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Main Tel: +92 21 35642400 9

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Chief Editor Abdul Sattar Azad  
 Managing Editor Muhammad Faryal Azad  
 Assistant Editor Musharraf Azad  
 Associate Editor Shahida Hameed  
 Resident Editor Waqas Masood  
 Reporter Bazla Sardar  
 Photographer S. Shahid Ikram  
 Contributors Prof. Safdar Sandal  
 Chief Correspondent Prof. Karamat Rajput.

Address B-65 Ablagh-e-Aamma  
 (media) Cooperative  
 Housing Society  
 Block-8, Gulistan-e-Jauhar  
 Karachi-75290

Phone 34615924  
 Cell 0333-2194853  
 Web. www.newflyerintl.com  
 E-mail flyer\_intl@hotmail.com  
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Lahore Waqas Masood  
 123 HH Phase 4  
 DHA, Lahore  
 Cell: 0333-3872222

Islamabad 8-Huma Plaza Block-25  
 Blue Area  
 Tel: 2275946-7,  
 Fax: 2279975

Peshawar 5-Biloor Plaza Saddar  
 Tel: 284649-50  
 Fax: 284614

Sialkot S. Shahid Ikram  
 Pervaiz Plaza Near  
 Railway Crossing  
 Kutchari Road  
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Art Director & Design Decent Print Enterprises  
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## **AIRSIAL awards Ground Handling contract to Shaheen Airport Services (SAPS)**



AIRSIAL is the new entrant in country's Aviation Industry. Shaheen Airport Services (SAPS) and AIRSIAL Management signed contract Agreement for providing Ramp and Cargo services by both Senior Executives on 1st January, 2020 at Head Office SAPS Jinnah International Airport, Karachi. SAPS is providing Ground Handling services to AIRSIAL in Karachi and Islamabad. First flight was handled by SAPS at Karachi Jinnah International Airport on 29th November, 2020.

Shaheen Airport Services (SAPS) being a project of Shaheen Foundation and a welfare organization of PAF, is providing services with latest setup of Ground Handling Services at all the major airport of Pakistan. SAPS is equipped with huge size of latest GSE and also have efficient & experienced staff to provide quality services to our valued clients. Over a period of 38 Years, SAPS has established and achieved its sole aim to provide safe, cost effective and quality services to client airlines.



AIRSIAL Flight was handled by Shaheen Airport Services at Jinnah International Airport, Karachi (29th November, 2020)



AIRSIAL receiving water salute on its arrival at Jinnah International Airport, Karachi on 29th November, 2020



## AirSial launches flight operations



Prime Minister Imran Khan inaugurating AirSial in Sialkot. Also seen in the picture are Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman, Mr. Qaisar Iqbal Baryar Sr. Vice Chairman, Mr. Ameen Ahsan CEO and Mr. M. Umar Mir Vice Chairman AirSial.

**A**irSial will create competition for other Pakistani airlines, Prime Minister Imran Khan said after he inaugurated the new airline in Sialkot on Wednesday Dec. 9.

Air Sial is Pakistan's third private airline. Its first aircraft Airbus A320 landed at the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi from the United States on 29th Nov. 2020.

All the three aircrafts of AirSial has reached in Pakistan two in Karachi and one in Sialkot.

The airline's operations will initially rely on three Airbus A320-200s, which have been leased from AerCap, the world's largest independent aircraft leasing company, based in Dublin, Ireland.

The premier called Sialkot's business community the "most vibrant" one in the country. "First they made Sialkot International Airport. No one has made such an airport in such limited resources," he said, congratulating the business community on launching the Air Sial initiative. The launch of Air Sial, the premier said, is beneficial for all.

He said Sialkot is about to become an even bigger export hub of Pakistan. "For this, they needed an airline," he said.

This is just the start, but I have no doubt that you will run this just as well as you've run your airport, the premier said, adding that Air Sial will give competition

to PIA.

"PIA will see that an airline is being run efficiently, on low funds and giving good service and this will put pressure on it to improve. Other airlines will also feel the pressure to be efficient," the premier said, adding that Pakistan will benefit.

AirSial Limited is proudly entering into the commercial aviation by announcing the delivery of its First Airbus A320 i.e. 29th Nov 2020, 2nd on 5th and 3rd on 11 of Dec. AirSial has inducted 3 Airbus A320 aircrafts. All 3 aircrafts are leased from AerCap – the biggest aircraft leasing company in the world. AirSial plans to commence its operations from 25th December 2020 across 5 cities of Pakistan Karachi, Sialkot, Islamabad, Lahore & Peshawar. 3 daily flights from Karachi to Lahore & 3 to Islamabad along with 3 weekly flights to Sialkot and 4 weekly flights to Peshawar are in the plan.

Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman said that AirSial introduced rationalized fares for passengers with all facilities. He also announced to transport dead bodies along with a care taker free of cost.

### **Message from the Chairman: Mr. Fazal Jilani – Chairman AirSial Limited**

Honorable members of Sialkot Chamber of Commerce were determined to accomplish this project. During the past years we had gone through testing times, particularly, COVID-19 has changed the entire dynamics of aviation industry. However, with constant support of all EBODs, we, as a Team of AirSial, are now

seeing this "Dream to come true". AirSial is now a reality and the only airline established by the Pakistani business community by themselves.

### **About AirSial**

AirSial Limited is a visionary project of Sialkot Chamber of Commerce. Taking the lead from the exceptional success of Sialkot International Airport Ltd (SIAL), the members of the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry conceived the idea of AirSial Limited in August, 2015 to make it another success story.

AirSial is a licensed airline to provide scheduled passenger and cargo services in both domestic and international markets. AirSial is committed to services, based on best safety and operational practices together with an attitude infused with hospitality & service standards par excellence. AirSial at the same time is aiming to bring real value to the market and eventually become a game changer in the industry.

Our Corporate Head Office is located at AirSial Limited, Corporate Head Office, Kashmir Road, Sialkot-51310, Punjab, Pakistan.

Our Operational Head Office is Located at 4th floor, Aviation dynamics building, Terminal-1 Road, Jinnah International Airport, Karachi.

AirSial is well on its way to commence the domestic flight operations from 25th December 2020.

*Cont. on page 26,27*

## PIA to acquire eight new aircraft on dry lease

The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has decided to add eight new narrow-body aircraft to its fleet on dry lease.

The aircraft with seating capacity of 170-plus (all economy with soft divider after two rows) are expected to be delivered from January to December 2021.

The PIA management has sought bids from different parties by January 11 next year for acquiring the eight aircraft on dry lease, which means the airline would only acquire the aircraft without flight crew.

PIA spokesman Abdullah Hafeez Khan said the airline was looking to improve and modernise its fleet.

The spokesman said new aircraft would replace some of the older planes in the fleet. He added it was part of the business plan PIA had been working on for the past two years which got pushed back due to reduced demand owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the information available on the PIA website, the airline's fleet comprises 37 aircraft seven Boeing 777s, nine Airbus-320s and 21 ATRs.

PIA's Chief Executive Officer Air Marshal Arshad Malik had said that 12 new aircraft will be added to the airline's fleet by 2023. With the induction of the new aircraft the PIA's fleet would go up to 45 by 2023.

Meanwhile, the PIA and Oriental Sky Aviation Ltd signed a landmark cargo charter agreement on Wednesday Dec. 3, paving the way for direct and daily cargo flights between Pakistan and China.

The PIA spokesman said that the instrument of agreement was signed by PIA's general manager for charters and MD of Oriental Sky Aviation at the PIA offices.

PIA's CEO Air Marshal Malik and Chief Commercial Officer Ali Tahir Qasim also attended the signing ceremony.

As per the agreement, PIA will operate seven weekly flights to Urumqi (China), with four flights a week originating from Islamabad and three flights from Lahore. It will be one of its kind operations as PIA has never operated daily cargo flights in this sector.

The national airline will be using its Airbus A320s for the said operations.

When contacted, the PIA spokesperson said that during the Covid-19 pandemic, airlines across the globe had seen unprecedented surge in demand for

air cargo and many airlines were converting their passenger planes to cargo freighters to take advantage of this situation.

"PIA is also aggressively pursuing this path and we are evaluating and on a lookout for opportunities to operate dedicated cargo flights to a number of sectors, specifically on China and Central Asian routes."

## Virgin Atlantic commences flight to Pakistan



Virgin Atlantic Cargo flight commenced between the UK and Pakistan on Monday Dec. 7, supporting growing trade volumes between exporters and importers in both countries. Flights launched from London Heathrow to Lahore on 7th December, passenger flight from Manchester to Islamabad on 11th December, and London Heathrow to Islamabad on 12th December.

This is the first time that Virgin Atlantic Cargo has flown to Pakistan, the airline is continuing to innovate and expand its destination offering in line with demand. The new services will add over 66 direct flights to Pakistan each month, expanding the direct UK to Pakistan market by 90% in December alone.

The UK is the largest export market for Pakistan in Europe, transporting high volumes of goods such as textiles, apparel and machinery. Trade in goods and services between the UK and Pakistan is worth some £3.3 billion a year, rising 4.7% year on year in 2019. The UK is the third biggest global market for Pakistani exporters after the US and China. Cargo customers in Pakistan will also benefit from fast connections to prime markets in the US as well as in Europe and Africa via London Heathrow. Virgin Atlantic Cargo also expects healthy demand for capacity into Pakistan from customers across its international network.

PIA is already operating passenger and cargo charters to Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan and Xi'an in China for different customers.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Air Marshal Malik praised his commercial team for initiatives to augment the existing revenue. He thanked the MD of Oriental Sky Aviation for his patronage of PIA.

He said with a daily connection, trade and commerce between the two countries in post-Covid scenario would be greatly facilitated and would help in normalcy after perhaps the most devastating year for commercial aviation worldwide.

"Business opportunities between the UK and Pakistan present an exciting new prospect for our customers, and the whole team look forward to our upcoming launch," commented Dominic Kennedy, managing director of Virgin Atlantic Cargo. "The import and export market for goods between the UK and Pakistan is extremely healthy, with over 114 million kilograms of cargo moving between Europe and Pakistan each year. Virgin Atlantic Cargo is confident of gaining a healthy share of this new market in the weeks and months ahead."

Arshad Wali Muhammad, group director, Gerry's Group, commented: "Virgin Atlantic Cargo's flights to Pakistan offer a fantastic opportunity for businesses to expand their export base by having direct connection to Europe and North America via Manchester and Heathrow. The two destinations in the UK will be a gateway to reach over 300 networks of destinations worldwide. With Gerry's as GSA for Pakistan, we look forward to including this successful new service within our network."

Janis Balkens, dnata CEO, New and Emerging Markets, added. "We are excited to extend our long-standing partnership with Virgin Atlantic Cargo to Pakistan and are proud to now also offer our award-winning, safe and reliable services across these new routes. We will ensure the success in London Heathrow and Manchester, as well as Islamabad and Lahore, providing our seamless multi-service offering to Virgin Atlantic Cargo and its customers. We have been partners for decades in the UK across our cargo operations as well as our travel businesses through the dnataTravel Group and we look forward to replicating this success in Pakistan."



## ***Heartiest Congratulations !***



*to SIAL and its management team on the auspicious occasion of commencement of AirSial flights to and from Sialkot, with best wishes for many more accomplishments in years to come.*

Gratitude, Congratulation and best wishes on completion of thirteen years of successful operations.



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## Embraer forecasts increased demand for sub-150 seat aircraft

Despite expecting world passenger traffic to have a compound growth rate of just 2.6% a year over the next decade, Brazilian planemaker Embraer senses an opportunity. They expect a worldwide demand for 5,500 new aircraft with up to 150-seats over the next decade, representing a total market value of US\$350 billion.



*Despite slowing demand for new aircraft, Embraer senses an opportunity.*

Embraer has just released its 2020 Commercial Market Outlook. The report looks at passenger demand for air travel and new aircraft deliveries over the next 10 years, emphasizing Embraer's product segment aircraft up to 150 seats.

"Our forecast reflects some of the trends we're already seeing: the early retirement of older and less efficient aircraft, a preference for more profitable smaller airplanes to match weaker demand, and the growing importance of domestic and regional airline networks in the restoration of air service," says Arjan Meijer, President and CEO of Embraer Commercial Aviation.

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Embraer gives four reasons why their aircraft are perfect for the times

Embraer acknowledges 2020 is reshaping commercial aviation. But they think it might be reshaping it in a way that could benefit Embraer. They cite four reasons why.

Firstly, airlines are using the travel downturn to "rightsized" their fleets.

"The airline capacity plans of the past will no longer fit," says Mr Meijer in the report. Embraer thinks there will be a shift to smaller capacity, more versatile aircraft to better match weaker demand.

"Overall lower demand, traffic patterns favoring short-haul versus long-haul, and an increasing need for connectivity and efficiency will drive worldwide demand for 4,420 jets with up to 150 seats. Of these, 30% will support market growth, and the remaining 70% will replace aging aircraft," says the

report. Embraer also thinks turboprop operators will drive demand for a further 1,080 turboprop aircraft over the next decade.

Secondly, Embraer believes we will see an increasing trend towards regionalization. Companies seeking to protect their supply chains from external shocks will bring businesses closer. That will generate new traffic flows. But that also points to more short-haul flying and less long-haul.



*There are four reasons why Embraer thinks their planes are perfect for the times.*

### Travelers predicted to bypass long-haul in favor of short-haul flying

Thirdly, and this is an interesting one; Embraer thinks travelers will remain skittish about long-haul flying for some time, preferring short-haul regional flying. That may or may not be the case. Passenger numbers bounced back well after the 9/11 and SARS shocks. But Embraer does point to an interesting trend that might be here to stay. Working from home and the decentralization of offices from large urban centers will require more diverse air networks. That's a trend United's Scott Kirby has already identified.

Finally, Embraer flags the trend towards more fuel-efficient, greener aircraft types.

"The advent of new state-of-the-art aircraft with excellent cost economics will be the cycle's hallmarks," says Arjan Meijer.

Embraer thinks there will be increased demand for short-haul regional flying. Photo: Embraer

Embraer notes 76% of global CEOs say that their organization's growth will depend on their ability to navigate the shift to a low-carbon, clean technology economy. For airlines, Embraer says this will lead to an intense drive to acquire aircraft with higher fuel efficiencies.

Naturally, Embraer thinks they are well-positioned to meet the needs of

airlines over the next decade. The in-house report and its findings dovetail nicely with the type of aircraft Embraer produces. But the report does highlight some key trends across the broader aviation industry: rightsizing, more efficient planes, and decreased demand. On these criteria alone, Embraer is potentially in the box seat to harness these opportunities over the coming years.

