

Bangladesh charter flights to return stranded Brits

Four charter flights from Bangladesh to the UK will take home up to 850 British nationals to the United Kingdom.

The charter flights will depart for London from Dhaka on 21, 23, 25 & 26 April, with accompanying transfers from Sylhet.

We have invited British Nationals in Bangladesh who wish to return home to express an interest. Priority is initially being given to vulnerable passengers, most at risk from the effects of coronavirus, including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.

Foreign Office Minister of State, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

We are in a truly unprecedented situation, and I know people are concerned about getting home to their loved ones.

Foreign Office staff in the UK and Bangladesh have been working tirelessly with the Bangladeshi authorities to help British travellers who want to come back to the UK and these flights mean people can now do that.

Our staff will continue to support those Britons who remain in Bangladesh throughout this crisis, and beyond.

The British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Robert Chatterton Dickson said:

I am pleased to confirm the first charter flight from Bangladesh to bring British travellers back home, especially for those most vulnerable and those most in need. Our team continues to work hard to arrange a safe journey back home for as many people as possible. The British High Commission Dhaka will remain in operation and continue to provide consular support to any British nationals who remain in Bangladesh and require assistance.

Those who wish to register for a flight, but have not already done so, should visit the [Bangladesh travel advice page on GOV.UK](#).

Further information

National testing coordinator warns against unapproved antibody tests

Professor John Newton, national coordinator of the UK coronavirus testing programme, has warned against the purchase of unapproved antibody testing kits and has released a statement.

Antibody tests – designed to detect if people have had the virus and are now immune – are a key part of the government’s strategy to boost testing capacity for COVID-19 to protect the vulnerable, support our NHS, and ultimately save lives.

Several reports have emerged of organisations seeking to purchase antibody tests for their employees, or of individuals purchasing these tests online for personal use. Antibody tests offer hope for people wanting to find out if they have had coronavirus, and are now immune and get back to work. But so far no country in the world, including the UK, has found a reliable antibody test.

Professor John Newton has warned that unapproved tests could be misleading, by providing inaccurate or inconsistent results, potentially putting those tested and those around them at risk.

The government is currently working with several companies who are offering these tests and are evaluating their effectiveness. However, so far, the antibody tests that have gone through the validation process have not proven accurate enough to be rolled out for public use, which is why the government is [backing industry efforts to develop a homegrown test](#).

Until then the government continues to urge everyone to follow the social distancing advice by staying home to protect the NHS and save lives.

Professor John Newton, National Coordinator of the UK Coronavirus Testing Programme, said:

The government, supported by world-leading experts and regulators, is continuing to work hard to rapidly deliver a reliable and accurate back-to-work antibody testing kit, to counter the spread of the virus and enable people to return to work safely. We are breaking new ground with this work every day and I am confident this major research effort will make a breakthrough. Until then, please don’t buy or take any unproven tests. They may not be reliable for your intended use; they may give a false reading and put you, your family or others at risk.

Testing is an important part of our war against coronavirus. At the moment we have swab testing that can tell you if you currently have coronavirus – for these tests a swab sample is taken and analysed in a lab. These tests are available to people in clinical need and

we are also providing them to more and more key frontline workers such as NHS staff and care workers, so that they can stop self-isolating and return to work if the test comes back negative.

There is another kind of test, an antibody test, which is a blood test designed to tell whether people have already had the virus and are now immune. We know they work best around a month after someone has had the virus. These could maybe be done at home with a finger prick, and deliver results in as little as 20 minutes. Such a test could, if developed in such a way that they could be reliably used at home and be sufficiently accurate, be a game-changer.

Right now, however, these antibody tests are brand new and still in development. No country in the world has yet found an antibody test reliable enough to work as a back-to-work diagnostic, but the UK is leading the way in this emerging area of science and technology, and companies and scientists are doing everything they can to improve the accuracy of the tests on the market. As soon as we have found a test that works for this purpose, we will be in a position to roll them out across the country as a back-to-work test.

In the meantime, I advise organisations, both in the public and private sector, against the use of antibody tests that have not been verified in a laboratory setting: and none have. The results of an inaccurate test are potentially misleading and can put people at risk of contracting the disease and transmitting it to others. The Chief Medical Officer has also said he strongly discourages the use of unvalidated tests and that, for now, the social distancing guidelines continue apply to everyone.

[Dairy industry to join together to manage milk supply](#)

The government will temporarily relax elements of UK competition law to support the dairy industry through the coronavirus outbreak.

The intention is that the industry will work together to address current market challenges, avoiding waste and maintaining productive capacity to meet future demand.

With the UK's dairy farmers producing over 40 million litres of milk every day, the legislation, which will be laid shortly, will allow the industry to adapt to changes in the supply chain including decreased demand from the hospitality sector and reduced collection by retailers who have had to close.

