

First batch of Hong Kong residents stranded in Pakistan to return home on chartered flight

A spokesman for the Security Bureau said today (April 29) that the first batch of around 300 Hong Kong residents stranded in Pakistan would take a chartered flight tentatively scheduled for departure from Islamabad in the morning on April 30 (local time) and expected to arrive in Hong Kong in the afternoon on April 30. The cost for taking the chartered flight is borne by the users.

Upon arrival at Hong Kong International Airport, the returnees will proceed to the Department of Health's Temporary Specimen Collection Centre at AsiaWorld-Expo by coaches for compulsory COVID-19 testing. After their deep throat saliva samples are collected, the returnees will be transferred by coaches to the quarantine centre at Chun Yeung Estate for a 14-day compulsory quarantine period.

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the Pakistan Government has banned all international flight movements since late March, resulting in Hong Kong residents stranded there being unable to return to Hong Kong through normal means for the time being. The Immigration Department (ImmD) has received requests for assistance from Hong Kong residents stranded there on their return arrangements, including the lists of assistance requests referred to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government by chambers of commerce and non-governmental organisations that are concerned about the affected people and Legislative Councillors.

As at April 28, the ImmD had successfully contacted about 1 600 Hong Kong residents stranded in Pakistan. Due to the large number of people requesting assistance and having regard to the quarantine arrangements for the returnees and the capacities for testing and the quarantine and treatment facilities, the HKSAR Government must adopt a phased approach in assisting in the return of the affected Hong Kong residents in batches subject to the circumstances. The first batch of affected persons taking a chartered flight are those staying in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, and its surrounding areas, and also those with special needs such as people with illness and pregnant women. The cost for taking the chartered flight is around HK\$6,000 per person and is borne by the users.

After receiving requests for assistance from Hong Kong residents stranded in Pakistan, the Security Bureau and the ImmD have been liaising with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR (OCMFA) and the Chinese Embassy in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to understand the local situation and take follow-up action, and to provide relevant information as well as practicable and appropriate assistance to the Hong Kong residents seeking help. The HKSAR

Government has also been liaising with the Consulate General of Pakistan in Hong Kong, and contacting several airlines to explore arrangement of flights for the return of stranded Hong Kong residents.

The spokesman said that the chartered flight could not have been arranged smoothly without the staunch support of the OCMFA and the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, as well as the full co-operation rendered by the Pakistan Government and the Consulate General of Pakistan in Hong Kong, for which the HKSAR Government is very grateful.

The HKSAR Government will continue to liaise with the Hong Kong residents still in Pakistan and adopt a phased approach in assisting in their return in batches subject to the circumstances.

Separately, the Government has noted that there will be a flight arriving from Doha this afternoon carrying about 170 Hong Kong residents coming back from Pakistan on their own. Upon arrival in Hong Kong, they will be subject to the same quarantine arrangement, i.e. they must proceed to the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre for collection of their deep throat saliva samples and then be admitted to the quarantine centre at Chun Yeung Estate for a 14-day compulsory quarantine period.

Apart from Pakistan, the Indian Government has also since late March banned all international flight movements. As at April 28, the ImmD had successfully contacted about 3 100 Hong Kong residents stranded in India who sought assistance on their return arrangements. The HKSAR Government is maintaining close contact with the OCMFA, the Chinese Embassy in the Republic of India and the Consulate General of India in Hong Kong, while at the same time contacting several airlines to explore arrangement of flights for the return of the stranded Hong Kong residents in batches subject to the circumstances.

The detailed arrangements such as the departure dates and location of the chartered flights are still subject to various factors, including the approval time of and the facilitation provided by the government concerned, the actual circumstances and the epidemic situation there, as well as land and air traffic or other restrictions. The Government will make an announcement as soon as the concrete arrangement is confirmed.