## Gulf Air introduces new fares using Sabre's branded fares technology

Sabre Corporation (NASDAQ: SABR), the leading software and technology company that powers the global travel industry, announced that Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, has recently implemented Sabre's branded fares technology enhanced merchandising capabilities that allow travel agents using the Sabre global distribution system (GDS) to access the full breadth of airlines' branded fares.

With this implementation, agents can now easily view, compare and sell Gulf Air's 'Boutique' fare family across the network, offering their customers greater choice and personalization at better value.

"With Sabre's branded fares, airlines can go beyond the basic fare rules," said Dino Gelmetti, Vice President EMEA, Sabre Travel Solutions. "They can package additional benefits and features, such as additional air miles, seat selection, checked baggage and other services, with the goal of providing their customers better flexibility and greater value. The ability to cater to and personalize these demands will enhance travelers' experiences and drive revenue for airlines."

Gulf Air has introduced a new price concept for all destinations effective Oct. 20, 2020, which travel agents can book through Sabre's GDS. With three economy class and two Falcon Gold class fare options, customers will be able to enjoy more choice when booking their flights. By marketing its "Boutique" fares through Sabre, Gulf Air will be giving its customers more control over their travel experiences, paying for the services that best meet their needs.

"We recognize that many travelers today consider the overall value of a ticket, rather than just the price alone and this means different things to different people," said Vincent Costa, Chief



Commercial Officer, Gulf Air. "While we continue to offer increased benefits across our fares, we also need to be able to cater to specific traveler demands. With Sabre, we can ensure that each traveler receives the best experience from flying with us by showcasing the full range of our fares."

Gulf Air is one of a growing number of carriers using Sabre's technology. Globally, Sabre is used by 225 airlines, including most of the world's largest carriers. Sabre's broad suite of flexible and scalable software solutions allows airlines to operate how they want to and adapt their business to changing needs and requirements. Sabre's solutions optimize day-to-day airline operations and ultimately help carriers solve their biggest challenges driving increased revenue, reducing costs and delivering better travel experiences.

## UK aviation firm acquires stakes in Pakistan

A UK-based global aviation services specialist Menzies Aviation recently announced the acquisition of a 51 per cent shareholding in Royal Airport Services (RAS).

An aviation services business based in Pakistan, RAS has been operating in the country since 2007 and has a strong position in local markets, a press release said. It has been providing a range of aviation services including ground and cargo handling, airline ticketing and cargo sales across Pakistan. RAS handles both domestic and international carriers across eight airports, with revenue in excess of \$20 million in 2019, the press release added.

The deal offers Menzies Aviation the opportunity to enter the growing Pakistan aviation services market as the acquisition creates a strong platform for the company. It [acquisition] represents clear delivery against the company's strategic objectives of increasing depth of service capability and expanding its geographical footprint, the statement added.

"We are delighted to be partnered with Royal Airport Services. The acquisition is in line with our global strategy to offer our service portfolio to new markets and we believe that a presence in Pakistan will provide a strong platform for further regional growth opportunities," Menzies Aviation's Executive Chairman Philipp Joeinig said.

## PIA announces new fares, rules for Umra pilgrims



*The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) on Tuesday 10 Nov. announced new fares and rules under its Umra Policy 2020, which would remain effective till Dec 31 this year*

The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) on Tuesday 10 Nov. announced new fares and rules under its Umra Policy 2020, which would remain effective till Dec 31 this year.

A spokesman for PIA said the economy class fare for Umra pilgrims from Karachi would be Rs91,000 each, whereas Rs96,000 each would be charged from pilgrims travelling from other cities. The maximum limit of baggage will be 36 kilograms for each passenger travelling from Pakistan to Jeddah or Madina.

He said flights would remain open under the system, but as per market requirements group requests would also be entertained. The spokesman further said that the airlines had started booking for groups of Umra pilgrims and the minimum size of the group would be 10 passengers.

The validity of air tickets will be one month from the date of departure.

Passengers of the Executive Economy Class will be allowed to carry 40 kilograms of baggage and each pilgrim would be allowed to carry five litres of Zamzam water, excluding the baggage limit. In addition to this, 10 kilograms of baggage allowance will be granted in terms of an infant.

The spokesman said that under the rules, PIA had facilitated passengers in terms of change of bookings (COB) without paying extra charges for one count if the request was made seven days before the date of departure.

Saudi Arabia has permitted all international airlines to fly in pilgrims with valid visas to perform Umra.

The aviation authority has instructed the airlines to strictly follow the Covid-19 SOPs.

## Govt appoints new DG CAA

The federal government on Friday Nov.28 appointed retired Flight Lieutenant Khaqan Murtaza as director general of the Civil Aviation Authority, a high-profile position that was vacant for quite some time.

A notification on the subject issued by the Establishment Division said: "The federal government has appointed Flt Lt (Retd) Khaqan Murtaza, a BS-21 officer of Pakistan Administrative Service, presently posted under government of Sindh, as director general (of) Civil Aviation Authority, under section 10 of the Civil Servant Act, 1973 with immediate effect and until further orders."

Mr Murtaza is currently working as principal secretary to the Sindh governor. He is also the chief executive officer of the Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Limited.

During hearing of a petition recently the federal government had assured the Islamabad High Court that the vacant post of CAA director general would be filled on a permanent basis in two to three days.

Earlier, the federal cabinet had given to aviation secretary the additional charge of DG, CAA. The IHC had directed the government to submit recruitment notification of the director general of CAA until Dec 8.

Chief Executive Officer of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) Air Marshal Arshad Malik welcomed the appointment and extended best wishes to Mr Murtaza.

Spokesman for PIA said the appointment of a permanent head of the regulator was a long-pending demand of the airline.

Air Marshal Malik said the government's step would serve to strengthen Pakistan's aviation industry as all the airlines operating in the country would strive to take matters forward in coordination with the CAA.

Mr Murtaza worked as the managing director of Utility Stores Corporation of Pakistan, under the Ministry of Industries and Production, in 2013-14. Later, he was transferred from the post and his services were handed over to the Establishment Division.

## CAA chalks out new SOPs for travel to Pakistan

Due to the recent spike in coronavirus cases, Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has chalked out fresh standard operating procedures (SOPs) for international travellers.

According to the authority, an updated list of countries for categories A, B and C has been approved for which these SOPs will be valid till Dec 31; RT-PCR tests of passengers from countries that have been placed in category A are not required. The following countries have been placed on the list: Australia, China, Cote D'Ivoire, Cuba, Fiji, Finland, Iceland, Japan, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malawi, Maldives, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

Passengers from the countries placed in categories B and C shall be required to provide negative RT-PCR test, conducted 96 hours prior to the flight, failing which the airline reserves the right to deny issuance of boarding pass.

For passengers travelling from category C countries, a negative test is mandatory before travelling to Pakistan while a second test will be done upon arrival.

Passengers who are less than 12 years of age, differently-abled or part of an international delegation, will only be required to submit a filled out health declaration form at the Pakistani airport.

Aircraft operations shall be subject to full compliance with CAA's instructions regarding disinfection of aircraft, passenger and crew protection measures while airlines are responsible towards ensuring that these instructions are followed.

It has also been made mandatory for passengers to download the Pass Track application on their mobile phones and enter their personal details along with an image of their RT-PCR test.

As stated in the guidelines, aircraft managements are responsible for keeping an inventory of essential personal protective equipment (PPE) comprising protection units, gloves, face masks, goggles, N-95 masks etc., inside prior to take-off. All passengers and crew members are required to wear face masks

during the flight.

Passengers have been advised to inform the cabin crew in case they experience symptoms of the disease.

Hand sanitisers will be provided to each passenger and the toilet will be sprayed after every hour.

In case of a positive RT-PCR result upon arrival, passengers will be required to self-isolate as per the isolation procedure.

## IATA appoints a new director-general Willie Walsh



Willy Walsh, the former chief executive of IAG, is set to become a new director of IATA. Walsh is taking over the role of Alexandre de Juniac on 31st March 2021.

The former Air France-KLM chairman De Juniac informed everyone about his decision to leave well in advance to allow for a smooth responsibilities transition. During the annual meeting on 24th November 2020, the IATA Board of Governors recommended Willie Walsh for taking De Juniac's seat. Willie Walsh will become the eighth Director-General of the Association.

"I did not come to this decision lightly. It has been the privilege of a lifetime to serve the global air transport industry what I call the business of freedoms as the head of IATA. Over the last years IATA has strategically increased its relevance as the voice of the global airline industry. This has been evident in the COVID-19 crisis. IATA has set the course to restore air connectivity amid the pandemic with systematic pre-departure testing. We are well into preparations to fulfill critical vaccine distribution needs. In parallel, we have restructured IATA to survive the crisis and be ready to support the industry recovery with an organization dimensioned to serve a smaller industry. And we have a motivated team that is

determined to get the job done. The building blocks for an industry recovery are in place. And now is the right time to hand over IATA's leadership for the long process of recovery," said de Juniac.

An airline executive Willie Walsh with over 40 years of experience is stepping into the role when the future of the aviation industry is atypically uncertain. It is estimated the airlines will face a loss of US\$80 billion this year, and the new IATA's Director-General will have to deal with the challenges.

IATA, representing 85% of the air companies worldwide, acts as a trade body for the world's airlines and improves the regulatory and legal environment.

## Crash victims' families slam decision to let Boeing 737 MAX fly again

Some of the relatives of victims of a fatal Boeing 737 MAX crash in Indonesia have slammed a decision by US aviation authorities to allow the jets to return to the skies, saying the move comes too soon.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on Wednesday 18 Nov. lifted a flight ban on Boeing's 737 MAX imposed after two fatal crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia killed 346 people within five months in 2018 and 2019.

Two years after the plane operated by Indonesia's Lion Air plunged into the Java Sea, killing all 189 on board, the tragedy is still raw.

"The US authorities shouldn't have lifted the grounding order this quickly," said Aris Sugiono, who lost his sister and brother-in-law in the crash. "They must consider the feelings of the victims' families."

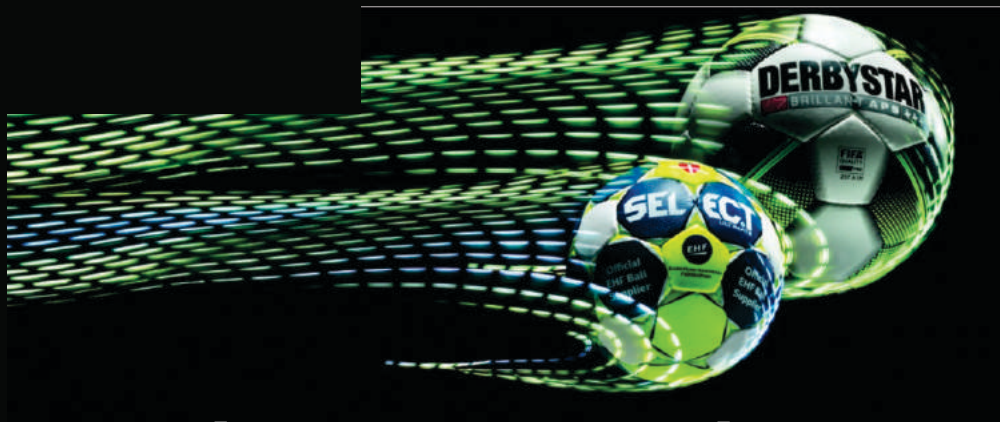
In the past, global air regulators promptly followed the guidance of the FAA, credited for decades with pioneering aviation safety. But many are now wary of seeming to toe the FAA line after the US agency was faulted for lax oversight.

"It's too soon," agreed Anton Sahadi, who had two young relatives on board the doomed flight. "It wasn't just the Lion Air flight, but also the victims in Ethiopia... The victims' families haven't 100% recovered yet."





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## Lufthansa reports strong bookings for the holidays



**L**ufthansa is recording a sharp rise in intercontinental and intra-European bookings for the upcoming Christmas and New Year travel season. Last week, up to 400 percent more people booked destinations overseas as well as Southern and Northern Europe than in the previous week. Particularly in demand were flight destinations in South Africa (Cape Town, Johannesburg), Namibia (Windhoek), the Canary Islands, Madeira and sunny destinations in the Mediterranean, but also snow-assured areas in Northern Finland.

Lufthansa is responding to the increased demand with new flights to and from destinations in Europe, but also by increasing the frequency of existing connections at favorable conditions.

For example, Lufthansa now flies from Frankfurt and Munich to almost every island in the Canary Islands and will offer nonstop flights from Frankfurt to the islands of La Palma and Fuerteventura from December 19, 2020 for the first time. Seville and Palermo will also be back in the flight schedule from Frankfurt and Munich. From Frankfurt, Heraklion on the Greek island of Crete, which can also boast significantly warmer temperatures in winter, is also on the program.

In addition to the classic sunny destinations, the snow-assured and spectacular ski resorts in Northern Finland are back in the flight schedule. Thus one reaches over the holidays from Frankfurt Ivalo and Kuusamo as well as from Munich Kittilä.

For flights from Frankfurt to Majorca, Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Madeira, Malta, Larnaca/Cyprus and Faro/Algarve and from Munich to Majorca, Faro/Algarve, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria and Tenerife, capacities have been significantly expanded and these sunny destinations are now offered several times a week in some cases.

## Ethiopian and Cainiao launch cold chain air freight for medicines from China



**E**thiopian Airlines has partnered with Cainiao Smart Logistics Network to launch a special cold chain air freight for the transportation of temperature-controlled medicines from Shenzhen Airport, China's first medical cross-border cold chain facility.

Ethiopian and Cainiao launch cold chain air freight for medicines from Shenzhen Airport, China's first medical cross-border cold chain facility. Image Ethiopian Airlines.

Temperature-controlled medicines will be distributed twice a week from Shenzhen to Africa, and to the rest of the world via Dubai and Addis Ababa.

This is China's first cross-border medical cold chain route to be operated regularly and is certified to transport temperature-controlled medicines including COVID-19 vaccines.

The end-to-end transportation process requires a highly effective cold chain management. During air freight, the entire cold chain cabin is equipped with a temperature control system that monitors the cabin's temperature in real-time. As the fourth airport in Mainland China that obtained International Air Transport Association (IATA)'s Centre of Excellence for Independent Validators (CEIV) certification for pharmaceutical logistics, Shenzhen Airport is also well-equipped to handle biotechnology products. The cargo terminal in Ethiopia is outfitted with compartmentalized cold storage facilities with temperature

between -23°C to 25°C. It occupies an area of 54,000 square metres, with dedicated cool dollies and pharma team, as well as real-time temperature monitoring system to ensure a safe and seamless cold chain logistics for handling temperature sensitive healthcare product.

