The High Commission organized a Seminar on 05 February 2020 to mark Kashmir Solidarity Day, observed by the Government and people of Pakistan across the globe. In a show of solidarity, Members of the British Parliament, Eminent Scholars, and Academics, Legal Experts, Members of the Civil Society and British friends of Kashmir participated in the Seminar.

The Seminar Speakers included President AJ&K, Sardar Masood Khan, Members of British Parliament Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, Lord Qurban Hussain, Debbie Abrahams MP, Yasmin Qureshi MP, Afzal Khan MP, Naz Shah MP, Muhammad Yasin MP, former UN’s Special Rapporteur Ben Emmerson QC, former MEP’s John Howarth and Phil Bennion, Professor Robert Wintemute, Professor Nazir Shaul and Cllr & NEC Member Yasmin Dar.

Mr Zakaria said the Seminar and all such activities are an expression of our unequivocal support and reassurance to the Kashmiri people that entire Pakistan stands with them resolutely, come what may, and would not be deterred until the Kashmiris get their right to self-determination as promised by the UN in its Security Council’s resolutions.

Sardar Masood Khan, President AJ&K said Modi government took illegal, outrageous and egregious steps since 05 August 2019 aiming at colonising IOK and effecting demographic change in the region in violation of UNSC Resolutions and relevant international conventions.

The speakers supported the political position taken by the UK and several other countries that human rights situation in Kashmir was an international issue and not India’s internal matter and that to term Kashmir dispute a bilateral issue was not tenable. To call it a bilateral issue is a simplistic view of a grave situation where massive human rights abuses are taking place, they added.

A similar seminar was held in the British Parliament on 04 February where India was urged to end crimes against humanity in occupied Kashmir. The High Commissioner was key note speaker whereas a large number of British Parliamentarians participated in the event.
High Commissioner hosts newly elected British Pakistani MPs

The High Commissioner hosted a reception on 11 February to celebrate the victory of the newly elected British MPs with Pakistani heritage in December 2019 election. The event was held at the ‘Pakistan House’.

Besides newly elected MPs and Lords, a large number of guests comprising Senior British Government Officials, High Commissioners/Ambassadors, Business People, Doctors, Engineers, Academics, Scientists, Lawyers, IT Professionals, British friends of Pakistan, Members of the Pakistani Diaspora and media representatives attended the reception. Dignitaries from Pakistan who were then visiting the UK, also attended the reception.

Felicitating the newly elected MPs, the High Commissioner said it was a moment of great pride and happiness to celebrate the achievements of the distinguished Pakistanis in the political life of the UK. The number of British Pakistani MPs has increased to 15, which is a testimony of the constructive political engagement of our community in the UK, he added.

High Commissioner congratulates Diaspora, commends their contribution

Pakistan Day was marked by Flag Hoisting ceremony at the Pakistan High Commission London on 23 March 2020. In deference to the instructions of the Government of Pakistan and the UK Government’s guidelines, the Flag was hoisted in a simple ceremony live streamed on the Mission’s Official Facebook for virtual participation of the Pakistani community keeping in view their sentimental attachment to the occasion. Thousands of British Pakistanis viewed the ceremony virtually on Facebook.

High Commissioner Mohammad Nafees Zakaria hoisted the flag. Messages of the President and the Prime Minister of Pakistan were also read out on the occasion.

Congratulating the Diaspora, the High Commissioner shed light on the importance of the National Day of Pakistan. He paid glowing tributes to the Quaid-i-Azam, Allama Iqbal and other founding fathers, who, through their unwavering resolve and visionary leadership created Pakistan.

Mr Zakaria said: “Today when we review the spirit behind Pakistan’s freedom movement and validity of Two-Nation Theory, we feel more and more grateful and admire Quaid-i-Azam, Allama Iqbal and Leadership of Pakistan Movement for their vision and far-sightedness.”

National Day of Pakistan observed at the High Commission
The High Commissioner has been regularly reaching out to the 1.5 million strong Pakistani Diaspora in the UK during the difficult time of ongoing pandemic Covid-19. In his public addresses through videos on 25 March and 1 April 2020, the High Commissioner offered all possible support to the British Pakistanis. He specifically addressed the stranded Pakistanis and assured them of resolving their issues related to UK visas and repatriation to Pakistan. He urged the community to adhere to the instructions issued by the Government of Pakistan and the UK Government guidelines pertaining to the pandemic COVID-19.

The High Commissioner paid rich tributes to the British Pakistani Doctors, Nurses and other health workers at the NHS who have waging a formidable fight against pandemic COVID-19. So far, a number of Pakistani Doctors and Nurses have sacrificed their lives in this fight. The High Commissioner has been sending messages of condolence to the bereaved families of these health professionals. Similarly, he has been reaching out to those British Pakistani families who lost their loved ones in the ongoing pandemic.

