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## New player's entry into aviation industry amid pandemic termed bold

While the country's three operational airlines have been taking cost-cutting measures against the backdrop of a crisis that the global aviation industry has been facing since the outbreak of coronavirus, the decision of AirSial to enter an already saturated market is being seen as a bold move that may give a tough time to competitors but will benefit the people.

The market situation can be gauged from a recent report of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) predicting that airline revenues this year will plunge by 60 per cent as a result of the coronavirus pandemic that "threatens the survival of the air transport industry".

Pakistan's commercial aviation sector is no different from the rest of the world as its airlines are taking drastic measures, including job cuts, for their survival.

*Operation of three airlines suspended in recent years*

RPT licences

Over the years, the Civil Aviation Authority had granted Regular Public Transport (RPT) licences to many airlines. Some of the airlines went out of business like Aero Asia. Currently six airlines the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Airblue, Shaheen Air International (SAI), Bhoja Air, Air Indus and Serene Air possess RPT licences but only three of them are operational as CAA's certified operators.

Issued by the CAA director general with the federal government approval for carriage of passengers and cargo services, RPT licence is only a permission to develop an organisation on ground. It is not considered a permission to operate an aircraft for which an airline must obtain an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) from the CAA. The CAA puts certain conditions that an airline needs to meet before starting its flight operations. A fleet of minimum three aircraft is the first such requirement for initiating passenger flights while one aircraft is needed for cargo operations. For getting an AOC, a company must register its fleet in Pakistan.

The CAA had earlier suspended the operations of Bhoja Air and Air Indus in 2012 and 2015, respectively, while SAI's operations were suspended in 2018. Air Indus, which lost two aircraft in the 2014 terrorist attack on Karachi airport that led to suspension of its operations in 2015, says on its website it is planning to import three latest models ATR 72-600 to restart its operation shortly.



*AirSial Airbus A320*

### Domestic market

At present, only three of the six airlines PIA, Airblue and Serene Air are operational as CAA's 'certified operators'. The PIA and Airblue operate commercial flights on both domestic and international routes, but the Serene Air is yet to start its international operation.

The fourth one, AirSial, has entered the domestic market after it met the requirement of having minimum three aircraft, as its chairman Fazal Jilani is reported to have announced selling tickets after the formal inauguration by the prime minister.

While the entry of a new player will definitely provide intending passengers better fares and service, it will slash the revenue of the other airlines because of increased competition and capacity. Yet the old players did not shy from extending good wishes for the new entrant.

"We welcome development of the local aviation industry and wish AirSial all the best," PIA spokesman Abdullah H. Khan said while talking to media. "Competition is healthy as it improves products and services for the consumers," he said.

Similar views were shared by Airblue that sees AirSial's commencing commercial flight operation as a 'bold step'.

"We welcome the new entrant in the market and wish them well. The aviation industry across the world and especially Pakistan is passing through a time never really seen before. To enter the industry is a bold step indeed," said Raheel Ahmed, Airblue's deputy managing director. "Competition in any field is good for the consumers. It improves the overall standard of service."

### Fleet size

The combined fleet size of Pakistan's four airlines is less than 50 aircraft, whereas Emirates, the flag carrier of the UAE, possesses a fleet of 255 passenger aircraft alone and Air India, the flag carrier of our eastern neighbour, operates 172 aircraft.

The PIA spokesman said the airline had a fleet of 30 aircraft including 12 Boeing 777s, 11 Airbus A-320s and seven ATRs. Airblue has a fleet of 10 aircraft, all Airbus A320 and A321, while Serene Air has five aircraft including four Boeing 737-800 and one Airbus A330-200.

In the financial year 2018-19, a total of 3,002,554 passengers in the country used Airblue, PIA, Serene Air and SAI (whose operations were suspended by the CAA in August 2018 for failing to pay over Rs1.5 billion arrears).

PIA got the lion's share as 1,795,877 passengers travelled through the national flag carrier, followed by Serene Air (875,536), Airblue (314,485) and SAI (16,656). A total of 18,470 PIA flights took off and landed on various country's airports during 2018-19 followed by Serene Air's 5,686 flight take-off and landings, Airblue's 1,991 and SAI's 155.

Aviation experts have been urging the government to rationalise heavy taxes on air tickets in order to make air travel affordable for more people. And restrictions imposed in the wake of coronavirus pandemic have already impacted the fragile industry badly.

As IATA director general Alexandre de Juniac had recently said that airlines "will have to continue to draw on their reserves until at least the fourth quarter of 2021", there are slim chances that the local aviation industry flourish in the short term without government patronage.

# AirSial, Pakistan's newest airline, takes off domestically



**A**ir Sial on Friday 25 Dec. started its Karachi-Islamabad flights operation using Airbus A320-200.

Prime Minister Imran Khan had inaugurated Air Sial on Dec 9 in Sialkot, the third private airline of Pakistan, which had been launched and operated by Sialkot's business community, initially with three Airbus A320-200s.

The first flight of Air Sial with 185 passengers on board departed from Jinnah International Airport on Friday 25 Dec. morning on domestic route and touched down the Islamabad International Airport at around 9:15am.

On arrival at IIAP, the Air Sial staff members welcomed the passengers.

Later the flight took off for Karachi.

Air Sial, a licensed airline, is the brainchild of members of the Sialkot

Chamber of Commerce and Industry who launched the project after the success of their earlier initiative, the Sialkot International Airport Ltd.

The airline management has also set up its booking and facilitation office at Islamabad International Airport as it was made operational by the airline staff.

Initially, the airline will operate two from Karachi and Lahore flights and two between Karachi and Islamabad which the management said would be increased to three flights.

They claimed that the airline will provide international standard service to its passengers.

Come early February, AirSial will have four routes in operation from Karachi with 49 weekly flights each way.

The carrier, Pakistan's fourth domestic operator, currently plans four

routes with three A320s: Karachi to Islamabad; Lahore; Peshawar; and Sialkot.

The first three routes are Pakistan's top-three based on pre-coronavirus 2019 seat capacity, OAG data shows.

Sialkot, however, was thin, with fewer than 48,000 two-way seats with one carrier: Pakistan International. Sialkot is the headquarters for AirSial.

From Karachi, Quetta, Faisalabad, Multan, Sukkur, and Rahim Yar Khan all had more seats than Sialkot. Karachi Quetta had four times as many and was the

This decline was the result of a myriad of things, including the country's struggling economic performance, PIA's ongoing major problems, and the end of Shaheen Air in late 2018. Source: OAG Schedules Analyser.

AirSial's flights will be almost the joint-highest in February.

Currently, AirSial is operating only two routes: Karachi to Islamabad and Lahore. Each has a 14-weekly offering.

From the week beginning 1 February, however, these will rise to 21-weekly apiece. In this period, Peshawar and Sialkot will start with a four- and three-weekly service respectively.

Although things may change, AirSial is scheduled to have 49 weekly flights each way in February. It'll have the second-highest volume of flights and have just two fewer than market leader, PIA.

Interestingly, all but Peshawar will have higher total weekly flights than in the same week in peak year 2017. And Lahore and Islamabad are up significantly over 2019; the hole left by Shaheen has been filled.

*Con. on page 26,27*



*Mr. Tariq Amin COO AirSial along with the airlines staff cutting a cake at IIAP*

## PIA to operate cargo flights to Saudi Arabia

The Pakistan International Airlines has announced its decision to operate cargo flights to Saudi Arabia to boost exports.

PIA spokesman Abdullah Hafeez said that fruits, vegetables and meat were exported to Saudi Arabia and the delivery of these products by air would save time.

He said the decision to operate cargo flights to Saudi Arabia had been taken as exports from Pakistan were likely to be affected because of a ban imposed by Riyadh on international passenger flights.

Mr Hafeez said the cargo fares had been kept very attractive and reasonable on the orders of PIA's Chief Executive Officer Arshad Malik. The first flight with 42 tonnes of cargo departed for Jeddah on Tuesday 22 Dec., he said.

The PIA had already started cargo flights to China.

Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation has already issued a circular to all airlines operating in the Kingdom to temporarily suspend international flights for one week.

After receiving the circular, the PIA immediately suspended its flights scheduled to operate.

Meanwhile, the Islamabad International Airport administration with the help of health authorities has put in place strict measures to prevent spread of the new wave of coronavirus as every inbound passenger from the United Kingdom is being subjected to a check-up.

An official said that a swab of every passenger arriving from the UK even by an indirect flight was being taken and the passengers were advised for one-week quarantine at their homes. They were only allowed to go after giving their addresses and whereabouts, he added.

The government has already allowed the passengers holding Pakistani passports and business, visitor and transit visas issued by the British authorities to travel back to Pakistan while keeping a negative polymerase chain reaction test report conducted within the 72 hours prior to commencement of travel to Pakistan.

## PIA, Askari Bank launch co-brand credit card

The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and Askari Bank Limited have launched Co-Brand Credit Card through which both organisations will offer their services for the benefit of a large number of customers in Pakistan.

A press release issued by the PIA said that Askari Bank and the PIA, being two market leaders in their respective industries, have long been associated with Pakistan's national identity and it was only natural that they would join forces to create a unique value for their consumers.

Hence, the product has been designed keeping in mind safety and security in transaction combined with ease in travel. The unveiled cards, in three tiers, Silver, Gold and Platinum, have been loaded with some amazing features, including complimentary PIA loyalty programme membership, discounts on PIA tickets, local & international lounge access, accelerated mile earning compared with normal credit cards, priority check-in, generous startup points and much more.

Speaking at the launching ceremony of Askari-PIA Co-Brand Credit Card held in Islamabad on Friday, PIA Chief Executive Officer Arshad Malik said that the card would be a true representation of a Pakistani brand. "This card is designed keeping in view this important but neglected segment.

"It is with great deliberation, research and the right intentions that we have developed a product that will reward its users greatly by paying them back for their loyalty and trust in our brand."

He said that the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) had acknowledged that the PIA had done its part but the final verdict was subject to final audit. "Only remaining issue is pilot licensing," he said.

He further said that the PIA management would change the face of the airline in upcoming years despite all challenges.

The CEO said that the PIA was suffering because of pilot licensing issues and safety concerns.

Speaking on the occasion, Askari Bank President Abid Sattar said that "Askari Bank is one of the country's leading credit card issuers and PIA is the country's national airlines with a truly remarkable history and a promising future".

He said: "We're truly honoured to be associated with our national carrier. This is the first all Pakistani Card where both co-brand partners are locally based. We see great potential in this partnership and we hope that this will prove to be beneficial for our Pakistani consumers."

## 110 pilots, cleared SC told

The Supreme Court was informed on Monday Dec. 14 that the national flag carrier had cleared 110 pilots out of the 141 whose licences to fly had been suspended against the backdrop of the fake degrees controversy.

Senior advocate Salman Akram Raja, representing the Pakistan International Airlines, informed a three-judge SC bench headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed that PIA had cleared 110 pilots and cancelled the licences of 15, whereas 14 pilots had been declared to be unfit to fly. A few cases were pending decision, he said.

The information came when Justice Umar Ata Bandial asked what steps were taken by the airline to vet the suspended licences and whether the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) was pushing the issue enough to get back the business by verifying the licences.

## PIA launches Quetta-Turbat operation

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) on Thursday Dec 10 started operating flights from Quetta to Turbat to facilitate the residents of southern Balochistan.

PIA spokesman Abdullah Hafeez Khan said the airline had launched two-way flights between Quetta and Turbat on Thursday Dec 10 and would operate flights two times a week on the route.



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## Pakistan puts curbs on passengers from UK

Pakistan on Monday Dec. 21 placed travel restrictions on UK passengers after emergence of a new mutated strain of Covid-19 that was spreading rapidly in England.

The measure is intended to restrict the spread of the variant in Pakistan, said a spokesperson for the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC).

A preliminary analysis, reportedly, suggests that this particular strain is approximately 70 per cent more transmissible. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the infection caused by the strain is any more severe so far.

The NCOC spokesperson said many countries, including Saudi Arabia and Oman, had either completely banned or imposed additional restrictions on flights and travellers coming from the UK.

Saudi Arabia temporarily suspended international commercial flights for one week while Muscat International Airport has been closed effective from 11:59pm on Dec 21.

Following Saudi Arabia's decision, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) cancelled its 44 flights to and from the kingdom on Monday.

Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) had announced late on Sunday Dec. 20 night that all international flights except in exceptional cases would remain suspended for one week, which could be extended for another week.

"Foreign flights currently in the territory of the Kingdom are allowed to leave," the GACA said in its notification issued to all airlines operating in the airports of Saudi Arabia.

However, the GACA said travel suspension would not affect cargo flights and supply chain, adding that instructions would be reviewed and updated in light of the developments related to the pandemic.

The new development came about after several European countries imposed travel ban from UK after Britain warned that a highly infectious new strain of the virus was spreading fast.

PIA spokesman Abdullah Hafeez Khan, in a statement, said the airline had temporarily suspended its flights to and from Saudi Arabia for a week as per the circular issued by the Saudi General Authority of Civil Aviation.

PIA flights for Lahore-Jeddah-Lahore, Islamabad-Dammam-Islamabad



*A SIGN on the M56 motorway informs the drivers on Monday Dec. 21 that all routes into France are closed at the junction with the M6 at Lower Stretton, northwest England. A growing number of countries blocked flights from Britain over a new highly infectious coronavirus strain the UK said was 'out of control'. [Right] A sign alerts travellers to the closure of Terminal 3 at Heathrow Airport in west London*

and Karachi-Madina-Karachi have been cancelled while flights from Lahore to Madina, Madina to Karachi, Madina to Multan and Karachi-Jeddah-Karachi were also cancelled.

The PIA spokesman said: "Until flight permissions are restored, all flights will remain cancelled," adding the affected passengers would be accommodated as soon as the flight operation for Saudi Arabia was restored.

The PIA has requested passengers to register their contact number with its call centre so that they could be timely informed about the status of flights.

Mr Khan also asked passengers to contact PIA's call centre 111-786-786 for any guidance or information.

Direct or indirect travel from the UK would be temporarily suspended, starting from 11:59pm on Dec 22, the spokesperson said, adding that passengers who were transiting through the UK and did not leave airside during the transit would be allowed to enter Pakistan.

The spokesman further said travellers who were in or had been in the UK over the past 10 days would not be allowed to enter Pakistan, however, Pakistani passport holders, who travelled to the UK on visitor or temporary visas, would be allowed to return but would have to follow protocols.

These include producing a negative result of the PCR test taken a maximum of 72 hours prior to boarding the flight in the UK and undertaking another test on arrival as arranged by the federal and provincial governments. The passengers will be required to stay in the airport or will be taken to a government facility until the test is taken and will also be required to undergo mandatory enforced home quarantine for seven days.

On the other hand, as per the decision

of the Supreme Committee of the Sultanate of Oman to prevent entry into and exit from the Sultanate in the wake of the pandemic, Muscat International Airport has been closed for international flights from 11:59pm on Dec 21.

This suspension will remain effective from Dec 22 to 29th. Following the suspension, PIA has also cancelled all flights to Muscat.

The PIA spokesperson said the airline would not operate its flights during the ban while all affected passengers would be accommodated as soon as the flights resume.

## UK aviation firm acquires stakes in Pakistan

A UK-based global aviation services specialist Menzies Aviation on Friday Dec. 4 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 Joenig said.

## Serene Air allowed to operate flights to Saudi Arabia, UAE



The Civil Aviation Authority has granted permission to private airline Serene Air to operate flights to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has granted permission to private airline Serene Air to operate flights to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The permission was granted by the Aviation Division to Serene Air after approval by the federal cabinet.

The private airline will start its flights for Jeddah, Riyadh, Dubai and Sharjah in January 2021.

