

**SHC told, Textile mills unable to pay wages to employees due to lockdown**

KARACHI: The textile mills are not able to pay wages to their employees as ordered by the Sindh government due to the shutting down of their units because of the lockdown, the Sindh High Court (SHC) was informed here on Monday.

The submission was made before a division bench of the SHC which heard a petition against the provincial government's decision barring the mills from sacking their employees and making it mandatory on them to pay full wages.

During the hearing, Home and Labour Departments of Sindh submitted their replies in the petition.

Counsel for the textile mills told the court that it was an important matter and needed to be resolved as soon as possible.

Secretary of Labour, Rasheed Ahmed Solangi, told the court that the coronavirus was a global pandemic, and a lockdown was in place across the world, which has shut commercial and industrial businesses.

He submitted that the provincial government also decided to shut down the businesses to prevent spread of the virus and argued that the factory owners were liable to pay their employees under the Sindh Payment of Wages Act 2015. "The Sindh government has taken all measures lawfully," contended the official.

However, the lawyer for the petitioners stated that the payment demanded for employees was, in fact, in violation of the law mentioned by the labour secretary.

"Industries are closed. We cannot pay the employees," the counsel stated.

The court asked both the petitioners and the respondents to continue their arguments on Wednesday (May 6).

Meanwhile, a division bench of the SHC sought a reply from the provincial government about approval of the COVID-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance, passed by Sindh cabinet, while hearing a petition seeking signing of the ordinance by the governor.

During the hearing, the judge asked the government what the legal standing of the ordinance passed by the cabinet was.

"We received many petitions during the lockdown in this regard," remarked the judge.

The Additional Advocate-General of Sindh, Jawad Dero, informed the court that the ordinance had been passed by the provincial cabinet on April 27, which was then sent to the governor of Sindh for approval.

However, the governor had not responded to the Sindh government yet, the lawyer stated and added that the provincial government can use special powers in extraordinary circumstances under Article 105 of the Constitution.

The bench asked the Sindh government to submit a detailed response regarding the ordinance by May 5.