Through his letters and video messages, the High Commissioner has been reaching out to the Pakistani Diaspora in the UK and offering them all possible help those affected by the pandemic.

In the wake of prevailing Coronavirus pandemic, the High Commission for Pakistan, London has been approached by several Pakistanis whose visas have either expired or would expire shortly and are unable to leave the UK for Pakistan due to recent suspension of flights.

Although the UK Government has extended visas of all stranded foreign nationals in the UK, all such stranded Pakistanis must visit the showed website and email, for updates and further necessary action.

The stranded Pakistanis must register themselves with the High Commission for return to Pakistan by sending a copy of their passport, contact number and detail of their situation at the given email address and advised to keep visiting Mission website for updates and comply with the UK Government guidelines.

The Pakistani community and students in the UK are requested to keep visiting High Commission’s website for updates on travel and health related issues.

The High Commission for Pakistan, London is keeping close contact with the Pakistani community and the students currently studying in the UK. In order to ensure effective liaison in this regard, High Commissioner has designated two officers as Focal Persons for Consular/Community Affairs and Students Affairs to assist during Coronavirus Pandemic crisis.

In view of the Social Distancing guidelines of the UK Government, currently the Consular Services are being provided online. Therefore, the community members are advised to avail the online facility and NOT to visit the High Commission.

The Pakistani community and students in the UK are requested to keep visiting High Commission’s website for updates on travel and health related issues.
High Commissioner Mohammad Nafees Zakaria said Pakistan deeply appreciates the support extended by our international partners in the fight against Polio including Rotary International; Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization; United Nations Foundation; and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. He said that at a Reception arranged in honour of Mr Mark Maloney, President of Rotary International, at the High Commission on 11 March 2020. The event was jointly organized by World Congress of Overseas Pakistanis and the High Commission.

Besides Mrs and Mr. Mark Maloney, President of Rotary International, the Reception was attended by Mrs. Susan Elden, Senior Health Advisor, DFID UK, Mr. Aziz Memon, Chairman Pakistan National Polio plus Committee, Ms. Judith of Rotary International, Javed Khan, Chief Executive of Barnardo’s, office bearers of Conservative Friends of Pakistan, representatives of World Congress of Overseas Pakistanis (WCOP), members of the British and Pakistani community and media persons.

The High Commissioner apprised the guests that Pakistan’s vaccination programme was driven by up to 260,000 vaccinators, the largest health service provider network of its kind in the world.

Mr Mark Maloney, President of Rotary International said Rotary International was committed to eradicating polio from the world. He acknowledged the commitment of Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government towards eliminating polio from the country.

Achievements of Doctors of Pakistani heritage are outstanding: Nafees Zakaria

High Commissioner Mohammad Nafees Zakaria said doctors and physicians of Pakistani heritage had achieved great successes in their respective fields and made Pakistan proud. He was addressing the Association of Pakistani Physicians of Northern Europe (APPNE) as Chief Guest and Patron of the organization in Manchester on 07 March 2020.

Mr Zakaria felicitated Dr. Amir Burney, President APPNE and Office Bearers and Members on organizing the first APPNE Annual event. He commended the significant contribution of doctors and physicians of Pakistani heritage to the British society, particularly to the National Health Service (NHS) of the UK.

On this occasion, the High Commissioner announced that the Mission would sponsor a Bursary for Urdu Studies at the University of Manchester. He commended the work and efforts of Mr. Shiraz Ali from the University of Manchester, Dr. John Morley, Director of University-wide Language Programme and Dr. Justyna Drobnik Rogers, for promotion of Urdu in the UK.

Dr. Amir Burney, President APPNE briefed the gathering about the aims and objectives of organisation.
A Roadshow to introduce the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and related investment opportunities under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was held at the Pakistan High Commission London on 04 March 2020. Chaudhry Muhammad Sarwar, Governor Punjab was the Chief Guest whereas a large number of British Pakistanis and potential investors attended the event.

The High Commissioner briefed the British Pakistanis on the investment opportunities in Pakistan, especially in SEZs being established under China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Given the economic potential of the CPEC, Mr Zakaria termed the project a game changer. He also apprised the guests of Mission’s efforts to attract foreign investments to Pakistan and the business prospects for investors.

In his address, Governor Punjab said that the Government of Prime Minister Imran Khan attached great importance to the expatriate Pakistanis and was committed to resolving all of their issues, particularly those related to their investment in Pakistan. He invited the overseas Pakistanis as well as foreign investors to take advantage of the investment friendly regime of Pakistan.

**PRIME MINISTER’S COVID-19 PANDEMIC RELIEF FUND-2020**

High Commission’s Exclusive Account with United Bank Limited (UBL) UK

In view of the ongoing global crisis, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan has set up a COVID-19 PANDEMIC RELIEF FUND-2020 to combat the economic impact of the disease in the country and to provide support for the poor and vulnerable segments of Pakistani society.

