

India extends int'l travel ban till April 30

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: India has extended its international travel ban till April 30. Meaning all scheduled international passenger flights remain suspended, with cargo and special travel bubble flights continuing.

After banning all flights in late March 2020 to curb the spread of coronavirus, India initiated its Vande Bharat repatriation mission in early May which saw hundreds of thousands request to return to India, forcing the government to ramp up flights quickly. Led by Air India, the mission flew to several unique destinations to rescue Indians, in addition to the most popular countries.

After 10 months, the Vande Bharat Mission (VBM) has repatriated over six million residents in total (including by other transport). All Air India flights continue to be added as “repatriation” services and the mission shows no signs of ending soon for several reasons.

In July, India signed its first set of “travel bubbles,” effective agreements that allowed two-way flights to resume between countries. The first agreement was with the UAE, followed quickly by the US and France (both of whom had protested India’s flight ban). Since then, India has signed agreements with 27 countries to resume flights.

The resumption of flights meant foreign carriers could once again fly into India and carry passengers after nearly four months. However, there were a few notable restrictions. Airlines cannot carry connecting passengers, with only point-to-point traffic allowed. This meant hub airline operations remain relatively scaled back despite the bubble.

Dozens of airlines have resumed flights to India last year, ranging from Emirates to Air Canada. However, there are also multiple holdouts due to the terms of the bubble. Except for Japan, no East Asian country has inked agreements with India, leaving repatriation flights the only option to reach countries like Singapore and China.

The impact of the international flight ban has been notable in Indian aviation. There has been a surge of new routes from North America to India, as airlines take advantage of the absence of hub carriers like Emirates and Qatar. New routes from Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Delhi are all set to begin this year, offering better connectivity in the future.

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