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வெளிநாட்டு உறவுகள் அமைச்சு
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

ජනරජ ගොඩනැගිල්ල, කොළඹ 1, ශ්‍රී ලංකාව குடியரசுக் கட்டிடம், கொழும்பு 1, இலங்கை Republic Building, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

Media Release

**Repatriation of OSLs constrained by limited availability of quarantine facilities
-Sri Lanka engaged with Kuwait to secure an extension of amnesty deadline**

Foreign Secretary Ravinatha Aryasinha has said, so far repatriations have been carried out by the GOSL identifying the most vulnerable categories of Overseas Sri Lankans (OSLs), in the face of the limited availability of quarantine facilities in the country, as Sri Lanka continues to seek to gain control over the spread of COVID 19 in Sri Lanka.

In comments on Friday -24 April, (to Sirasa Radio and the “Dawasa” TV programme), the Secretary said through the ‘Contact Sri Lanka’ web portal and other means, to-date, over 27,000 OSLs have expressed their wish to return. This number includes over 17,000 migrant workers and dependents, 6,000 students and about 3,000 short term visa holders and tourists.

Secretary Aryasinha said the government’s focus in the present wave of repatriation was on students and those on government training in South Asia, considering the particular vulnerability they faced from a medical perspective. This repatriation process is being operationalized by Sri Lanka Missions in those countries in consultation with the Ministry, the Covid 19 Task Force and a host of national agencies. Similar developing situations elsewhere are also being closely monitored by the Ministry of Foreign Relations and appropriate recommendations will be made for the consideration of the policy makers, for decision and facilitation for repatriation.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka’s network of 67 Missions are assisting and facilitating Sri Lankan expatriates in need. In addition to provision of dry rations and medicines, where necessary with the assistance of local Sri Lanka community and religious organizations, Missions are also facilitating extension of visa, enabling repatriation/transfer of funds through banking channels, coordination with educational institutes and overall ensuring the well-being of OSLs.

He said the specific situation in Kuwait, where an amnesty has been declared for over 19,000 workers who are out of status, has been a key focus of the Ministry. The Governments of Sri Lanka and Kuwait are in discussion to extend the amnesty period and the modalities of implementation were the focus of a discussion held this week by Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena and the Kuwaiti Ambassador in Colombo Khalaf M. M. Bu Dhair, pursuant to a telephone conversation held between Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Kuwaiti Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The Foreign Secretary said following these discussions, conscious of the difficulty in repatriating persons to Sri Lanka at this time, a mutually beneficial decision is expected.

Secretary Aryasinha noted, that Missions had been able to minimize the vulnerability faced by the OSLs migrant workers in most settings. Assistance provided by International organizations such as IOM, Caritas and Red Crescent societies have been supportive to further the efforts of the Missions. He said the Mission in Seoul, ROK had assured that while there had been delays in some commencing their employment contracts, their jobs were secure. The Mission is also

engaged in discussions with local authorities to extend the contractual periods of those currently due to complete their contracts in the ROK. The Mission is additionally seeking opportunities to fill any gaps in employment, which could arise due to the dislocation caused by the present pandemic.

Ministry of Foreign Relations
Colombo

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