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- **CURFEW NOW TO REMAIN IN PUNJAB TILL MAY 17, BUT SHOPS TO OPEN BY ROTATION FROM TOMORROW FOR 4 HOURS EVERY MORNING**
- **APEALS TO INDUSTRY TO OPEN WITH LABOUR STAYING IN OR NEARBY TO REVIVE STATE'S ECONOMY**

Chandigarh, April 29:

Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Wednesday announced extension of curfew in the state by two weeks after May 3, while unveiling steps for limited lifting of the lockdown restrictions, from tomorrow, in the non-containment and non-red zones, with strict adherence to Covid-19 safety protocols.

Based on the report of the Expert Committee set up to formulate the state's exit strategy, and the inputs received from various sections of the society, the Chief Minister said it was necessary to continue with the lockdown restrictions for some more time.

The curfew/lockdown in the state will now remain in force in Punjab till May 17, though limited easing of restrictions will be in place from tomorrow from 7 am to 11 am every day. The containment and red zones will, however, continue to remain under total and strict lockdown.

In an address to the people of the state, the Chief Minister said the situation will be reviewed after two weeks and further relaxations will be announced thereafter if the pandemic remains in control.

As per the limited relief announced by the Chief Minister, certain shops will be allowed to remain open in certain areas by rotation, for four hours every morning, with 50% staff strength. The DCs have been directed to work out the rotational schedule for the shops that are allowed to be opened in line with the Chief Minister's directives, which have come into effect four days after the new MHA guidelines came into effect.

The lockdown/curfew will remain in place after 11 a.m., as usual, said the Chief Minister, appealing to people to be back in their homes by that time, and continue to maintain social distancing. All those stepping out during the relaxation period would have to wear masks and maintain a 2 meters distance from others, he said, adding that the relief has been provided only for the convenience of the people and should not be used for interactions with friends etc. If the situation improves after two weeks, we can take more steps, said Captain Amarinder

The limited relaxations announced by the Chief Minister from tomorrow include permission for opening of all registered shops, except those in multi-brand and single-brand malls, with 50% strength of workers from 7 am to 11 am. In urban areas, all stand-alone shops, neighbourhood shops and shops in residential complexes are allowed to open during this period, as per the new directives, which make it clear, however, that establishments dealing in services like saloons, barber shops etc. would continue to remain closed. Further, e-Commerce companies will continue to be permitted to deal in essential goods only during this period.

Expressing his government's keenness to open up the industry, the Chief Minister urged all those who could accommodate the workers or had workers staying in the vicinity to start opening up, in order to help revive the state's battered economy.

Referring to the large number of Punjabis stranded in other states due to the lockdown, the Chief Minister said it was his government's duty to bring them back but they would have to be quarantined for 21 days. The state had made arrangements for their quarantine in all district, he said, adding that the problem had aggravated in Punjab due to the large number of NRIs who came home, followed by the attendees of the Nizamuddin event. The state, he said, could not afford to let those coming from outside again let things spiral out of control. The quarantine for those coming home from other states was essential for the protection of the people, he said.

Earlier, the Chief Minister said the relief announced today was for the benefit of the people who had been under severe curfew restrictions for the past 38 days. Describing it as a difficult time for the people, who had sacrificed a lot for themselves, their families and the state at large, Captain Amarinder said it had been necessary to control the pandemic, which had so far infected 330 people in the state.

While various experts were coming out with different opinions, there seemed to be an indication that the coronavirus crisis could continue till July/August, or even

September, said Captain Amarinder, terming it a long-drawn battle. Pointing out that no country had escaped the coronavirus, he observed that the disease had claimed lots of lives across the world, with nearly 50000 people dying in the US, which had reported 10 lakh cases so far. He cited the examples of UK, Germany and Canada, to underscore the need for continued caution.

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