The airline will use new Airbus A330 and Boeing 777 aircraft for operating its flights to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation has permitted Serene Air to operate its flights to Jeddah and Riyadh.

CAA takes exception to violation of Covid SOPs by airlines.

Serene Air has also sought permission to operate flights to China and the United Kingdom and its application is under process.

The airline had started its domestic operation four years ago.

The CAA director of air transport and economic regulations issued a notification granting permission to Serene Air for operating international flights.

The notification said: "The designation of Serene Air to the UAE and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has been accepted by the respective aeronautical authorities; Serene may like to submit its operational plan for commencement of international operations to and from the UAE and KSA to the CAA.

"Formal flight schedule be submitted through Air Transport Flight Management at an appropriate time when Serene Air is ready to commence international flight operation for the KSA and UAE."

A senior official of Serene Air told

media that the airline's offices in Jeddah and Riyadh had already been established and shortly the offices will be set up in Dubai and Sharjah.

"Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the process of operating international flights was delayed, but it would be started in January 2021," he said.

Meanwhile, the CAA has taken notice

## Gerry's dnata has formed a multiyear partnership with Virgin Atlantic Airways

10th December 2020 Gerry's dnata, a joint venture of Ground Handling Services between dnata Dubai and Gerry's Group Pakistan has announced its partnership with Virgin Atlantic Airways by becoming the airline's preferred Ground Services Provider (GSP) for Lahore-London and Islamabad-London/Manchester flight operations in Pakistan.

Virgin Atlantic Airways is scheduled to operate in January from Lahore and Islamabad with direct flights to London. In its extended plans, Manchester route will be opened for direct flights from Islamabad. Whereas, Virgin Atlantic Cargo had stepped into Pakistani territory on 8th December 2020.

Haris Raza, CEO, Gerry's dnata said "We have a firm commitment to delivering high-quality and safe ground-handling services in Pakistan which is fundamental to our success in this market. We have proudly played an integral part in keeping the global supply chain going during 2020 and are thrilled to welcome Virgin Atlantic Airways and Virgin Atlantic Cargo to the Gerry's dnata family in Pakistan with our full suite of ground handling and cargo services."

At the onset of COVID-19, several airlines with well-established operations in Pakistan made a strategically benefitting decision to

of violation of its orders regarding following the approved slots to ensure effective compliance with Covid-19 SOPs at different airports across the country.

In a directive to the all-schedule landing airlines, the CAA director of air transport said that it had been reported by the airport managements of different locations that airlines are still reluctant to adhere to the approved slots finalised and approved by the Air Transport Directorate of CAA. It is not only causing congestion but also hampering the effective implementation of Covid-19 SOPs.

The CAA directed the airlines to ensure strict adherence to approved slots and in case of change of plus/minus 15 minutes in slot timings, prior coordination must be made with the respective airport management, otherwise strict action will be taken against airlines.

switch to Gerry's dnata services. These airlines include Etihad Airways which previously worked with a small local player, Azerbaijan Airlines which resumed operations through charter services after a strategic move out of Pakistani market and Pegasus Airline, the second carrier operating out of Turkey.

Gerry's dnata's trajectory over the last seven years tells a compelling story of transformation, making it an uncontested leader in the ground handling services market of Pakistan. With a clientele base of 13 scheduled passenger airlines, 10 cargo airlines and more than 30 charter operators as partners, the ground handling services landscape is dominantly secured by Gerry's dnata. Currently, it provides its services to 07 stations across Pakistan and holds the accolade of being the only transformational market player with Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning backed cargo warehouse operation system.



## PIA getting rid of four aircraft due to expensive lease



The PIA has decided to remove four ATR aircraft from its current fleet of 30 due to an “expensive lease” arrangement.

While the Pakistan International Airlines is set to acquire more planes as part of its business plan, it has decided to remove four ATR aircraft from its current fleet of 30 due to an “expensive lease” arrangement.

One of the four ATR aircraft was sent to Johannesburg from Karachi on Saturday Dec. 12, while the remaining three would soon be sent to the firms from which the national flag carrier had acquired them on dry lease.

The PIA's fleet comprises 12 Boeing 777s, 11 Airbus A-320s and seven ATRs.

After the cancellation of the lease arrangement of four ATRs, the airline would keep operating the remaining ATR aircraft on short routes to make them financially viable.

A PIA spokesman said in a statement that the first ATR-72 aircraft, having registration number APBKY, departed from Karachi for Johannesburg, South Africa, while three more ATR-72s would be returned.

He said the ATR-72 aircraft were high on operational cost and expected market value, making flight operations non-profitable.

These aircraft were acquired on lease in 2015 and are costlier than the present market price but PIA was facing problems in returning them due to enforcement of a long-term agreement.

He said the management, on the instructions of PIA chief executive officer retired Air Marshal Arshad Malik, reviewed the lease agreement thoroughly and got benefit of a clause in the document during the suspension of flights due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“The ATR-72 planes on lease to PIA were costing rentals whilst on ground.

PIA officials negotiated a deal to return the aircraft to the leasing company with no cash penalty. It is beyond the norms of leasing business,” the spokesman said.

He said the personal efforts of the airlines' chief as well as support from its board of directors made such a deal possible under extreme pressure on the aviation sector due to the pandemic.

“It will save the national carrier millions of dollars in rent, which would have been paid had the aircraft continued to be in the PIA fleet but would be sitting idle due to the pandemic,” the spokesman said, adding: “The bleeding has stopped and an expensive deal of the past has been terminated. This is yet another course correction by the PIA CEO.”

Air Marshal Malik congratulated the PIA team on successful negotiations that led to the return of the aircraft. He said it was a difficult but unavoidable decision at this crucial time.

He said under the supervision of the federal government, PIA would soon add new aircraft to its fleet, which would improve the airline's products and services considerably. “New aircraft and improved service expected since long by our passengers will soon be realised,” he said.

Recently, PIA decided to add eight new narrow-body aircraft to its fleet on dry lease. The aircraft with seating capacity of 170-plus are expected to be delivered next year.

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

### Pakistan International Airlines to return ATR72-500s to lessor

Citing high lease costs and sub-optimal utilization, PIA Pakistan International Airlines is sending its fleet of leased ATR72-500s back to the owner. The Karachi-based airline has four ATRs from aircraft leasing company ABRIC Leasing. The lease was due to run until 2021, but PIA has brokered a deal with ABRIC and has already started sending the planes



PIA is sending four leased ATR72-500s back to the owner.

back.

### The first ATR72 has already left Karachi

The aircraft in question are AP-BKV, AP-BKX, AP-BKY, and AP-BKZ. According to planespotter.net, the ATRs came to PIA in the middle of 2015 after a stint flying for UTair-Ukraine. All four aircraft have spent much of 2020 parked. One of the ATRs, AP-BKY, has already left Pakistan. Aircraft tracking databases have it landing in Johannesburg on December 14.

Pakistan's criminal investigation, counter-intelligence, and security agency, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), has commenced an investigation into the 2015 leasing deal. At issue is the lease price paid. Pakistani news channel Ary News reports three ATR planes were leased at Rs179,500 per aircraft. That equates to approximately US\$1120, so the figure likely reflects a per day rate, or just over US\$34,000 per calendar month. The remaining two ATRs cost slightly less.



An investigation has been launched into the ATR leases.

It is reported the 2015 leasing decision has since cost PIA US\$43.7 million, a hit to the bottom line the embattled airline can ill-afford. The airline is said to have assets worth around US\$668 million but is carrying debts of nearly \$3 billion. Earlier this month, CEO Arshad Malik claimed PIA was on track to become profitable within a few years.

“We are trying to reduce the PIA's losses with the cooperation of the private sector,” today's Express Tribune quotes him saying.

“We are facing issues because of the coronavirus pandemic, but the PIA will soon reach new heights.

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## CAA `s bifurcation an international aviation requirement: minister

Aviation Minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan said the bifurcation of Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) was being done according to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) requirement.

In reply to a question during a press conference on Saturday Jan. 2, the minister said the CAA will be separated into two divisions on the basis of regulatory functions and airport services which will improve the services and facilities.

About diversion of flights to Islamabad from Lahore, the minister said the main runway at Allama Iqbal International Airport, which was equipped with CAT3B anti-fog landing system, was being repaired and the secondary runway had no such facility. As a result, incoming flights affected by fog were being diverted to Islamabad International Airport.

The minister said CAA had offered its employees to transfer from one department to another based on their skills and qualifications as a part of the bifurcation of the department into "Regulatory, Airport and Operations" divisions.

The CAA will be split into two divisions operational and regulatory each for different responsibilities.

The CAA board in September 2020 had approved the functional separation of CAA into two divisions in line with a decision of the federal cabinet.

The aim of the functional separation was to demarcate the regulator and service role of the CAA, not only to meet the international aviation standard but also to enhance the overall efficiency of the functions.

Following the decision, a management plan was made for smooth transitioning of the functional separation of the aviation regulator.

If an employee belonged to the family of airports and operations division trade but due to their experience was working in the regulatory division or vice versa, they are given a choice to opt for transfer of service in the division of their choice.

The CAA Human Resource directorate has asked its employees for their willingness for transfer of service in the division of their choice with fulfilling the criterion of any post. Interested employees should submit their willingness till Jan 15.

Transfer of service application forms - containing an undertaking - has been offered to CAA employees with terms and conditions.

On the other hand, the CAA employees have expressed their concerns over the bifurcation plan. After receiving the HR directorate's letter, the employees

said it did not elaborate which sections or directorates were included in the airport services and which were in the regulatory division and what were their core responsibilities.

They also asked the authorities concerned about what will be the service structure of the two divisions and what will be the pay and allowances and pension structure of the two divisions.

They said after their concerns and ambiguities were clarified, it would help them choose the proper and appropriate section for further serving in the CAA.

## Appointment of CAA chief challenged in IHC



*A petition has been filed in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) against the recruitment of retired Flight Lieutenant Khaqan Murtaza as the director general of the Civil Aviation Authority (DG CAA).*

A petition has been filed in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) against the recruitment of retired Flight Lieutenant Khaqan Murtaza as the director general of the Civil Aviation Authority (DG CAA) that seeks contempt of court proceedings against the government functionaries for making this appointment.

The federal government on Nov 28 appointed Mr Murtaza as the DG CAA.

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 was working as principal secretary to the Sindh governor. He was also the chief executive officer of the Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Limited.

In the petition, Capt Asim Nawaz referring to the Nov 27 order of the IHC alleged that Mr Murtaza, an officer of the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS), was not a qualified person for the highly technical and challenging post, especially when Pakistan is facing a ban of the

International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) on flying by the country's airline pilots to 188 countries.

"It's to bring to the kind notice of this Honourable Court that ICAO has already issued serious safety concerns about CAA Pakistan and if not handled properly according to International aviation regulatory standards, it would have dire consequences against entire aviation industry of Pakistan," the petition said, adding that the government has tried to obstruct the process of the court through deceptive skills and got appointed a DG against the rules, regulations and the Supreme Court ruling.

It further said that after PIA A320 crash and a lot of argument / splash on the media against inefficiency of CAA, the post of DG was advertised by the aviation ministry. After that around 600 candidates applied for the post; among them 18 candidates were short-listed and interviewed by the defunct selection board on Oct 14, but no one was selected by the redundant board.

Thereafter, on Nov 7 the secretary aviation informed the cabinet that they could not find a single suitable candidate among 600 applicants, which was false, fabricated and frivolous statement by him (Responsible 1 in the petition), as all short-listed 18 aspirants were much more qualified than the present DG selected against the IHC orders, the petition contended.

The petition requested the court to set aside the notification for the appointment of Mr Murtaza and issue a directive for making this appointment on merit.

It also requested the court to initiate contempt of court proceedings against the officials responsible for obstructing the court order.

The IHC will take up the petition recently.

## Top 20 safest airlines named



(PHOTO: Shutterstock)

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AirlineRatings.com, a global airline safety, and product rating website, has announced its Top Twenty Safest Airlines 2021 from the 385 different airlines it monitors. The Top 20 in order are:

Qantas  
 Qatar Airways  
 Air New Zealand  
 Singapore Airlines  
 Emirates  
 EVA Air  
 Etihad Airways  
 Alaska Airlines  
 Cathay Pacific Airways  
 British Airways  
 Virgin Australia/Virgin Atlantic  
 Hawaiian Airlines  
 Southwest Airlines  
 Delta Air Lines  
 American Airlines  
 SAS  
 Finnair  
 Lufthansa  
 KLM  
 United Airlines

According to AirlineRatings.com Editor-in-Chief Geoffrey Thomas, these airlines are standouts in the industry and are at the forefront of safety, innovation, and launching of new aircraft. “For instance, Australia’s Qantas has been recognised by the British Advertising Standards Association in a test case as the world’s most experienced airline,” Thomas said. “Qantas has been the lead airline in virtually every major operational safety advancement over the past 60 years and has not had a fatality in the pure jet era,” he added. “But Qantas is not alone. Long established airlines such as Hawaiian and Finnair have perfect records in the jet era.”

According to Thomas, the editors analyse: crashes, serious incidents, audits

from aviation’s governing bodies and lead associations; government audits, and fleet age in making their determinations. “However all airlines have incidents every day, and many are aircraft or engine manufacture issues, not airline operational problems. It is the way the flight crew handles these incidents that determines a good airline from an unsafe one,” Thomas said.

## Saudi Arabia reopens flight operations after two weeks

Saudi Arabia on Sunday Jan. 3 announced the reopening of borders and the resumption of international flights after a two-week suspension aimed to stem the spread of a new Covid-19 strain.

The government ordered the lifting of “precautionary measures related to the spread of a new variant of coronavirus”, the Ministry of the Interior said, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

Saudi Arabia has recorded more than 363,000 cases, including over 6,200 deaths the highest among the Gulf Arab states but has also reported a high recovery rate.

Riyadh suspended international flights and access through land crossings and ports on December 21.

Other Gulf countries, Oman and Kuwait, who had taken similar measures, have also lifted them in recent days.

But travellers returning from Britain, South Africa or “any country where the new variant of the coronavirus is spreading” are subject to more restrictions, the statement added.

Foreigners coming from those countries must spend 14 days in another country before entering Saudi Arabia, and show a negative test.

Saudi nationals returning from those countries will be able to enter directly but must then spend two weeks in quarantine on arrival, and be subject to tests.

Last month Saudi Arabia was one of the first Gulf countries to launch a massive vaccination campaign using the Pfizer-BioNTech jab.

## Scott Kirby elected new chairman of the star alliance chief executive board

Scott Kirby, CEO of United Airlines, has been elected as the new Chairman of the Star Alliance Chief Executive Board (CEB). He succeeds Pedro Heilbron, CEO of Copa Holdings and of Copa Airlines, who held the post for the last four years. Speaking on behalf of all Star Alliance CEOs, Kirby said: “I would like to thank Pedro for the time he invested and his dedication to the role of CEB Chairman. His four-year tenure came at an important time in the Alliance’s development, during which the organisation has demonstrated its technological leadership in the implementation of a digitally transformed customer experience.” In his role as CEB Chairman, Kirby will conduct the two annual board meetings and act as the designated spokesperson for the board. Reflecting on his tenure, Heilbron commented: “It was an honour for me to lead the board at a time of challenging market conditions for the entire airline industry. Scott’s standing as CEO of our largest member airline, and an acknowledged industry leader, make him an excellent choice to lead the Star Alliance Chief Executive Board during the most challenging times for our industry.” Kirby said: “I am looking forward to working with the board over the next two years in continuing our groundbreaking work in delivering the leading airline alliance customer proposition, focused on seamless travel experiences and superior loyalty benefits.” All 26 member airlines are represented by their respective CEO on the CEB, which acts as the controlling body of the Alliance and provides the overall strategic direction.



