

## Lahore

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PROVINCIAL Minister for Education and Youth Affairs Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan has said that all private and public educational institutions in Punjab will open on January 12, barring schools and universities that have refused to comply with the new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) given by the Punjab government. The security of students and faculty staff is the topmost priority of the PML-N government, the minister added.

He said this while speaking at a press conference on Tuesday organised by the Barghad Organisation for Youth Development and Government of the Punjab to launch the Punjab Assembly Youth Caucus.

The Punjab Assembly, for the first time, has formed the youth caucus to highlight and raise issues pertaining to the young in the province including early child marriage, unemployment, and drug addiction. PML-Q MPA Sardar Vickas Hassan Mokal has been elected unopposed as the first Chairman of the Punjab Assembly Youth Caucus.

Speaking to the press, Minister Rana Mashhood said that a group, comprising MPAs below 45 years, were members of the youth caucus. The young MPAs will work beyond the party affiliations to debate and highlight challenges facing the youth of Punjab. According to Mashhood, an estimate 86 members of the Punjab Assembly are under the age of 45 years and are capable of representing the youth of the province consisting 50 percent of the total population.

The journey of forming the Punjab Youth Caucus began in 2010 and the last eight months were spent in holding elections of office-bearers, said Mashhood. He assured the politicians that both women and parliamentarians of non-Muslim faiths would have an opportunity to take the leadership positions within the caucus. In this defining moment when faced with terrorism and religious extremism, the caucus will play a positive role, emphasised Rana Mashhood.

Addressing the press conference along with the caucus Executive Committee of PML-N MPA Mary Gill, PML-N MPA Mian Irfan Daultana, and PML-Q MPA Sardar Vickas Hassan Mokal, Mashhood stated that the youth caucus was need of the hour as issues of young people

were not debated in the Punjab Assembly. He urged other provinces to form similar forums for the young parliamentarians. Already a women caucus is working in the Punjab Assembly on the female empowerment and a youth caucus will actively work to address grievances of the young people, the minister added.

The youth caucus, before the elections of the Executive Committee, also recently held meetings with Punjab Assembly Speaker Rana Muhammad Iqbal Khan and took him into confidence, the minister stated. He further said the Speaker assured full cooperation to the Punjab Assembly Youth Caucus.

Executive Director of the Barghad Organisation for Youth Development, Sabiha Shaheen, said the youth caucus was a bipartisan forum and the Punjab government had encouraged the opposition and other political parties to participate in the caucus.

The caucus aims to work for consensus building and agenda-setting beyond and above party lines for the youth and adolescent empowerment in the areas of education, health, sports, jobs, skills development, and socio-economic betterment, she stated on Tuesday. It will initiate programmes for the capacity building of members on key adolescent and youth empowerment issues. The caucus will also conduct research and analyses of issues facing them and raise them in the Punjab Assembly and its committees through its MPA members, Shaheen informed.

Mashhood told the media present there that the youth caucus would ensure parliamentary insight for the implementation of the Punjab Youth Policy 2012 and other youth-related initiatives of the government.

It will suggest the policy reforms and laws to the Punjab government through the assembly resolutions and debates in the House to resolve their problems.