

'Sindh agrees to resume public transport after Eid holidays'

KARACHI: Just a day after the Sindh government refused to lift its ban on public transport despite prime minister's appeal, provincial authorities on Saturday announced that they would allow operations of buses and ride-hailing service across the province after Eid holidays.

It has been more than two months to the curb imposed on public transport as well as ride hailing companies to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Sindh Transport Minister Syed Awais Shah also announced a relief package for transporters, who he said had suffered huge losses due to the lockdown but extended their cooperation to the government.

The package included exemption of several taxes and duties on transport services and companies.

'We plan to allow public transport after three days of Eid holidays,' the minister said in a statement. 'However, this relaxation would be allowed only under the denned standard operating procedures (SOPs), which have to be followed both by transporters and passengers for safety and health of everyone.

The Sindh government put a ban on all kind of public transport services in the third week of March before the lockdown was formally imposed on March 23.

With the imposition of the lockdown, the operations of ride-sharing services was also suspended leaving people mostly dependent on private or personal vehicles to move from one place to another.

The provincial government also banned the intercity bus service to stop movement of people from one city to other.

The Pakistan Railways on March 24 suspended the operation of all its passenger trains throughout the country in view of the f astspreading coronavirus, further reducing options for commuters.

Only on Friday the minister hadcited the violation of the SOPs and government guidelines both by traders and buyers when the lockdown was relaxed earlier this week on directives of the federal government, claiming it resulted in a spike in cases of Covid-19.

A similar situation, he had said, was witnessed at different industrial units allowed to resume their operations, but they failed to meet the commitment and follow the rules of

social distancing and implementation of all due precautions and questioned in such situation how the transport service could be allowed.

However, the minister did not explain in his statement about a sudden change of heart in just one day.

He, however, mentioned multiple other moves which his department was making for transporters' relief and in this regard a summary had been forwarded to the chief minister.

Once the summary was approved by the chief minister, he said, the relief would start trickling down to the owners of different commercial vehicles and public transport.

'Buses, rickshaws, taxis and cargo vehicles will be provided relief in taxes and different fee, he said. 'We have also proposed a 50 per cent cut in amount of fines imposed in case of violations of different traffic rules. Similarly, it is also proposed to reduce the motor vehicles inspection fee by 50pc and a 25pc concession in the motor vehicle tax. The fee of route permit has also been proposed to be cut by 50pc.