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May 19, 2020: National / International Current Affairs

1. SC orders opening of all shopping malls

- The Supreme Court on May 18, 2020 set aside the federal government's decision to close shops, markets and businesses on Saturdays and Sundays, saying it relected no justifiable rationale.
 - The SC order required the provincial governments to open all shopping malls without any hindrance or obstruction but ensure strict adherence to standard operating procedures (SOPs). The businessmen shall be allowed to do their business on all days, which is permissible under the law, subject to enforcement of SOPs, the Supreme Court ruled after a suo-motu hearing on government's efforts to curb the spread of coronavirus in the country.
 - Looking at the past history of Pakistan where business activities of private entrepreneurs were interfered with by the governments, the apex court cautioned, such entrepreneurs lost faith in the system and packed up to move to some other destinations in the world, where they considered their investment to be more safe and profitable.
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2. PM launches cash scheme for workers affected by pandemic

- Prime Minister Imran Khan launched a multi-billion Ehsaas emergency cash programme on May 18, 2020 for the workers and daily wage earners badly affected by the coronavirus crisis.
- The prime minister met many jobless persons and inquired about their problems during the ceremony at the Ehsaas Centre. A stipend of Rs12,000 will be given to each applicant under the emergency programme. The scheme is distinct from the Ehsaas cash programme already in operation under which Rs144 billion was allocated for 12 million families .Over Rs100bn has so far been distributed.

- Dr Sania Nishtar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation, accompanied the prime minister and briefed him on the programme
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3. Balochistan not to allow public transport resumption

- The Balochistan government has decided to not allow the resumption of public transport in the province and discouraged people from travelling in trains to halt the fast transmission of coronavirus.
 - A high-level meeting presided over by Chief Minister Jam Khan Alyani on May 18, 2020 expressed its serious reservations over the opening of road transport and rail service, saying, `resuming transport without SOPs would cause the spread of Covid-19 in villages and remote parts of the province` and the government had therefore decided to not resume intercity and inter-provincial public transport.
 - CM Alyani appealed to people to refrain from travelling, saying that the `people of Quetta should not go out of Quetta and people from other areas should also not come to the provincial capital as the number of infected persons are far more in Quetta who could then infect other people coming outside of Quetta.
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4. Railways allowed to resume partial operation from tomorrow

- Prime Minister Imran Khan on May 18, 2020 allowed the Pakistan Railways to resume 30 passenger trains (15-Up and 15-Down) from Wednesday (tomorrow) after the Minister for Railways met him and apprised him of the growing transport-related issues in the country due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - The countrywide passenger train service was suspended on March 25 due to the spread of the novel coronavirus.
 - `I had a meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan today and finally he allowed us to resume a limited operation of 30 trains from May 20, Sheikh Rashid confirmed to Dawn.
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5. \$371m WB loans signed for agriculture, social sectors

- Pakistan and the World Bank on May 18, 2020 signed two loan agreements of \$371 million to support projects in the agriculture and social sectors.

- The agreements were signed online by Ministry of Economic Affairs secretary Noor Ahmed on behalf of the federal government, while representatives of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa signed the agreements on behalf of their governments.
 - World Bank`s country director Patchamuthu Illangovan signed the agreements on behalf of his organisation
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6. WB agrees to launch \$145m Covid-19, locust control projects in Sindh

- The World Bank and the Sindh government agreed on May 18, 2020 to launch a \$145 million Sindh Covid-19 Response Programme and a Locust Control Programme in the province.
 - This decision was taken in a meeting between Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and World Bank country director Patchamuthu Illangovan through video link. The chief minister took part in the meeting from the CM House and the WB director with his team from his Islamabad office.
 - The chief minister was assisted by Energy Minister Imtiaz Sheikh, CM`s coordinator Haris Gazdar, chairman of P&D Mohammad Waseem, energy secretary Musadiq Khan, finance secretary Hassan Naqvi and investment secretary Najam Shah.
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7. China backs virus probe `after pandemic`

- China supports an independent inquiry into the handling of the coronavirus pandemic after it is `brought under control`, President Xi Jinping said on May 18, 2020, as Europe accelerated its re-openings with landmarks Saint Peter`s Basilica and the Acropolis in Athens welcoming visitors again.
 - After weeks dogged by allegations from the US and elsewhere that Beijing had covered up the virus` origins, Xi insisted during the World Health Assembly that China has `always had an open, transparent and responsible attitude`.
 - More than 4.7 million people have tested positive and 315,270 killed by the disease since it emerged in Wuhan late last year, according to an AFP tally
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8. Under-trial vaccine succeeds in producing Covid-19 antibodies in humans

- An American biotech company, Moderna, announced on May 18, 2020 that initial human trials of its coronavirus vaccine produced Covid-19 antibodies in all 45 participants.
 - `With today`s positive interim Phase 1 data and the positive data in the mouse challenge model, the Moderna team continues to focus on moving as fast as safely possible to start our pivotal Phase 3 study in July and, if successful, file a license application,` said Moderna`s Chief Executive Officer Stéphane Bancel.
 - `We are investing to scale up manufacturing so we can maximize the number of doses we can produce to help protect as many people as we can from SARS-CoV-2.
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9. Libya`s unity govt seizes airbase in new blow for rival Haftar

- Libya`s UN-recognised government scored another battlefield victory on May 18, 2020 against strongman Khalifa Haftar, capturing a key rear base used by his fighters in a conflict now in its second year.
 - Haftar, who controls swathes of eastern Libya, launched an offensive in April last year against the capital Tripoli, seat of the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA).
 - On May 18, 2020, the GNA said its forces had seized the strategic Al-Watiya airbase southwest of Tripoli, representing the latest in a string of setbacks suffered by Haftar`s camp in recent weeks, including the loss of two key western coastal cities in April.
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10. Japan launches new unit to step up defence in outer space

- Japan launched its new space defense unit on May 18, 2020 to monitor and counter threats to the country`s satellites. The Space Operations Squadron, part of Japan`s Air Self Defence Force, starts with 20 members and is expected to grow to about 100 members once the unit is fully operational in 2023.
 - The role of the unit is mainly to monitor and protect Japanese satellites from enemy attacks or space debris. It will also conduct satellite-based navigation and communications for other troops in the field. The launch of the new unit comes amid growing Japanese concern that China and Russia are seeking ways to interfere, disable or destroy satellites
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Daily Top 10 Current Affairs

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