Scott Kirby  
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## Deaths in air crashes rose last year despite decline in number of flights



*Soldiers carry a coffin containing the remains of one of the eleven Ukrainian victims of the Ukraine International Airlines flight 752 plane disaster during a memorial ceremony at the Boryspil International Airport, outside Kiev, Ukraine January 19, 2020.*

The number of people killed in large commercial airplane crashes in 2020 stood at 299 worldwide, even as the number of crashes fell by more than 50 per cent, a Dutch consulting firm said recently.

Aviation consulting firm To70 said in 2020 there were 40 accidents involving large commercial passenger planes, five of which were fatal, resulting in 299 fatalities. In 2019 there were 86 accidents, eight of which were fatal, resulting in 257 fatalities.

Large commercial airplanes had 0.27 fatal accidents per million flights in 2020, To70 said, or one fatal crash every 3.7m flights up from 0.18 fatal accidents per million flights in 2019.

The decline in crashes came amid a sharp decline in flights due to the coronavirus pandemic. Flightradar24 reported commercial flights it tracked worldwide in 2020 fell 42pc to 24.4m.

More than half of all deaths in the To70 review were the 176 people killed in January 2020 when a Ukrainian plane was shot down in Iranian airspace.

The second deadliest incident involved a [Pakistan airliner](#) that crashed in May, killing 98.

Large passenger airplanes covered by the statistics are used by nearly all travellers on airlines but exclude small commuter airplanes in service.

Over the last two decades, aviation deaths have been falling dramatically. As recently as 2005, there were 1,015 deaths aboard commercial passenger flights worldwide, the Aviation Safety Network (ASN) said.

Over the last five years, there have been an average of 14 fatal accidents for commercial passenger and cargo planes resulting in 345 deaths annually, ASN

said.

In 2017, aviation had its safest year on record worldwide with only two fatal accidents involving regional turboprops that resulted in 13 deaths and no fatal crashes of passenger jets.

The United States has not had a fatal US passenger airline crash since February 2009 and had one fatality due to a US passenger airline accident in that period.

## Saudi Arabia to end Qatar's Airspace ban



*A Qatar Airways A350-1000 taxis in São Paulo/Guarulhos.*

In 2017 there was a diplomatic escalation in which Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt decided to cut flights to and from Doha, and to which Saudi Arabia added the closure of its airspace. The denial of the use of Saudi airspace created multiple inconveniences for Qatar, which had to program longer routes to circumnavigate blocked airspace. But with the signing of a major deal for the region, the latest in a series of Middle East deals sought by the United States aimed at building a united front against Iran, that blockade could finally be lifted.

As part of the agreement, Saudi Arabia will reopen its airspace and all land and sea borders with Qatar starting Monday Jan 4, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Ahmad Nasser al-Sabah said on Kuwait TV. The Saudi state agency SPA quoted Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as saying that the annual meeting of Gulf leaders would unite member countries "in the face of the challenges facing the region."

The ruler of Qatar, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, will attend, the royal court said. Jared Kushner, the US presidential adviser for the Middle East, said that the crown prince of Saudi Arabia and the emir of Qatar would sign the

agreement. While Saudi Arabia made it clear that it intended to lift the blockade, the other three countries did not, but Kushner said "we expect" that they will also join together to lift the blockade. Under the emerging agreement, Qatar will suspend lawsuits filed in international courts related to the blockade, the official said.

In June 2020, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in favor of Qatar, rejecting an appeal of a 2018 ICAO decision to dismiss their challenge of jurisdiction. A minor victory, since it was based on procedural questions rather than advancing throughout the merits of the case presented by Qatar in 2017, but analysts deemed the dismissal as positive for the country's position in the litigation.

In the current state of things, any measure that eases conditions for carriers is more than welcome. If this relaxation of the blockade finally takes place, steep overcharges will be avoided by Qatar Airways, as flight extension to elude Saudi Arabia was penalizing both fuel quantity and crew expenses. These costs impacted severely in 2019 results for the company, which reached -\$639 million, ten times the losses accrued in the 2017-2018 period. Although not all expenses are to be attributed to the blockage, the combination of factors was a big burden in the fiscal year that ended in March 2020. It is expected that despite the severe drop of demand that occurred in the fiscal year that will end in March 2021, the overextended flight routes will still play a role in the carrier's economy.

Qatar Airways' reroutes have led to longer routes, more fuel expenses and more CO2 emissions. In fact, the CEO Akbar Al Baker confirmed some years ago their dissatisfaction with the blockade: "While this illegal blockade has been ongoing for more than three years, we should never allow these illegal actions to be normalized. Threats to the safety and normalcy of International Civil Aviation should never be an acceptable tool for political posturing, and the international community must not allow the current actions to set the precedent for using freedom of navigation as a weapon to harm our country and its people".

It has been some very busy days for the Qatari carrier after receiving three new Boeing 777 freighters and their 53rd Airbus A350. Moreover, the carrier has agreed on many new codeshare agreements with different airlines to promote connections with Qatar. From now on, the airline will fly their aircraft without any airspace restrictions. As the Qatar Airways CEO said, "As global travel recovers, our passengers can rely on us to fly greener and smarter with more flights to more destinations via the Best Airport in the Middle East, Hamad International Airport."

## Sparks fly in PIA

**A**MID a sense of fear and insecurity that has prevailed among thousands of employees, the Pakistan International Airlines' (PIA) management is moving forward with its plan to cut the existing workforce by half and shift the head office of the national flag carrier from Karachi to Islamabad despite the fact that it needs the parliament's nod before taking any such step, it has emerged.

While the PIA management has its own reasons to justify the relocation of the head office and downsizing, current and former employees paint a grim picture of the state of affairs in the airline where even the country's premier spy agency is being used as a tool to silence dissenting voices.

Background interviews with representatives of employees, officers, pilots and engineers suggest that none of them was taken on board by the management before and after deciding to shift the head office as well as the airline's hub to Islamabad from Karachi.

They say that the management could not shift the head office on its own without obtaining the approval of the parliament that has to amend the Pakistan International Airlines Corporation (Conversion) Act, 2016.

Section 7 (2) of the PIAC Act reads: "The Headquarters of the Company and any of its subsidiary companies carrying on air-transport business shall be at Karachi."

### 'No valid reason'

"There is not a single valid reason to justify shifting of either the head office or airline's hub from Karachi to Islamabad," said PIA Officers Association's general secretary Safdar Anjum, who is most vocal among all against the incumbent management led by retired Air Marshal Arshad Malik.

"Karachi is a unique place where entire organisational network of PIA is situated within an area of two-three kilometres. It has the Ispahani Hangar, complete engineering system. Is it wise to close down the hangar, outsource several other works and give engineering to PAF just to relocate the head office to Islamabad?" he asked.

He claimed that the only reason behind the relocation decision was that Air Marshal Malik and his coterie of advisers, whom he brought from the Pakistan Air Force on deputation, had houses and families in Islamabad.

However, the PIA management has rejected all the allegations as politically motivated.

"PIA is shifting its operational and



*The head offices of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), including the flight services division, commercial department and human resource divisions, will be shifted from Karachi to Islamabad by the end of January.*

support offices to Islamabad because of the inherent shift in travelling demographics. Previously, majority of PIA's traffic originated from Karachi being the trade centre and largest city of the country but now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and adjoining areas contribute majority of the labour in Gulf countries and north eastern GT Road adjacent areas and AJK contribute maximum traffic to Europe, the UK and Far East," said PIA spokesperson Abdullah Hafeez Khan.

"So it's very natural that PIA in order to target this segment has to increase its presence in the north. With increased operations, the manpower requirement has also increased. It is now not possible to keep the workforce centralised in Karachi while running operations from the north," he explained the management's point of view.

But the decision is being seen as a political move to deprive people of Sindh and Balochistan who would find it hard to settle in a city situated far away from their home. Almost every political party has rejected the decision and only on Tuesday PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari vowed to include PIA workers in the opposition's anti-government campaign.

Currently, PPP-backed Peoples Unity is the CBA in PIA but many of its opponents allege that the CBA is not doing what it was supposed to do i.e. to safeguard the interest of workers and instead its leaders have been showered with favours by the incumbent management.

The Air League, a workers' body



associated with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, termed the relocation of head office to Islamabad an "undemocratic and anti-people" decision that has shattered the national solidarity.

And the pilot's body, Pakistan Air Line Pilots Association (Palpa), said that shifting of the head office would have far-reaching consequences and locals would lose jobs, as most employees were unable to move out of Karachi.

However, an aviation expert having 40 years of experience believed that shifting of the head office was "one of the best thing that can happen to help PIA get back on its feet".

He agreed with the PIA that Karachi was no more leading in number of flights saying "maximum flights out of Pakistan are from Islamabad and Lahore".

### Downsizing plan

With 29 planes, the current aircraft-to-employee ratio of PIA is 500 employees per aircraft and the airline management wants to reduce it by half to 250 per aircraft.

The PIA currently has 14,500 employees and earlier this month it had introduced a Voluntarily Separation Scheme (VSS) with a target of laying off 3,500 workers.

The current and former officials view the relocation of head office plan as a move to rid the airline of maximum number of staffers particularly those living in Sindh and Balochistan.

They say the management had transferred around 800 employees of all groups to Islamabad from Karachi and, therefore, most of Sindhi and Urdu-speaking employees opted for the VSS instead of going to a city that was far more expensive than Karachi.

A Palpa spokesperson told Dawn that "employees have been put under tremendous stress by posting them out to Islamabad" at the shortest possible notice so that they could avail VSS.

Mr Anjum of Officers Association and Palpa spokesperson say VSS was not a new scheme as it was offered twice during different administrations.

"No one can object to a retirement scheme as long as it remains voluntary," said Mr Anjum, adding: "But the VSS is not voluntary as employees are being harassed and intimidated."

"An atmosphere of fear and dreadfulness has been created so that employees opt out in the fear of aftermath of VSS; this includes selective leakages of documents, Mandatory Separation Scheme, forced transfers, shifting of head office, downgrading basic rights and

benefits, and so-called performance-based profiling, leading to firing of employees,” the Palpa spokesperson said.

When asked about allegations of harassment and use of intelligence outfits for intimidating employees, PIA spokesperson Khan said: “PIA associations are all politically affiliated to the parties that instilled them in the corporation and generated funds and influence through them, and they often

carry the same narrative as their political masters. Their presence is not as important and critical in greater political landscape as they tend to believe.”

The incumbent chief executive of PIA was the vice chief of air staff when he assumed the responsibility of national carrier. His administration has so far sacked over 900 people on disciplinary grounds because of their alleged involvement in corruption, fake degrees

and other charges. As he retired from the PAF and became the full-time PIA CEO, he draws support from the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government for bringing reforms and restructure the debt-ridden organisation.

“Whatever his intentions are, one thing is clear that his anti-workers steps are making Prime Minister Imran Khan and PTI highly unpopular,” observed a senior PIA official, asking not to be named.

## **EU ban won't be lifted before CAA audit, PIA told**

A day after Aviation Minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan expressed hopes that the ban imposed on Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) to operate flights in Europe would be lifted soon, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) informed the national flag carrier that the ban had been extended by three months and that it would not be reviewed until a safety audit of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), it emerged on Saturday 26 Dec.

Only on Friday Dec 25, the aviation minister had told reporters in Taxila that most concerns of EASA regarding the process of issuing licences to commercial pilots had been addressed and soon the ban imposed on PIA flights in European countries would be lifted.

However, a senior PIA official confirmed to media that PIA had received a disappointing message in response to a request made by the airline.

He said that the national carrier had asked the European agency to give its provisional permission to operate flights to and from European destinations since it had met several conditions.

“us provisional permission,” he said, adding that in response the agency said it could not issue such a permission.

The EASA letter says: “Regarding the lack of confidence in certification and oversight activities performed by the Pakistani CAA, which was the second aspect that led to the suspension of Third Country Operator Authorisation, the investigation performed by the European Commission and by the ICAO have not yet been concluded.

“Consequently, as all preconditions to lift the suspension are not met and, as an audit will be necessary, the agency decided not to revoke your Third Country Operator Authorisation but to extend the suspension period by additional three months....”

The official explained that the ban was not on PIA per se but on the state of

Pakistan and it would not be lifted until the regulator brought reforms to the satisfaction of EASA.

Sources said that PIA was in constant touch with the European agency and had provided it necessary documents as evidence regarding the implementation of the agreed corrective action plan. EASA had told PIA that it found the documents satisfactory but linked the lifting of the ban with meeting certain conditions that primarily related to the CAA because of the 'fake' pilots' licence issue.

EASA told PIA it was investigating the issue of 'fake' pilots' licences and it would review the ban after an audit but added that its officials could not visit Pakistan because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Taking advantage of ban

The EASA ban is not only causing a huge financial loss to PIA, it is also giving an opportunity to foreign airlines to expand their operations.

Earlier this month, British airline Virgin Atlantic launched its direct flight operations for Islamabad and Lahore while British Airways had already expanded its operations from Islamabad to Lahore.

EASA had in July suspended the authorisation for PIA to operate flights in the EU member states for six months due to safety concerns after the aviation minister, while making public the preliminary report of the May 22 air crash, told parliament that 262 Pakistani pilots possessed dubious licences.

The curbs were extended later as EASA was not fully satisfied by the measures taken to improve the process of issuing the licences as well as other safety matters.

The European agency had given PIA the right to appeal against its decision in two months but its Air Marshal Arshad Malik-led management decided not to lodge the appeal because of the visit of a team of International Air Transport Association's (IATA) Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) to assess the operational management and control systems of the airline.

The IOSA team visited the country in September and its focus was on PIA's flight operations and its passenger service, engineering, etc.

## **Emirates takes its newest A380 to London**

Emirates will deploy its latest flagship A380 aircraft featuring new premium economy seats and other enhancements across all cabins to London Heathrow.

Starting from 4th January, passengers flying between Dubai and London Heathrow can experience Emirates' latest A380. Operating as EK003/004, the aircraft is scheduled to depart Dubai daily at 14:30hrs, arriving at 18:20hrs in London Heathrow. The return flight departs London at 20:20hrs and arrives in Dubai the next day at 07:20hrs. All timings local.

Emirates recently unveiled its latest A380 with brand new premium economy seats that offer a generous seat pitch of up to 40 inches, in addition to new economy class seats similar to those installed on its latest Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, enhancements to its popular A380 First and Business Class including its signature Shower Spa and Onboard Lounge, and refreshed colours and fittings across all cabins.

Until more Premium Economy seats enter its inventory, the airline intends to offer these as spot upgrades for its valued customers on a discretionary basis. All other signature Emirates A380 First, Business and Economy cabins are available for reservation on emirates.com or via travel agents.

The airline has safely and gradually restored its network over the past months, bringing back signature experiences onboard and on the ground with comprehensive measures in place for the health and safety of its customers and employees.

Emirates currently serves London Heathrow with five daily flights of which four are operated with an A380. The airline also operates 10 flights a week to Manchester and daily flights to both Birmingham and Glasgow.

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## Gen Bajwa appreciates ASF's role in aviation security

Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff (COAS), appreciated the role of the Airport Security Force in aviation security and hoped that the new entrants, including women, would further strengthen the ASF.

He was speaking at the 48th Basic Aviation Security Course passing out parade held at Airport Security Force Academy here. A large number of serving and retired officials and families of passing-out trainees witnessed the parade.

The COAS said that training of ASF trainees would enhance the standards of aviation security in Pakistan. He expressed satisfaction with the training and performance of the ASF trainees and also appreciated participation of women in the force. He congratulated the trainees and their families and gave away prizes to position-holders.

Earlier on arrival, the COAS was received by Maj-Gen Zafar UI Haq, director general of ASF at the academy.