## PIA stops serving hot beverages on flights

**T**he Pakistan International Airlines has discontinued serving 'hot beverages' on domestic and international flights to limit interactions between passengers and crew as the travellers would be only served pre-packaged cold beverages.

A spokesman for the PIA said the move was part of reviewed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to limit the interaction between the cabin crew and passengers due to increase in Covid19 cases.

He said the passengers on domestic flights would be served with a pre-packaged box with cold beverage, instead of tea or coffee.

Like all major airlines, face coverings with masks are mandatory for passengers traveling by PIA to check the spread of Covid19.

According to sources, the PIA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) had approved the changes in meal service which had come into force from Nov 16.

According to change in meal service, tray service should be immediately stopped in all sectors. In domestic sectors, only cold beverages will be served as no tea or coffee will be served, the PIA decided.

The airline decided to serve snacks, club sandwiches, chicken patties, one banana and muffin but no tea or coffee will be served in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sector.

On return flight club sandwiches, chicken patties, one banana and biscuit will be served.

Likewise, only snacks would be served on Kabul and Gulf country flights.

On the Far East and YYZ (Canada) menu will be as per food schedule in box service while on UK and CDG (Paris) chartered flight box service will be used.

The change in meal service in different sectors was made as part of precautionary measures and to reduce interaction between travellers and crew members.



## Thai Airways to export fresh fruit in bid to recover



Thai Airways will expand its cargo services in order to promote Thailand's fresh fruit and vegetable products to Asian and European markets.

Thailand's national carrier Thai Airways, in cooperation with the government ministries of commerce, agriculture and transport, would reportedly concentrate on delivering seasonal fruit and vegetables to promote the country's fresh products and generate revenue.

According to the Nation,

Suvadhana Sibunruang, vice president of Thai Airways aviation business unit and acting managing director for cargo, mail and commercial flights, said "the airline was cooperating with the Thai government to facilitate more fresh produce exports to generate revenue for growers, exporters and itself."

"We have asked the Commerce Ministry to give us information on the trend of fruit and vegetable exports because the airline is currently operating semi-commercial flights and expect the

cargo business to generate revenue next year," Sibunruang said.

Somdet Susomboon, director general of Thailand's Department of International Trade Promotion, said that over the next 12 months, Thai Airways would help the country's produce reach key markets, including Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, and several European countries.

Since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, Thai Airways experienced a great revenue loss due to decline in Thailand's tourism and closed international flights.

After recently reporting a huge third quarter net loss reaching \$711 million (21.53 billion baht), the airline has put 34 airplanes up for sale.

However, with the government's bailout, Thailand's national flag carrier also designed original initiatives to boost the airline's recovery.

Firstly, Thai Airways opened a pop-up restaurant in its Bangkok headquarters, so the customers who miss eating plane food could enjoy in-flight meals.

Additionally, Thai Airways joined the number of airlines selling flights to nowhere, which have become a trend particularly in Asia.

## Saudi's Riyadh opens new COVID vaccines, perishables centre

**S**AUDI Arabian Logistics (SAL) has unveiled its new pharmaceuticals and perishable shipments facilities ahead of the much-anticipated global distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

The two infrastructures boast a 5,000-sq m storage area which combined can handle up to 365,000 tonnes of air cargo annually at the King Khalid International Airport (KKIA) 'Cargo Village' in Riyadh.

SAL, a subsidiary of Saudi Arabian Airlines Corporation, is the main 'cargo gate' at the Kingdom's airports and the only logistics entity that connects airlines with airports providing them with a number of services, including ground handling, e-commerce activities, land transportation, warehouse management and storage solutions.

The new facilities inaugurated by His Excellency the Saudi Minister of Transport Eng. Saleh bin Nasser Al-Jasser include four docks for loading refrigerated containers; a thermal isolation area; 12 warehouses with different temperatures ranging from minus 20 degrees Celsius to plus 25 degrees Celsius to suit the nature and type of cargo to be stored; a 650-sq m temperature-controlled area for breaking



down consolidated palletised shipments; along with a section which can house 20 active containers.

There are divisions operated by the Saudi Food and Drug Authority and the Saudi Customs authorities to inspect and expedite the cargo handling process.

"SAL's partnership with Saudi Customs and the Saudi Food and Drug Authority has made the clearance of shipments easier and faster," insists a statement.

In addition, there is a separate special storage area dedicated to fresh-cut flowers.

News of the unveiling comes after the Saudi Ministry of Transport assured the country's transport infrastructure and facilities, particularly air cargo and logistics, "are fully prepared to handle the COVID-19 vaccine once it's ready for distribution," says the statement.

The capital city's cargo village, which covers more than 275,000 sq m and is capable of processing up to a total of 1.6 million tonnes, is also expected to be a multi-modal shipment and clearance centre aimed at transforming Saudi Arabia into a global logistics hub.

SAL's own operational capacity, which has now doubled at KKIA, has reached 450,000 tonnes a year.

Omar Hariri, chief executive of Saudi Arabian Logistics, insists: "The launch of the Riyadh Cold Storage facilities come at a historic moment that coincides with the world's anticipation for the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccines.

"This urgency makes us harness the capabilities of the operation capacity of our pharmaceuticals facility and be fully prepared to receive and handle the new vaccines in coordination with the health authorities," he adds.

"The new project will enhance SAL's handling and storage services for medical and pharmaceuticals in line with the highest quality standards approved by the European Union's Good Distribution Practices (GDP)," he emphasises.

GDP is a quality standards validation certification for warehouse and distribution centres which handle medicines and vaccines.



## MOU SIGNING CEREMONY BETWEEN UIC & AIRSIAL



United Insurance Company of Pakistan Ltd, recently signed an MoU with AirSial at corporate Head Office of AirSial Sialkot. At the ceremony Chairman AirSial - Mr. Fazal Jilani, Senior Vice Chariman AirSial - Mr. Qaiser Iqbal, Chief Operating Officer AirSial - Mr. Tariq Ameen, Chairman UIG - Mr. Mian M.A. Shahid, Deputy Managing Director UIC - Mr. Shakil Ahmed, General Manager UIC - Mr. Waqar Riaz were present.





## Probe blames PIA engineers for 2016 crash

Nearly four years after the tragic incident, the Aircraft Accident and Investigation Board (AAIB) has completed investigation into crash of Pakistan International Airlines' flight PK-661 near Havelian, which has revealed that the aircraft had three "technical anomalies" for which the airline's engineers were responsible.

A total of 47 passengers and crewmembers lost their lives when the ATR42 plane crashed into hills about 24 nautical miles north of Benazir Bhutto Islamabad International Airport on Dec 7, 2016.

Junaid Jamshed, a singer-turned-preacher, was among the people killed in one of the most disastrous air crashes in the country's aviation history.

Head of the AAIB Air Commodore Usman Ghani submitted the report on Thursday Nov. 19 to a bench of the Sindh High Court (SHC) after repeated directives by the bench in a petition filed about various incidents involving ATR planes.

A spokesman for the aviation division, senior joint secretary Abdul Sattar Khokhar, said in a press release the investigation was carried out under the guidelines provided by the International Civil Aviation Organisation and were aimed at improving the safety of air travel.

According to the investigation report, the air crash was the result of three "latent technical factors", including fracture of one of the power turbine blades of Engine 1; a broken/fractured pin inside over-speed governor; and probable pre-existing contamination inside Propeller Valve Module.

The AAIB report, which held the PIA engineers responsible for the disaster, said the aircraft remained in air for about 42 minutes before the crash.

Analysis of the digital flight data recorder indicated that the aircraft's Engine 1 was degraded.

"The flight took off with two pre-existing technical anomalies. One anomaly was a fractured Power Turbine (PT-1) blade and the second was a fractured pin inside the Over-Speed Governor of the same side. The probable latent pre-existing condition was contamination external from the engine observed in Propeller Valve Module

(PVM)," the report said.

It said most probably the PT-1 blade had fractured during a previous flight. However, this defect is not observable during regular operations.

"It was determined that the pin inside the OSG was fractured due to improper re-assembly. Metallurgical evaluation of the OSG pilot valve pin fracture surface, at Woodward, USA, determined that the pin had failed due to overload resulting from the valve being forced together using an improper re-assembly method during some unauthorised/undocumented maintenance activity," the report said.

Continued operation with a broken pin may possibly have weakened component(s) inside OSG.

"It has been established that any of the latent pre-existing technical anomalies and probable latent pre-existing condition ... alone may not lead to such a catastrophic/hazardous situation except in the presence of unusual combination and/or additional contributing factor(s)."

The report suggested that the simultaneous existence of the three "technical anomalies" made it extremely difficult for the cockpit crew to tackle the situation effectively.

"The event was unexpected and the crew was not trained for this specific sequence of events," said the report.

It said the captain and the first officers were well-trained and had a good overall total flying hours. They led a normal family life.

Responding to the AIIB report, the management of PIA said the airline had already incorporated immediate safety recommendations, including PT blade modifications and inspections of OSG at the manufacturing facility.

Spokesman for PIA Abdullah Hafeez Khan said the management had reviewed the crash report and acknowledged that there were three latent factors that aligned together at the time of the crash. Had any of these factors happened in isolation, the consequences would not have been so devastating.

He said that during the course of the investigation, PIA remained at the disposal of AAIB for implementing the most immediate safety recommendations which were given earlier.

There has been no similar event in the industry or with the same equipment which could help PIA maintenance and training teams to simulate such a scenario.

Meanwhile, the SHC summoned the PIA and CAA officials after submission of the investigation report.

The two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar summoned the director for safety management and maintenance of PIA and director for airworthiness of CAA to appear before it on Dec 1.

Air Commodore Ghani informed the bench that the report was available on the website of CAA. When the bench asked about the safety of the public, he contended that clear responsibility had been fixed in the report and certain recommendations had also been given to ensure safety measures.

## CAA bans serving meals during domestic flights

Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has imposed a ban on serving meals during all domestic flight operations - chartered and private - as coronavirus cases in the country continue to rise.

Passengers and crew members have also been asked to wear face masks throughout the flight.

In pursuance of the authority's directive, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has discontinued serving hot beverages like tea or coffee on domestic and international flights so that interactions between members of the crew and passengers could be limited; prepackaged cold beverages will be served during the flight instead.

According to PIA, this move is a part of new standard operating procedures (SOPs) issued by the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) amid the virus's second wave in Pakistan, however, passengers will be allowed to bring their own meals if they wish to.

All domestic flight operators have been asked to ensure strict adherence to SOPs; the NCOC has also directed CAA to ensure that a proper mechanism is formed to monitor whether these health guidelines are being followed.

The Airport Security Force (ASF), airport management, airline management, flight crew and CAA have also been directed to coordinate and cooperate effectively in this regard to prevent further spread of coronavirus.

The virus's second wave can be curbed if SOPs are implemented in true letter and spirit and all authorities concerned unite to make that happen.

## European Union retains ban on PIA

**T**he European Commission has decided to retain the ban on Pakistan International Airlines operations in its member countries and asked the country's aviation authorities to remove safety deficiencies and improve the whole process of issuing licences to commercial pilots.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) had suspended the authorisation for the PIA to operate in European Union member countries for six months in July 2020.

The EASA ban was soon followed by similar action by the UK and US aviation authorities, crippling the PIA which was already suffering in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis. The EU had also put Pakistan on notice showing concern over the issue of pilots' licences citing the aviation minister's speech on the floor of parliament that one third of Pakistani pilots had suspicious licences.

The EU Air Safety Committee (ASC) met on November 17 and 18 in Brussels to update the list of airlines whose operations had been banned by the European Commission.

animous opinion of the ASC, the European Commission formally adopted a regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 474/2006 of March 22, 2006, establishing the list of air carriers, which are subject to an operating ban within the EU.

A copy of the list may be accessed at the following website: [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/safety/air-ban/index\\_en.html](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/safety/air-ban/index_en.html)

A letter sent to former secretary of aviation Hasan Nasir Jamy said the situation of the air carriers certified in Pakistan was examined during the ASC meeting. An excerpt of the regulation with the recitals pertaining to Pakistan was attached with the letter.

The European Commission reported to the ASC about the technical meetings held on July 9 and 25 September 25 and the numerous correspondences received between the end of June and November from the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA).

The EU said that the ASC deliberations confirmed a continued concern over the measures taken by the PCAA in terms of a proper root cause analysis and suitable corrective measures to prevent re-occurrence of the same or similar safety deficiencies.

According to the EU, concern persists about PCAA safety deficiencies, not only on the pilot licencing areas but on the whole licencing and authorisation processes, application and oversight of

safety management systems and the establishment of the occurrence reporting system, among others.

It said it had also been recognised that the PCAA was making significant efforts to put in place and enforce some corrective measures to address the identified safety situation in Pakistan.

The European Commission and the ASC have noted the willingness of the PCAA to react to the case of the fraudulent licenses, and also appreciated its transparency and openness in recognising the deficiencies.

"In view of this, it has been decided not to make any changes to the list of air carriers subject to an operating ban with respect to air carriers certified in Pakistan," the EASA said.

It urged the PCAA to maintain regular contact with the European Commission to keep it informed of the further actions to respond to and deal with the safety concerns.

The former aviation secretary was also informed that the European Commission would continue its monitoring and assessment of how the situation developed further, and this might include a visit to Pakistan when travel conditions would permit it.

The letter said the European Commission would remain committed to working closely with the PCAA to solve in a sustainable manner the identified safety issues with a view to achieving common objective of a safe international aviation system, while at the same time ensuring that any current safety risks were adequately contained.

On the other hand, European Union Aviation Safety Agency, in its letter to PIA Corporation Limited, said the agency had reviewed the material provided by the PIA regarding safety management system and found it satisfactory and sufficient as a first important step.

The EASA said it would conduct an audit of the third country operator when it would consider the lifting of a suspension of PIA operations when the conditions were met. However, the conditions have not been met yet.

The EASA said in particular the investigation conducted by European Commission on the issuance of professional licenses was still ongoing which indicated that there was a possibility the audit would not have the expected positive results.

Commenting on the EC ban on air carriers certified in Pakistan, the PIA spokesman said that PIA had been working hard to comply with EASA observations as these were unprecedented times.

He said in routine things were taken differently but with added pressure of a ban, synergistic efforts were being made to adhere to the minutest of details.

He said: "Now we are eagerly awaiting regulatory compliance so that we could resume our flights to one of our most productive sectors."

