

25th March 2020

Coronavirus Crisis: Repatriation of UK Residents from India

To: Rt Hon Dominic Raab, Foreign Secretary

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE TO BRING UK RESIDENTS BACK FROM INDIA

Sikh Assembly have become aware of thousands of UK residents stranded in India due to a change in Indian government policy creating restrictions on movement and flying, in response to the Coronavirus crisis. It is a busy time of the year for visiting families as the weather continues to be relatively mild before an expected sharp rise in temperatures in the coming weeks. Many of those who are stranded are British Sikhs, particularly in Punjab, but we are concerned for all from the UK who are trapped in India.

As airlines have cancelled return flights and the government have advised all UK residents to return immediately, those in India had been struggling to do so due to a lack of available flights and now a 21-day complete lockdown has been introduced across India on Tuesday 24th March 2020. Many have expressed difficulties contacting the British High Commission and receiving advice to contact airlines. The airlines have closed nearly all their offices and are extremely difficult to contact, as are insurance companies, who are also advising travellers to contact airlines.

We welcome the new FCO advice for those using the India Travel Advice [webpage](#), providing the email address Congry.Newdelhi@fco.gov.uk for those wishing to return immediately. However, we note with great concern the limited scope of assistance being made available via these systems, people are being asked to provide identity, location and contact information. Those currently in India are urgently requesting provisions be made to bring them back and are dismayed by the advice being given at this moment, namely, they will be informed when commercial flights begin again.

We believe it is our responsibility to bring to your attention our serious concern for those stranded in India being placed in compulsory quarantine, and others being asked to leave hotels that are closing for business. Of more serious concern is the circumstances of British residents who have pre-existing conditions, some age related and others for ongoing health issues that require continuous medical treatment which is simply unavailable to them in the current situation and circumstances.

It is our understanding that the FCO has made arrangements for the repatriation of UK residents, 400 people from Peru for example. We believe similar arrangements should be made, as a matter of urgency, and a negotiated arrangement should be agreed with the government of India to return UK residents from India also.

We urge you to negotiate with the Indian government to organise rescue and repatriation flights by UK carriers, which can fly to India, pick up the UK residents and fly straight back. With enough crew to cover both legs of the journey and avoid requiring the outbound crew to disembark in India, this should allay fears of Indian authorities about foreigners entering the country with Coronavirus. British carriers already have licences to fly direct routes to various cities in India and therefore there should be no legal barriers to organising these flights, which could even follow their normal schedules.

Whilst your statement on Tuesday in Parliament offered some reassurance for those stranded in India, those seeking Consular assistance have experienced a lack of empathy and practical assistance. We humbly ask that you treat this matter with the highest priority and reunite families during this period of global crisis at the earliest possible opportunity. Sikh Assembly are ready to discuss, assist and work with you to find practical solutions.

We look forward to hearing back from you very soon and wish you the best of health.

Yours faithfully,

Paramjit Kaur Matharu

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Sikh Assembly, CEO

cc: Rt Hon Boris Johnson, Prime Minister

Rt Hon Priti Patel, Home Secretary

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government