Later, the COAS visited the Pakistan Rangers Sindh headquarters, where he was received by Maj-Gen Omer Ahmed Bokhari.

During interaction, the COAS appreciated the contributions of the Rangers in maintaining peace and stability in Karachi and paid homage to their sacrifices.

He also laid a wreath on Yadgar-i-Shuhuda, says an ISPR press release.

## Air force inducts 14 locally-built JF-

Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) formally handed over 14 state-of-the-art indigenously developed fourth generation JF-17 Thunder Block-III dual carrier fighter jets equipped with a long-range superior radar system and advance firing capability to Pakistan Air Force (PAF) at a simple ceremony on Wednesday 30 Dec.

Terming the aircraft's inclusion in the national fleet a 'significant milestone' in the country's history, Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan said JF-17 Thunder was proved a battle-tested aircraft during the successful expression of mastery in Operation Swift Retort against Indian Air Force's violation of territorial sovereignty on Feb 27, 2019.

While addressing the handing over ceremony at the PAC Kamra, the air chief commended completion of the project in time by the Aircraft Manufacturing Factory (AMF) team of the PAC involved in the development of the advance generation of the JF-17B Thunder Block-III jets version.

Air Marshal Anwar proudly said that PAC Kamra upheld its traditions despite the most challenging times of the pandemic. "I would like to commend the entire team and PAC leadership, including PAC chairman and AMF managing director, for their concerted efforts to meet the project deadlines."

The PAC, he said, was the backbone of PAF's operational readiness and had displayed its capabilities to meet the challenges with limited resources at the optimum level.

The air chief also extended his gratitude to the Ministry of Defence Production and Chinese Aviation Industry

for their continuous support. JF-17B and Block-III production was a significant achievement as it would play an important role in geostrategic milieu due to the technology installed in the modern aircraft.

He mentioned that the project's completion was not possible without the assistance of Chinese experts, engineers and technicians. This project had further solidified Pak-China friendship and bilateral defence ties, he said.

Air Marshal Anwar also acknowledged the role of media for highlighting Pak-China friendship and collaboration under China Pakistan Economic Corridor and JF-17B Thunder production. He urged the media to further promote the Pak-China ties and collaboration in a positive manner.

He said PAF had demonstrated its capabilities time and again and was ever ready to thwart any aggression of the enemy with a crushing response.

PAC Chairman Air Marshal Syed Nauman Ali briefed the participants over the project details and highlighted that JF-17 Thunder would be the shining symbol of cooperation between the two neighbouring countries.

Despite many odds due to coronavirus-related lockdown in PAC, the technicians and experts completed the project in due time with the extraordinary support of the Chinese experts for meeting the programme targets.

Air Marshal Ali resolved that PAC would stand committed to fulfill the sacred duty of augmenting fighting force and strength to defend the country's aerial sovereignty.

Speaking on the occasion, Chinese Ambassador Nong Rong said PAC's successful acquiring of the capacity to build JF-17B Thunder Block-III aircraft set up a perfect model of Pak-China friendship. "Pakistan has become self-sufficient in developing JF-17 Thunder and an advance fighter aircraft producing country in the world. JF-17 Thunder has finally become the backbone of Pakistan's defence," he remarked.

He expressed the hope that it would further strengthen defence ties between Pakistan and China. Close collaboration between both countries would bring more success, he said.

The Chinese aviation industry representatives also addressed the ceremony via video messages and the air chief visited the facility where he observed the newly built aircraft whereas PAC school children presented a national song.



PERSONNEL of the Pakistan Air Force stand in a row near the 14 dual-seat JF-17B multi-role aircraft rolled out at a ceremony on Wednesday Dec.30 at the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex in Kamra.



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## Airbus-Boeing spat hits new heights at year end



Gulf Air Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft makes a fly-by as Emirates Airlines Airbus A380-800 plane is seen during the Bahrain International Air Show 2018.

A long-running US-EU aircraft trade dispute flew to new heights as the year drew to a close, as Washington hit France and Germany with new punitive import tariffs.

It was the latest retaliation in the 16-year-old conflict over government subsidies for competing aircraft manufacturers Airbus and Boeing, and defies recent statements that the sides were close to reaching a final truce.

The US Trade Representative (USTR) recently announced new tariffs on aircraft parts, wine, cognac and brandies from France and Germany, adding those to a long list of products from EU countries that have been subject to 25 percent duties since 2019.

The USTR said the move was in retaliation for tariffs the European Union imposed in November which it considers unjustified and calculated unfairly.

The latest twist in the battle over aircraft subsidies that turned increasingly sour under the protectionist instincts of US President Donald Trump comes despite hopes for a trade truce once President-elect Joe Biden takes office January 20.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has given the go ahead for Brussels and Washington to impose the retaliatory duties in separate but related cases over subsidies granted to Boeing and Airbus.

After a WTO ruling in October, the EU last month levied additional customs duties on \$4 billion worth of American products including Boeing planes but also farm produce, such as wheat and tobacco, plus strong alcohol and chocolate.

But Washington said the EU calculated the amount using pandemic-ravaged trade data, which meant a much wider array of American goods were targeted.

“In implementing its tariffs... the EU used trade data from a period in which trade volumes had been drastically

reduced due to the horrific effects on the global economy from the Covid-19 virus,” the USTR said.

“The result of this choice was that Europe imposed tariffs on substantially more products than would have been covered if it had utilised a normal period.” As a result the US “is forced to change its reference period to the same period used by the European Union,” the statement said.

At the time the tariffs were announced, USTR complained the move was unjustified since the subsidies provided to Boeing by the state of Washington had long since been revoked, but did not raise the calculation issue in the public statement.

But the statement said “the United States explained to the EU the distortive effect of its selected time period, the EU refused to change its approach.” However, USTR said that “in order to not escalate the situation, the United States is adjusting the product coverage by less than the full amount that would be justified utilizing the EU's chosen time period.” The US also deplored an EU decision to exclude the UK from its calculations, which it argued unfairly increased the tariffs.

As usual in the trans-Atlantic dispute, each side blames the other for the escalation.

Hope for a truce Brussels complained that Washington had “unilaterally” disrupted ongoing talks and said it would seek a solution to the row with the incoming administration, which takes office on January 20.

The European Commission said it “regrets that the United States has chosen to add further EU products to its retaliation list in the WTO Airbus case on aircraft subsidies.”

“The EU will engage with the new US Administration at the earliest possible moment to continue these negotiations and find a lasting solution to the dispute,” it said.

The feud over European aircraft manufacturer Airbus and its American competitor Boeing is the longest and most complicated ever handled by the WTO.

The aviation feud predates Trump, but Washington quickly embraced the opportunity to impose tariffs on in European goods after the WTO last year authorized duties on a record \$7.5 billion in goods.

Washington imposed punitive tariffs of 25 percent on iconic EU products such as wine, cheese and olive oil and put a 15 percent tariff on Airbus planes in March.

## EgyptAir and Gulf Air expand codeshare agreement



Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and EgyptAir, the national airline of Egypt, announced the expansion of their codeshare partnership, bringing more travel opportunities for their customers.

Building upon the success of their existing codeshare relationship, Gulf Air will be adding its 'GF' code on EgyptAir's flights to Aswan, Asyut, Hurghada, Luxor and Sharmel-Sheikh. This expansion further enhances seamless travel options for Gulf Air and EgyptAir passengers including thru-check-in.

This cooperation also supports the strengthening of commercial cooperation between the two airlines.

Captain Waleed A. Hameed AlAlawi, Gulf Air's Acting Chief Executive Officer, said:

“This is a welcoming and positive announcement for Gulf Air, EgyptAir and our customers, given the current challenging industry climate. Customers of both airlines have more options to fly and feel reassured with all the extra health and safety measures in place to ensure a safe journey. The relationship between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt has always been strong and we feel proud to be working closely with our friends in EgyptAir. I look forward to seeing this partnership grow.”

Captain Roshdy Zakaria, EgyptAir Chief Executive Officer, said:

“The current situation requires all partners to enhance their cooperation ties and to exert many efforts in serving their loyal customers. From this view, EgyptAir and Gulf Air have worked on enhancing their partnership by offering EgyptAir domestic destinations to Gulf Air customers who will enjoy the utmost levels of hospitality and health procedures onboard our flights.”



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## SIAL provides best facilities to the airlines and passengers



Mian Naeem Javed Chairman SIAL

Chairman SIAL Mian Naeem Javed has said that the management of Sialkot International Airport has taken full care of the needs and regulations of its passengers and airlines during the Corona epidemic and has taken all possible steps for them. We are now fully prepared to provide better facilities to passengers on flights that cannot land at other airports during fog season. He expressed these views while talking to representatives of airlines at the SIAL Secretariat. Vice Chairman Chaudhry Muhammad Afzal Shaheen, Airport Manager Nisar Ahmed and other officials were also present. Chairman SIAL Mian Naeem Javed said that due to the location of Sialkot Airport between Lahore and Islamabad and the proximity of Sialkot to Lahore Motorway and the cheap fares of many

airlines coming here, passengers from Lahore and remote areas already choose their journey from Sialkot Airport but now due to fog flights that cannot land at Lahore or Islamabad Airport, land at Sialkot Airport, so their passengers have to be taken to their respective airports. There is a responsibility of SIAL management that helps them and make every effort to make it easier for them. He said that the SIAL management was campaigning with different airlines to sign memorandum of understanding as an alternative airport so that their flights may land at Sialkot Airport at any time. Chairman SIAL Mian Naeem Javed said that they are trying to provide the best possible facilities to all the airlines and their passengers. He also thanked the representatives of all the airlines for their exemplary cooperation in this difficult situation and appreciated their services.



Vice Chairman SIAL Ch. M. Afzal Shaheen presenting a shield to Mr. Umar Farooq co-ordinator CM Punjab for party Affairs at SIAL

## SIAL delegation fetes Chairman TZA

Newly elected Chairman Sialkot Tannery Zone Association Chaudhry Raza Munir has said that the Tannery Zone project launched by the business community of Sialkot for the development and improvement of leather industry will prove to be a good omen for Sialkot and Pakistan. It will have far-reaching effects on the country's economy. He expressed these views while talking to a delegation led by Vice Chairman SIAL Chaudhry Muhammad Afzal Shaheen to meet him and congratulate him on his election as Chairman Tannery Zone Association. The delegation also included former chairman SIAL Mohammad Ashfaq Chaudhry, former vice chairman Naeem Yousuf, director SIAL Mohammad Javed Chaudhry, Mian Atiq-ur-Rehman and Faraz Akram Awan.

Chairman Sialkot Tannery Zone Association Chaudhry Raza Munir said that the business community of Sialkot has succeeded in establishing a dry port, Sialkot Airport and its own airline as part of the ongoing service to the people of Sialkot and Pakistan. At the same time, work is underway on a tannery zone project to eliminate environmental pollution from Sialkot city. Soon after the completion of this project, all the tanneries from Sialkot city will start shifting to Sialkot tannery zone, which on the one hand will eliminate environmental pollution due to the dismantling of scattered leather factories and units in Sialkot city. However, the diseases caused by them will decrease rapidly.

The production of international quality leather in the tannery zone will also enhance the quality of its products. Higher exports will also boost the country's foreign exchange. Chaudhry Raza Munir thanked the delegation for visiting his residence and assured them of his full cooperation.



Vice Chairman SIAL Muhammad Afzal Shaheen Chaudhry (4-R) presenting a bouquet to Raza Munir new chairman Tannery Zone Association while former chairman SIAL Muhammad Ashfaq Chaudhry, former vice chairman Naeem Yousuf, director SIAL Muhammad Javed Chaudhry, Mian Atiq-ur-Rehman and others are also present on the occasion.

# Glimpses of AirSial 1st flight from Karachi to Islamabad Karachi



Mr. Tariq Amin COO AirSial cutting cake at Jinnah International Airport to inaugurate the AirSial flight from Karachi to Islamabad.



Mr. Tariq Amin with AirSial staff at Islamabad International Airport on the occasion of departure the 1st flight of AirSial from Islamabad to Karachi,



Mr. A. S. Azad Editor Flyer International with Mr. Tariq Amin COO AirSial on board the inaugural flight of Air Sial.



An interior view of AirSial Airbus A320.



## AirSial celebrates 1st flight from Sialkot to Karachi



Mr. Ameen Ahsan, CEO AirSial, Mr. Afzal Shaheen Vice Chairman SIAL, Mr. Babar Iqbal CEO SIAL, Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman AirSial Mr. Qaisar Iqbal Baryar President SCCI and Mr. M. Umer Mir, Vice Chairman AirSial cutting the cake on the occasion of 1st flight from Sialkot to Karachi.



Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman AirSial addressing the guests at a ceremony held at Ramada Plaza Hotel Karachi on the occasion of 1st flight from Sialkot to Karachi.



Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman along with Mr. Ameen Ahsan CEO, Mr. M. Umer Mir Vice Chairman and Mr. Tariq Amin COO AirSial presenting a souvenir to the guest of honour.



Mian Naeem Javed Chairman SIAL Dr. Mian Azhar, Dr. Muhammad Akram, Mr. M. Afzal Shaheen Vice Chairman SIAL and Mr. A. S. Azad Editor Flyer International.





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# Human Rights: 'Lebensraum of Cashmere'

Professor Safdar Sandal



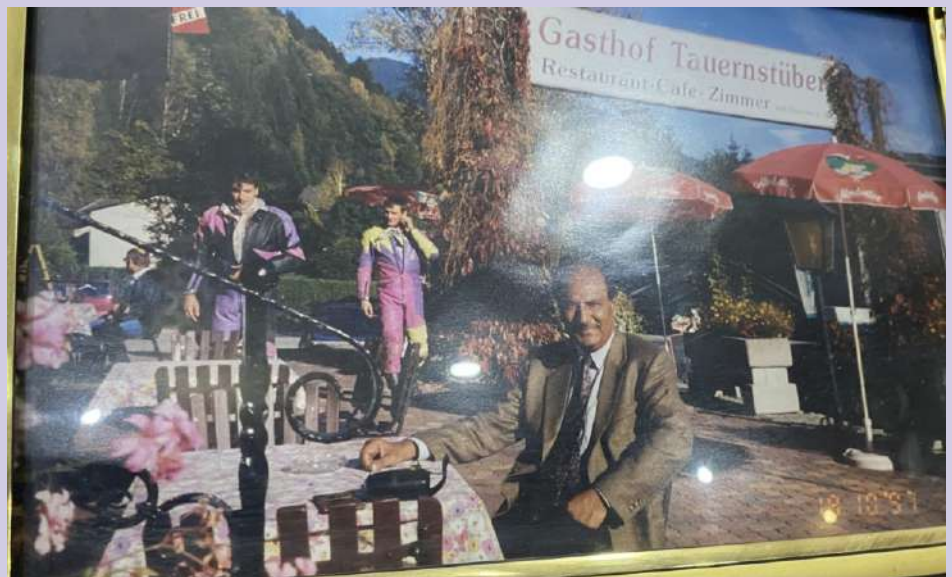
The writer

**T**oday, when I write this article, it is the middle of the 'International Human Rights Day' (year 2020) and also amidst an unprecedented in Human History of violations, trampling down of Human Rights in India. The readers will automatically feel and refer it, to the treatment meted out to the people of Kashmir, Muslims, Christians and Dalits (and other low castes of Hindus) as widely acknowledged by the world opinion.