### PIA closes offices

The PIA has closed its all offices in interior of Sindh that had no clients travelling across the country.

PIA spokesman Abdullah Hafeez said that the bulk of PIA operations was shifting to the northern areas, Islamabad and Lahore with most of PIA flights now originating from there and adjoining areas such as Peshawar, Swat, Mardan, Nowshera, Charsada, Rawalpindi, Gujar Khan and Jhelum belt, Kharian and Sialkot belt. Hence the major required staff is to be placed in Islamabad.

He said that there was no point in retaining a large work force in Karachi.

## PIA's German ex-boss booked for illegal appointment

**T**he Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Monday Nov. 30 registered a case against two foreigners for allegedly being involved in an illegal appointment made in the Pakistan International Airlines which caused financial losses to the exchequer.

"The FIA Corporate Crime Circle has registered an FIR against German national Bernd Hildenbrand, a former acting CEO of PIA, for allegedly abusing his powers and illegally appointing Austrian national Helmut Bechhofner as a consultant to CEO in October 2016," said deputy director, FIA, CCC, Karachi, Abdur Rauf.

"The illegal appointment of Austrian national, Helmut Bechhofner caused a loss of \$50,203 (equivalent to Rs5,256,254) to national exchequer," says a press release. "It has been established that the accused German national by abusing his official position as acting CEO of PIA, unlawfully appointed the accused Austrian national as consultant in the PIA without the approval of competent authority."

The case was registered under Section 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1947 read with Sections 109 (abetment) and 409 (criminal breach of trust by public servant, or by banker, merchant or agent) of the Pakistan Penal Code.



## One world, Sky Team and Star Alliance support a globally harmonised approach to health testing to build a framework of trust

The three global airline alliances, oneworld, SkyTeam and Star Alliance, are in full support of the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) second-phase Council on Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) report released on 9 November. Together, they urge governments to implement the report guidelines for passenger testing protocols, as well as the adoption of digital health pass technology, so air travel may safely resume.

Government-imposed travel and entry restrictions continue to significantly impact global travel demand. Meanwhile, COVID-19 testing has emerged as an important part of an end-to-end solution to enable the safe restart of international travel by potentially reducing the reliance on the blunt instrument of blanket quarantines.

"We welcome the publication of the updated CART report which, among other things, calls for the serious consideration of screening and testing as a means for easing travel and border restrictions, and reviving the travel and tourism industry and the global economy," said Star Alliance CEO Jeffrey Goh. "A robust protocol for testing will also provide further evidence to demonstrate that air travel is not a material cause for infections and will pave the way for a framework of trust to be established between countries."

On behalf of their 58 member airlines, representing over 60% of world airline capacity and carrying over 1.87 billion passengers annually prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the three alliances are calling for a harmonised approach to testing that will form the foundation of a trust framework, as recommended by the ICAO guidelines.

SkyTeam CEO Kristin Colville said: "Testing regimes and trials of digital health passes have identified an effective means to restoring confidence and reopening borders, complementing the layer upon layer of passenger safety measures already implemented by

airlines and airports worldwide. Aviation supports millions of jobs around the world and drives international commerce, trade and tourism. Urgent action is needed to adopt testing and technology to mitigate COVID risks and safely and quickly revive international air travel."

The recent digital 'health pass' trials, such as Common Pass, are presenting a strong case for using digital technology to deliver harmonised standards in the validation and verification of accredited passenger health data. The alliances support technical solutions that provide a consistent, scalable and affordable way to

declare passenger health data that is simple to implement as part of the customer journey, with processes initiated pre-travel to reduce passenger inconvenience at airports.

oneworld CEO Rob Gurney said: "With extensive travel restrictions creating much uncertainty for customers, testing can play a role in enabling the safe restart of travel. Any solution used in declaring passenger health data should be consistent, scalable and cost effective this will provide clarity and confidence to customers, airlines and other stakeholders as international travel resumes."

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## Comments sought on CAA's procedure to issue airworthiness certificate

The Sindh High Court on Tuesday Dec. 1st directed the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to submit comments regarding the entire procedure being followed before issuing airworthiness certificate in a petition seeking a judicial probe following the 2016 PIA ATR plane crash.

PIA officials submitted that they had enhanced their capabilities with due diligence for all compliance while petitioner informed the bench about an email sent in 2012 regarding lack of capability on the part of PIA to perform inspection and repair.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar also directed the PIA officials to file its reply about the concerns shown in the email and its current status.

In the last hearing, the bench had summoned the officials of PIA and CAA after submission of the final investigation report regarding an ATR aircraft crash in 2016 that revealed that the aircraft had three technical anomalies.

At the outset of the hearing, the PIA representatives submitted statements along with some documents.

They informed the bench that currently, six ATR aircraft were in operation two at Islamabad and four at Karachi.

However, CAA's director-airworthiness Zahid Bhatti submitted that he had recently come from aboard and requested for a short time to submit his comments.

The bench directed him to appear on Dec 17 along with comments about the entire procedure followed by the CAA before issuing an airworthiness certificate.

He stated that besides physical inspection, they also check one-year flight record including maintenance, if any, carried out.

PIA's general manager-corporate safety Captain Mohsin Ausaf informed the bench that in order to implement the safety measures they had installed a flight data monitoring (FDM) system.

He maintained that in case of any violation by the pilot the FDM software immediately raised flags associated with such violations as the purpose of flags was to give monitoring management a clear idea of how safe its pilots were operating.

The chief technical officer of the PIA, Amer Ali, also submitted a statement along with some documents regarding

implementation of the Aircraft Accident and Investigation Board's (AAIB) safety recommendations and was of the view that PIA was complying with all such measures.

He submitted that PIA's engineering department, which was mainly held responsible for the ATR crash in the investigation report by the AAIB, had reviewed and implemented more restrictive maintenance philosophy on the old design power turbine blades by changing "its soft life interval of 10,000 to a hard life".

He maintained that at present the PIA fleet of operating ATR aircraft was installed with over-speed governors, certified after required inspection of the pin from its manufacturer, in compliance with the AAIB's safety recommendations.

The propeller value modules (PVM) are properly maintained in accordance with service information letter issued in April 2019 while Pratt & Whitney Canada conducted a facility survey in May 2018 for enhancement of its overhauling capabilities of PW127 engines, he added.

The bench observed that in a nutshell the PIA representatives affirmed that they had enhanced their capabilities with due diligence for all compliance as both officials stated that they were observing all prerequisites of technical and maintenance issues in all aircraft/fleet of the PIA and accepted the responsibility to ensure future safety and technical measures.

At this, the petitioner placed before the bench a copy of an email dated Aug 29, 2012 generated by UTC Aerospace Systems to the PIA deputy chief engineer regarding the 563F propeller blade major inspection.

The petitioner emphasized that according to the email, in some areas the PIA had no capability to perform all the works but they were interfering, which might cause major accident.

In the email it was reminded to the operations that they did not have the capability to perform several tasks. They had also shown their concern in the mail that they received blades (FR20061049RT) for repair and the company got information that it was overhauled by the PIA in December 2011.

The bench directed the petitioner to provide a copy of the email to the PIA representatives so that they might also submit a reply on the next date of hearing about what was the current status and

whether the concern shown in the email had been attended and implemented.

The petition was filed after an Islamabad-bound flight of the national flag carrier had crashed in Abbottabad district after it took off from Chitral on December 7, 2016 in which 42 passengers and crew, including singer-turned-preacher Junaid Jamshed and his wife, lost their lives.

Impleading the PIA, CAA and others as respondents, the petitioner argued that there were various incidents where ATR planes of the PIA crashed in which a large number of precious lives were lost and pleaded for a judicial inquiry to fix responsibility on the officials responsible for it, prosecute them and order compensation to the legal heirs of the victims.

## UAE visa suspension linked to 'security concerns'

The United Arab Emirates has stopped issuing new visas to citizens of 13 mostly Muslim-majority countries, including Iran, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, according to a document issued by a state-owned business park.

A source briefed on the matter said the visas had temporarily stopped being issued to Afghans, Pakistanis and citizens of several other countries over security concerns, but did not provide details of those concerns.

The document, sent to companies operating in the park and seen by Reuters, cited an immigration circular that came into effect on Nov 18.

The document said applications for new employment and visit visas had been suspended for nationals those outside the UAE of 13 countries that also included Somalia, Libya and Yemen until further notice.

The ban also applies to citizens of Algeria, Kenya, Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia and Turkey, it says. It was not clear if there were any exceptions to the ban.

The UAE's Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship had no immediate comment when contacted.

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# History of PIA and others

(Prof. SafdarSandal)

Pakistan did not have a national airline until 1955, when the private 'Orient Airways', was nationalized and renamed 'Pakistan International Airways'. Initially it was founded on 29 October 1946 and was based in Calcutta; later shifted to the newly independent state of Pakistan in 1947, after which it was nationalized to form as 'Pakistan International Airlines Corporation' (PIAC).

PIA became one of the fastest-growing airlines in the 1960s. It was the first airline to have introduced in-flight



entertainment. The uniforms of PIA stewardesses were designed by famous French fashion designer, Pierre Cardin. M.A. Ispahani was a leading industrialist, to have set up a national airline for the country, on a priority basis. Mirza Ahmed Ispahani was a Perso-Bengali businessman based in Chittagong and was the first Chairman of 'Pakistan International Airlines'. With his singular vision and foresight, Mr. Jinnah realized that with the formation of the two wings of the country Pakistan, (East Pakistan and West Pakistan) separated by a hostile land of 1,372 miles (= 2,208 km), a swift and efficient mode of transport and communication was imperative. The Airline performed well and even made its way into the list of first five leading international airlines of the World during the 1970s. "For the airline of a country which was cut in half six months ago; PIA deserves praise for the speed with which it had faced facts and turned disaster into opportunity" came the remarks of Murray Bailey in 1972. Bailey (a famous writer of



international repute) was referring to the bifurcation of Pakistan into Bangladesh and Pakistan in 1971. PIA's fortunes however started to decline after the late 1980s. It is being resurrected now though not efficaciously enough.

PIA had bonanza men, the famed engineers and technicians who had provided training facilities to Emirates'



first staff members. The Pakistan Airlines got ensured that they had the resources needed for the project. Several weeks later, the airline (Emirates) had earned a name. Today the Emirates Airline has been recognized internationally as one of the best airline and declared so deservedly. It continues to enjoy the repute of good service and has grown into multi-dimensional business and made profits immeasurably. The day when Emirates touched the shores of Sialkot, it was for SIAL Company, a day like Columbus had discovered and landed in America. The picture above inside the aero plane was taken by me in my mobile, during my last journey (in 2020) and is very much enjoyed by me.

In order to fill the gap in a modest way the industrialists of Sialkot in their well-known fashion, have decided to float a much needed Airline (of their own) for service of their country, to operate domestically first and later internationally. They have established this Airline, again with their own money and above all with a

national zeal and dedication. The progressive people of Sialkot have already built an International Airport on their own initiative and are running it successfully on BOO (Build, Own and Operate) basis. Now they have gone a step further to establish an airline of their own, with the name 'AIR SIAL' (it may be noted that SIAL is a historical name: Raja SALBAN was the ruler of India based in Sialkot in the second millennium CE. He is believed to have founded the fort and later the city of Sialkot (originally SALKOT). The name is pretty enough like the city itself which is lying in the foothills of mighty Kashmir Mountains. Formerly it had been the winter capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and is now in the Punjab province of Pakistan, close to the country's north eastern border with India. Jammu being 30 miles away by road or by train (the straight-line distance (from my



house) is 10KM or 6.50 English miles; so I can see the Kashmir Mountains as close-by). Both the links (road and train) to Jammu from Sialkot or vice versa still exist, although in shambles and not in working order. It is one of the biggest pities and a tragedy of human history.

The delay in operation of 'AIR SIAL' has been caused mainly due to Covid-19 virus and the resultant decrease in activity of the local Pakistani people and the diaspora residing in foreign countries. Hopefully, it is possible that someday people of Jammu will also use the 'Sialkot International Airport' and the 'AIR SIAL'; as in history chronically, intervals of century-old-periods are not uncommon. Of course, Sialkot and Jammu have remained as twin cities from times immemorial. Relationships or kinships between the people of two cities had been immense at all times and are still full of remorse among many families. The times may come again as is said that 'history repeats itself'. It will be undoubtedly to the jubilation of all people of Jammu and Sialkot, since later has been a gateway to Kashmir.





Mr. Fazal Jilani, Chairman AirSial flanked by Mr. Ameen Ahsan, Qaisar Iqbal Baryar Sr. Vice Chairman (Left) Mr. M. Umer Mir Vice Chairman and Mr. Tariq Amin COO AirSial (Right) addressing the press conference in Karachi.



Mr. Fazal Jilani with other guests at SIAL.



Mr. Fazal Jilani briefing a media person in Karachi.



Chairman AirSial Mr. Fazal Jilani with others.



Mr. Riazuddin Sheikh businessmen group leader flanked by Mr. Ameen Ahsan CEO AirSial, Mian Naeem Javed Chairman SIAL and others.





Chairman AirSial Mr. Fazal Jilani, Sr. Vice Chairman Mr. Qaisar Iqbal Baryar and the children Presenting the bouquet to Prime Minister Imran Khan on his arrival to inaugurate AirSial at SIAL.



Chairman Air Sial Mr. Fazal Jilani and Sr. Vice Chairman AirSial Mr. Qaisar Iqbal Baryar receiving the Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan at SIAL.



Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan addressing the inaugural ceremony of AirSial at SIAL.



Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman AirSial addressing the guests on the occasion of inauguration of AirSial at SIAL.



Prime Minister Imran Khan being escorted by Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman and Mr. Qaisar Iqbal Baryar SVP AirSial and president SCCI.



## SIAL news in pictures



Chairman SIAL Mian Naeem Javed presenting a shield and souvenir to Chief Minister Punjab Sardar Usman Buzdar upon his visit to Sialkot International Airport. Also seen in the picture are Vice Chairman SIAL Choudhry M. Afzal Shaheen and Punjab Special Education Minister Ch. Muhammad Akhlaq.



Mian Naeem Javed Chairman, Mr. Babar Iqbal CEO, Ch. M. Afzal Shaheen Vice Chairman talking to Media Advisor Firdous Ashiq Awan on her visit to SIAL.



Mr. Abdul Shakoor Mirza PR Manager SIAL photographed with Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Kazmi, Tanveer Kazmi and cricket fan Sufi Abdul Jalil Chacha on the occasion of inaugural ceremony of AirSial at SIAL.