In order to facilitate Pakistani community in the UK, the High Commission has opened an exclusive account with the United Bank Limited (UBL), London with the approval of the Government of Pakistan. The Pakistani community can directly deposit their contributions in this account.

While Pakistani Community Members are extending support in kind, deposits to the above-mentioned Relief Fund would be of significant value and impact on the lives of the families in need.

Given the size of our Community in the UK, its generous contributions to the Fund can greatly assist the Government of Pakistan in its undertaking to effectively combat the pandemic and provide relief for the economically less privileged population of the country.

For details of the account established by the Government of Pakistan, please visit: https://www.nbp.com.pk/COVIDFUND/index.aspx
The Health Foundation introduces its work on Hepatitis

The High Commission hosted The Health Foundation (THF) on 21 February 2020 UK, where it introduced its work on eradication of Hepatitis B/C from Pakistan. The purpose of the event was to create awareness about the prevalence of this viral disease in Pakistan and get the support of British Pakistanis for this cause. A large number of health professionals, philanthropists, members of the civil society and media persons attended the event.

The High Commissioner appreciated the good work of THF and termed it a noble cause. He called upon the British Pakistanis to play their role and contribute towards THF efforts to eliminate the disease from the country. Mr Zakaria also commended the role of the pharmaceutical sector of Pakistan in significantly bringing down the prices of the vaccine and related medicines.

Dr Saad Khalid Niaz, Mr Seed Allawala and Dr Abdullah Hoodbhoy spoke on the occasion.

Dr Saad Khalid Niaz, Mr Seed Allawala and Dr Abdullah Hoodbhoy spoke on the occasion.

The High Commissioner inaugurated a research network named MaRC (Materials Advanced Research Consortium) at the High Commission on 28 February 2020. The research network is collaboration between University of Huddersfield, UK and various Pakistani partner institutions. To establish this strategic research partnership with Pakistan, Dr Usman Ghori, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Huddersfield along with the faculty took the initiative.

One of the objectives of the project is to bring clean, affordable drinking water to the people of Pakistan. In this regard, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in Islamabad recently to form a Consortium of Universities.

The High Commissioner appreciated the research collaboration and commended the young scientist Dr Ghori and the team on their achievement. He emphasized on nurturing and guiding the young Pakistani talent in the UK to the benefit of both the countries. Mr. Zakaria hoped that such initiatives aiming at quality research will usher in an era of innovation, development and economic prosperity in Pakistan.
The High Commission hosted the UK Launch of Global Development Workshops on 17 February 2020. A UK based charity UPSIGN (UK Pakistan Science Innovation Global Network) has partnered with UK Research & Innovation (UKRI), through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) to organise development workshops in Pakistan. The activities will create and foster new relationships and develop new networks interested in solving development issues, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The High Commissioner appreciated the initiative and said Pakistan had a long history of working in partnership with its UK diaspora; therefore, it was fantastic to see British Pakistani professionals taking such impactful and sustainable initiatives.

Professor Nicola Lowe, UKRI’s GCRF Challenge lead for Food Systems, Prof Jawwad Darr, University College London, & the Chairman of UPSIGN Network and Dr Khalid Mahmood, UPSIGN Cofounder briefed the audience about the initiative.

High Commissioner Mohammad Nafees Zakaria briefing the cross-party Parliamentary Caucus from Pakistan on the UK-Pakistan bilateral relations at the Pakistan High Commission London. The women Parliamentarians visited the UK on the invitation of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK.
It is the middle of May and as one approaches the village of Balanguru, the sound of the chanting and rhythmically beating drum becomes louder and louder. This is a village in celebration.

But this is no ordinary celebration for this is Joshi - the Spring Festival of the Kalash. It is the biggest of the year and held in the three Kalash Valleys of Rumbur, Bumboret and Brir.

The Kalash are the only indigenous people in Pakistan and number only about 3000 in three remote valleys near Chitral, KP.

At the various ceremonies, there is much dancing and chanting to a beat of the drum. The women are instantly recognisable as they wear their traditional black robes and are adorned with coloured beads and ornate cowrie shelled headdresses.

The festival honours the fairies but also safeguards the goats and shepherds before they go to the pastures. It is a time for rejoicing for the many months ahead.

The origins of the Kalash fascinate anthropologists as they have no written language and their culture is passed down by word. They claim legendary ancestry as descendants of Alexander the Great's armies. A claim very easy to appreciate given the many sandy coloured hair and blue-eyed locals one encounters. However, this claim is not backed up by archaeologists as evidence is yet to be found to support that theory.

The Kalash themselves don't seem overly concerned about this as they link arms and continue to dance late into the night.

The Spring Festival lasts for four days and will take place this year from the 14th -16th May. Daily flights run to Chitral from Islamabad.