To be more contentious, I wish to lament over, that in Indian held Kashmir, the Modi government unilaterally lifted the special status of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019, and sent an additional force of 35,000 soldiers to the already well-armed area. Instead of letting Parliament to vote on it, he had his decision to delete two relevant articles in the Indian constitution enforced by President Ram Nath Kovind. The announcement put senior politicians in Kashmir under house arrest, closed schools and shops and curfew imposed on

the entire population. In addition, all lines were cut telephone, Cell-phone network, Internet, television and radio, were no longer working. Despite these bans, there were protests and riots in the valley. The Government of Jammu and Kashmir called on pilgrims and holiday makers to leave the region. Pakistan responded by announcing the expulsion of the Indian Ambassador, limiting diplomatic relations with India and calling on the International Court of Justice. It was not only a violation of the Indian Constitution itself but also a clear abuse of the resolutions passed by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and a devastation of Human Rights - structure. Kashmir had been defined as a disputed territory. The Indian National Congress plans to appeal to the Constitutional Court of India, over this unconstitutional act of the BJP. Article 35A was designed and integrated in

organization RSS, has caused Articles 370 and 35A to be repealed. The RSS, which inspired the Norwegian white supremacist Andreas Breiivik, among numerous other anti-Islamic events in democratic Europe, for his attack in Norway-he killed 77 people in 2011. BJP admired in his manifesto, the transformation of society in India into a purely Hindu one. The RSS was founded in 1925 as a paramilitary organization at a time when Hitler published his book "Mein Kampf". With attacks on Muslims and under the influence of National Socialism, 'RSS' had developed into a hardliner - fascist organization and 'BJP' being its offspring, unlawfully deleted the Article 370 from the Indian Constitution, which had given Indian-occupied Kashmir a special and autonomous status. Pakistan which also claims the region, based on rules of conduct set at the time of Partition, condemned the move as haughty, one sided and thus



1954 as a presidential decree to empower the state law to define permanent residents of the state and their special rights and privileges; Indian nationals from other states could not acquire land or property in J&K, take up work or take advantage of other government benefits such as higher education and health care.

'BJP' - the political arm of the Hindu terrorist

unconstitutional and contrary to the UN resolutions. As a party to this international conflict, Pakistan has the right to use all possible options to counter these illegal steps, claimed the 'Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs'.

Before proceeding further on the matter and quite relevantly; I like to state some personal experiences and complaints over religious intolerance existing worldwide. During my numerous trips of Europe and lastly in April 2019 (Covids have stopped further trips meanwhile), I was leisurely walking in the beautiful 'walking street' (Schiller Strasse) of the most advanced city Munich of a civilized country, Germany. Nearly in the middle of the street in a square was formed a stage and on it stood nearly a dozen people (probably clergy). One of them was delivering a speech criticizing and desecrating 'Quran' by



(Members of happy Pakistani Christian community in a rally, celebrating the dawn of Christmas 2020)

holding the Holy Book in his hand and obviously insulting it, in German language. Despite having a little knowledge but not mastery over German language, I did understand as to what he meant. I dared ask a man standing next to me, as to what the speaker with the mike was saying. The good German fellow replied to me; 'forget him', but to be honest, I was badly hurt. After that I strolled my way. There were about 50-60 people listening to the speech unintentionally. I do not call it (being a student of Political Science) a 'Freedom of Speech' which hurts the sentiments and beliefs of other people.

On another occasion in (Tyrol) Austria, I was sitting in the lawns of the hotel where I was staying; a bearded man approached me and he started to convince me to become a Christian. I was dumbfounded at his attempt. It was unbecoming of the hotel management to have allowed such people an entry in the hotel premises and make the guests feel uncomfortable, about which I protested to them later. A similar attempt was faced by me in my apartment in Gothenburg (Sweden), a couple of years ago, which too was despised by me, despite the fact that I have an open heart. But I believe in firm personal freedom and do not like to be disturbed by others especially when they are un-invited, unexpected and naturally not welcome. I wonder how such people are let loose. I feel happy that in a Muslim society to which I belong to, nobody ever dares or likes to insult any holy books like Bible, Torah, Gita or The Vedas etc. To do so, is punishable under law. In my country the Christians and other religionist live together and enjoy complete freedom and harmony. Criticism of other religious faiths is not done by the people by habit and it has also strictly been forbidden in Islam. It is definitely a better and civilized way of life.

I come back to my preceding paragraph. Pakistan which also claims the region (Kashmir) condemned the Indian move as 'illegal'. The "Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs" warned India of any 'unilateral steps' to change the internationally committed status of Kashmir. "As a party to this conflict, Pakistan will use all possible options of counter these illegal steps", stated the ministry of foreign affairs in Islamabad.

Modi employing Hitler's "Lebensraum" policy, wishes to occupy any land around his country in pursuit of his Hindutva ideology which he believes to apply for the whole of the sub-continent India, to be Hindu only, as Adolf Hitler had a firm faith in the superiority of German race and inferiority of other races. That mentality caused the World War II, in which 75 million people were killed.

In 1947, Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdullah who did not accede to Pakistan and preferred for an 'Independent Kashmir' (or a plebiscite for it to decide its future), despite the fact that the state was to be completely land-locked and encompassed by warring countries, India, Pakistan and China (now all three are nuclear powers) was easily duped by Nehru to side with him which he did at the cost of his own people. The decades that followed took a gruesome posture for Kashmiris with 'inhuman abuses' being

committed on them incessantly. It seems improbable that the position could be corrected in the near future :a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since 1947-48. Three wars have resulted so far and a million people have died on both sides of the Line of Control. After all, they do say: "fool me once shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me". Who will solve the dilemma? I apprehend if I can see it done, in my lifetime!!

*Prof. Safdar Sandal  
A business - analyst  
Director - 'Sialkot International Airport*

## Long-awaited bridge over Chenab links SIAL, finally functional

The much-awaited mega project of Shahbazpur bridge over Chenab river connecting Gujrat with Sialkot international airport and Sialkot-Lahore motorway (M11), has finally been completed after construction of an eight-kilometre long road on Sialkot side of the bridge.

The route has now become formally functional for the motorists who have started travelling towards Sialkot and Lahore from Gujrat side for the last more than a week. However, final touches are being given to the project through construction of shoulders on both sides of the newly- built road on Sialkot side as 11-kilometre long road and a bridge over stormwater channel on Gujrat side had already been completed.

In the absence of yellow and white lanes as well as the cat's eyes along the road shoulders, the driving on this road can be dangerous for the motorists as drivers usually drive fast on this newly-constructed road which has resulted in several road accidents during the last one week or so, said Osama Iqbal who daily commutes to Sambrial tehsil of Sialkot from a village of Gujrat by his car.

He said his vehicle had also been hit by a speeding car whereas several other incidents had also been reported in the dangerous zone.

A resident of Jalalpur Jattan Town that close to the Shahbazpur bridge said the vehicle of his father had fallen into a roadside ditch recently due to dense fog. He told media that had there been light installed along the route or at least there were cat's eyes and yellow lanes on the road, the risk to travel on the road could be minimised.

He demanded the provision of safety measures along the route such as lights,

speed checking by the traffic police as well as patrolling of police on both sides of the bridge particularly after evening to make the travel smooth on the route. However, Gujrat police have already established a small picket at the start of bridge by putting barriers whereas Punjab patrol police also have its formal check post around 10 kilometres into the Sialkot side near Bangla Chowk from the bridge but patrolling mechanism has not yet been activated within 20 kilometres of both sides of bridge.

Though the project of Shahbazpur bridge had been approved by the PML-Q's Punjab government in 2006-07, the PML-N government had changed its location and site plan due to some technical issues.

Later, the then Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif had allocated a huge sum of Rs 5.2 billion for the project in 2015-16 when the execution of project was started by the contractor firm National Logistic Cell (NLC) that had completed 90pc of the work until April 2018 however the completion of project was delayed for at least 32 months due to paucity of funds.

The Punjab government released Rs272.8 million in the budget of current fiscal year after which the project is now being given final touches.

Official sources said Chief Minister Usman Buzdar is likely to inaugurate the project within the current month.





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## EU states ban flights as Britain says new virus strain is 'out of control'

European countries banned flights from the UK recently and the WHO called for stronger containment measures as the British government warned that a highly infectious new strain of the virus was "out of control".

As the World Health Organisation urged its European members to strengthen measures against a new variant of Covid-19 circulating in Britain, European nations including Germany, Ireland, Italy, Austria, Romania, The Netherlands and Belgium said they were moving to block air travel.

A German government source said the restriction could be adopted by the entire 27-member European Union and that countries were also discussing a joint response over sea, road and rail links with Britain.

Rome and Berlin said they would both be suspending flights to and from Britain from midnight.

The Netherlands imposed a ban on UK flights and Belgium said it would follow suit from midnight with a ban on planes and trains from the UK.

Alarm bells were ringing across Europe which last week became the first region in the world to pass 500,000 deaths from Covid-19 since the pandemic broke out a year ago after it appeared that a new, even more infectious strain of the virus was raging in parts of Britain.

Austria's health ministry told the APA news agency that it would also impose a flight ban, the details of which were still being worked out.

A spokeswoman for WHO Europe said that "across Europe, where transmission is intense and widespread, countries need to redouble their control and prevention approaches." Romania also said it banned all flights to and from the UK for two weeks.

French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel held a conference call on Sunday about the matter, according to the Elysee palace in Paris.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the infectiousness of the new strain had forced his hand into imposing a lockdown across much of England over the Christmas period.

"Unfortunately the new strain was out of control. We have got to get it under control," UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock told Sky News after Johnson U-

turned on his previously stated policy of easing containment measures over the festive season.

Scientists first discovered the new variant which they believe is 70 percent

more transmissible in a patient in September. And Public Health England notified the government when modelling revealed the full seriousness of the new strain.



[Clockwise] A passenger walks at Rome's Fiumicino airport after the Italian government announced the suspension of all flights to and from Britain over fears of a new strain of the coronavirus. An international high-speed Eurostar train is seen at London's St Pancras railway station after European countries banned flights coming from the United Kingdom. A sign on the door of a shop on London's Oxford Street notifies customers that it has had to close because of the latest coronavirus restrictions.

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## New year brings final separation between Britain and EU

Like a separated couple still living together, Britain and the European Union spent 2020 wrangling and wondering whether they can remain friends.

After more than four years of Brexit political drama, the event itself is something of an anticlimax. Lockdown measures in Britain to curb the coronavirus have curtailed mass gatherings to celebrate or mourn the moment, though Parliament's huge Big Ben bell sounded the hour as it prepares to ring in the new year.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, for whom represents the fulfilment of his promise to get Brexit done, said the day marks a new beginning in history and a new relationship with the EU as the biggest ally.

"This moment is finally upon us and now is the time to seize it," he said after Parliament approved a UK-EU trade deal overnight, the final formal hurdle on the UK side before departure.

It has been four years since Britain voted in a referendum to leave the bloc it had joined in 1973. The UK left the EU's political structures on Jan 31, 2020, but the repercussions of that decision have yet to be felt, since the economic relationship with the bloc remained unchanged during an 11-month transition period that ended on Thursday.

Now Britain has left the EU's vast single market and customs union, the biggest single economic change the country has experienced since World War II.

A free trade agreement sealed on Christmas eve after months of tense negotiations will ensure Britain and the 27-nation EU can continue to trade in goods without tariffs or quotas. That should help protect the 660 billion pounds (\$894 billion) in annual trade between the two sides, and the hundreds of thousands of jobs that rely on it.

But firms face sheaves of new paperwork and expenses. Traders are struggling to digest the new rules imposed by a 1,200-page deal that was agreed just a week before the changes take place.

The English Channel port of Dover and the Eurotunnel passenger and freight route are bracing for delays, though the pandemic and the holiday weekend mean there will be less cross-Channel traffic than usual. The vital supply route was snarled for days after France closed its border to UK truckers for 48 hours last

week in response to a fast-spreading variant of the virus identified in England.

The British government insisted that the border systems and infrastructure we need are in place, and we are ready for the new start.

But freight companies are holding their breath. U.K. haulage firm Youngs

Transportation is suspending services to the EU.

"We figure it gives the country a week or so to get used to all of these new systems in and out and we can have a look and hopefully resolve any issues in advance of actually sending our trucks," said Young's director Rob Hollyman.

## France threatens veto as 'difficult' Brexit talks drag on

European doubts over a post-Brexit trade deal with Britain boiled over with France threatening a veto as tricky negotiations entered what could be their final hours.

As night fell in London, France threatens veto as 'difficult' Brexit talks drag on. EU and UK negotiators Michel Barnier and David Frost were locked in last-minute debates over fishing rights, fair trade rules and an enforcement mechanism to govern any deal.

But, with time running out for the accord to be ratified before the end of the year and ahead of Britain's departure from the EU single market, EU capitals are getting cold feet.

"If there's a deal that isn't a good one, we'd oppose it," France's minister for European affairs Clement Beaune told Europe 1 radio, adding that "every country has the right to veto".

A European diplomat said that Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Denmark share France's concerns that in the rush to conclude a deal, Barnier will give too much ground on rules to maintain fair competition.

Britain's nearest neighbours suspect Germany and the European Commission are too keen to agree a deal to avoid damaging economic fallout.

"We don't want to lock in an unbalanced relationship for decades to come," the diplomat said.

"We are not going to want to explain to our companies why they are being undercut in their market by enterprising British corporates in a less regulated environment." Germany currently holds the EU's rotating presidency and is also the bloc's biggest economy and most influential member.

Asked about the state of the talks, Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman said Europe "is ready to reach an agreement with Great Britain, but not at any price".

"It's clear that there are red lines, yet there is always room for compromise," Steffen Seibert told reporters.

Thus far, the capitals have remained united behind Barnier, who has been battling Frost as UK Prime Minister Boris



Michel Barnier (centre), the European Commission's representative in negotiations with the United Kingdom, arrives with his team at the conference venue.

Johnson faces his own choice about whether to compromise.

"Time is in very short supply. We are at a difficult point in the talks," Johnson's official spokesman told reporters.

"What is certain is that we will not be able to agree a deal that does not respect our fundamental principles on sovereignty and taking back control." A European source with knowledge of the talks said reports of an imminent conclusion to the eight months of wrangling were "premature", suggesting big differences remained.

British officials have complained that the EU has made new demands late in the process that London sets up an independent body to regulate state subsidies. Downing Street insisted anew that its red lines will apply once Britain leaves a post-Brexit transition period on December 31: controlling UK borders, regulating its own state subsidies and managing its fishing waters.

The European Parliament has warned that it will need to see the text within days if it is to properly examine it in time to enact it by the end of the year.

And European leaders will now want to see what Barnier is planning at their summit on December 10.

But the host of next week's summit, European Council president Charles Michel, hailed Barnier's work and urged unity "until the last minute, the last second of the procedure".

Some diplomats suggest that EU capitals could allow Britain to crash out of the single market without a deal in January and then return to new trade talks later in 2021.

## Divided United Kingdom casts off into the Brexit unknown



**FOLKESTONE (United Kingdom):** Lorries are being loaded inside a train bound for Europe at the Eurotunnel.

The United Kingdom began the New Year outside the European Union's orbit recently after ending a tempestuous 48-year liaison with the European project, its most significant geopolitical shift since the loss of empire.

Brexit took effect in substance at the strike of midnight in Brussels, or 2300 London time (GMT), at the end of a transition period that largely maintained the status quo for 11 months after Britain formally left the EU on Jan 31, 2020.

"This is an amazing moment for this country," Prime Minister Boris Johnson, 56, said in his New Year's Eve message. "We have our freedom in our hands and it is up to us to make the most of it." For five years, the frenzied gyrations of the Brexit crisis dominated European affairs, buffeted the sterling markets and tarnished the United Kingdom's reputation as a reliable pillar of Western stability.

Supporters cast Brexit as the dawn of a newly independent "global Britain", but the drama has weakened the bonds that bind England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

After all the vitriol, one of the most significant events in European history since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 passed with little fanfare: the United Kingdom slipped away, shrouded in the silence of the Covid-19 crisis.