Mr. Tahir Kapoor, an Industrialist hosted a grand reception for elites of Sialkot. Photo shows the prominent Industrialists Sheikh Yaqub, Prof. Safdar Sandal, Akmal Cheema and others.



Group photo of Directors of SIAL taken with Director Anticorruption Punjab Brdg. Ch. Aslam Ghuman on the occasion of inaugural ceremony of AirSial recently held at the Sialkot International Airport.



(R-L) Mr. Babar Iqbal CEO SIAL Mr. Naeem Ahsan Bhutta, Sardar Usman Buzdar Chief Minister Punjab and Mr. Muhammad Saleem Baryar in a meeting.



DC Sialkot Mr. Zeeshan Javed with the Chairman SIAL Mian Naeem Javed, CEO Babar Iqbal and Ch. M. Afzal Shaheen Vice Chairman SIAL visiting the airport prior to visit of the PM.



Sheikh Muhammad Jhangir Chairman Siliver Star and Director SIAL inaugurating Filtration Plant at Sialkot International Airport (The plant is donated by him).





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## Sialkot's history and future is brilliant

By Mirza Abdul Shakoor

**S**ialkot, a city of unique traditions, the business community of Sialkot has not only worldwide reputation for its quality products and their export to different parts of the World but also known as dreamers and initiators of Mega Projects on self-help basis. The role of the business community has been recognized at National and International level.

In the process of socio-economic development of the Sialkot contribution of senior officers of the Pakistan Army, bureaucrats and government officials serving in Sialkot or belonging to Sialkot are much higher than any ruling politicians of Sialkot, which is valued by citizens of Sialkot. It is worthwhile to mention that the people of Sialkot are very lucky that they have many Sialkoti friends are in contact with business leaders of Sialkot to provide services for linking up with high ups and decision makers to get support for resolutions of their issues. Fortunately, these all friends are associated with Islamabad based Shehr-e- Iqbal Forum (SIF) under the leadership of Internationally known Police & Justice Sector Reform Specialist Dr Muhammad Shoaib Suddle.

SIF was formed almost thirty years ago through the efforts of retired and serving officers, important personalities associated with business and private institutions based in Islamabad to promote and disseminate teaching of Allama Iqbal in the country. It is very encouraging and commendable step of SIF President

Dr Shoaib Suddle to take interest to be the part of socio-economic uplift of

Sialkot. Some of sympathetic members of SIF also started using their personal connections to provide support to the business community of Sialkot in their efforts to solve Sialkot's problems on self-help basis. Although this process is still ongoing individually. But the present leaders of the city of Iqbal have now begun to emphasize the need for a regular support to the business community of Sialkot by the systematic way to play their full role in resolving the problems of Sialkot. It is important to note that it is the first time in the forum, two executive members (Chaudhry Muhammad Afzal Shaheen and Abdul Shakoor Mirza) were elected from Sialkot. At the invitation of executive members based in Sialkot, the President of Shehr-e-Iqbal Forum, Dr. Muhammad Shoaib Suddle and his team members paid a one-day goodwill visit to Sialkot and offered to contribute regularly for the welfare & development of Sialkot.

He volunteered to become the ambassador of Sialkot and play his role in solving the civic and business problems of Sialkot, which was warmly welcomed by the leaders of the business community of Sialkot.

A reception was arranged by Sialkot International Airport Limited (SIAL)



President Iqbal Forum Islamabad is getting details about the house belonging to Dr. Muhammad Shoaib Suddle, Mian Muhammad Riaz, Muhammad Afzal Shaheen, Naeem Yusuf, and Muhammad Javed Chaudhry, Mian Atiq-ur-Rehman and Sheikh Abdul Hameed are also present.

Management in honor of the delegation. Chairman Mian Naeem Javed, Chief Executive Officer Babar Iqbal, Founder, Chairman SIAL Mian Muhammad Riaz and former Chairman Ghulam Mustafa Chaudhry paid homage to Dr Muhammad Shoaib Suddle (Sitara-e- Imtiaz) and appreciated his services to the nation and thanked for support for Sialkot Airport.

Dr. Muhammad Shoaib Suddle in his address said that the business community of Sialkot has established a tradition of solving its own problems which has increased the respect of the people of Sialkot. All the members of Shehr-e- Iqbal Forum Islamabad feel proud of the role played by the business community of Sialkot. He suggested to set up an institution in Islamabad called Sialkot House or Shehr-e-Iqbal House, where all the products made in Sialkot will be

exhibited. Diplomats and senior government officials based in Islamabad should be invited to be informed about the success stories made in Sialkot. Everyone welcomed the proposal and assured all possible cooperation from SIAL. All members of the delegation were presented SIAL shields.

The reception was also organized by Sialkot Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCI) in honor of the delegation President

*Continue page 34*



The writer briefing the delegation.





United Insurance Company of Pakistan Limited and Bukhari Travel Sialkot GSA Flynas signed MoU for UIC Insurance guarantees for Flynas capping on GDs. Photo taken on the occasion shows Mr. M. Rafiq Chairman Bukhari Group and Mr. Shakil Ahmed Dy. Managing Director UIC signing the contract at a ceremony held recently at PC Hotel Karachi. Mr. Manzoor Thanvi Country Manager, Flynas also share the occasion.



The Lahore centre of Peace Research and Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in Pakistan hosted a round table conference under the title 'both countries relation and foreign investment'. Group photo taken with HE Eark Beshan Bu Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan and Former Ambassador Shamshad Ahmed, Executive Nazir Hussan, Third Secretary Kyrgyzstan Embassy Ms. Sabina Mokhmedanuve, and Mr. Zahoor Durrani of Sehra Travel & Tours.



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## China, Asean sign world's biggest trade deal

China and 14 other countries recently agreed to set up the world's largest trading bloc, encompassing nearly a third of all economic activity, in a deal many in Asia are hoping will help hasten a recovery from the shocks of the pandemic.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, was signed virtually on the sidelines of the annual summit of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

"I am delighted to say that after eight years of hard work, as of today, we have officially brought RCEP negotiations to a conclusion for signing," said host country Vietnam's Prime Minister, Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

The conclusion of RCEP negotiation, the largest free trade agreement in the world, will send a strong message that affirms Asean's leading role in supporting the multilateral trading system, creating a new trading structure in the region, enabling sustainable trade facilitation, revitalising the supply chains disrupted by Covid-19 and assisting the post-pandemic recovery, Phuc said.

The accord will take already low tariffs on trade between member countries still lower, over time, and is less comprehensive than an 11-nation trans-Pacific trade deal that President Donald Trump pulled out of shortly after taking office.

Apart from the 10 Asean members, it includes China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, but not the United States.

Officials said the accord leaves the door open for India, which dropped out due to fierce domestic opposition to its market-opening requirements, to rejoin the bloc.

It will take time to fully assess exact details of the agreement encompassing tariff schedules and rules for all 15 countries involved the tariffs schedule just for Japan is 1,334 pages long.

It is not expected to go as far as the European Union in integrating member economies but does build on existing free trade arrangements.

The deal has powerful symbolic ramifications, showing that nearly four years after Trump launched his 'America First' policy of forging trade deals with individual countries, Asia remains committed to multi-nation efforts toward freer trade that are seen as a formula for future prosperity.

Ahead of RCEP special summit meeting, Japanese Prime Minister

Yoshihide Suga said he would firmly convey his government's support for broadening a free and fair economic zone, including a possibility of India's future return to the deal, and hope to gain support from the other countries.

The accord is also a coup for China, by far the biggest market in the region with more than 1.3 billion people, allowing Beijing to cast itself as a champion of globalisation and multilateral cooperation and giving it greater influence over rules governing regional trade, Gareth Leather, senior Asian economist for Capital Economics, said in a report.

China's official Xinhua News Agency quoted Premier Li Keqiang hailing the agreement as a victory against protectionism, in remarks delivered via a video link.

The signing of the RCEP is not only a landmark achievement of East Asian regional cooperation, but also a victory of multilateralism and free trade, Li said.

The agreement is expected to help China, Japan and South Korea finally reach a trilateral free trade deal after years of struggling to bridge their differences.

Now that Trump's opponent Joe Biden has been declared president-elect, the region is watching to see how US policy on trade and other issues will evolve.

Analysts are sceptical Biden will push hard to rejoin the trans-Pacific trade pact or to roll back many of the US trade sanctions imposed on China by the Trump administration given widespread frustration with Beijing's trade and human rights records, and accusations of spying and technology theft.

Critics of free trade agreements say they tend to encourage companies to move manufacturing jobs overseas. "So, having won over disaffected rust-belt voters in Michigan and western Pennsylvania in the Nov 3 election, Biden is not going to squander that by going back into TPP," Michael Jonathan Green of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies said in a web seminar.

But given concerns over China's growing influence, Biden is likely to seek much more engagement with Southeast Asia to protect US interests, he said.

The fast-growing and increasingly affluent Southeast Asian market of 650 million people has been hit hard by the pandemic and is urgently seeking fresh drivers for growth.

RCEP originally would have included about 3.6 billion people and encompassed about a third of world trade and global

GDP. Minus India, it still covers more than 2 billion people and close to a third of all trade and business activity.

The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, the retooled version of the North American Free Trade Agreement under Trump, covers slightly less economic activity but less than a tenth of the world's population. The EU and Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, the revised version of the deal Trump rejected, also are smaller. RCEP includes six of the 11 remaining CPTPP members.

### Failure to get Brexit deal will wipe out 2pc off UK output: OBR

Failure by Britain and the European Union to agree a free trade deal would wipe an extra two per cent off the United Kingdom's economic output while driving up inflation, unemployment and public borrowing, official forecasts showed on Wednesday 25 Nov..

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) revisited its Brexit forecasts after deciding the prospect of a "no deal" exit remained a risk, just over five weeks before Britain fully leaves the world's biggest trading bloc on Dec 31.

The OBR said the imposition of tariffs under World Trade Organisation rules and disruption at borders would hit parts of the economy such as manufacturing that were emerging relatively unscathed from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The independent body had already forecast Brexit would cost Britain 4pc of GDP in the long run even if Britain secures a free trade agreement with the EU, compared to it staying in the bloc.

"This (no deal) would further reduce output by 2pc initially and 1.5pc at the forecast horizon," it said.

The initial economic hit would be felt at the start of the following year, and the OBR predicted little of the lost output would be recovered over the next five years.

Unemployment, at 4.8pc in the third quarter of 2020, could peak at 8.3pc in the third quarter of 2021 if there is no deal 0.9 percentage points higher than in its central forecast for that period.



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## NA panel clears CPEC authority bill with majority vote



**A**mid dissent by opposition members, a parliamentary committee on Tuesday 17 Nov. cleared with majority vote "The China Pakistan Economic Corridor Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2020".

A meeting of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Planning and Development, presided over by PTI MNA Junaid Akbar, took up the government bill which was blocked by the opposition members during the last meeting.

At the outset of the meeting, the committee inquired from the Ministry of Planning and Development as to what salary package was being given to the present CPEC Authority (CPECA) chairman, retired Lt Gen Asim Saleem Bajwa.

The ministry replied that no salary package was being given to the chairman as no memorandum of understanding was signed by him after the expiry of the CPEC Ordinance in May this year.

The opposition members said their objections over the creation of the CPECA had not been addressed and the creation of a new authority would affect CPEC projects instead of expediting them.

Planning and Development Minister Asad Umar said the CPECA would have no powers as all work would be carried out by the line ministries, adding that the authority's operations would not be in conflict with the working of the line ministries.

The committee chairman then put the bill to vote, saying a comprehensive discussion had already been held during the previous meeting. The committee recommended with majority 7:5 votes that the bill may be passed by the National Assembly.

Members of the committee belonging to the PML-N and PPP opposed the bill. Mohammad Sajjad, Ahsan Iqbal, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry and Sardar Mohammad Irfan Dogar of the PMLN and Syed Agha Rafiullah of the PPP submitted their note of dissent.

Former planning minister Ahsan Iqbal strongly opposed the creation of the CPECA, saying it was unnecessary and superfluous as the planning ministry had discharged the role very diligently and effectively in the past.

The PML-N members believed that the CPECA would become a parallel Planning Commission with little utility and real role and would be another "white elephant".

Mr Iqbal recalled that more than \$29 billion worth of investment had been channelised by the Planning Commission successfully without any authority and with the support of various ministries which should continue for successful implementation.

The planning ministry advocated the creation of CPECA, saying it would be "responsible for planning, facilitating, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating to ensure implementation of all activities related to CPEC". It said the authority was also required to ensure inter-provincial and inter-ministerial coordination, organising and coordinating meetings of joint coordination committee and joint working groups. It would also "be responsible for conducting sectoral research for informed decision making and long-term planning, monitoring and evaluation and to ensure implementation, besides narrative building and communication of CPEC and other related activities from time to time".

According to an official statement, the committee inquired the compliance status of its previous three meetings and the ministry responded positively.

The committee directed the Higher Education Commission to arrange a detailed briefing on its financial needs so that the committee could recommend additional funds for the HEC.

The committee asked the HEC as to why students were being stopped from getting higher education abroad on scholarship.

The HEC representatives said they were not stopping the scholarship, but universities all over the world were not accepting foreign students due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

PTI members of the committee Sher Akbar Khan, Saleh Mohammad, Shaikat Ali, Syed Faiz-ul-Hassan, Nawab Sher, Dr Seemi Bokhari and Imran Khattak voted in favour of the CPECA bill.

From page 30

### Sialkot's history and future is brilliant

Kaiser Iqbal Baryar, Senior Vice President Khurram Aslam Butt, Vice President Ansar Aziz Puri and Chairman Air SIAL Fazal Jilani were also present on the occasion. Addressing the gathering, Dr Muhammad Shoaib Suddle said that the business community of Sialkot has completed projects of international importance and have set up shining examples in the world. The delegation of Shehr-e-Iqbal Forum also visited Sialkot Export Processing Zone Sambrial. Prominent industrialist & Director Sialkot International Airport Limited Muhammad Javed Chaudhry hosted a reception in the honor of the delegation. Founder, Chairman SIAL Mian Muhammad Riaz, Vice Chairman Chaudhry Muhammad Afzal Shaheen, former Vice Chairman SIAL Naeem Yousuf, Director Saul Muhammad Javed Chaudhry and Mian Atiq-ur-Rehman welcomed him by presenting bouquets.

The delegation visited the House of Brother of Grand Father of Dr Allama Muhammad Iqbal at Jaythi Kay near Sambrial. Talking to citizens of the Jaythi Kay Dr Muhammad Shoaib Suddle said that there is an urgent need to highlight the valuable services rendered by the poet of the East, Hazrat Allama Iqbal for the entire Muslim Ummah.

