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SAYS COMMITTEE IS LOOKING INTO STAGGERED RELAXATIONS IN STATE, BUT NO CURFEW VIOLATIONS WILL BE ALLOWED

ASSURES NO PAY CUTS FOR GOVT EMPLOYEES TO DEAL WITH COVID CRISIS

Chandigarh, April 14:

The Punjab Government plans to provide PPE kits also to its police force in the frontline of the battle against COVID-19.

This was disclosed here on Tuesday by Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh at a video press conference, during which he said that while the first priority was the protection of the health workers, for whom the state already has 16,000 PPE kits. The government is also procuring more kits to be given to the police personnel, after all the doctors, paramedics and sanitation workers in hospitals are equipped with such kits, he said, adding that the police force was facing major risks in the current situation.

On the Patiala attack on a police party, leading to the amputation of an ASI's hand, the Chief Minister said he had told the DGP to take strict action against the perpetrators. "What do the Nihang think? That they can get away with this?," he quipped, adding that his first reaction to the incident was of "extreme anger". ASI Harjeet Singh was an extremely brave man, said Captain Amarinder.

The Chief Minister, in response to a question, made it clear that the relief operations being conducted by the police were their own initiative and from their own resources. No police personnel were being asked to do any work over and above their duty of enforcing the curfew and maintaining law and order in the state, he added.

While his government was cognizant of the problems faced by the people, there was no option but to continue with the stringent restrictions for the present, given the massive threat of the pandemic spiralling out of control, said the Chief Minister. But he admitted that the

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DIRECTIONS FOR
CONTAINMENT OF
COVID-19

Please share this list carrying essential phone numbers for each district

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Birthday Guru Nanak Dev Ji

550yearsofgurunanakdevji

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2020

lockdown could not continue till September, which is when experts say the curve is expected to come down in India. For the moment, however, the curfew/lockdown had to be strictly enforced, he said, adding that the police had instructions not to allow any violation, including with regard to wearing of masks when outside.

Conceding that the number of COVID tests being conducted in the state was not sufficient, Captain Amarinder said for mass testing, at least 10 lakh Rapid Testing Kits were needed, which the government had ordered from ICMR. So far, only 1000 kits had been received, which had become operational today in Mohali and Jalandhar.

On the issue of relaxations to be given, as also announced today by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister the committee formed by his government was already examining ways of doing so without compromising on the health of the people. The people's lives and health were the key priority, at the moment, he said, adding that the relaxations would have to be staggered, in phases, and the way forward was being worked out by the task force set up for this purpose.

While there was no proposal to open liquor vends in the state at present, as the primary focus was currently on ensuring supply chain of essential goods, a decision would gradually be taken in this regard also, Captain Amarinder said in response to a question.

Replying to a question, he said there was no proposal to cut the salaries of the government employees to generate funds to meet the COVID-19 battle expenditure.

To a question on the central government support for the state, the Chief Minister said his government had already sought a special package, including Rs 729 for hospital upgradation, Rs 550 crore for setting up an institute for advanced virology, as well as release of the pending GST arrears of Rs 4400 crore. While the Prime Minister had given positive indications, the package was yet to come, he said, adding that his government was giving the Centre time to formulate a collective response to the demands of all the states.

Asked about revival of industry in the state, the Chief Minister said priority was currently on saving lives, but a high-powered committee was being set up to look into the matter of post lockdown economic and industrial revival. He disclosed that four industrial units in Bathinda had already resumed operations with the migrant labourers they were housing in their premises, following the central government's approval for such activity.

On the issue of storage in Mandis, the Chief Minister said that the lifting of food grains had already started from Punjab as 72 Railway racks had transported wheat. Also, the state had sufficient space in rice shellers to accommodate the new crop, he added.

In response to a question about students and other stranded in Canada and other places within and outside India, the Chief Minister said requests had been received but till travel restrictions are lifted, nothing could be done. Even the Supreme Court has advised students to stay put where they are, he added. But he said he was concerned about the students, in particular, and would take up the issue with the Centre at the appropriate time.

The Chief Minister ruled out any compromise on his government's manifesto promises due to this unexpected and unprecedented crisis, and declared that all promises would be fulfilled.