

Maldives bans travellers from Bangladesh, other South Asian countries

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Dhaka: The Maldives on May 12 barred travellers from Bangladesh and all other South Asian countries, in an effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus, even after having one of the world's most successful vaccination roll-outs.

Sri Lanka and other countries in the region have also imposed travel restrictions as they battle a new wave of the virus that has hit India and its neighbours including Bangladesh.

The Maldives, whose economy relies on tourists visiting its pristine atolls, has suffered a more than 15-fold increase in daily infections in the past week.

The Indian Ocean nation, which halted international flights for more than three months last year, saw a record single-day rise of 1,500 cases on May 11 -- compared to less than 100 just a month ago.

Authorities said tourist arrivals from the key Indian market and other South Asian countries would stop from May 13. They have already banned the entry of foreign labourers from around South Asia except for health workers.

"These restrictions apply to travellers originating from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan,

India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka," Maldives Immigration said in a statement.

Anyone who has only transited through South Asia would also be included, it added.

Travellers from other countries are still permitted to travel to the Maldives with a negative coronavirus test but are not allowed to have contact with the local population.

A curfew from 9 pm to 4 am has been extended to start at 4 pm as part of measures to contain the virus.

About 60 per cent of the Maldives' resident population of 515,000 has received a shot of the Covid-19 vaccine -- one of the world's highest figures -- but less than a quarter have had two injections, a top UN official said.

"At least 80 to 90 per cent of the population needs to be vaccinated with both doses to reach herd immunity," Haswell said.