He appreciated the campaign launched by the Madinah Trust to name Government College of Technology Sialkot, after Allama Iqbal's father, Sheikh Noor Mohammad and Government College Women's University Sialkot after his mother Mohtarima Imam Bibi. He assured of all possible cooperation from his side. Founder, Chairman SIAL Mian Muhammad Riaz said that if the house owned by Tariq Butt really proves to be the residence of Allama Sahib's grandfather, he would do his utmost to preserve it as a national heritage. Assistant Commissioner Sambrial Sonia Sadaf assured full cooperation in housing research.

On this occasion, Tariq Butt, owner of the house named after Allama Iqbal's ancestors, Vice Chairman, Sialkot International Airport Limited Ch. Muhammad Afzal Shaheen, Syed Zaheer Ahmad Gilani, Secretary General SIF, Syed Naseer Ahmad Gilani, executive members Amjad Farooq, Mohammad Ashraf Chaudhry, Ahmed Imran Bajwa, Dr Sabahat Qadeer Ahmed Sheikh, Mohammad Ishaq N Rana, Mohammad Ashraf Ansari, Col (R) Mohammad Siddique, Mohammad Anwar, Former Vice Chairman SIAL Naeem Yousuf, Director SIAL Muhammad Javed Chaudhry, Mian Atiq-ur-Rehman, Overseas Pakistani Shamroze Elahi Ghuman, Lawyer Zubair Cheema, Young Architect Muhammad Abdullah Mirza and a large number of dignitaries were present on the occasion.



## **Form-E condition for exports up to \$5,000 goes**

**T**he State Bank recently removed the condition of filling the lengthy Form-E for small exporters in a bid to boost exports amid the Covid-19 pandemic and changing global consumer markets.

The central bank issued a detail regulatory framework to facilitate Business-to-Consumer (B2C) e-Commerce exports from Pakistan.

Under the new regulatory framework, the mandatory requirement of the 'Export' (E) form has been done away with and now an exporter can send goods up to \$5000 per consignment abroad without this document, said the SBP.

This step will facilitate exports in small quantities directly to the consumers. This will also help small entrepreneurs and exporters who typically export varied goods in small quantities and find it cumbersome to fulfill the detailed requirements of the Form-E that is mainly designed for bulk exports.

The Form-E was required for each shipment with complete description of the goods being exported and has been designed keeping in view the export of large quantities of homogenous goods. However, for exports of small value, different items to individuals destined for different jurisdiction, (as is the case in B2C e-commerce exports) the existing process was not conducive.

The SBP said that up till now, goods from Pakistan could only be exported after certification of electronic or manual Form-E by the Authorised Dealers (ADs) and subsequent filing of Goods Declaration by the customers with Pakistan Customs.

Earlier in 2000, the SBP had issued regulatory instructions to promote B2C e-Commerce in Foreign Exchange Manual with primary focus on opening of Internet Merchant Account to facilitate e-commerce.

However, with the advancement in technology, these instructions needed to

cater to the current business dynamics of e-commerce and therefore required to be replaced, said the SBP.

"The SBP collaborated with the relevant stakeholders including business community, Pakistan Customs, Ministry of Commerce, courier companies and banking industry in a bid to develop a regulatory framework, which not only addresses the market needs but also takes into account regulatory objectives," said bank said.

"Global emerging trends especially in the consumer market place have seen a major shift from traditional market place to e-commerce due to the advent of new technologies. A surge in this trend was particularly witnessed during the global lockdown owing to Covid-19 pandemic," the SBP said.

In line with these trends, the SBP focused on facilitating cross border trade for B2C exports from Pakistan, including by small entrepreneurs and exporters. This was aimed at improving competitiveness and digital connectivity of Pakistani businesses with the global market during the development phase of e-Commerce Policy, the central bank added.

## **Rs38bn cross-border optic fibre project under CPEC cleared**

**T**he Central Development Working Party (CDWP) on Wednesday Dec 2 cleared five development projects at a cumulative cost of about Rs54 billion including Rs38bn second phase of a project for laying cross-border optic fibre cable with China.

At a meeting presided over by Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan, the CDWP itself approved four development projects with cumulative estimated cost of Rs16bn and referred for approval to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) the Rs37.91bn Optic Fibre Cable (OFC) Project along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Route (Khunjab-Gwadar-Karachi).

The objective of the project is to provide alternate path for international connectivity through Northern border of Pakistan with China and ensure continuous uninterrupted connectivity between Northern and Southern borders of the country by establishing multiple rings for secure and uninterrupted communication network etc.

Under the financial rules in vogue, the CDWP is empowered to itself approve

projects costing no more than Rs10bn while projects of higher estimated costs are approved by Ecne once the CDWP clears them on technical grounds.

The meeting also agreed 50:50 sharing of Covid-19 Responsive and Other Natural Calamities Control Programme with provinces. The project had already been cleared but financing shares remained unsettled. The federal share of the project would now be Rs70bn.

The CDWP agreed with the recommendations of the committee for the project titled "Covid-19 Responsive and Other Natural Calamities Control Programme" worth Rs70bn with proposed changes. The PC-1 of this project will facilitate the national programme to improve facilities at 50:50 basis financial supports to all the provinces in district and tehsil headquarters level hospitals, public health surveillance separately for both human and animals, National Programme for Water Sanitation and Hygiene and Improvement in local infrastructure. AJK and GB will also be covered under the project financing.

The meeting approved a project related to Physical Planning & Housing

titled "Construction of Islamabad High Court Building at Islamabad (Revised)" worth Rs4.989bn. It involves construction of Islamabad High Court on an already acquired plot measuring 220,000 sq.ft at sector G-5, Islamabad. The scope of works includes: construction of courts, auditorium, car parking, road & paths, plumbing works and wood works etc.

Two projects related to education were presented to the committee. First project namely "Support to Basic Education Development Project AJ&K" worth Rs5.97bn and second project titled "Basic Education for All Project AJ&K" worth Rs1.58bn were approved by the CDWP.

The meeting also approved a Rs3.482bn worth of project namely "Establishment of National Aerospace Science & Technology Park".

Two Position Papers related to Industries and Commerce were also approved in the meeting. These included "Establishment of Hub Special Economic Zone" worth Rs2.288bn and "Remodeling and Expansion of Karachi Expo Center" at a cost of Rs2.677bn.

Another Position Paper related to water resources namely Nai Gaj Dam with an estimated cost of Rs46.555bn was also approved. The project envisaged construction of 194 ft high central core earth fill dam with a gross storage capacity of 0.30 million acre-feet and live storage of

## Exports rise 7.2pc to \$2.15bn, says Razak

Pakistan's exports grew for the second consecutive month in October to \$2.066 billion, up 2.1 per cent from \$2.024bn in the corresponding period last year, data released by the Ministry of Commerce showed recently.

Exports in the new fiscal year started on a positive note but witnessed steep decline of 19pc in August before rebounding in September and October.

Between July to October, exports fell by 0.1pc to \$7.540bn, from \$7.547bn over the corresponding months of last year.

In FY20, exports fell by 6.83pc or \$1.57bn to \$21.4bn, compared to \$22.97bn the previous year. Data shows visible improvements in export orders from international buyers, mainly in the textile and clothing sectors since May.

Adviser to PM on Commerce Razak Dawood expressed his satisfaction at the export trends and praised Pakistan's exporters, who made it possible for bringing the exports to pre-Covid-19 levels despite uncertainty and contraction in Pakistan's major export markets.

In a statement, Dawood expressed his hope that Pakistan's economy will continue on its upward recovery trend and directed officials to continue facilitating exporters and businessmen.

On the other hand, imports posted a negative growth of 10.3pc in October to \$3.653bn, as against \$4.074bn over the corresponding month of last year. During 4MFY20, the overall import bill dropped by 2.02pc to \$14.964bn, down from \$15.273bn over the corresponding months of last year.

The continuous decline in imports has provided some breathing space to the government in managing external accounts despite a downward trend in exports. However, imports are now expected to increase in the coming months following the abolishment of regulatory duty on imports of raw materials and semi-finished products.

In FY20, the import bill witnessed a steep decline of \$10.29bn or 18.78pc to \$44.509bn, compared to \$54.799bn in the previous year.

The country's trade deficit also shrank by 22.6pc in October, mainly due to a growth in export proceeds. In absolute terms, the trade gap narrowed to \$1.587bn, as compared to \$2.05bn over the corresponding month of last year.

In the first four months, the trade deficit narrowed by 4.5pc to \$7.424bn, as against \$7.776bn over the last year. During FY20, it narrowed to \$23.099bn, from \$31.820bn.

An official announcement of the

ministry further said the rise in export was due to value-added sectors. The increases were witnessed in home textiles, up 10.0pc; women's garments 20.8pc; jerseys & pullovers 35.3pc; made-up articles of textile 10.4pc; stockings & socks 19.2pc; cement 10.8pc; pharmaceutical products 26.8pc; tarpaulins 66.8pc and made-up clothing accessories 245.2pc as compared to the same period last year.

A decline was noted in non-value added sectors during the period under review. In the non-value-added sectors, exports of cotton fabric declined by 8.0pc; cotton yarn 40.1pc; worn clothing 63.6pc; raw leather 38.4pc; crude petroleum 53.7pc and cotton 95.7pc.

Pakistan's top five growing export markets during July-October were: Indonesia, witnessing a growth of 39.3pc, followed by Qatar 34.5pc, Denmark 24.9pc, South Korea 22.5pc and Afghanistan 15.6pc.

## Timely refund payment spurs activity: FBR

Delays in refund payments have been eliminated and the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Board is focused on increasing tax collections and expanding the tax net, Chairman FBR Javed Ghani said in a meeting with a delegation of Pakistan Leather Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PLGMEA) led by its chairman Danish Khan.

The FBR chief said timely payment of tax refunds has not only accelerated business activities but also increased the volume of tax collection. Providing help and facilities to exporters and taxpayers is our top priority, he added.

The PLGMEA delegation informed the FBR chairman regarding matters related to three per cent additional sales tax, 1pc income tax and other issues. Khan said the recovery of sales tax and refund claims have encouraged taxpayers.

Meanwhile, Chief Commissioner Corporate Tax Office Karachi Dr Aftab Imam recently informed the hosiery manufacturers at the office of Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers Association (PHMA) that Faster Plus is processing refunds in 42-72 hours. However, particular cases of exporters and all the legitimate pending matters of exporters in the hands of Corporate Tax Office, Karachi shall be resolved on priority basis, he added.



## Chinese financier buys pigeon for record 1.6m euros



An employee of PIPA, a Belgian auction house for racing pigeons, shows a two-year old female pigeon after an auction on Sunday Nov. 15.

An unidentified Chinese buyer on Sunday 15 Nov. paid a world record 1.6 million euros (\$1.9 million) for a female homing pigeon called New Kim, online auctioneers Pigeon Paradise (PIPA) said.

The sale beat the 1.25 million euros paid for male pigeon Armando last year, according to PIPA.

New Kim, a well-bred two-year-old from a renowned Antwerp loft, was put up for auction at just 200 euros.

"I believe it's a world record, there has never been an officially documented sale at such a price," PIPA chairman Nikolaas Gyselsbrecht said.

"I didn't think we could reach that amount." The buyer, who was not named, "will probably want to breed her", he added.

New Kim won the 2018 crown as "Ace Pigeon Grand National Middle Distance" in competitions held at Chteauroux and Argenton-sur-Creuse in France.

Top European birds have won global fame in recent years and particularly in China where pigeon racing can generate huge winnings.

Wealthy buyers from the Gulf and Asia have forced up prices for champion birds for their instinctive ability to fly as many as hundreds of kilometres (miles) and still find their way back home.

Pigeon fancying is rooted in Belgian and Dutch life with the tradition spreading over to northern France.

The sport had been considered in decline until auctions started showing serious prices for potential champions and proven winners.



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## Dubai ruler allowed to 'export' 150 falcons from Pakistan



*This file photo shows a man releasing his falcon during a falcon contest at Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival at Sealine desert, Qatar*

**T**he federal government has issued a special permit to Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al Maktoum, Vice President of the United Arab Emirates and ruler of Dubai, to "export" 150 falcons of rare species from Pakistan to the UAE, sources told media on Monday 23 Nov..

According to the sources, the permission was issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and delivered to the UAE's embassy in the federal capital.

The rare species peregrine and Saker are used by Arab hunters to trap houbara bustards. As hunters need to replace aging falcons with younger ones, the demand for these birds almost always remains stable.

Falcons are protected under international nature conservation treaties including the Switzerland-based Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES) and their trans-boundary travel is restricted. Pakistan is a signatory to the treaty.

Trapping and trade in falcons are banned under the wildlife protection laws of the country. There are no formal shops and markets anywhere for lawful sale and purchase of falcons.

The sources said that in the face of a ban on trapping and trade of falcons legally, a "falcon exporter" has to purchase illegally trapped falcons from illegal wildlife traders.

The federal government and the "exporter" will be guilty of patronising this illegal wildlife trafficking.

Besides violating various local wildlife protection laws as well as international nature conservation treaties, the government is putting at risk the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) Plus status given to it by the European Union (EU), the sources explained. The status facilitates the easy access of Pakistani exports to the highly lucrative market of the European Union.

A country having the GSP Plus status

has to observe international nature conservation treaties and if it violates these agreements, the EU has the powers to strip the state concerned of its GSP Plus status. This would restrict easy access of Pakistani exports to EU markets, badly affecting foreign exchange earnings of a foreign currency-starved country.

The permit issued in favour of the UAE vice president on Sept 15 this year reads: "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan presents its compliments to the Embassy of UAE in Islamabad and with reference to its ... regarding export of falcons has the honour to inform that the esteemed embassy may

export one hundred and fifty (150) falcons from Pakistan to the United Arab Emirate (UAE) for personal use of His Highness Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al Maktoum, vice president of UAE and ruler of Dubai, from Karachi/Bahawalpur/Rahim Yar Khan/Islamabad/Quetta.

"In this regard, the concerned authorities have been requested to accord facilitation for the export of one hundred and fifty (150) falcons from Pakistan to UAE.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the esteemed mission of the assurances of its highest consideration."

The permit was issued under the signature of the foreign ministry's deputy chief of protocol.

## Dilip's, Kapoor's Peshawar homes being brought back to life

**T**ucked away near the centuries-old Storytellers' Bazaar, the decaying Pakistani mansions once home to Bollywood superstars are being brought back to life as Peshawar emerges from years of militancy.

