

Punjab extends curfew till May 1; task force to decide on exit strategy

ET Bureau | Last Updated: Apr 10, 2020, 06.10 PM IST

Citing the grim projections about the spread of the pandemic in the coming weeks, the Chief Minister said the curfew restrictions were essential so that the medical infrastructure is not burdened beyond its capabilities.

CHANDIGARH: Amid apprehensions of community spread of COVID-19, the Punjab Government on Friday decided to extend the curfew in the state till May 1, 2020.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Council of Ministers, chaired by Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh, to check community spread of the pandemic and to prevent overcrowding at the Mandis in the light of the ensuing wheat harvesting/procurement season.

Captain Amarinder will convey the decision to Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Saturday's conference with the chief ministers, according to an official spokesperson.

"PUNJAB CABINET @capt_amarinder UNANIMOUSLY APPROVES EXTENSION OF PUNJAB CURFEW/ LOCKDOWN till 30 April, 2020/1st May, 2020. Extension by 21 days from today. Strict enforcement (sic)," Special Chief Secretary KBS Sidhu tweeted.

Citing the grim projections about the spread of the pandemic in the coming weeks, the Chief Minister said the curfew restrictions were essential so that the medical infrastructure is not burdened beyond its capabilities. There was general consensus in the medical community that the lockdown curbs would only delay the spread of the disease, he said, hoping that some medication/cure would be found soon.

On a proposal by the Chief Minister, the Council of Ministers also decided to set up a multi-disciplinary task force to formulate an exit strategy for gradual relaxation of curfew/lockdown. The task force will submit its report within 10 days. The task force will be comprised of about 15 members representing trade, business, industry, agriculture, civil society and health care professionals. The Chief Minister has been authorized to decide on the composition of the task force.

The Cabinet also approved establishment of a high-powered committee to suggest a road map for State's economic revival in post-COVID era once the crisis softens and normal working is restored. Captain Amarinder said he will request former Planning Commission deputy chairman Montek Ahluwalia to head the committee.

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The Council Ministers also resolved to urge upon Government of India to establish an Advance Center of Virology in Punjab with an anticipated investment of Rs.500 crore, with the state government to offer land free of cost for the project.

For the quick upgradation of the state's health infrastructure to combat the current crisis, the Cabinet set up a task force under the Principal Secretary, PWD, to look into it. Principal, Secretary, TCA and MD, Punjab Health Systems Corporation will be other members of the task force, which will carry out the task of quick upgradation of health infrastructure in a time bound manner. The Chief Minister asked the Health Department to submit a detailed proposal for this.