With gatherings banned in London and most of the country due to soaring rates of infection, there were few outward displays of emotion when the Great Bell known as Big Ben tolled 11 through a scaffold.

As EU leaders and citizens bade farewell, Johnson said there would be no bonfire of regulations to build a "bargain basement Dickensian Britain" and that the

country would remain the "quintessential European civilisation".

But Johnson, the face of the Brexit campaign, has been short on detail about what he wants to build with Britain's "independence" or how to do it while borrowing record amounts to pay for the Covid-19 crisis.

His 80-year-old father, Stanley Johnson, who had voted for Britain to remain in the bloc, said he was applying for a French passport, which would give him rights and freedoms in Europe now inaccessible to most Britons.

In the June 23, 2016, referendum, 17.4 million voters, or 52pc, backed Brexit while 16.1 million, or 48pc, backed staying in the bloc. Few have changed their minds since. England and Wales voted out but Scotland and Northern Ireland voted in.

"Scotland will be back soon, Europe. Keep the light on," Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said.

The referendum revealed a United Kingdom polarised about much more than the European Union, and fuelled soul searching about everything from secession and immigration to capitalism, the legacy of empire and what it now means to be British.

Leaving was once the far-fetched dream of a motley crew of eurosceptics on the fringes of British politics: the UK joined in 1973 as the sick man of Europe. Two decades ago British leaders were arguing whether to join the euro. They never did.

But the turmoil of the euro zone crisis, attempts to integrate the EU further, fears about mass immigration and discontent with leaders in London helped Brexiteers win the referendum with a message of patriotic, if vague, hope.

"We see a global future for ourselves," said Johnson who won power in 2019 and, against the odds, clinched a Brexit divorce treaty and a trade deal, as well as the biggest Conservative parliamentary majority since Margaret Thatcher.

## UK, EU reach post-Brexit trade agreement

Just a week before the deadline, Britain and the European Union struck a free-trade deal recently that should avert economic chaos on new year's day and bring a measure of certainty for businesses after years of Brexit turmoil.

Once ratified by both sides, the agreement will ensure Britain and the 27-



**EUROPEAN Union's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier talks to European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen following their statement on the outcome of the Brexit negotiations in Brussels recently. [Right] Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson leaves after holding a remote press conference to update the nation on the post-Brexit trade agreement, inside 10 Downing Street in London. Britain said an agreement had been secured on the country's future relationship with the EU.**

nation bloc can continue to trade in goods without tariffs or quotas after the UK breaks fully free of the EU on Jan 1.

Relief was palpable all around that nine months of tense and often testy negotiations had finally produced a positive result.

The Christmas eve breakthrough was doubly welcome amid a coronavirus pandemic that has left some 70,000 people in Britain dead and led the country's neighbours to shut their borders to the UK over a new and seemingly more contagious variant of the virus spreading in England.

"We have taken back control of our laws and our destiny," declared British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who posted a picture of himself on social media, beaming with thumbs up.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said it was a long and winding road, but "we have got a good deal to show for it".

She added: "It is fair, it is a balanced deal, and it is the right and responsible thing to do for both sides."

The 27 EU countries and the British and European parliaments still need to vote on the agreement, though action by the European body may not happen until after the Jan 1 breakup. Britain's parliament is set to vote on Dec 30.

France, long seen as Britain's toughest obstacle to a deal, said the uncanny steadfastness among the 27 nations with widely varying interests was a triumph in itself.

"European unity and firmness paid off," French President Emmanuel Macron said in a statement.

And German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that unity will now probably result in all the EU nations backing the deal: "I am very optimistic that we can present a good result here."

It has been over four years since Britons voted 52% to 48% to leave the EU and in the words of the Brexiteers campaign slogan take back control of the UK's borders and laws.

## Textile exports rise 5pc

Pakistan's textile and clothing exports grew by 4.88 per cent year-on-year to \$6.04 billion between July to November FY21 compared to \$5.76bn in the same period last year, data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) showed.

In November, export proceeds were up by 9.27pc from a year ago. In October, export proceeds were up by 6.18pc and in September, they grew by 11.03pc while a decline of 15pc was recorded in August.

In the first month of the current fiscal year, exports recorded a robust increase of 14.4pc on a year-on-year basis. The rebound in exports of textile and clothing is the outcome of a series of incentives to support exporters to meet the challenges in the wake of the pandemic and disruption in supplies.

The demand for country's exports had collapsed in months following March due to the Covid-19 pandemic, while there has been a gradual improvement since June from international buyers.

Adviser to PM on Commerce in a tweet said that in November, the exports of cotton yarn declined by 25pc, raw leather by 21pc, and cotton fabric by 12.2pc. "This is an indication that exports of low value-added products are decreasing and we are moving towards more value-added exports", he said while adding that "I urge our exporters to keep pursuing this policy."

The PBS data showed that ready-made garment exports edged up by 4.36pc in value while plunging in quantity by 44.64pc during July to November this year from a year ago. Exports of knitwear increased by 14.34pc in value and 32.35pc in quantity; bedwear exports were up 12.28pc while dipped 7.95pc in quantity.

Towel exports went up 14.24pc in value and 3.79pc in quantity, whereas those of cotton cloth dipped 8.73pc and 31.78pc in quantity.

Among primary commodities, cotton yarn exports plunged by 37.34pc, yarn other than cotton by 16.69pc, made-up articles excluding towels was up 15.53pc and tents, canvas and tarpaulin increased by a massive 58.05pc during the months under review.

Textile machinery imports dropped by 6.07pc during the first five months of current fiscal year a sign that no expansion or modernisation projects were taken up by the industry in the given period.

Petroleum imports declined 22.78pc in the first five months (July-November) to \$3.94bn, compared to \$5.11bn over the last year, the PBS data showed.

Of these, petroleum product imports

were down 16.51pc in value in the first five months' despite increasing by 54.42pc in quantity. Similarly, import of crude oil dipped 27.01pc in value, but posted a growth of 14.78pc in quantity during the period under review while those of liquefied natural gas fell by 34.73pc in value. On the other hand, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) imports jumped 52.06pc in value in July-Nov, largely to plug a shortfall in local production.

Machinery imports went down 5.78pc to \$3.37bn in the first five months from \$3.58bn last year. The decline in imports was recorded in almost all kinds of machinery except power generating machinery, office machinery and mobile phones.

The power generating machinery imports went up 21.73pc in the first five months mainly due to revival of power projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and office machinery increased by 0.7pc during the months under review.

In the telecommunication sector, imports surged by 31.32pc on the back of mobile handsets arrivals which were up by 45.26pc. This was the result of a crackdown on smuggling and doing away with free imports in baggage schemes. Import of other apparatus fell by 6.39pc.

The overall transport group witnessed a growth of 13.92pc. This growth was mainly driven by an increase in imports of road motor vehicles (build unit, CKD/SKD) and CBU during the months under review.

An increase of 60.36pc was seen in imports of textile group raw cotton, synthetic and artificial silk yarn.

Overall food group import jumped by 44.53pc to \$3.01bn during the first five months this year as against \$2.08bn from a year ago. The government is importing wheat and sugar to bridge local shortages. The import of almost all essential food products milk, wheat, dry fruits, tea, spices, palm oil, soybean oil, pulses, sugar etc witnessed growth during the months under review.

**Exports jump 7.67pc to \$2.161bn**

Pakistan's exports grew for the third consecutive month in November to \$2.161 billion, up 7.67 per cent from \$2.007bn in the corresponding month last year, data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics showed recently.

The increase in exports is mainly driven by double-digit growth in proceeds

from textile and non-textile commodities. Meanwhile, during the month under review, imports also increased 7pc leading to a slight increase in trade deficit.

Data showed a significant growth has been seen in the exports of home textiles (20pc), pharmaceutical products (20pc), rice (14pc), surgical goods (11pc), stockings & socks (41pc), jerseys & pullovers (21pc), women's garments (11pc) and men's garments (4.3pc), as compared to Nov 2019.

Between July to November, exports slightly increased by 2.11pc to \$9.737bn, from \$9.536bn over the corresponding months of last year. Exports in the new fiscal year started on a positive note but witnessed a steep decline of 19pc in August before rebounding in September, October, and November.

To promote exports of textile products, the Ministry of Commerce released Rs1.78bn for the textiles sector under Drawback of Local Taxes and Levies (DLTL) scheme. "I hope this will resolve the liquidity issues of our exporters and enable them to enhance exports", said Adviser to PM on Commerce and Textile Razak Dawood.

He said the DLTL for non-textile sector are also being released shortly. Razak also disclosed that the export of animal casings from Pakistan to Japan has resumed after a ban of four years. "I commend the efforts made by our trade section in Tokyo. I advise our trade missions to actively engage with importers," he said.

"I urge exporters to take benefit of this opportunity and move full speed 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. On the other hand, imports also rose by 7.77pc in November to \$4.229bn, as against \$3.924bn over the corresponding month of last year. During 5MFY20, the overall import bill slightly increased by 1.29pc to \$19.422bn, up from \$19.175bn 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 further 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 went up by 7.88pc in November, mainly due to a growth in imports proceeds. In absolute terms, the trade gap stood at \$2.068bn, as compared to \$1.917bn over the corresponding month of last year.

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## Measures to boost mango exports



*The Ministry of Commerce in consultation with stakeholders has agreed to take several measures for promotion of mango exports.*

The Ministry of Commerce in consultation with stakeholders has agreed to take several measures for promotion of mango exports.

After extensive discussions at a virtual meeting held on Saturday Dec. 12 and chaired by Commerce Adviser Razak Dawood, it was agreed that the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) will examine all the legal issues for operationalising the already-imported Vapour Heat Treatment Plant, presently lying at the Expo Centre Karachi.

Pakistan Fruit & Vegetable Exporters, Importers & Merchants Association (PFVA) chairman Waheed Ahmad, farmers and exporters of mangoes also participated in the meeting.

It was also agreed that the ministry will focus on exploring new markets and obtain tariff concessions for the export of mangoes. Dawood advised the TDAP to double its efforts for marketing mangoes abroad.

It was decided that cold storage areas would be established at airport and shipping ports, besides the Ministry of Aviation and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will be approached for reserving a dedicated area for mango consignments. Also the CAA will be asked to install bigger scanners for consignments instead of loading and unloading small crates.

It was also agreed that the establishment of a Mango Development Council will be explored which will have representation from all stakeholders, including farmers, traders, cool chains representatives, research institutes, etc.

The meeting also discussed in detail all bottlenecks being faced by mango growers and exporters. The main issues identified were meeting the compliance requirements, high freight charges, lack of cold storage facilities at the airports, and

insufficient water/vapour treatment facilities.

After a brief presentation by the Agro Wing of Commerce Division, the participants noted that mangoes export

was maintaining a positive trajectory and the fruit now getting better prices as compared to previous years.

The export increased to \$104 million in 2019-20 from \$78m the previous year.

## Pakistan seeks data sharing pact with UAE to curb under invoicing



*Containers are stacked at the Jebel Ali port in Dubai.*

In what appears to be a last resort, Pakistan Customs has linked curbing the menace of under-invoicing by the country's importers to the inking of an Electronic Data Exchange (EDE) agreement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Over the past few years UAE ports have emerged as a leading source of under-invoicing for Pakistani importers who declare their products at lesser value there in order to reduce their tax payments. The issue of under-invoicing among others was raised at the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Policy Board meeting chaired by Finance Adviser Dr Hafeez Shaikh recently.

A well-placed source privy to the meeting told media that Indian goods are also being routed via UAE ports to Pakistan with change in origin. This is a major issue of concern for Pakistani authorities, the source added.

Pakistan has suspended its trade relation with India in reaction to India's decision to revoke Article 370 of its constitution that granted occupied Kashmir a special status in August 2019.

The FBR Policy Board was briefed over the steps so far taken to control the menace which also include Pakistan's request to the Emirati authorities for signing the agreement. "We have already requested the UAE authorities in this regard," the source said. However, no response was received so far, the source added.

Pakistan's commercial imports excluding oil from UAE stood at \$1.6 billion.

The source said Pakistan Customs has requested the Ministry of Finance to take up the issue diplomatically with the Gulf nation for signing of the EDE.

On the income tax side, the FBR has also approached the UAE finance ministry for provision of information on those Pakistanis who have sought iqama (work permit) under the residence by investment scheme in a bid to hide their illegal wealth.

According to the source, under-invoicing from China was minimised to an extent following the electronic exchange of date on import value between the two countries. As a result, the valuation tables of products were also updated.

The valuation tables and other measures will be completed by March 31, 2021, to control under-invoicing, the source said. The existing system will also be upgraded further while the Customs Department will also include Artificial Intelligence in the Customs clearance process by end June 2021, the source added.

An official statement issued after the meeting said that Member Customs Operations Tariq Huda made a detailed presentation on Customs Valuation (under-invoicing) and highlighted measures which would be taken to plug in gaps and enhance the department's revenues in future.

He informed the meeting that the FBR has issued Valuation Rulings and entered into EDE agreements with China, Iran, Afghanistan, etc to address the issue of under-invoicing of imports effectively. These agreements have yielded positive results, he claimed.

The finance adviser stressed the need to evaluate the clearance time with reference to the regional trading partners in order to make the FBR more competitive.

The policy board meeting was also attended by Minister for Privatisation Mohammad Soomro, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Revenue Dr Waqar Masood, Adviser to the PM on Institutional Reforms and Austerity Dr Ishrat Husain and Minister for Industries and Production Hammad Azhar.

## Sarghoda's citrus claim to fame

“You are entering the world's best citrus-producing regions,” boasts the signpost to every motorist on the motorway as they approach the Sarghoda district from Lahore or Islamabad side. Lying between rivers Chenab and Jhelum or Chejh doab, the district comprising 1.4 million acres produces more than 60 per cent of the total 2.1m tonnes citrus and is mostly known for the unique taste of its kinnow, a citrus variety.

Before the introduction of the canal system by the British, the district, then known as Shahpur, used to serve as pastures (Bars in the local diction). Sargodha, the current headquarters of the district, was founded in 1903 as the Lower Jhelum Canal colony along the railway track laid in the last decade of the 19th century.

With a population of around 4.9m in the district, Jatt is the major tribe whose sub-clans like Noons, Ranjhas, Pirachas, Cheemas, Gondals, Midhianas, Chatthas, Tiwanas and Luks are mostly engaged with farming. Cheemas, Chatthas and the like from Sialkot and Indian Punjab districts were incentivised by the English through the grant of large tracts of lands to migrate to Sargodha for cultivating barren lands at the inauguration of the canal system. There are also Rajputs, Araen and Kambohs but have mostly migrated after the Partition and inhabit urban centres.

Noons, Pirachas, Cheemas and Ranjhas are politically influential clans. Malik Feroze Khan Noon served as prime minister for a few months in the 1950s, while scions of Pirachas, Cheemas and Ranjhas have been serving in various federal and provincial cabinets. Rising from the 1979 non-party local body polls, late Malik Anwer Ali Cheema remained unbeaten in all National Assembly elections till his death before the 2018 polls.

The climate and soil texture is suitable for most kinds of Rabi and Kharif crops, fruits and vegetables. There is also a very wide range of plant and animal species in the district. Amongst plants, Shisham (*Dalbergia sissoo*), Kikar (*Acacia*), Phulai (*Acaucs Moclerta*), Simal (*Bombax ceiba*), Siris (*Albizia lebbek*), Toot (*Morus Alba*), Neem (*Azadirachta Indica*), and Jamman (*Eugenia Jambolana/Black Plum*) are found in abundance.

Wheat, rice, sugarcane, fodder, cotton and maize are major crops. Peas, spinach, cauliflower, coriander, squash, bitter gourd, chillies, radish, carrots are the major vegetables. Wheat is sown on around 0.5m acres, sugarcane on 150,000 acres, rice on 115,000 acres, citrus orchards claim 220,000 acres, various types of fodder on 190,000 acres, and

cotton at around 3,000 acres.