The ancestral homes of Golden Age heroes Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar in the northwestern city are symbols of its link to the world's largest film industry, but have suffered from decades of neglect.

The region's archaeology team says it is close to wresting the more than 100-year-old buildings, located in the heart of the historic walled city, from their private owners so they can be restored and turned into museums.

"I always feel sad and angry while looking at Kapoor's house, that it once was a beautiful mansion of top quality," said Samiuddin Khan, who remembers running through the 40-room abandoned house as a child and flying kites from the rooftop.

"It was extremely beautiful inside. The structure is still intact but some walls have collapsed and much of the wood has been damaged."

Once an architectural wonder, the family home of Kapoor, who died aged 63 in 1988, is influenced by Mughal empire, Central Asian and British colonial design, featuring ornately carved doors and balconies and gothic-style windows.

Kumar lived in a simpler home down a small lane in a busy market, its entrance faded and its roofless interior heavily damaged.

The actors grew up in a quarter that is home to the fabled Qissa Khwani (Storytellers) Bazaar where travellers

would share tales of their adventures.

Kumar, who is now 97, has credited his successful career to his early life in the neighbourhood, where he first learned to narrate.

But like many emerging actors, the pair were enticed away from Peshawar to India's entertainment centre Bombay, now Mumbai, in the years before the partition.

The pair even starred alongside each other at the beginning of their careers, in the 1949 hit "Andaz".

"This is our cultural heritage and we take pride in preserving it. We are very proud that Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor were from Peshawar," said Abdul Samad, director of archaeology and museums in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of which Peshawar is the capital.

Present-day Indian superstar Shah Rukh Khan, known as the King of Bollywood, also has links to the area but his family home which is still in use has not suffered the same decline.

Peshawar suffered a huge knock-back to its cultural standing after becoming a hotbed of extremist violence from the 1980s onwards, bringing an end to the golden era of Pashto-language cinema in the region, known as Pollywood.





## Crown prince, two other Saudi royals issued permits for hunting houbara bustards

**T**he federal government has issued special permits to Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and two other members of the Saudi ruling family to hunt the internationally protected houbara bustards during the hunting season 2020-21, it is learnt.

Sources said the two other hunters are governors and one of them is a defaulter as he has not paid the hunting fees/dues for last year (hunting season 2019-20).

The sources said that the hunters had been allocated certain hunting areas in two provinces Balochistan and Punjab.

They said that though the foreign ministry was expected to maintain the protocol and official hierarchy, the name of the most powerful person and “real” ruler of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman has been mentioned at the bottom of the list of hunters sent to the Saudi Embassy in Islamabad.

A resident of the colder Central Asian region, the houbara bustard in its bid to avoid the harsh weather conditions in its habitat migrates southwards every year to spend its winters in a relatively warmer environment here where it is hunted by Arab hunters specially invited by the government.

Owing to its dwindling population, the houbara is not only protected under various international nature conservation treaties but is also protected under local wildlife protection laws. Pakistanis are not allowed to hunt it.

The sources said that earlier Prime Minister Imran Khan, when he was in the opposition, used to criticise the then federal government for issuing houbara hunting permits and had not allowed houbara hunting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,

where his Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf ruled, but now has issued the permits to hunters from Saudi Arabia.

The sources said that the hunting permits issued by the foreign ministry's deputy chief of protocol (P&I) were delivered to Saudi Embassy to be sent to the hunters.

They said that the names of the hunters and areas allotted to them, according to the permits issued on Oct 16, 2020, are:

“HRH Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, crown prince, Deputy Premier and minister of Defence has been allocated Layyah and Bhakkar districts in Punjab.

“HRH Prince Fahad bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Governor of Tabuk, has been allocated district Awaran, district Noshki (less Noshki city), and district Chaghai (excluding Nok Kundi) in Balochistan.

“HH Prince Mansour bin Mohammad S. Abdul Rehman Al-Saud, Governor of Hafr Al-Batin has been allocated Dera Ghazi Khan district in Punjab.”

Defaulter of mandatory fee

The sources said that Tabuk Governor Prince Fahad bin Sultan, who had attracted international media attention when news regarding his poaching over 2,000 houbaras was published sometime back, did not pay the mandatory houbara hunting fees of \$100,000 last year. Though Prince Fahad had also brought in 60 falcons last year, he did not pay the falcon fees as well \$1,000 for each falcon totalling \$60,000. The total dues to the Tabuk governor last year (hunting season 2019-20) come to \$160,000, the sources added. They said Prince Fahad had arrived in Chaghai district on Feb 1, 2020.

The sources said that the houbara

hunting permit clearly mentions that, “... is informed that compulsory hunting fee of one hundred thousand dollars (100,000 US\$) per dignitary per area and one thousand dollars (1,000 US\$) for import-cum-export of each falcon is mandatory.”

## Italian consul general, spouse visit Thar



**N**ewly appointed Italian Consul General in Karachi Danilo Giurdanella and his spouse arrived in Thar on Monday 23 Nov. to visit heritage sites and scenic beauty of the desert region.

The guests thanked their host, Sindh Minister for Culture and Tourism Syed Sardar Ali Shah, for providing them an opportunity to meet amazing people of Thar, receive exemplary respect and see wonderful historical and natural sites.

Mr Giurdanella said that during their stay in Umerkot and Tharparkar districts they were treated to exquisite performance by local singers Mai Dhai and Ustad Yousuf Fakeer, at Kasbo village.

The minister told reporters that the department was making sincere efforts to promote tourism and culture in the desert region. In future he would invite envoys of other countries as well to visit Thar, he said.

He said that the Italian guests had reached Thar on his invitation and they were very much impressed by the beauty, culture, music and art of the region. Sindh government planned to establish more resorts and roads leading to tourist sites in Thar, he said.

He said the Italian government had already extended cooperation to the department in protecting heritage sites at Bhambhore and hoped they would continue the cooperation in future as well to promote tourism and ancient heritage sites in Thar.

He said the new consul general, who took keen interest in art, music, handicrafts and cultural events, would keep visiting Thar and other historical sites in Sindh. The department was devising many plans to promote tourism and rich culture of Thar in coming years, he said.





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## KP tourism department to outsource 128 rest houses

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa tourism department has decided to outsource 128 official rest houses in the province whereas five rest houses have already been transferred to the department under the Integrated Tourism Zones (ITZ) programme.

An official statement issued here said that 128 rest houses of the total 168 would be re-advertised for outsourcing next month. Five rest houses in Nathiagali have been transferred to tourism department under ITZ programme.

A meeting chaired by Chief Minister Mahmood Khan recently discussed in detail the outsourcing of rest houses, ITZ programme, public sector development projects, construction of access roads to tourism spots and schemes reflected in current Annual Development Programme. The meeting was informed that four ITZs in Mansehra, Abbottabad, Lower Chitral and Swat were approved. These projects would be ready in all respect for launching by June next year.

The meeting was told that during the last financial year, 100 per cent utilisation of funds was ensured while Rs 910 million was spent so far of total Rs 2,916 million allocated for new and ongoing projects of tourism department during the current financial year.

Similarly, survey of eight new ITZs has been conducted and will soon be presented to relevant forum for approval. These new sites include Kalash valley in Lower Chitral; Shahi in Lower Dir; Jaroga in Swat; Marghazar DaK, Mahabanar and Ilum valley in Buner; and Serene and Mamoor valleys Mansehra.

Furthermore, under the PSDP projects, feasibility studies had been approved for the development of resorts at Takht-e-Sulaman Dera Ismail Khan, Garam Chashma district Chitral, Chapri and Shal zone District Kurram,

Sheikh Baden Lakki and Takhtbhai District Mardan whereas negotiations with the concerned company were also in final stages for the execution of these projects.

Similarly, feasibility of 14-kilometre Kumrat cable car project is being prepared whereas progress on Ayubia chairlift project is underway. Under the public-private partnership initiatives, work on the feasibility studies for development of Hund theme park in Swabi and Mahodand Lake in Swat is in progress.

The meeting was informed that various schemes including development of six waterfalls, four tourist sites and construction of three access roads were approved by PDWP. Development of 52.5-kilometre access roads in Malakand division and 60-kilometre access roads of Hazara division is also part of current developmental programme.

Beside these projects, PC-1 of the World Bank-assisted access roads project would be approved next month. The authorities said that survey was underway for establishment of rest areas in various tourist zones of the province.

In order to promote heritage tourism, 134 signboards have been installed in Mardan, on Swat Motorway, in Takhtbhai, Jamal Garhi and Shahbaz Garhi to facilitate tourists whereas installation of 130 signboards in Swat has been ordered.

The chief minister termed promotion of tourism one of the top priorities of the government. He said that government was taking pragmatic steps to develop tourism as an industry to create job opportunities for the people of the province.

He directed the officials concerned to take all necessary steps for timely completion and rehabilitation of access roads to tourist spots.

## Sahibzada Sultan wins final round of Thal Jeep Rally

Sahibzada Muhammad Ali Sultan won the final round of 5th Thal Desert Jeep Rally on Sunday 22 Nov.

More than three dozen vehicles participated in the round, which finished at tehsil Chobara of district Layyah.

Asif Fazal Chaudhry took second position and Faisal Zaffar remained third.

Sahibzada Sultan's vehicle reached the finishing point in one hour and six minutes while Asif Fazal Chaudhry reached the spot with one hour and seven minutes. Mir Nadir Magsi and Roni Patel did not participate in this event.

Talking to the media, Muzaffargarh Acting Deputy Commissioner Imran Shams said it was a big challenge for him to hold the event and the tourism department had also helped him in deciding route of the 105km long track.

Mr Shams added that it was the first time that the motorcyclists also participated in the rally and the administration had made a nine kilometers long track for them. The track started from Head Muhammadwali and it had touched the boundary of district Layyah and finished at Chobara.

Six motorcyclists took part in this event. Ibrahim Khan remained first in the motorcycle category, Zaigham Ali got second while Moeen took the third position.

In the women category, Salma got the first prize.

The DC said 14 check posts were set up coupled along the track. Police, Rescue 1122 and municipal officials also performed duties to make the event successful.

The award distribution ceremony was held at Faisal Stadium where the DC and tourism department officials and local parliamentarians distributed prizes among the winners.

A large number of people from across the country came to see the mega event that featured international drivers too. The music bands and local singers performed at the award distribution ceremony. The families and a large number of people enjoyed the music with food at the stalls.



## Saudi Arabia, Iraq reopen border after 30 years

**I**raq and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday 18 Nov. reopened their land border for the first time in 30 years, with closer trade ties between the two countries irking allies of Riyadh's rival, Tehran.



Top officials including Iraq's interior minister and the head of its border commission travelled from Baghdad to formally open the Arar crossing.

They met a delegation who had joined them from Riyadh, all in masks, and cut a red ribbon at the border crossing as a line of cargo trucks waited behind them.

Arar will be open to both goods and people for the first time since Riyadh cut off its diplomatic relationship with Baghdad in 1990, following Iraqi ex-dictator Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

Ties have remained rocky ever since, but current Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi has a close personal relationship with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Kadhemi was to travel to Saudi Arabia on his first foreign trip as prime minister in May, but the visit was cancelled at the last minute when Saudi King Salman was hospitalised.

He has yet to make the trip, although Iraqi ministers have visited Riyadh to meet their counterparts and a top-level Saudi delegation travelled to Baghdad recently.

Baghdad sees Arar as a potential alternative to its crossings with eastern neighbour Iran, through which Iraq brings in a large share of its imports.

The two Arab states are also exploring the reopening of a second border point at Al-Jumayma, along Iraq's southern border with the Saudi kingdom.

But pro-Iran factions in Iraq, which call themselves the "Islamic Resistance", have stood firmly against closer ties with Saudi Arabia.

Ahead of Arar's opening, one such group identifying itself as Ashab al-Kahf published a statement announcing its "rejection of the Saudi project in Iraq".

"The intelligence cadres of the Islamic Resistance are following all the details of the Saudi enemy's activities on the Iraqi border," it warned.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday evening 17 Nov., Kadhemi fired back against those describing the rapprochement as Saudi "colonialism".

"This is a lie. It's shameful," he said.

"Let them invest. Welcome to Iraq," Kadhemi added, saying Saudi investment could bring in a flood of new jobs to Iraq where more than one-third of youth are unemployed.

The closer ties have been a long time coming.

They did not improve much after Saddam's toppling in the 2003 US-led invasion, as Riyadh looked at the new Shiite-dominated political class with suspicion due to their ties to Iran.

A thaw began in 2017 when then Saudi foreign minister Adel al-Jubeir travelled to Baghdad the first such visit in decades followed by a Riyadh trip by Iraqi premier Haider al-Abadi.

The first commercial flights resumed between the two countries and officials began discussing Arar, with high-profile US diplomat Brett McGurk even visiting the crossing in 2017 to support its reopening.

But those plans were repeatedly delayed, with Arar only opened on rare occasions to allow through Iraqi religious pilgrims on their way to Makkah for the Haj.

Iraq is the second-largest producer in the OPEC oil cartel, outranked only by Saudi Arabia.

Its oil, gas and electricity infrastructure is severely outdated and inefficient but low oil prices this year have stymied efforts to revamp it.

Baghdad is also notoriously slow to activate external investment, with international firms and foreign countries complaining that rampant corruption hamstrings more investment.

Kadhemi's government has sought to fast-track foreign investment including Saudi support for energy and agriculture.

On his trip to Washington this summer, he agreed to a half-dozen projects that would use Saudi funding to finance US energy firms.

Last year, Iraq signed a deal to plug into the Gulf Cooperation Council's power grid and add up to 500 MW of electricity to its dilapidated electricity sector.

Those deals too have been criticised by pro-Iran factions in Iraq.

## Researchers find microplastics on top of the world at Everest



**T**rades of microplastics have been found close to the top of Mount Everest, a study showed on Friday Nov. 20, likely originating from equipment used by the hundreds of climbers who summit the world's highest peak every year.

Fluorescent tents, discarded climbing equipment, empty gas canisters and even frozen excrement have long littered the well-trodden route to the 8,848-metre (29,029-feet) high summit, earning it the name of "the highest dumpster in the world".

But in the first study of microplastics on Everest, by a research team part of the 2019 National Geographic and Rolex Perpetual Planet Everest Expedition, the tiny pollutants were found as high as 8,440 metres above sea level, although concentration levels were higher at the mountain's base camp.

The findings, which reveal the potential threat to Everest posed by plastic pollutants, were published in the environmental journal *One Earth* recently.

