

HKSAR Government arranging chartered flight to bring back Hong Kong residents stranded in India

A Government spokesman said today (May 13) that the first chartered flight to take Hong Kong residents stranded in India home is tentatively scheduled to depart New Delhi for Hong Kong on May 17 at the earliest.

The first chartered flight will first assist Hong Kong residents who are now located in New Delhi, the capital of India, and those in its surrounding areas with special needs such as people with illness, pregnant women and children, as well as family members travelling with them.

Over the past few days, the Immigration Department (ImmD) has individually contacted assistance seekers who meet the above circumstances in order to confirm their wishes to take the chartered flight, and to obtain their personal particulars for applying for travel permission from the local government. As the ImmD is still contacting the assistance seekers concerned, the final number of passengers to be carried by the chartered flight is yet to be confirmed, though it is expected to be over 200. The cost for taking the chartered flight is estimated to be around HK\$8,000 per person at most, and will be borne by the users. The final cost is subject to the total number of passengers.

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

The chartered flight is tentatively planned to depart New Delhi for Hong Kong on May 17 at the earliest. However, the exact date and time of departure are still subject to the approval time of and the facilitation provided by the local government, land traffic situations and relevant permissions received by airlines. The relevant applications are being processed by the relevant Indian authorities.

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the Indian Government has banned all international flight movements since late March. Since last month, the ImmD has received requests for assistance in return arrangements from Hong Kong residents stranded there, including the lists of assistance requests referred to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government by chambers of commerce and non-governmental organisations which are concerned about the affected people, as well as by Legislative Councillors.

After receiving requests for assistance, 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 and the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of India to understand the local situation and take follow-up action, and to provide relevant information as well as appropriate suggestions and practicable assistance to the assistance seekers.

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

As at May 10, the ImmD had successfully contacted about 3 500 Hong Kong residents stranded in India, gaining a preliminary grasp of their personal particulars and whereabouts. They are currently scattered in different locations in India.

Considering the current restrictions on land and air traffic across India such that all travel must be approved by the relevant authorities, and having regard to the quarantine arrangement for the returnees and the capacities of relevant facilities, the HKSAR Government would arrange flights to assist in the return of the Hong Kong residents subject to the circumstances.

The spokesman said the Government understands that there are still many Hong Kong residents stranded in different areas of India. The Government will continue to liaise with them closely and assist them in returning to Hong Kong in an orderly manner in batches subject to the circumstances. The Government will contact them as soon as further information is available.