

# Int'l flights resume after three months

Govt reopens 25% of country's airspace to bring back citizens stuck abroad

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Pakistan partially allowed international flights to resume on Sunday to bring back more citizens stranded in other countries because of the coronavirus, over three months after they were suspended as part of the country's efforts to stem the spread of the disease.

The country had closed its airspace for international flights on March 21 for two weeks and then extended the suspension several times as the Covid-19 situation grew worse in the country.

Now the government has reopened 25% of the country's airspace so that the citizens stuck abroad could return.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has

vowed that the government would take every possible measure to facilitate the citizens returning to the country after losing their overseas employment because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Overseas workers have suffered the most in this pandemic but have shown great courage and made us proud," the prime minister wrote on Twitter.

Welcoming the returning expatriates, PM Imran assured them that the government would assist them in every way possible.

He also appreciated the philanthropic role played by the Pakistani diaspora in helping the citizens stuck abroad amid the pandemic.

"There are many examples where the Pakistani community [living abroad] has been a source of inspiration, helping those around in need," he added.

Speaking to the private TV channel, Special Assistant to the PM on Overseas Pakistanis and Human

The PM has vowed that the govt would facilitate the returning expats who have lost their overseas employment

Resource Development Zulfikar Abbas Bukhari said the initiative to partially reopen the airspace was taken on the instructions of the prime minister as the government was concerned about the large number of Pakistani labourers stuck abroad, particularly in Gulf countries.

"We have resumed partial international flight operations to bring back the maximum number expatriates stranded in foreign countries," he added.

The federal government had unveiled a new policy on Wednesday under which it announced its decision to reopen 25% of its airspace after June 20.

Under the policy, around 40,000 to 45,000 Pakistanis will return to the country every week and all stranded citizens will be home in a month.

Only symptomatic passengers will be tested and if found they positive, they will be quarantined at the facilities provided by the government.

However, it will be mandatory for every passenger to quarantine themselves for 14 days at home and they will have to submit this in writing at the airport.

The provinces through the track and trace system will keep an eye on these passengers and those found in violation would be penalised in accordance with law.

The government has also decided to make the Quetta and Sialkot airports functional to expand the repatriation flight operation.

Around 70% of the flights have been dedicated for Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Malaysia where Pakistani labourers were

stranded.

Speaking about the policy, Special Assistant to the PM on National Security and Strategic Policy Dr Moeed Yusuf clarified that the flight operation was only for repatriation of stranded Pakistanis and the government had not decided to resume pre-coronavirus pandemic flight operations.

The SAPM also dispelled the impression that Pakistanis returning to the country were responsible for transmission of Covid-19 in the country.

"Only 3% Pakistanis brought the virus to the country whereas the remaining 97% cases are locally transmitted."

Special Assistant to the PM on Overseas Pakistanis Zulfikar Abbas Bukhari elaborated that 80,000 stranded Pakistanis had been repatriated to the country, of which 40,000 were workers who had been laid off by their employers abroad.