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Press Release

Today, a meeting of the National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee, (NJPMC), was held at 4:00 p.m. under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Mr. Justice Gulzar Ahmed, Chief Justice of Pakistan/Chairman, NJPMC, in Committee Room, Supreme Court of Pakistan, Islamabad.

On special invitation, the meeting was graced by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Mushir Alam, Senior Puisne Judge, Supreme Court of Pakistan, Hon'ble Mr. Justice Umar Ata Bandial, Judge, Supreme Court of Pakistan, and Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ijaz Ul Ahsan, Judge, Supreme Court of Pakistan.

The meeting was attended by the Hon'ble Members of the NJPMC, including Hon'ble Chief Justice, Federal Shariat Court, Mr. Justice Muhammad Noor Meskanzai, Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ahmed Ali M. Shaikh, Chief Justice, High Court of Sindh (participated in the meeting through video linking), Mr. Justice Waqar Ahmad Seth, Chief Justice, Peshawar High Court, Mr. Justice Athar Minallah, Chief Justice, Islamabad High Court, Mr. Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Chief Justice, High Court of Balochistan and Mr. Justice Muhammad Qasim Khan, Chief Justice, Lahore High Court. Dr. Muhammad Raheem Awan, Secretary, National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee (NJPMC) convened the meeting.

Furthermore, on special invitation, Dr. Zafar Mirza, Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Health and Dr. Khurram Shahzad Akram, Incharge Judges Medical Centre, also attended the meeting.

The Hon'ble Chief Justice of Pakistan/Chairman, NJPMC welcomed the participants and remarked that the prevailing situation on Corona Virus (COVID-19) in the country requires special attention and practical actions. He further remarked that the Supreme Court of Pakistan has already issued instructions regarding preventive measures to minimize the spread of contagion COVID-19. The Hon'ble Chair mentioned that Dr. Zafar Mirza, Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Health, has been specially invited for apprising the Committee regarding various measures taken by the Federal Government to curb the Coronavirus in the Country.

The Hon'ble Chief Justice of Pakistan further remarked that we will not compromise on our judicial system and not let it be derailed by getting panicked as people of Pakistan have great deal of confidence on judicial system so we will never disappoint them. The apex judiciary of the country will ensure and take all the necessary preventive measures for health and safety of our judges, court staff, lawyers, litigants and other justice sector stake holders up to the district and tehsil

levels. Hon'ble Chairman, NJPMC, said that detailed instructions have already been issued to all High Courts to take all possible preventive measures by way of case management to ensure that the Court Rooms are not crowded and physical contact between individuals attending Courts is avoided. The Supreme Court of Pakistan has been and will continue to monitor implementation of such measures.

The Secretary, NJPMC, briefed the Committee about the prevailing situation on Corona Virus in the country. The Secretary also apprised the Committee about preventive measures taken by the august Supreme Court of Pakistan to curb the virus, which include avoiding hand shake, regular use of fumigation and disinfectant for cleaning of court premises/offices, cafeterias, Bar rooms, libraries, mosques and committee room, etc.

After deliberations, the Committee unanimously resolved that instructions/guidelines issued by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, shall be adopted by the Federal Shariat Court and High Courts upto the District and Tehsil Courts. Besides, the same may also be forwarded to the superior Judiciary of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

The Committee also deliberated upon and directed that the jail inmates (prisoners) shall be protected from being exposed to the risk of coronavirus/infection without denial of their right of family meetings, however, authorities will make sure to adopt precautionary measures and regulate the procedure of meetings. The Committee also deliberated upon likelihood of jail inmates to be exposed to coronavirus coming from outside, therefore, visitors visiting jail premises should be examined and properly screened to avoid any threat of infection of coronavirus to the prisoners, if any of the prisoner found infected he will be quarantined within jail premises without any delay from the premises.

The NJPMC unanimously resolved to adopt all these SoPs issued by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, which would be applicable on all the Courts. It is further decided that courts will remain open at all levels by reducing the judicial work load, so that the people working in the courts or visiting shall not be exposed to any risk of getting affected by virus. Therefore, people are urged not to unnecessarily visit court premises unless specifically required by any court. It is further resolved that protocol of health and hygiene would be ensured and adopted. In this regard like High Courts, District Courts will also reduce the work by hearing urgent matters and discouraging the entry of general public, as well as, assure to conduct screening tests of all persons entering in the Court premises. It is also resolved that no adverse order against any party would be passed in the courts in default i.e. non-prosecution or ex-parte order, etc.

The Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Health informed the Committee that the issues like National Health Policy, Coordination, Research and Development, etc., devising guidelines regarding health emergencies and global representations, resides with the Federal Government. Further informed that in the National Institute of Health, Islamabad, a surveillance unit has been established while there are similar units also operational in the Country and symptoms of Corona Virus are not

disease specific. Moreover, the Virus has entered into Country from outside. Whereas, in few days, the Federal Government would import kits which would be made available to the Public Sector Health institution free of cost, moreover, the said free kits will be provided for conducting tests of specified categories of individuals free of cost to the eminent private sector hospitals and diagnostic centers.

The Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Health further informed that in the 32nd Meeting of the National Security Committee, dated 13th March, 2020, it was decided that the National Disaster Management Authority would be the lead operational agency of the Federal Government and would coordinate its efforts with the provincial and district authorities for implementation of preventive and curative actions. He further informed that the Federal Government Hospital, Islamabad, near to the National Institute of Health, Chak Shahzad, Islamabad, is being dedicated to combat Corona Virus. Moreover, the private sector is also coming forward to help the government to combat the Corona Virus.

It was further resolved that the Crisis Management Committees would be formed by the respective High Courts to liaison with the concerned authorities for devising mechanism for safe guarding general public, litigants, lawyers, etc., from the spread of Corona Virus in the Federal Shariat Court and respective High Court premises, while for the District Judiciary the Hon'ble Chief Justice, High Courts would devise uniform plan/SoPs after consulting with the respective Administrative Committees, District and Sessions Judges and Bars. Besides, the High Courts shall decide suitable protocol for type of urgent cases to be fixed for hearing, the number of Judges to hold Court, the duration of their sessions held on rotation and the corresponding number of judges and the staff that shall be on leave during such sessions.

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan, Judge Supreme Court of Pakistan has been nominated as focal Judge being Chairman of the Supreme Court Health and Safety Committee to ensure the implementation of the directions of the NJPMC. Whereas, the Federal Shariat Court and High Courts would also nominate a Focal Person to maintain the liaison among the Judiciary, Government Departments and relevant authorities. The Hon'ble Chief Justice of High Courts will take such additional steps including administrative measure in consultation with Provincial health Authorities as may be deemed necessary. In order to ensure uniformity, the Hon'ble Focal Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan shall be kept in loop before such additional steps and measures are implemented. It was unanimously agreed that these all measures are taken for three weeks after that these will be reviewed according to the prevailing situation of the county.

This press release can be down loaded from the website, i.e. www.ljcp.gov.pk.

Sd/-
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