

Headlines:

- **British Prime Minister Johnson Tests Positive for Virus**
- **US Places Pakistan on High-Priority List for Covid-19 Assistance**
- **Saudi Arabia asks Pakistan Not to Sign Hajj Contracts**

Details:

British Prime Minister Johnson Tests Positive for Virus

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has tested positive for the new coronavirus, the first leader of a major nation to contract COVID-19, but he insisted Friday that he remains in charge of the U.K.'s response to the outbreak. Two of Johnson's top aides in the fight against the virus — his health secretary and top medical adviser — also said they had the disease. Johnson, 55, said he was tested Thursday after showing “mild symptoms”: a temperature and a persistent cough. “I’ve taken a test, that’s come out positive so I am working from home, I am self-isolating, and that’s entirely the right thing to do,” Johnson said in a video message posted on his Twitter account. “But be in no doubt that I can continue, thanks to the wizardry of modern technology, to communicate with all my top team to lead the national fightback against coronavirus.” Health Secretary Matt Hancock was also confirmed to have the virus. Hancock, 41, tweeted: “Thankfully my symptoms are mild.” Chris Whitty, who is chief medical officer for England, tweeted that he had “symptoms compatible with COVID-19” and would be self-isolating at home for a week. Johnson, Hancock and Whitty have attended meetings of the government's COVID-19 crisis committee and appeared at the government's daily coronavirus press conferences. Johnson is the highest-profile political leader to have contracted the virus, which has infected more than 500,000 people around the world. Elsewhere, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa have all been tested and found to be negative. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau self-isolated after his wife tested positive for COVID-19. The British diagnoses are the latest evidence that no one — no matter how high-profile — is untouched by the global pandemic. [Source: *NYT*]

From the outset of the COVID 19 crisis, the British have taken an extremely relaxed attitude towards combating the disease. Initially, Johnson’s government supported “herd immunity” but then quickly backtracked under intense public pressure, and adopted flatten the curve strategy pursued by other nations. Also, Johnson is reluctant to impose a full lockdown on the British people, and this means that the virus is likely to spread at an exponential rate. The announcement that Johnson and his Health Secretary have contracted the virus along with Prince Charles (how convenient) sends a clear message to the masses to take social distancing measures seriously. Time will tell whether the British public follow Johnson’s advice.

US Places Pakistan on High-Priority List for Covid-19 Assistance

The United States has placed Pakistan among the high-priority countries that will receive US assistance for curbing the outbreak of the deadly coronavirus, a senior American official said. Briefing journalists in Washington on Thursday afternoon on the US response to this pandemic, Bonnie Glick, deputy administrator of the US Agency for International Development said Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Thailand, Burma and Uzbekistan were also among these high-priority states. The United States has set up a \$274 million fund to help the international community in combating the outbreak of this deadly disease. [Source: The Dawn]

Despite being the richest country in the world, America is unable to protect its own population. The US media reports are rife about the extent of America's unprepared to handle COVID 19. In fact COVID 19 has exposed the fragility of America's healthcare system and economy. Within this context any handout given by the US should only be viewed as another tool to control Pakistan and other developing countries.

Saudi Arabia asks Pakistan Not to Sign Hajj Contracts

The Saudi government has asked Pakistan to stop making any contracts for Hajj 2020 due to the threat of Covid-19. The Saudi government conveyed this through a letter written to Pakistan's Ministry for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony. The letter says, all the pilgrims must be directed that no new contracts would take place due to the outbreak of coronavirus around the world. It further explained that all these measures were taken for the good health and life of the people coming for Hajj from around the world. The Saudi government further assured the Pakistani government that it is regularly monitoring the situation and will inform Pakistan regarding the further development. It is pertinent to mention that Saudi Arabia has already halted travel to the holy sites of Muslims over the Covid-19 over fears just months ahead of the annual Hajj pilgrimage, as the Middle East recorded more than hundreds of confirmed cases. The extraordinary decision by Saudi Arabia prevents foreigners from reaching the holy city of Mecca and the Kaaba. The earliest recorded outbreak came in 632 as pilgrims fought off malaria. A cholera outbreak in 1821 killed an estimated 20,000 pilgrims. Another cholera outbreak in 1865 killed 15,000 pilgrims and then spread worldwide. [Source: The Nation]

The Saudis have taken similar steps with other Muslim countries like Indonesia by cancelling Hajj visas. It appears the Saudis are using COVID 19 as an excuse to cancel the Hajj this year, and stymie the immense anger felt by Muslims worldwide towards MBS's Westernization of the country. It was narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri: The Prophet (saw) said: «لِيُحَجَّ النَّبِيُّ وَلِيُعْتَمَرَ بَعْدَ خُرُوجِ يَأْجُوجَ وَمَاجُوجَ» "The people will continue performing the Hajj and 'Umra to the Ka'ba even after the appearance of Gog and Magog." [Sahih Bukhari]. It is absolutely forbidden to abandon the Hajj and the Muslims must upend any decision taken by the Saudi to stop the Hajj.