

Centre has introduced uniform national policy for Covid-19, Supreme Court told

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court was informed on Saturday that a uniform national policy has been proposed for combating Covid-19 in consultation with the provinces which will be implemented by the federal government in consistent manner throughout Pakistan.

The federal government as well as four provinces on Saturday submitted their respective reports in the Supreme Court in suo motu case regarding combating the pandemic of coronavirus.

A five-member larger bench of the apex court headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed will resume hearing tomorrow on May 18 in the instant matter.

Two new members, including Justice Mushir Alam and Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, have been added to the bench due to non-availability of Justice Umar Ata Bandial and Justice Sajjad Ali Shah.

Justice Umar Ata Bandial will be hearing cases at the Lahore Registry from next week while Justice Sajjad Ali Shah will be hearing cases at the Karachi Registry.

Earlier, five-member larger bench of the apex court headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Gulzar Ahmed and comprising Justice Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Mazhar Alam Khan Miankhel, Justice Sajjad Ali Shah and Justice Qazi Muhammad Amin Ahmed was hearing the instant matter.

In pursuance of the court's last order, the Centre and four provinces filed their respective reports about the steps taken for dealing with the pandemic.

In its report, the federal government through Deputy Attorney General Sohail Mahmood, informed the court that the latest meeting of the National Coordination Committee (NCC) presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan proposed for adoption of uniform national policy for combating COVID-19 in consultation with the provinces which will be implemented by the federal government in consistent manner throughout Pakistan as per direction of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

It added that during the meeting Attorney General Khalid Javed informed about the order passed by the apex court in the suo motu case regarding coronavirus. The AG pointed out the observation of the apex court that a national uniformed policy should be adopted by the federal and provincial governments to combat the pandemic as it affects fundamental rights of the people.

The AG emphasised the apex court's observations that the federal government has to take lead in consultation with the provincial governments, take into account the advice of the medical experts and implementation of required SOPs and the government should also reopen trade and businesses, particularly the small ones, including community shops and small traders being the vulnerable segments of the society, involving livelihood of millions of people.

The court was informed that after detailed deliberations, the committee decided that construction sector could proceed with phase-II of the plan as per SOPs till May 11. Offices, shopping malls, public congregations, wedding halls and public gatherings would remain closed until May 21, 2020.

The decision to extend the shutdown or otherwise would be taken before May 31, while small community markets in urban and rural areas would be opened," it added.

The court was further informed that the committee decided that provinces would notify Saturday and Sunday as days for complete lock down except essential services.

The committee further decided that the matter of resuming the inter-city public transport and inter-provincial transport via air, road, rail could be deliberated further in the NCOC meetings, the court was informed adding that all educational institutions would remain closed till July 15, 2020 and further extension of the period of closing down could be reviewed in the last week of June, 2020.

Likewise, the Punjab government in its report while defending its steps being taken for dealing with COVID-19 submitted that the provincial government is empowered to make legislation pertaining to health sector as well as maintaining peace and informed the court that in order to take effective measures for providing better health facilities to the people as well as maintaining peace promulgated Punjab Infection Diseases and Control Prevention Ordinance 2020, adding that the federal government has empowered the provinces to take decision relating to lockdown.

The report claimed to have full harmony with the federal government, adding that the provincial government suspended business activities in line with the direction of the Centre.

The report further stated that there is no difference among the federal government and provinces relating to lockdown, adding that lockdown was necessary for the safety of the people.