"The samples showed significant quantities of polyester, acrylic, nylon, and polypropylene fibres," author Imogen Napper, a National Geographic explorer and scientist based at the University of Plymouth in Britain, said in a statement.

"It really surprised me to find microplastics in every single snow sample I analysed. Mount Everest is somewhere I have always considered remote and pristine. To know we are polluting near the top of the tallest mountain (in the world) is a real eye-opener."

A majority of outdoor clothing worn by trekkers and climbers on Everest is made of synthetic fabrics. Tents, climbing ropes and other gear also use the materials.

"We highly suspect that these types of items are the major source of pollution rather than things like food and drink containers," Napper said, referring to the trash accumulation on the peak after decades of commercial mountaineering.

Last year, a 14-member team spent six weeks scouring for litter at Everest base camp and at Camp 4 nearly 8,000 metres up.



## Sikhs celebrate Guru Nanak's birth anniversary

**S**ikh pilgrims from the country and abroad, including 600 from India, participated in the 551st birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak on Monday Nov. 30..

The three-day celebrations of birth anniversary of the founder of the Sikh faith began on Saturday Nov. 28 at Nankana Sahib, Kartarpura, Hassan Abdal and other places in Pakistan.

Langar was arranged for all the guests. Dozens of Sikh women cut up vegetables, kneaded flour and made bread in the kitchens of Nankana Sahib for feeding the hungry and Kar Seva is considered a religious duty in the Sikh faith.

Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Pir Noorul Haq Qadri spoke at the central ceremony at Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Baba Guru Nanak, on Monday 30 Nov..

He said that despite rising cases of coronavirus, the government ensured holding of the birth anniversary under strict implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs). "We do not want followers of any religion to think that there is any discrimination being committed against them," he said.

The minister told the audience that the work on Baba Guru Nanak University would be completed at the stipulated time and that a link road from Lahore-Sialkot Motorway would be built for Kartarpur Corridor so that the followers of Guru Nanak could reach Kartarpur Sahib from Nankana Sahib easily.

Mr Qadri said: "Pakistan treats everyone equally without any discrimination and has promised to remove all hurdles in the way of interfaith harmony."

He said all minorities in India were facing brutalities at the hands of the majority Hindus.

The minister said Baba Guru Nanak was a great name for humanity and he would be remembered forever. He congratulated the followers of Baba Guru Nanak on his 551st birth anniversary. He also distributed gifts among the guests.

Punjab Minister for Minorities Affairs Ijaz Alam Augustine, chairman of the National Commission for Minorities Chela Ram, MPA Mahindarpal Singh and Indian Sikh leaders, besides about 4,000 local and foreign pilgrims, attended the ceremonies.

Later, a Palki procession was taken out from Gurdwara Janamsthan in Nankana Sahib.

### Safety of religious sites

Felicitating the Sikh community, Prime Minister Imran Khan said rights of all minorities in the country would be safeguarded and their religious sites protected.

In a video message, the prime minister assured the Sikh community that his government would protect their holy sites in Pakistan, including the two most revered at Nankana Sahib and Kartarpur.

Both the sites are sacred to Sikhs just like Makkah and Madina are to the Muslims, he added.

Mr Khan said the government would extend every possible assistance and facility to the Sikh community, citing the example of the recently-revamped railway station in Hassanabdul.

"The policy of our government is to protect religious minorities in Pakistan and their holy places, may they be churches, temples or Buddhist monasteries," the prime minister said.

The three-day celebrations of Baba Guru Nanak's birth anniversary began on Saturday in Nankana Sahib with the arrival of over 600 pilgrims from India through the Wagah border.

The main ceremony took place at Gurdwara Janamasthan in Nankana Sahib. Celebrations also included the Nagar

Kirtan procession, followed by Bhog ritual at night.

The prime minister had opened the Kartarpur Corridor last year on the occasion of Baba Guru Nanak's 550th birth anniversary as a goodwill gesture to facilitate Sikhs within the country and from across the border.

## Feasibility study of tourist sites in Sindh to be conducted

The Sindh government recently decided to conduct feasibility study of tourist sites in nine districts and the coastal area of the province, and also identify more such sites for the promotion of tourism under the public-private partnership ventures.

The sites and areas for which the feasibility study is to be conducted are Gorakh Hill Station in Dadu district, Rannikot and Sehwan in Jamshoro district, Keenjhar Lake in Thatta district, Nagarparkar in Tharparkar district, Achhrro Thar in Sanghar district, Moenjodaro in Larkana district, Bhitshah in Matiari district, Drigh and Langh lakes in Qambar-Shahdadt district, Lab-i-Mehran and Sadhu Belo in Sukkur district and the coastal belt of the province.

The decision was taken at a meeting of culture and tourism department which was presided over by Chief Secretary Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah.

Culture and Tourism Secretary Ghulam Akbar Leghari and relevant officials attended the meeting.

CS Shah said that the province had a great potential for tourism which needed to be explored. "The Sindh government wants to develop facilities for tourists so that tourism could flourish," he said, adding that besides developing the existing sites, the neglected ones should also be developed. A survey of the sites would be conducted with the help of private sector, he said.

He directed the works and services department to get the roads leading to Rannikot and Nagarparkar repaired at the earliest to facilitate tourists' comfortable travel to various sites there.

Mr Leghari informed the meeting that a feasibility study of Lab-i-Mehran and Gorakh Hills had already been conducted and plans were afoot to build a theme park at Moenjodaro, low-cost hotels in Sehwan, Keenjhar, Karoonjhar and other places for tourists.

The chief secretary told him to present the feasibility study in the next meeting, and asked officials of public-private partnership unit to incorporate tourism in the agenda of their policymakers' board.





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## Baltic Sea ferry runs aground in Finnish waters



People gather after Viking Line cruise ferry Viking Grace ran aground with some 300 passengers in south of Mariehamn, autonomous Åland Islands

A Baltic Sea ferry with 331 passengers and a crew of 98 has run aground in the Åland Islands archipelago between Finland and Sweden.

Finnish authorities say there are no lives in immediate danger and the vessel isn't leaking.

The Finnish coast guard tweeted on Saturday 21 Nov. afternoon that the Viking Line ferry that runs between the Finnish port city of Turku and Swedish capital Stockholm hit ground just off the port of Mariehamn, the capital of the Åland Islands.

The coast guard tweeted a photo showing the M/S Viking Grace stuck just off shore.

Viking Grace has ran aground in front of Mariehamn. Firmly grounded, no leaks....The first rescue units are on site, the tweet said.

The vessel was en route from Stockholm to Turku with a scheduled stop at Mariehamn. Strong storm winds prevailed in the area at the time. Ferry operator Viking Line confirmed the incident and said it was investigating.

Coast guard officials told Finnish media that the Viking Grace, a large vessel capable of carrying up to 2,800 passengers, was near the shore when for some reason it seemed to have floated towards land.

In September, Viking Lines M/S Amorella passenger ferry also ran aground in the Åland Islands, an autonomous Finnish territory that consists of thousands of named and unnamed islands. Its shallow waters and narrow passages are particularly tricky to navigate for large ships. No one was injured in the Sept incident.

## Biggest catch in three decades brings joy to Thatta fishermen



LOCAL fishermen throng the site where the huge fish catch is being offloaded from boats.

Local fishermen caught more than 100 tonnes of giant sea catfish, an unusually large amount of catch netted after over three decades, at the mouth of Khai Creek in Indus delta late on Sunday 22 Nov. night.

Fishermen told media on Monday 23 Nov. that it took seven vessels and more than five hours to harvest the entire aggregation of catfish which came to around about 100 metric tonnes, later auctioned at Karachi Fish Harbour at a price of Rs110 per kilo, making a total sale of Rs11 million.

Eyewitnesses said that a large vessel (hoara) noticed the large-scale aggregation of catfish at the mouth of the creek and then the fishermen on the vessel called six other boats operating in the vicinity to give them a helping hand because the cluster was too big to be harvested by a single boat.

In past, clusters of catfish were frequently found between October and March along the country's coast. Such mass-scale aggregations called pinn in Sindh and aaranga in Balochi are usually observed at the mouths of creeks in the Indus delta, Sonmiani bay, Ormara and Pasni in Balochistan.

However, overfishing and changes in oceanographic conditions had made sighting of such aggregations a rare occurrence. The last such cluster was reported from the mouth of Khobar creek in March 2017 when about 80 metric tonnes of catfish were harvested by four boats.

Along the Balochistan coast, the last aggregation was reported in April 2015 near Malan and about 150 metric tonnes of catfish were caught by 10 boats. The largest known cluster of a school of catfish

was reported in April 1984 in Ormara (Pedi Zur) when about 700 metric tonnes of catfish from a single school were harvested by fishermen and it took them five days to complete the operation.

Mohammad Moazzam Khan, technical adviser

on marine fisheries with WWF-Pakistan, said that catfish formed large breeding aggregations in coastal areas. During such aggregations, females laid their eggs and being mouth breeders males picked up eggs from the waters and sediment and kept them in their mouth for about one month after which juveniles were released into the sea. During this period, male catfish did not feed and relied on their accumulated fat, he said.

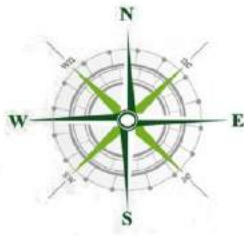
He said that such aggregations might consist of one species or multi-species of catfish simultaneously breeding in winter. The present aggregation seemed to consist of only one species, which was called Netuma thalassina or giant catfish which could grow to a size of 180cm (achieving 19kg), he said.

Dr Tahir Rasheed, WWF-Pakistan regional head of Sindh and Balochistan, pointed out that the occurrence of large aggregation of catfish at the mouth of Indus delta in Khai Creek was indicative of healthy and rich environmental conditions along the country's coast.

He stressed the need to reduce fishing fleets in Sindh and Balochistan as already recommended in 2016 under the Fisheries Resource Assessment Project conducted by the marine fisheries department and UN's FAO.

WWF-Pakistan had trained fishermen to reduce by-catch and catch target fisheries through its capacity building programme and more than 30 fishermen had been trained to use android-based mobile application system to collect and report fish catch data, he said.

He said the initiative would help academia and policymakers fill data gaps, undertake research studies on various aspects of fisheries and formulate robust fisheries regulations.



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## Hashoo Group to launch PC Legacy hotel in Naran soon

**H**ashoo Group collaborates with SNQ Resorts (Pvt) Limited to boost adventure travel and promote tourism in the valley.

The latest addition to their leading chain of hotels across Pakistan, Hashoo Group has announced to launch a new brand of four-star hotels by the name of "PC Legacy".

Hashoo Group is the leading chain of hotels, which already owns and operates the five-star Pearl-Continental Hotels & Resorts, Marriott Hotels, and the select-service Hotel One brand in Pakistan.

SNQ Resorts (Pvt) Limited is a new entrant in the market, which will work towards developing tourism in the northern parts of Pakistan.

In this connection, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Pakistan Services Limited and SNQ Resorts (Pvt) Limited in Crystal Ballroom at Islamabad Marriott.

"PC Legacy is our new brand of four-star hotels and I congratulate SNQ Resorts (Pvt) Ltd for becoming the first signers of this franchise. We, in line with the Prime Minister's vision to promote tourism in Pakistan, are delighted to manage this prestigious hotel" expressed Mr. Murtaza Hashwani, Hashoo Group Deputy Chairman and CEO, at the MoU signing ceremony.

SNQ Resorts (Pvt) Limited CEO Mr. Syed Kaiser Mehmood Shah said: "We are proud to collaborate with Hashoo Group for developing a new space for tourism by providing contemporary architecture and modern travel facilities in Naran."

Nestled amid the majestic Himalayan Mountains, Naran is surrounded by the dense Alpine forest, capturing stunning views of the lush green valley attracting tourists and adventure enthusiasts from

around the world.

Designed for both business and leisure travellers, PC Legacy Hotel Naran will offer a host of modern amenities to all guests. At the hotel, they can choose from a combination of 70 rooms and suites for their stay, dine at the in-house restaurants, utilise elegant event spaces, and avail gym and wellness services as well as kids' recreational facilities in the hotel.

Located in the upper Kaghan valley of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Naran is about 280 kilometres away from Islamabad. A highly popular tourist destination, it attracts scores of tourists to explore its radiant beauty and experience prominent tourist attractions in the vicinity such as the enchanted SaifulMalook Lake, Shogran, Babusar Top, and Siri Paye Meadows.

## Towering lift zips tourists up China's 'Avatar' cliff



**T**owering more than 300 metres up the cliff face that inspired the landscape for the blockbuster movie, Avatar, the world's highest outdoor lift whisks brave tourists to breathtaking views. The three double-decker elevators in central China's Zhangjiajie forest park zip up the cliff in just 88 seconds, a speedy attraction as domestic tourism slowly recovers in China after the coronavirus forced strict travel measures. It delivers tourists to the top of the sandstone rock face that inspired the fictional jungle moon of Pandora of the 2009 James Cameron smash hit. "One of the main reasons we came is that the site inspired Avatar," said QiaoKe, 45, who travelled to the lift with his family. "The film really made an impression on us. And it really is beautiful here. Around 8,000 tourists take the lift every day. However, numbers are still significantly down from an average of 14,000 before the pandemic."

## Four-star hotel in Sukkur faces demolition

**T**he irrigation department has reportedly issued a notice to the owners/management of Hotel Inter Pak Inn, a major four-star hotel in the city, seeking valid documents of the ownership of its entire covered area.

The notice came as the department, assisted by the district administration and law enforcement agencies, has launched a massive anti-encroachment operation to retrieve its occupied land across the province in pursuance of a Sindh High Court order.

On Thursday Nov. 26, an assistant executive engineer of the irrigation department visited the hotel standing between Northwest Canal and Rice Canal on the right bank of the Indus and overlooking Sukkur Barrage and reportedly told the management that it either entirely stood on the department's land or partially encroached upon it. The management was asked to produce documentary evidence within the next three days to satisfy the department about ownership of the hotel's covered area.

The official made it clear to the hotel management that its partial or complete demolition as encroachment was discussed at a recent meeting of the department.

The building of the hotel was originally owned by the national flag carrier, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), but was later privatised and purchased by then Senator Islamuddin Shaikh in 1985.

It has been gathered that Mr Shaikh still owned the hotel though various 'administrators' took it over to run its affairs since 1985. A reliable source said here on Friday Nov. 27 that Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Manzoor Hussain Wassan was also a partner in the hotel's business and another PPP leader Aslam Shaikh was associated with it as the administrator. Aslam Shaikh has in the past served as chairman of the Sukkur district council.





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