

With a total of 48 Buddhist pilgrims returning in the last SriLankan Airlines dedicated flight that departed New Delhi at 05:10 hrs. today (22) before India closed its airports for inward commercial passenger flights, all Sri Lankan Buddhist pilgrims who were stranded in India have now returned to Sri Lanka.

Earlier in the day, another dedicated SriLankan Airlines aircraft that left Chennai at 03:00 hrs. brought 97 Buddhist pilgrims to Colombo, making a total of 145 pilgrims returning to Sri Lanka on 22 March.

On 21 March, a total of 298 pilgrims left New Delhi by SriLankan Airlines flight UL196, which departed Indira Gandhi International Airport at 19:31 hrs.

By the time the Government of Sri Lanka announced a temporary closure of airports in Sri Lanka for inward commercial passenger aircraft, there were approximately 1500 Sri Lankan Buddhist pilgrims in India. Since then, all these pilgrims left India, earlier by scheduled commercial flights and later by dedicated SriLankan Airlines aircraft that were operated to bring back stranded pilgrims.

On 21 and 22 March, The High Commission of Sri Lanka in New Delhi and the Deputy High Commission of Sri Lanka in Chennai, in consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Relations and the Ministry of Buddha Sasana, closely coordinated with the SriLankan Airlines offices in New Delhi and Chennai as well as tour groups themselves to facilitate the return of pilgrims. These efforts included re-arranging the tickets of the pilgrims as well as assistance provided at the international airports in Delhi and Chennai.

The High Commission of Sri Lanka in New Delhi and the Deputy High Commission of Sri Lanka in Chennai wishes to place on record their deep appreciation to the relevant entities of the Government of India, including the Ministry of External Affairs and airport authorities, Sri Lankan Airlines offices in Delhi and Chennai, and the venerable monks residing in Sri Lankan Buddhist temples and Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India as well as the Sri Lanka Buddhist Pilgrims' Rest

All Buddhist pilgrims stranded in India repatriated

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in New Delhi for their assistance in successfully returning the stranded pilgrims to Sri Lanka.

High Commission of Sri Lanka
New Delhi

22 March 2020