It was a cotton-producing region until the onslaught of sugarcane that began with the commissioning of the first sugar mill in 1966 by the Noon family. Two more mills were established in the later years, while another is functional close to the district's boundary in Jhang. Free supply of seeds and offers of cash payments in advance by the mills attracted the farmers towards growing sugarcane.



It worked against the cotton crop because the climatic changes, particularly the increase in moisture due to the water-guzzling sugarcane, invited pest attacks on the white lint. The resultant need for pesticide sprays added to the cost of production and the drop in production further incentivised growers away from it. Now cotton is sown on just a couple of thousands of acres for the lovers of 'desi' lint. Consequently, almost all ginning



factories and the lone Noon Textile Mill in Bhalwal are closed. The mill restarted functioning after it was sold to another party.

Citrus and guava (presently sown over 4,500 acres) orchards also gained popularity in the early 1970s. A couple of citrus value addition units were also set up, one by the Noons, during that period. Iran was the largest market for Pakistani citrus fruits followed by Afghanistan. The revolution in Iran and the eruption of the Afghan war damaged both markets to the disadvantage of growers and traders. In

the late 1980s, an American company, Cargill, also set up a large citrus juice extracting plant but it left after the first wave of terror incidents in the country.

The boom in the citrus value addition industry came in the 1990s and now over 200 units are engaged in the grading, polishing and waxing of kinnow across the district. The value chains are very diverse, and a number of different players actively participate in these chains, which ultimately decide the destination of citrus fruit.

The waxing improves the fruit's shelf life to 60 days enabling the country to fetch over \$200 million per year through exports to Russia, Ukraine, Indonesia, Middle East, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and some European destinations. Legal and illegal exports to Iran and Afghanistan also continue. However, only 10-12pc of around one million tonnes produced is exported and the rest is consumed in the local market.

Qasim Ejaz, a kinnow exporter, bemoans that little attention is being paid by the federal commerce ministry to their problems. He says the authorities are not even ready to raise the quota issue with their Indonesian counterparts as the island country issues a quota at a time when kinnow season is about to end here. He says they have suggested barter trade with Indonesia, selling kinnow against large palm oil imports, but to no avail.

Hanif Hanjra, a progressive farmer from Bhalwal, says almost 30pc of the produce is lost because of poor post-harvest technologies and unskilled labour employed to pick the fruit. He says that each tree produces between 100-150kg kinnow. The yield is reducing each year owing to a lack of research on developing new seeds, spurious insecticides being marketed with impunity, deeper tillage and excessive use of fertilisers damaging natural soil fertility, he laments. Greenery and canker diseases are also causing financial losses to the growers as the agriculture research institutions are failing to find a solution to fruits' whitefly problem.

Fish farming is a new trend gaining attention in the countryside. Fish farms at around 5,000 acres of land have sprung up during the last four years or so. Mehr Abrar, a fish farmer from Sillanwali tehsil, says mostly low-lying unutilised land or the tracts affected by salinity and

waterlogging are being used to earn extra money by the farmers. He claims that Sargodha is third in producing fish among 36 districts in Punjab. A frozen fish processing plant is also being set up at the recently established motorway industrial zone close to the Bhera interchange.



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## Corals in Astola Island bristle with marine life



*A STUNNING view of Astola Island.*

A recent four-day diving expedition undertaken to evaluate the environmental conditions of Astola Island in Balochistan found “amazing wildlife and a very healthy and productive marine ecosystem”.

The team didn't find any evidence of coral bleaching as has recently been noticed around the Churna Island.

According to a World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan (WWF-P) statement released recently, the Indus scuba divers led by S.H. Momin Zaidi undertook surveys at important diving sites along Astola Island a Marine Protected Area and found coral and associated habitats teeming with marine life including important fish, such as barracuda, trevallies, hot-lips as well lobsters, fan-worm, sea urchins and soft corals.

The team also dived to a shipwreck located about 4km off Astola Island, which was also found to have rich marine life.

Several green turtles were seen nesting on the island's beaches and juvenile turtles hatching and returning to the sea.

Commenting on the team's findings, Muhammad Moazzam Khan, technical advisor on marine fisheries at WWF-P, said Astola Island was known to be rich in marine biodiversity and once had the largest nesting ground of the great-crested tern globally.

“However, due to the introduction of feral cats and rats, nesting colonies have dwindled in the past few decades. The island is also an important fishing ground for fishermen based in Pasni and other coastal areas of Balochistan, besides being a nesting area of green turtles.”

The existence of healthy corals and associated habitat around the island, he pointed out, was much to do with negligible industrial activities in the vicinity.

“This can also be attributed to the declaration of the island as a Marine Protected Area in June 2017. This

declaration aimed to help conserve biodiversity of the area, ban illegal fishing and regulate sustainable recreational activities.”

According to WWF-P studies, the first one conducted in 1995, Astola Island is a hotspot of biodiversity, diverse terrestrial flora and fauna.

The island is home to an endemic saw scaled viper (*Echis sochureki astolae*), carpet viper and cliff racer. This is in addition to nine species of sea snakes which inhabit the subtidal habitats around the island. The island is reported to be inhabited by two agama lizards namely skink and long-tailed desert lizard.

The island is known for a well-diversified bird fauna consisting of 19 terrestrial and 87 aquatic birds occurring on the island.

The organisation has reported 82 species of terrestrial plants from the island. The island harbours rich marine animals, including 23 species of hard coral and a number of soft corals.

Moreover, 156 species of associated fish are found in coral habitat including a large number of invertebrates. The island is also rich in commercially important fish and shellfish species, a source of livelihood for coastal communities of the area.

The Arabian humpback whale, which is considered to be one of the rarest marine mammals, is also occasionally reported from the surrounding area. The protected, threatened and endangered species such as crustaceans, sharks, whales, whale sharks, guitarfish and mobulids have been reported from the island.

According to experts, coral habitats harbour the highest biodiversity of any ecosystem globally and directly support over 500 million people worldwide, mostly in poor countries. But, they are also the most threatened ecosystems on earth, largely due to unprecedented global warming and climate change.

## Minister announces Pak-Afghan train service

The then Minister for Railways Sheikh Rashid Ahmed had announced plans to link Pakistan with Afghanistan through railway by laying a track from Chaman to Spin Boldak, the first Afghan town near the Pak-Afghan border.

He disclosed this while speaking at a press conference after arriving in Quetta on a two-day visit on Thursday 3 Dec.

He said that in the first phase Pakistan would lay around 11km-long railway track from Chaman to Spin Boldak, adding that a survey had been completed in this regard and preparation for PC-1 of the project was in progress.

National Assembly Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri and senior officials of Pakistan Railways were present on the occasion.

Mr Rashid further said that after construction of the railway track between Chaman and the Afghan border town of Spin Boldak, Pakistan would be ready to extend the railway track from Spin Boldak to Kandahar if the Afghan government expressed its willingness.

He said that linking Chaman with Spin Boldak through rail would further promote trade between the two neighbouring countries.

Referring to the government's decision to restart the Quetta-Chaman passenger train, the railways minister said that it was running successfully and Pakistan Railways had decided to hand over the operation of the Quetta-Chaman train to the private sector.

Talking about restoration of the train service between Sibi and Harnai, he said that all arrangements had been completed to restore the train service. Work on the Sibi-Harnai track had been completed and all stations along the route had now been renovated, he said, adding that soon after receiving security clearance the train service would be launched.

In reply to a question, he said there was a plan to resume services of more passenger trains from Quetta, but due to Covid-19 a large number of people were avoiding travelling through trains and planes.

The minister said Pakistan Railways had launched many freight trains across the country and was earning income from them.

Mr Rashid criticised the opposition's alliance Pakistan Democratic Movement, saying that its leaders were playing with the lives of the people by holding public gatherings at a time when the cases of Covid-19 were increasing.

He said the opposition should understand that it could not remove the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government through its public gatherings or agitation. The Imran Khan government, he added, would complete its five-year term.

He said the people of the country had rejected the politics of the opposition parties.

Answering another question, he said that politicians never closed the door of negotiations, adding that political parties should hold talks for resolving issues being faced by the country.

## Sindh Culture Day celebrated in Karachi, major towns of province

**S**indh Culture Day was celebrated in the metropolis and other major towns of the province with jubilant crowds wearing Sindhi caps and Ajraks and singing and dancing to music and songs sung by popular vocalists.

The main event was held at the Karachi Press Club, but this time the venue was spread to Fawara Chowk on Abdullah Haroon, to the YMCA Ground near the Arts Council Chowrangi as mostly media houses organised the events that were supported by activists and leaders of different political parties. Some of the organisers demanded that the Fawara Chowk roundabout be renamed 'Culture Chowrangi'.

In their speeches, political activists vowed that they would resist Centre's move to take over the islands of Sindh and quarry stones from the Karoonjhar Hills in Thar apart from making other political demands.

The main event began in front of the KPC at 12noon, which continued till late into the evening. It was attended by a large number of people, including women and children.

Some of the participants came riding horses from Gulshan-i-Hadeed led by a female, who were welcomed by the organisers.

Speaking to the participants on this occasion, Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz leader Asif Baladi said that the people of Sindh had today joined together and that the "flow of people" was equal to the flow of the Indus River when it flows from the Himalayas. He said that the people of Sindh had proved that they were united to resist Centre's move to control Sindh's islands. He said culture was also part of politics and economy and vowed to continue a peaceful struggle "for achieving rights of the people of Sindh".

Mr Baladi said: "We are fortunate that we are receiving greetings from all over the world."

He asked the powers that be to read Shah Latif Bhitai's 'Sur Samoondi' to understand the longing of the people of Sindh for the sea.

Another nationalist leader, Nawaz Zaur, asked the federal government to stop "illegal" occupation of islands of Sindh and vowed to resist it. He also announced that the people of Sindh would resist quarrying of stones from the Karoonjhar Hills in Thar.

Another nationalist leader, Illahi Bux Bikak, recalled that Sindh Culture Day was started in December 2009 when a TV anchor criticised then president Asif Ali Zardari for wearing a Sindhi cap during his visit abroad. He said it was the Sindhi-language media which started observing the culture day.

Barring these political speeches, it was a mostly culture event, where people danced and sang songs in jubilation.

Some of the popular singers, including Shaman Ali Mirali, Tufail Sanjrani, Asif Siyal and Ali Murad Jatoi, sang folk songs and Sufi poetry and received applause from the audience. Social media star Asghar Khoso also entertained the participants.

Some small events were also held at different places in Malir and other parts of the city.

Meanwhile, police claimed to have arrested one of the participants of Sindh Culture Day at Bhains Colony who allegedly resorted to aerial firing and whose video went viral on social media. A police spokesperson in a statement said that the Sukhan police had registered a case against the held suspect and seized arms and ammunition from him and started an investigation into the case.

## Quaid's birth anniversary celebrated with traditional enthusiasm



*The Sindh governor and chief minister, along with other officials, offer fateha at the Quaid's mazar.*

In a rare show of unity, Sindh Governor Imran Ismail and Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah together visited the mausoleum of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah to pay homage to the father of the nation on the occasion of his birth anniversary on Friday 25 Dec.

CM Shah reached the Quaid's mausoleum in the morning a little before to receive the governor.

They offered fateha and laid floral wreaths together at the mazar.

People largely appreciated the message communicated through this gesture when a video was posted on social media by an aide of the CM.

Both Governor Ismail and CM Shah also penned their comments in the visitors' book with a specific reference to the Quaid's birth anniversary.

Change of guard at Quaid's mausoleum

A total of 78 cadets, including six female cadets, from the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) on Friday Dec. 25 assumed guard responsibilities of Mazar-i-Quaid in an impressive ceremony.

PMA Commandant Major General Omer Ahmed Bukhari was the chief guest on the occasion. The ceremony was also attended by senior military and civil officials and prominent citizens.

Of the 78 PMA cadets, 72 represented the 144 and 147 Long Course while female cadets were from the Lady Cadet Corps 17.

Maj Gen Bukhari laid a wreath and offered fateha.

The ceremony concluded with a march past by the cadets assuming guard responsibilities.



## Pir Sohawa to be developed into tourist spot

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) is considering converting Pir Sohawa into a tourist spot which would become an alternative to Murree.

A number of restaurants and hotels will be established to attract tourists from within and outside the country as Pir Sohawa is one of the most peaceful areas of the country.

The decision was taken during a visit to the area by CDA Chairman Amer Ali Ahmed and Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Syed Zulfiqar Abbas Bukhari.

Mr Ahmed termed Daman-i-Koh, Pir Sohawa and adjoining areas a rare gift of God for Islamabad.

He issued instructions to various directorates to establish more hotels and restaurants for tourists in the area. He also directed them to pay special attention on cleanliness of the area besides increasing the number of sanitation staff and installing additional bins.

The CDA chairman said it was the responsibility of the civic agency to take care of the greenery and ensure cleanliness of the area.

"This area has the status of a tourist destination not only for residents of the capital city but also for the whole country and abroad," he said. Giving instructions to the Road Maintenance Department, he said work on repairing, carpeting and lane marking in Daman-i-Koh should be completed as soon as possible.

Officers of Road Maintenance, Sanitation, Environment, Streetlights and other departments were also present.

An official of the CDA added that Pir Sohawa is one of the most beautiful areas of the federal capital and most of the dignitaries visiting Islamabad were taken there. Pir Sohawa is a rapidly developing tourist resort located on top of Margalla Hills.

According to official website of the CDA, the Margallas are a series of hills located in the north of Islamabad. These hills are an excellent site for hiking.

The best season to hike here is the mild winter months when there is less rain and the days are extremely pleasant. Interesting places here are Daman-i-Koh, Pir Sohawa, Gokeena, Mount Happiness and Loh-i-Dandi.

The area is also home to a number of wild animals such as barking deer, wild boars, Asiatic leopard, chinkara, red fox, leopard and jackals.

## Seven projects under way to promote tourism in coastal areas



*The projects will attract not only tourists but also investors interested in investing in the coastal areas of the province.*

The Balochistan government has launched seven projects to promote tourism in coastal areas of the province and work on these projects is in progress.

The projects will attract not only tourists but also investors interested in investing in the coastal areas of the province.

This was said in a briefing at a meeting to discuss promotion of tourism, culture and archeology and development schemes launched at tourist sites in various areas of Balochistan.

The meeting was presided over by Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani and attended by Adviser to the CM on tourism and culture Abdul Khaliq Hazara, Chief Secretary of Balochistan Capt (retd) Fazeel Asghar, Additional Chief Secretary Planning and Development Abdul Saboor Kakar and the secretary of culture and tourism.

The meeting was informed that a master plan had been prepared for promotion of tourism and culture and work on eco-tourism resorts was under way at seven places in the coastal areas of the province.

The participants were briefed about feasibility and construction of cultural complexes in different areas of the province at a cost of Rs50 million.

"Model beach parks will be established at Gadani, Kund Malir, Ormara, Pasni and Gwadar to provide maximum facilities to tourists," the tourism secretary told the meeting, adding that the master plans for Ziarat and Shaban valleys had also been prepared.

Chief Minister Alyani said that tourism offices should be set up at divisional levels, tourism information centers should be opened on major highways and signs on tourist spots and culture should be installed on the highways.

## GB official hunts Himalayan ibex



A local official hunted Himalayan ibex with horns measuring 44 inches near the Nanga Parbat base camp in Astore district here on Friday 25 Dec.

Masood Sifat, a CSP officer, claimed the trophy hunting after travelling for 14 hours amid snow.

According to the GB wildlife and environmental department, Mr Sifat hunted the ibex in Chorhat Rupal Conservancy.

