

Flight operations to China resume

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan will resume flight operations to and from China today after a pause of three days.

Earlier on Friday, Pakistan had suspended its national flag carrier's flights to and from China until Feb 2.

"Flight operation to and from China will begin after Sunday as a China Southern flight for Islamabad is scheduled to land at 9:30am on Monday," Senior Joint Secretary of Aviation Division Abdul Sattar Khokhar told Dawn, adding that Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will also resume flights to China.

On Thursday night, PIA had decided to suspend its flights to Beijing until Feb 2 as other airlines began suspending their flights to and from China due to the novel coronavirus outbreak.

PIA had started two flights a week to Beijing in May 2019 after a gap of three months.

Preparations have been made at Islamabad International Airport (IIA) to scan passengers arriving via the China Southern flight.

Every passenger will be scanned and if any symptom of virus is detected in any passenger then he or she will be shifted to Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims) or Benazir Bhutto Hospital as both have been declared focal hospitals, he said.

Punjab government has issued SOPs for protection of doctors and paramedical staff of government hospitals in case they are looking after a virus affected patient.

All passengers arriving from China on Monday will be rescanned at IIA, Mr Sattar said.

A senior official from IIA told Dawn that all the passengers arriving from United Arab Emirates are also being scanned to ensure that no affected passenger goes unnoticed.

On the arrival of China Southern flight, all the airport security staff, immigration officials and customs staff will be wearing masks and gloves.

Earlier on Saturday, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on health Dr Zafar Mirza visited IIA to inspect the special health desk, established for screening of passengers.

The health minister was appraised by Health Secretary Dr Allah Baksh, Senior Joint Secretary Aviation Abdul Sattar Khokhar, officials of Civil Aviation Authority and management of the airport.

The health minister also reviewed preparations to make passengers' screening foolproof at the airport.

A full scale mock exercise was also conducted on the occasion by paramedical staff at IIA to combat coronavirus.