

Saudi bound Bangladeshi migrant workers in despair following new travel advisory

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 23 May, 2021



Dhaka: Thousands of Saudi-bound Bangladeshi migrant workers are in despair as the Kingdom on May 20 announced new travel restrictions for arrivals that require medical insurance covering the risk of covid-19 infections and hotel reservations for institutional quarantine. On top of it, these new travel conditions must be arranged through the respective airline a traveler is flying on.

Due to this sudden new travel advisory, several Saudi-bound expatriate workers who have already availed visas and air tickets, only awaiting their return to the Middle Eastern country, are now stuck in Bangladesh as time is ticking away.

As a result, a huge crowd is being witnessed every day in front of Saudi Arabian Airline's office in the capital from May 21 as several migrant workers are rushing to Saudia to ensure health insurance and hotel reservation for institutional quarantine.

Speaking to The Bangladesh Monitor on May 23 at Saudia's office in the capital, a spokesperson for the airline said, "Saudi-bound expatriate workers need to pay additional BDT 60,000-70,000, apart from airfare, to Saudia to comply with the new travel conditions that include health insurance, institutional quarantine, airport pick and drop and food for

one person.”

This not only adds the burden of paying a huge sum of money to the migrant workers out of the blue but also raises concerns whether the travellers can ensure these conditions on time before their visas expire. Otherwise, they will be in risk of losing their jobs, expressed many Saudi-bound migrants to The Bangladesh Monitor on May 23.

A migrant worker in the morning today at Saudia’s office said, “My flight leaves at 12 tonight, but I could not even get inside the office premises of the airline yet, to ensure the insurance cover and quarantine, due to a huge queue in front of the office.”

Now he is worrying if he can get the formalities done on time by today. Otherwise, he will miss his flight and have to reschedule. “On the other hand, if I cannot reach Saudi on time, he will find himself without the current job,” the migrant worker said.



Saudia spokesperson directs migrant workers at the airline’s office premise as they ask for health insurance and reservations for institutional quarantine before flying to Saudia Arabia
– Photo: Monitor

On the contrary, violators of the new conditions will be deported and banned indefinitely from entering the Gulf country, said the kingdom’s authority. Therefore, there is no other way for the migrants but to go through these untold sufferings.

“So far, 700 Saudi-bound migrant workers have come and applied for the health insurance and institutional quarantine package to us,” said a spokesperson of Saudia.

Besides Saudi Arabian Airlines, Biman Bangladesh Airlines also used to fly to Saudi Arabia from Bangladesh. However, following the new travel advisory of the kingdom, effective from May 20, Biman Bangladesh Airlines was forced to suspend all international flights to Saudi Arabia for five days till May 24, asking for time to make arrangements to comply with the latest travel advisory.

Several thousand migrant workers who failed to travel to Saudi Arabia due to the suspension of Biman flights said they fear that their visas would expire if they fail to return to their workplaces in the kingdom on time.

The suspension of Biman flights has caused uncertainty in the return of several thousand Bangladeshi expatriate workers to their workplaces in Saudi Arabia, said spokespersons from the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) and Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB).

Biman currently operates flights to three destinations in Saudi Arabia. The destinations are Riyadh, Dammam, and Jeddah. The airline operates 18 flights a week to these destinations. However, these are currently suspended till May 24.

On May 20, Saudi Arabia General Authority Civil Aviation (GACA) said in a circular, the government of KSA requires institutional quarantine for those who intend to travel to the Gulf country from non-restricted countries and should have medical insurance that covers the risk of Covid-19 infections.

According to the new travel advisory, all travelers must obtain medical insurance to cover their treatment of Covid-19.

"The insurance should cover the cost of treatment in outpatient clinics, emergencies, and hospitals including institutional quarantine for a period of up to 14 days," said the circular.

Saudi citizens and their companions are exempt from institutional quarantine if they are fully vaccinated or passed 14 days after taking the first dose or recovered from Covid-19 within 6 months. Otherwise, they have to complete seven days' home quarantine.

The exemption also applies to passengers who have passed 14 days after receiving full Covid-19 vaccine doses and possess a vaccination certificate. The vaccination certificate must be certified by the health authorities from the country of vaccination.

Non-vaccinated/non-exempt Saudi citizens and their accompanying domestic workers, diplomats, and their residing families shall complete seven days' home quarantine and will undergo a Covid-19 test on the sixth day of their home quarantine.

All travelers arriving in the KSA shall undergo seven days' institutional quarantine (except those who are exempted, mentioned above) at their own expense and shall complete a PCR test on day 1 and day 7. Children under the age of eight are exempted from the PCR test.

The reservation of the institutional quarantine shall be through the respective airlines.

Airlines should contract with institutional quarantine establishments that are listed by the Ministry of Tourism and shall inform GACA and the Ministry of Tourism about the quarantine institutions.

Airlines shall contract with medical care centers to perform two PCR tests – on day one and day one – of all travelers at institutional quarantine facilities and facilitate the transportation of all travelers.

Saudi Arabia also demanded that the airline submit the list of passengers to the country's authorities four days before their departure.