28 Maldivian patients travel to India for medical treatment

28 Maldivians travelled to India for critical medical care, on Monday night.

The government of India, last week, approved the travel of critically-ill Maldivian patients requiring advanced care that is not available in the island nation. The permission granted to Maldivian patients by Indian authorities, is the first of its kind.

While the 28 patients departed on Monday night, caregivers as well as two doctors and five nurses travelled with them. They were allowed to travel after testing negative for Covid-19.

Upon arrival in India, they will be tested again after the required 14-day quarantine period.

While the foreign ministry had previously revealed that they will undergo treatment in Cochin, it has since been confirmed that their treatment will be at Amrita Institute of Medical Science (AIMS). Officials from the institute received the patients and companions from the airport.

The patients are to stay at an accommodation block at AIMS during the quarantine period, and will be undergoing treatment during the period as well.

While India had approved the travel of 37 patients, authorities said that the number decreased to 28 as some patients refused to travel.

They were allowed to travel to India, which is yet to open borders for international travel following the lockdown imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, under a special permission from the country's Ministry of Home Affairs to allow Maldivian patients in critical condition due to the lack of treatment options in the Maldives.

Following their departure, Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid thanked the Indian government and people "for this incredible gesture of goodwill and friendship in this time of crisis".

The Indian High Commission in Maldives said that a pandemic "cannot come between the strong people-to-people connect between India and Maldives", adding that the pandemic has brought the countries "closer".

Authorities announced efforts to transport patients in critical condition to the neighboring nation under the national social health insurance scheme Aasandha, earlier this month. Aasandha has since revealed work to send 50 additional patients for advanced medical care.

A majority of Maldivians seek medical treatment in India every year, due to the lack of treatment options in the Maldives.

According to Aasandha, there are about 200 Maldivians in need of medical treatment abroad, including patients seeking treatment for cancer, heart diseases and various other conditions.