

Rapid surge in Covid-19 cases: Crucial NCC meeting today

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan is scheduled to preside over an all important meeting of the National Coordination Committee (NCC) today (Monday) to review the existing situation in the backdrop of rapid spread of coronavirus across the country, and to take decisions accordingly. The chief ministers of all four provinces of Pakistan, CM Gilgit-Baltistan, PM Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), federal ministers and other high-ranking officials are expected to attend the meeting. The three options that are expected to be reviewed in the meeting include tightening the lockdown measures, further relaxing the lockdown measures, maintaining the status quo and going for the 'smart' lockdown. The 'smart' lockdown implies taking restrictive measures only in those areas that have seen spread of coronavirus. However, in an indication that the federal government may further ease the lockdown restrictions, the National Command and Control Centre (NCOC) that met under the chair of Planning Minister Asad Umar on Sunday had reviewed the option to ease the lockdown restrictions. A statement issued after the meeting quoted the planning minister as directing the NCOC to "concentrate on the plan to ease the lockdown while strictly implementing the SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures)." The NCC is taking place at a time when the calls from political and public circles to go for strict measures to stop the spread of coronavirus are gaining momentum in the backdrop of the devastation unleashed by coronavirus in Pakistan. As many as 88 coronavirus-related deaths were recorded with 3,039 new cases surfaced in 24 hours and 201 patients were on ventilators battling for life, till Sunday evening. According to NCOC, the total coronavirus tally in Pakistan (by Sunday evening) had reached 69,496 with 1483 total deaths and 522 critically ill. The number of patients recovered from coronavirus was 25,271. The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Sindh was recorded at 27,360, Punjab 25,056 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 9,540, Balochistan 4,193, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) 2,418, Gilgit Baltistan (GB) 678 and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) 251. As many as 14,972 coronavirus screening tests were carried out in last 24 hours with the total number of screening tests having reached 547,030 till Sunday evening. The federal government has declared wearing masks at the public places mandatory and has decided to launch "no, mask no service" initiative at the commercial markets which would bound the shopkeepers to deny entertaining those customers who do not wear masks. The measure is taken in a bid to stem the unabated spread of the pandemic in Pakistan. The administration offices of federal educational institutions would be opened (not for students) from today (June 1) while NCOC has recommended closing the educational institutions (for students/classes) till August keeping in view the predictions that coronavirus might be at its peak in Pakistan by July 15, the earlier date for the opening of educational institutions.