The government has already relaxed competition rules to allow retailers, suppliers and logistic services to work together. While this has already allowed the dairy industry to redirect some of their supplies to retailers, today's announcement will enable further collaboration between dairy farmers and producers so they can avoid their surplus milk going to waste and harming the environment.

This could include sharing labour and facilities, cooperating to temporarily reduce production or identifying where there is hidden capacity in the supply chain for processing milk into other dairy products such as cheese and butter.

Dairy UK and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) will now lead work to bring the industry together to identify spare processing capacity, how to stimulate demand and how production could be temporarily reduced.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

Our dairy industry plays a crucial role in feeding the nation and it is essential that they are able to work together at this time.

We've heard loud and clear our dairy farmers' concerns which is why we are further suspending competition rules law to allow dairy farmers to work together on some of the most pressing challenges they are facing. I am also urging farm businesses to access the loans that are available from their bank to support them in this period.

We welcome our farmers' heroic efforts in ensuring food supplies remain resilient and will continue to support them through this difficult time.

The dairy sector is the UK's largest farming sector, with milk accounting for 16.85% of total agricultural output in the UK in 2018.

Of this, approximately 50% of UK dairy sector output is fresh milk and as such accounts for a significant amount of UK processing capacity.

The government encourages any farm business facing difficulties to access the range of support which has been put in place to help businesses manage this challenging period. This includes the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme farming businesses can access. The government has been speaking to the banks and they are ready to support farm businesses as best they can.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

COVID-19 presents an enormous challenge to the country. We must be adaptable and help businesses implement creative solutions to new problems.

Temporarily relaxing competition law for the dairy sector will mean farmers can work together to minimise waste of milk, and use it to make other essential dairy products.

This important step will help our dairy farmers weather this storm, providing support to a key sector in the British economy.

Today's announcement will help ensure this fresh milk does not go to waste, supporting industry to adapt to a temporary reduction in demand by collectively identifying opportunities for processing milk into storable milk products such as butter, cheese and skimmed milk powder.

The UK's food supply chain remains resilient and the Environment Secretary continues to meet regularly with representatives of the food and farming industry to ensure people can get the food and groceries they need.

[Government sets out plans to ensure bereaved families can attend funerals during pandemic](#)

- Councils asked to introduce safe and innovative approaches so that bereaved families can attend funerals
- The government is clear that close family must be allowed to attend funerals in person
- [Guidance published](#) on contingency measures needed by local authorities in managing funerals

Local Government Minister Simon Clarke today (17 April 2020) wrote to all councils in England to ensure that family members can attend the funerals of their loved ones and that the wishes of the deceased are respected during this pandemic.

The government has consistently been clear that it is important that funerals are not delayed and take place in line with social distancing guidelines – to protect both those attending and staff.

In a letter to councils Local Government Minister Simon Clarke MP asked all local authorities to work with faith groups and funeral directors to develop safe, sensitive and innovative ways for funerals to take place. He praised

the majority of councils who are already working hard to ensure that family members can attend the funerals of their loved ones and that the wishes of the deceased are respected during this pandemic.

Many councils across the country have already introduced innovative approaches to support the wishes of the bereaved and create the closest experience to a normal cremation or burial as possible whilst keeping crematoria staff and those attending funerals of loved ones safe.

Secretary of State Robert Jenrick MP said:

It is only right that families have a final opportunity to pay their last respects to those they love at this incredibly difficult time.

Close family must be able to attend funerals in person during this pandemic and can safely do so by following in line with social distancing guidelines. We will continue to work closely with councils to ensure that safe and sensitive measures are put in place all across the country.

Local Government Minister Simon Clarke MP said:

Nobody wants to have to consider funeral plans for a loved one at this difficult time – but it's important that funerals are not delayed.

Many councils have already put in place innovative arrangements so funerals can take place in a safe and sensitive fashion. I want all councils to consider how best to facilitate funerals so close family can attend and mourn their loved ones in an appropriate way. This will help to ensure that people can be laid to rest with dignity, and that their final wishes and beliefs are respected while we protect the public from the spread of coronavirus.

The government has also published new guidance for councils which outlines contingency measures as set out in Schedule 28 of the Coronavirus Act. These powers allow councils to issue direction if required on whether to bury or cremate someone, to direct crematoria to operate longer hours and to direct funeral directors to have shorter services. The government has always been clear that these will only be triggered in exceptional circumstances if there is a public health risk.

The government has worked closely with faith groups to ensure religious requirements and wishes are considered when making funeral arrangements, including the need for burial or cremation.

Read the [letter from Minister Clarke](#) in full.

The government has not yet designated any emergency powers to a local authority. When any designation is made a notice will be published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

In this notice, the reasons behind any designation will be clear.

If an area is designated they may be able to direct crematoria to operate longer hours; businesses to use their vehicles to transport bodies or resources; funeral directors to hold shorter services; shorter times for body storage.

View the [Coronavirus Act 2020](#).

Letter to local authorities to work with faith groups and funeral directors to develop safe, sensitive and innovative ways for funerals to take place

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.