

PM Advocates Global Debt Relief Initiative for Developing Countries

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday called for a global initiative on debt relief for developing countries, including Pakistan, so that they could combat the novel coronavirus in a better way.

During a telephonic conversation with Bill Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, PM Khan apprised him how his government was fighting on two fronts simultaneously — combating Covid-19 and saving people from hunger caused by the countrywide lockdown.

According to an official press release, Prime Minister Khan discussed with Bill Gates the latest developments surrounding the Covid-19 response. He appreciated the support provided by the Gates Foundation and other international partners during this unprecedented crisis and emphasised on the continued urgency of the situation.

Pakistan, he said, was making all-out efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic with a robust and coordinated response. “Pakistan is facing a dual challenge of overcoming the pandemic and saving people, particularly the most vulnerable segments of the population, from hunger due to lockdown,” he added.

The prime minister said his government had given a \$8 billion package to support people and businesses affected by the lockdown in the country due to coronavirus.

Imran speaks to Bill Gates, chairs meeting to review Covid-19 situation, cash distribution programme

He said the steps taken by the government had helped contain the spread of coronavirus in Pakistan and urged the world to announce a debt relief package for developing countries so that they could fight the deadly virus in a better way. “The prime minister called for ‘Global Initiative on Debt Relief’ for developing countries,” said the press release.

Mr Gates said Covid-19 was a threat to the world and commended Pakistan’s efforts to protect the lives and livelihood of vulnerable people.

The prime minister and Mr Gates also discussed their shared priority of polio eradication. They discussed the important role that Pakistan’s polio staff and infrastructure are playing in the fight against Covid-19.

The polio teams are supporting the training of frontline health workers on Covid-19. In the context of the pandemic, they agreed that routine immunisation programmes for children, especially polio vaccination, could not be ignored, and stressed the need for capacity enhancement of the National Institute of Health.

Cash distribution programme

The prime minister presided over a meeting held to review the present situation and impact of coronavirus on the country's economy and low-income groups of society, as well as the Ehsaas cash distribution programme.

The meeting was informed that under the programme, the government had so far distributed Rs80.5 billion among 6.6 million families as Rs12,000 four-month stipend. A total of 12 million families would be benefited and R144bn had been allocated for the programme.

The prime minister said the cabinet had approved a Rs75bn relief package for labourers and daily wage earners badly affected by the countrywide lockdown. He directed his special assistant on social protection Sania Nishtar to devise a comprehensive mechanism for providing relief to the labourers.

PM Khan also issued directives for devising anti-coronavirus strategies considering the needs of all segments of society, particularly the poor, ridding the country of previous tendency of pro-rich policies.

He reiterated that amid the pandemic situation in the country the government had to maintain a balance between prevention against coronavirus and sustainability of economic process.

The prime minister told the meeting that the government had finalised a policy regarding allowing Taraweeh prayers at mosques after consultation with ulema, who had also taken responsibility of its true implementation. He said maintaining social distancing for protection against coronavirus was everyone's responsibility.

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