

Emirates resumes service to four cities

RAWALPINDI: As Malay-sia's aviation regulator on Fri-day temporarily suspended pilots employed by domestic airlines who hold Pakistani licences, Emirates resumed passenger service to Pakistan's four main cities — Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad and Sialkot — after a temporary suspension, but with a condition that passengers will be required to carry with them a fresh negative Covid-19 report from a specified laboratory.

A spokesperson for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) airline said: "Following the receipt of relevant government approvals, Emirates has resumed passenger services to Pakistan. Customers can travel to Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad and Sialkot if they meet the requirements of their destination."

Emirates said: "The health and safety of our crew, customers and communities remain our top priority. Emirates have put in place a comprehensive set of measures at every step of the customer journey on the ground and in the air, to minimise the risk of infection spread."

The Emirates spokesperson said passengers travelling from Pakistan to Dubai and beyond must present a negative Covid-19 PCR test result certificate at the time of check-in.

"The PCR test must be taken up to four days prior to the travel date (96 hrs maximum) and must be conducted at the Emirates authorised Health Centre — Chughtai Labs — at the passenger's expense."

According to the spokesperson, children under the age of 12 years are exempted from the test if they are travelling with their parents who have tested negative and are fit to travel.

A senior official of the Aviation Division told Dawn that the issue of the Covid-19 test report required by Emirates came under discussion at the meeting of the National Command Operation Centre (NCOC) on Thursday.

"Emirates have designated a laboratory for the Covid-19 test for passengers travelling by the airliner from Pakistan, but it has not been made mandatory by other countries so far," the senior official said.

He said: "The requirement of the Covid-19 test report is an issue between passengers and the airline as the aviation authorities in Pakistan have been taking all precautionary measures to ensure the safety and health of people travelling from here."

On June 24, 2020, Emirates had temporarily suspended passenger services from Pakistan till July 3 after about 30 Pakistanis who arrived in Hong Kong on board an Emirates flight tested positive for Covid-19. Of the 30 male and female passengers, some had symptoms of fever, cough and sore throat while others were asymptomatic.

As part of safety measures, members of the Emirates team wearing full personal protective equipment (PPA) welcomed the passenger on the flight. Passengers are boarded the aircraft in smaller groups from the last row to the first and the boarding gates areas are deep cleaned once everyone is on the flight.

Emirates said: "You will need to keep your mask on at all times in the airport, during boarding and on board."

Dubious qualifications

According to Reuters news agency, Malaysia's aviation regulator has temporarily suspended pilots employed by domestic airlines who hold Pakistani licences, after the government of the South Asian nation revealed that many pilots had dubious qualifications.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Malaysia (CAAM) said in a statement on Thursday that the decision came after an evaluation of all foreign pilots in Malaysia. The regulator told Reuters that there are less than 20 Pakistani pilots in the country.

Pakistan last week grounded almost a third of its pilots after discovering they may have falsified their qualifications. Pakistan has a total of 860 pilots, 107 of whom work for foreign airlines.

Global concern has mounted since the announcement, with countries grounding Pakistani pilots and seeking to verify their credentials.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency has also suspended Pakistan International Airlines' authorisation to fly to the bloc for six months.

CAAM said it is making efforts with its Pakistani counterpart to verify the authenticity of the licence holders.

"Licence holders that are verified as valid by (the Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority) will be reinstated immediately," it said.

National carrier Malaysia Airlines said it does not have any Pakistani pilot.