The local hunter had got the hunting permit after paying Rs200,000 to the department. He had also paid Rs50,000 to the local community.

This was the first Himalayan ibex hunt in Astore under the trophy hunting programme.

The purpose of hunting of the Himalayan ibex in Astore is to attract foreign hunters to take part in trophy hunting of wildlife species.

The wildlife, environment and forest department has already auctioned four permits for Astore Markhor, 18 for Blue Sheep and 150 for Himalayan ibexes for trophy hunting programme of 2020-21.

The trophy hunting programme starts in November and ends in April. Foreign, national and local hunters hunt the trophies after getting licences in conservation areas of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Meanwhile, Diamer district magistrate imposed ban on cutting of forests and transportation of timber.

According to a notification issued on Friday Dec. 25, timber mafia was indulging in illegal cutting of forests and transportation, which was cause deforestation and environmental pollution.

The district magistrate, exercising his authority under section 144, imposed ban on illegal cutting of forests and transportation of timber, and warned that action would be taken against those found violating the ban.



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## Special permits issued to Qatari royal for houbara hunting

The federal government has issued special permits to Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani and nine other members of the royal family to hunt the internationally protected houbara bustard during the 2019-20 hunting season, it has learnt here reliably.

Among the permit holders are the emir's uncle, his brother and other dignitaries of the tiny country located on the northern side of the Arabian peninsula along the coast of the Gulf. The allotted hunting areas are spread over three provinces Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab of the country.

The hunters can hunt 100 houbara bustards in a 10-day safari during the three-month hunting season between Nov 1, 2019 and Jan 31, 2020. The permit is person-specific.

Originally the inhabitant of the colder central Asian region, the houbara bustard, in order to avoid harsh weather conditions in its habitat, migrates southwards to spend the winter in a relatively warm environment here every year.

Keeping in view its dwindling population the migratory bird is not only protected under various international

nature conservation treaties but its hunting is also banned under local wildlife protection laws. Pakistanis are not allowed to hunt this bird.

The federal government, however, specially invites royal Arab hunters to hunt it every year.

The sources said that according to the hunting permits issued by the foreign ministry's deputy chief of protocol, Mohammad Adeel Pervaiz, the names of the Qatari hunters and the areas allocated to them are: Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani has been allocated the hunting areas in three provinces. The areas are Tharparkar district, including Mithi and Nagarparkar minus the protected area in Sindh; Mashkhel tehsil in Balochistan, and Jhang and Layyah districts in Punjab.

A former deputy prime minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Khalifa al Thani, who is also a brother of the father of the emir of Qatar, has been allocated district Loralai (less Duki area) in Balochistan.

Sheikh Jasim bin Hamad al Thani, who is a son of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani (father of the emir), has been given Musakhel and Drug tehsils in Musakhel district and Sani Shoran tehsil in Kachhi district in Balochistan.

A royal family member, Sheikh Fasil bin Nasser bin Hamad al Thani, has been allotted Diplo tehsil in Tharparkar district in Sindh and Qila Saifullah district, including Kakar Khurassan and Qamar Din Karez, in Balochistan. Another member of the royal family, Sheikh Khalid bin Thani al Thani, has been given Dadu city in Sindh to hunt the protected bird.

A ruling family member, Sheikh Fahad bin Abdul Rehman bin Hamad al Thani, has been allocated Mirpurkhas district in Sindh. Sheikh Mohammad bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Thani has been given Barkhan district in Balochistan.

Sheikh Thani bin Abdul Aziz Al-Thani has been allotted Surab tehsil in Kalat district of Balochistan. Sheikh Fasil bin Qasim bin Faisal bin Thani al Thani has been given Dera Bugti district in Balochistan. Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah Thani al Thani has been given Kech/Turbat district in Balochistan.

The sources said that earlier when the ruling Tehreek-i-Insaf Pakistan party was in the opposition, it used to criticise the federal government over this issue and at that time did not allow houbara hunting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where it was in the provincial government.

## Royals from Bahrain also given Houbara bustard hunting permits

The federal government has issued special permits to King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa and six other members of the royal family to hunt the internationally protected Houbara bustards during the hunting season 2020-21, it is learnt here reliably.

According to sources, others in the elite list of hunters include the king's uncle, interior minister, commander-in-chief of defence forces, king's defence adviser and a couple of his cousins.

The sources said that the hunting permits were person-specific and the hunting could be carried out for 10 days only with the bag limit being 100 bustards.

The sources said that the special hunting permits issued by the foreign ministry's deputy chief of protocol (P&I) were delivered to the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain in Islamabad so that these could be sent to the hunters belonging to the tiny island country in the Gulf.



*The federal government has issued special permits to King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa and six other members of the royal family to hunt the internationally protected Houbara bustards during the hunting season 2020-21.*

The king and members of his family will hunt the internationally protected birds.

The permits mentioned the names of the hunters and the areas allocated to them.

King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa can hunt in Jamshoro district of Sindh, including tehsils of Thanu Bula Khan, Kotri, Manjhand and Sehwan.

The king's uncle and senior member of the ruling family, Sheikh Ebrahim bin

Hamad bin Abdullah Al-Khalifa, can hunt in tehsil Shah Bander of Sujawal district in Sindh.

The interior minister and the king's cousin, Lt Gen Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al-Khalifa, has been allocated Jaffarabad district in Balochistan and Naushehro Feroz district in Sindh for hunting.

Commander-in-chief of the Bahrain Defence Force Field Marshal Sheikh Khalifa bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa has been allotted tehsil Toisar of Musakhel district in Balochistan.

The king's adviser on defence affairs, Sheikh Abdullah bin Salman Al-Khalifa, has been allocated tehsil Jati of Sujawal district in Sindh.

King's cousin Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali Al-Khalifa has been allocated Hyderabad district and Malir district (excluding Malir Cantonment and Dhabeji areas) in Sindh.

King's another cousin Sheikh Khalid bin Rashid bin Abdullah Al-Khalifa has been allotted Tando Mohammad Khan district in Sindh.

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## Archaeologists uncover ancient street food shop in Pompeii



An undated photo made shows the thermopolium in the Pompeii archeological park.

Archaeologists in Pompeii, the city buried in a volcanic eruption in 79 AD, have made the extraordinary find of a frescoed hot food and drinks shop that served up the ancient equivalent of street food to Roman passersby.

Known as a thermopolium, Latin for hot drinks counter, the shop was discovered in the archaeological park's Regio V site, which is not yet open to the public, and unveiled on Saturday 26 Dec.

Traces of nearly 2,000-year-old food were found in some of the deep terra cotta jars containing hot food which the shop keeper lowered into a counter with circular holes.

The front of the counter was decorated with brightly coloured frescoes, some depicting animals that were part of the ingredients in the food sold, such as a chicken and two ducks hanging upside down.

"This is an extraordinary find. It's the first time we are excavating an entire thermopolium," said Massimo Ossana, director of the Pompeii archaeological park.

Archaeologists also found a decorated bronze drinking bowl known as a patera, ceramic jars used for cooking stews and soups, wine flasks and amphora.

Pompeii, 23 km southeast of Naples, was home to about 13,000 people when it was buried under ash, pumice pebbles and dust as it endured the force of an eruption equivalent to many atomic bombs.

"Our preliminary analyses shows that the figures drawn on the front of the counter, represent, at least in part, the food and drink that were sold there," said Valeria Amoretti, a site anthropologist.

Amoretti said traces of pork, fish, snails and beef had been found in the containers, a discovery she called a "testimony to the great variety of animal products used to prepare dishes".

## Earth's highest point gets higher as China, Nepal revise Everest height



The highest point on Earth got a bit higher on Tuesday Dec. 8 as China and Nepal finally agreed on a precise elevation for Mount Everest after years of debate.

The agreed height of 8,848.86 metres (29,031 feet) unveiled at a news conference in Kathmandu was 86 centimetres (2.8 feet) higher than the measurement previously recognised by Nepal, and more than four metres above China's official figure.

This discrepancy was due to China measuring the rock base on the summit and not as with the new reading the covering of snow and ice on the peak. Everest straddles the border of Nepal and China. Employing trigonometry hundreds of miles away on the Indian plains, British colonial geographers first determined Everest's height in 1856 at 8,840 meters (29,002 feet) above sea level.

After Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa famously first reached the summit of Everest on May 29, 1953, an Indian survey readjusted the altitude to 8,848 meters (29,028 feet).

That measurement was widely accepted, with the number appealing not only to ambitious mountaineers but also inspiring names for adventure clothing lines, restaurants and even a vodka brand.

In 1999 the US National Geographic Society concluded the world's highest point was 8,850 meters (29,035 feet), but Nepal never officially recognised this -- although it is widely quoted.

China meanwhile conducted several surveys of its own, and in 2005 came up with a measurement

of 8,844.43 metres (29,015 feet).

The provoked a row with Nepal, which was only resolved in 2010 when Kathmandu and Beijing agreed that their measurements referred to different things one to the height of Everest's rock and the other to the height of its snowcap.

## UAE royals arrive in Chagai for hunting Houbara bustards

Eleven members of the royal family of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Sunday Dec 20 arrived in Chagai district for hunting Houbara bustards.

According to official sources, the royal hunters who arrived at Dalbandin Airport in a special plane were led by Sheikh Sultan Bin Tehnoon Bin Mohammad Al Nahyan. Salar Khan Sanjrani, younger brother of Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani, accompanied the royal delegation.

The sources said the UAE hunters had arrived in Chagai for the first time as earlier they had been allotted hunting areas in Nokkundi, Taftan and Saindak.

The royal hunters were received by civil and military officials at the airport. Later, they moved to their camp in the Kachanawar area by road amid tight security.

The UAE delegation comprises Sheikh Sultan Bin Tehnoon Al-Nahyan, Arif Mohammad, Mohammad Ismail, Mohammad Matar Obaid Dalmouk, Mohammad Saeed Shuwain, Eid Jauaan Mohammad Al-Shamsi, Rashed Nayel Rasheed, Abdullah Awadh Saeed, Abdul Sattar, Ali Musabeh Mishar, Saeed Abdullah Ahmed and Tanveer Zia Dar.

The sources said the delegation, which was equipped with hunting instruments and falcons, would stay in the area for one week.



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# From highways to the skies: truck art goes airborne

Pakistan's famous truck art will move from its highways to the skies, as a flying academy is painting a two-seater Cessna aircraft with the colourful technique.

With elaborate and flamboyant motifs, Pakistani truck art has inspired gallery exhibitions abroad and prompted stores in Western cities to sell miniatures.

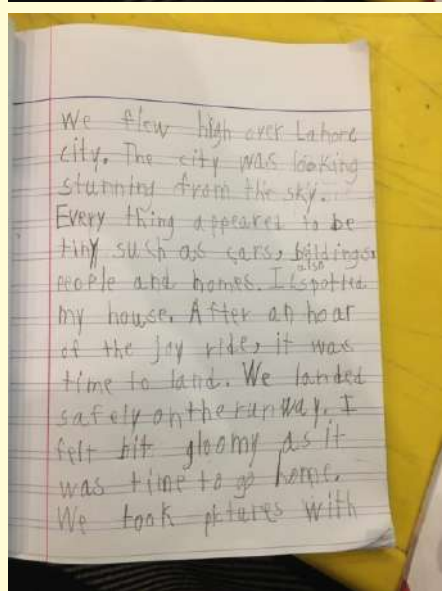
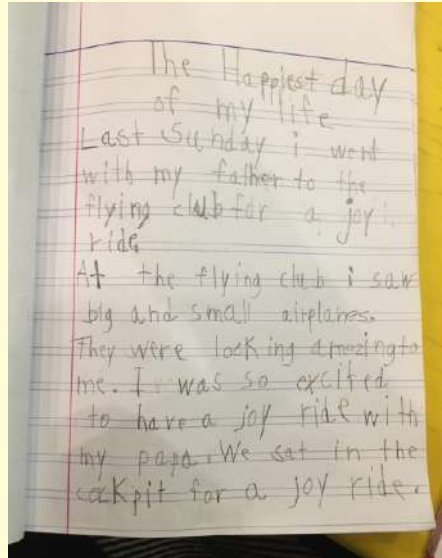
"We want to show the world that Pakistan is not all about Financial Action Task Force and terrorism issues; it's a very diverse country and a land of opportunities," Imran Aslam Khan, chief operating officer of Sky Wings, a flight training organisation, said.

He also plans to paint other aircraft, with the aim of promoting tourism in Pakistan.

Such art has become one of Pakistan's best-known cultural exports in recent years. Unesco, for example, has been using truck art, blended with indigenous themes, to promote girls' education in a northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

"The world is familiar with our truck art representation; now, with this aircraft, our colours will fly in the air. We are really excited," Haider Ali, the artist painting the aircraft, said at the academy's hangar.

Trained by his father, Ali, 40, has been decorating trucks since his childhood and is now one of the most prominent such painters in Pakistan.



## An Exciting Excursion

By Aahil Waqas

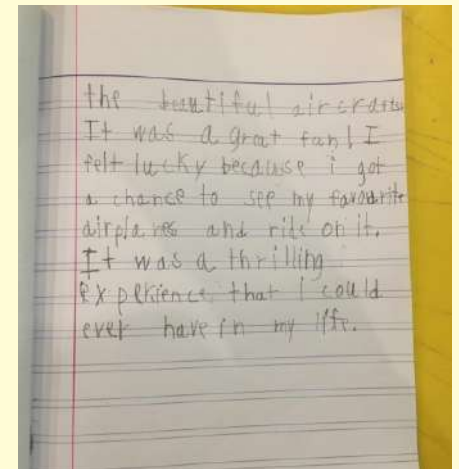


### The Happiest Day of my life:

Last Sunday I went with my father to the flying club for a joy ride.

At the flying club, I saw big and small airplanes, they were looking amazing to me. I was so excited to have a joy ride with my papa. We sat in the cockpit for a joy ride. We flew high over Lahore city. The city was looking stunning from the sky. Everything appeared to be tiny such as cars, buildings, people and homes. I also spotted my house. After an hour of the joy ride, it was time to land. We landed safely on the runway.

I felt a bit gloomy as it was time to go home. We took pictures with beautiful aircraft. It was great fun, I felt lucky because I got a chance to see my favorite aeroplanes and ride on it. It was a thrilling experience that I could ever have in my life.



Aahil Waqas studies in class-1, and his father is a pilot.

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# CEO's Interpretation of the passing year!

## A MOSTLY DIFFICULT YEAR



There are no other words to describe 2020. It has been a year like none other in modern times. We're in the midst of Global Pandemic that has impacted millions of people, hundreds of thousands of lives were lost and caused a deep recession. Amid this landscape, our essential values have never been more important.

It is important to think about this particular shock within a broader context; it is a foretaste of the kind of disruption and devastation the world will experience if we do not address climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and inequality. We've learned several things over the course of this global pandemic, which continues to unfold across our global business. First, we learned how to be more decisive and creative in our management and leadership. We improvised, built new relationships with all our stakeholders, and leveraged technology in new ways. We have great examples of how our teams have transformed our services to respond to new needs and adapted to travel and other restrictions by providing options of remote auditing and workshops, training, and continued the delivery of optimum service levels to all our clients.

Looking at the positives, we have come through this which has taught us resilience, compassion and empathy towards others. Family and friends have a greater meaning and we don't take the little things in our lives for granted. With the support around us, we will all come out of this stronger. Although we know we can't turn on a switch and assume 2021 will be different, I have no doubt we are all glad to see the back of 2020. I for one am looking forward to having a flourishing and successful year ahead and am welcoming the new year with hope and warm wishes to everyone.

**Even the Darkest Cloud has a Silver Lining. Happy New Year everyone!**

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