

People home want peace, says Pakistan woman on medical tourism

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New Delhi: Nothing had changed, said Lahore resident Sofia Joseph when she reached Delhi on Friday evening. This was the second time she had travelled to Delhi with her son on the Delhi to Lahore bus. This time, the family travelled to India so the five-year-old boy could have open-heart surgery.

Sofia Joseph with her son after they arrived in the Capital by the Delhi-Lahore bus on Friday.

“There is no change. People in Pakistan want peace. The only difference is that it was more difficult to get visas this time compared to when we came four years ago,” she said outside the Delhi Transport Corporation’s (DTC) Ambedkar Bus Terminal.

On alternate days, a DTC or Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) bus leaves from Delhi at 6 a.m. and a bus from Lahore arrives in the evening. On Friday, it was the white and green coloured PTDC bus that rolled into the terminal.

The tensions between India and Pakistan after 18 Indian soldiers were killed by militants in Uri on September 18 only escalated when India carried out what it termed “surgical strikes” against alleged terrorist “launchpads” across the Line of Control on Thursday.

But for passengers on the Delhi-Lahore bus, which was started in 1999 with then-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee travelling on the inaugural service, not much had changed.

Mohammad Asif, a Lahore resident who travelled with his wife and two children for a wedding in Delhi, said that this was the family’s second visit and did not feel any different from the first.

“Half of our family is here so we only want peace. There are no ill feelings towards Indians,” said Mr. Asif.

Indians returning agreed.

Nafees Bano, a resident of Lucknow, had gone to visit her ailing sister in Karachi on September 8.

“We did not face any trouble, but my family back in India started asking us to return quickly after the incidents in Kashmir. The people of both countries only want peace,” she said.

According to a spokesperson of the DTC, the bus service had not been affected by happenings at the Line of Control. The spokesperson said the number of passengers tended to fluctuate. For instance, on Friday morning the bus left with 17 passengers, though there were 20 bookings. There were 26 bookings on September 21, 43 or full capacity on September 23, 24 on September 26 and 14 on September 28 - the day before the Indian Army’s strike.

For those planning to travel to Lahore, the current tensions between the two countries were not enough to force a change in plans.

A businessman from Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, Mashad Raza, on Friday booked tickets to travel with his wife to Lahore on October 3. Mr. Raza said the two would be travelling to Karachi as his father-in-law had passed away.

“Since my wife is from Pakistan, I have been there four times. Whenever people in Karachi would find out I was an

Indian, they would welcome me. People over there want peace," said Mr. Raza.

However, echoing the complaint of the Pakistani Ms. Joseph , Mr. Raza said the visa formalities had become more complex.

- The Hindu