

Limited domestic flight operations resume today

RAWALPINDI: The government has decided to open the limited domestic flight operations from five major airports — Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta — from Saturday (today) due to growing demand and ease in coronavirus restrictions across the country.

However, the government extended suspension of the international flight operations to Sunday (May 31) at 2359 hours PST, pushing back its first announcement for resuming international flights from May 15.

The Civil Aviation Authority has issued the requisite NOTAM (notice to airmen) regarding allowing restricted domestic schedule and chartered passenger flight operations between five airports only in accordance with the guidelines which will be valid until midnight of June 30.

The NOTAM said that the domestic flight operations to and from the Islamabad International Airport for Gilgit and Skardu airports would continue as normal operations. Domestic scheduled and chartered passenger flight operations from all other airports will remain suspended.

Strict SOPs to be observed to ensure disinfection, social distancing and safety for crew, passengers

The NOTAM further said: "The general aviation and private aircraft operations undertaken subject to compliance with relevant standard operating procedures, cargo and special flights will continue for all airports."

Pakistan had suspended all international flights on March 21 to stop the spread of coronavirus. However, cargo, special and chartered flights continued to operate with strictly following SOPs and ensuring precautionary measures to control the spread of Covid-19.

Aviation Division spokesperson Abdul Sattar Khokhar said in a press release on Thursday that in view of the difficulties being faced by passengers in travelling between major cities in the country, the federal government has allowed the limited domestic flight operations from five major airports namely Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta with effect from May 16.

Minister for Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan had also announced the same during a session of the Parliament on Thursday.

He stated that the Aviation Division had prepared very strict Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) ensuring disinfection, social distancing and safety for the airline

crew and passengers. Initially, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and Serene Air will operate domestic flights.

It is highlighted that the SOPs for domestic passengers and the chartered flight operation require disinfection of the aircraft prior to boarding. At least one seat will remain vacant between passengers and wearing of masks and use of hand sanitiser will be compulsory for passengers. Each passenger will be provided hand sanitiser after every 30 minutes during the flight. Cabin crew will spray disinfectant in the lavatory after every use and use alcohol-based disinfection wipes to clean and disinfect their hands.

Besides all that no food and beverages will be allowed during domestic flight. Food will not be served during the flight, except in emergency situation and for medical requirement. Airlines are required to maintain emergency Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) in every aircraft to deal with any health emergency during the flight.

After completion of boarding, the senior purser or lead cabin crew will take a picture of each zone of the aircraft displaying passengers seated while wearing masks. The picture will be submitted for record.

Health declaration form

The Aviation Division said every passenger would be required to fill a health declaration form prior to boarding the aircraft, which include identification of the passenger, brief travel history during past two weeks, current health state and an undertaking to comply with the SOPs.

At airports, passengers will be subjected to thermal scanning during their entry, departure and upon arrival at the destination city. Anyone with raised body temperature or visible symptoms of Covid-19 will be examined by a health professional and required action, if any, will be taken as per advice of the health professional.

Disembarkation will be done in an orderly manner (from front to back) ensuring social distancing. No meet and greet at the airport will be allowed and drivers will stay inside their vehicles in parking areas. Only passengers and airport staff will be allowed to go beyond parking areas.

Furthermore, no protocol would be allowed beyond the briefing area and social distancing will be maintained at every stage of departure and arrival formalities. The luggage will be disinfected prior to loading onto the aircraft and after arrival at the destination airport.

It may be mentioned here that the decision to resume the domestic flight operation has been taken in consultation with the federating units, the spokesman said.

At present, PIA have been operating