, PML-N Parliamentary Meeting, 24 News, 10 March<sup>35</sup>**

There is lots of confusion and doubts among the workers of the PML-N regarding Nawaz Sharif and Shebaz Sharifs return to the country. In this regard a parliamentary meeting of the PML-N was convened to discuss all these issues. In this episode Najam Sethi discuss the issues within the PML-N and the future moves of PML-N. **The main points are:** *First*, right now there is resentment, hurt and confusion in the PML-N. The silence of Nawaz Sharif, Shebaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz are creating all these confusions and their silence is disturbing. *Second*, according to Najam Sethi, Nawaz Sharif has now given a green light to the leaders of PML-N to create a counter narrative and that is why veteran leaders like Rana Sana Ullah, Shaihd Qaqan Abbasi are talking to the media frequently. *Third*, The PML-N wants to bring an inhouse change within six months or a year, then bring electoral reforms in favour of national interest. Then they want to have free and fair elections. *Fourth*, If we talk about the PTI governments act of writing a letter to the UK government to bring Nawaz Sharif back, then according to Najam Sethi its all a drama as in reality they do not want Nawaz Sharif back in the country. Nawaz Sharif left the country if not through an NRO then some kind of understanding with the PTI government. Bringing him back forcefully will kill the motive of the PTI and will back fire. *Fifth*, If Nawaz Sahrif comes back to the country, then it will trigger protests by PML-N which in turn will mobilize and channelize the anger of the people of Pakistan who are already angry on the present affairs of the country, especially economy.

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqqYs8T2g0M>

**Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Sath, Ulema and Federal government in Agreement to Restrain Congressional Prayers in Mosques, Geo News, 26 March<sup>36</sup>**

It has to be noted that earlier PM Imran Khan has said that we cannot close the doors to mosque at any cost because religious institutions play a vital role when it comes to politics of Pakistan. *Only when all the Ulema was taken into confidence the decision to restrict the number of persons in the mosques was taken and the same was announced by the minster of religious affairs in a press conference.* The main points are: *First*, after much deliberation and meeting with Ulema associations in the country, the Federal government of Pakistan has decided not to close mosques for prayers but to restrain the number of people allowed in the mosque. But the number of people allowed in the mosques is not clear while on the other *hand Sindh government has cleared the numbers and said only 4 to 5 including the head of the mosque is allowed till 05 April 2020.* *Second*, addressing a news conference here on Thursday, Dr Noor-ul-Haq Qadri said, "It has been decided with a consensus that Friday prayers will be 'restrained'. Only mosques' administration staff and a limited number of worshippers will be allowed to pray inside mosques." *Mosques will not be closed but prayers and zikr will continue inside them, he clarified adding that the decision had been taken in consultation with ulema belonging to various schools of thought.* *Third*, justifying the decision of the government to restrict the number of prayers in mosques Qadri referred to the various Fatwa's given by Muslim countries to stop congregation prayers in mosque as a preventive measure to stop the virus. They also disclosed that the Saudi *Government has written letter to Pakistan not to start any agreement or arrangement related to Haj pilgrim this year as of yet till Saudi gives green signal.* *Fourth*, Dr. Yasmeen Rashid, Health Minister of Pakistan on this episode emphasized the importance of social distancing and I agree that even Friday prayers should be restricted. She informed that the Jhelum region has been cordoned off because of the increasing cases of the virus. Punjab has agreed to implement the steps and restrict the prayers in the mosques. *It is been feared that the village can become another epicentre of corona virus.*

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<sup>36</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY8Q\\_kvFvk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY8Q_kvFvk)

## BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

*(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)*

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
<b>Punjab</b>				
Rawalpindi <sup>37</sup>	13/03/2020	Five people hurt in cracker explosion	00	55
<b>KP</b>				
Peshawar <sup>38</sup>		Mud houses collapse in heavy rains killing 17 in NW Pakistan	17	30

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/628551-five-people-hurt-in-cracker-explosion>

<sup>38</sup> <https://apnews.com/aca70fd7662c4de047a626122136b98f>