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Lahore's walton airport, flying club gone with the wind?



A VIEW of the main gate of Walton Aerodrome.

AT the dead end of the Yasir Shaheed Road, off Ferozepur Road near Gulab Devi Hospital Chowk, Lahore Flying Club (Walton Airport) is huddled between Askari Flats and Falcon Complex. While the Walton Airport has survived the rigours of time since the 1930s, its resistance may not last long with the authorities apparently hand in glove with property developers having set their eyes on its prime land.

It was in the Shehbaz Sharif government in Punjab in 2013-14 when it was decided that one of the oldest airports of the country be closed and a business hub be launched in its place, Mohsin Syed, the Hybrid Aviation Ltd chairman who moved the court against the government plan and got a stay, tells *media*. The case is still going on with more petitions added to it.

“The court gave us a stay immediately because the then government did not have any alternative plan to relocate the Lahore Flying Club. This government (of the PTI) expressed willingness to relocate the flying club along the Lahore-Sialkot Motorway outside the city. We agreed to the move on the conditions, including a certain length of the runway and day-and-night services. In the high court, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) agreed not to shut the Walton Airport until our relocation to the new site.”

According to Mohsin, four Hindu doctors had donated 30 acres of their personal property to launch the Northern India Flying Club in 1930 and got 256 acres land from the Government of Punjab, India, on lease. The Walton Airport (named after Sir Colonel Cusack Walton, who headed the flying club in 1935) was established over about 300 acres. In 1940, the British rulers acquired

1,000 acres from the forest department and local villagers before giving it to the Civil Aviation of India to establish a proper airport. The area included the land where now Main Boulevard of Gulberg, Mini Golf Course and Children's Hospital are situated besides the land that's now in possession of Pakistan Navy and Army. The airport still holds 400 to 500 acres of land.

British Wing Commander W.W. Russell, in his book *Forgotten Skies; The Story of Air Forces in India and Burma*, mentions the Walton Airfield, which housed the Initial Training School during the World War II where young Indians joining the Indian States Forces (ISF) as pilots were trained, showing that the facility has been a centre of training for pilots in the pre-Partition era. The practice continued with Pakistan Air Force (PAF) pilots after the Partition.

The Walton Airport had served as the airport of Lahore until 1962 when the Pakistan International Airlines included Boeing 720 in its fleet and the old airport could not accommodate the new fleet of aircraft. Currently, the Walton Airport not only provides training to pilots, but also serves as a training institute for related fields such as aeronautical engineering and aviation management.

Mohsin, a professional pilot with a degree in Chemical Engineering, launched Hybrid Aviation in 1998 with two aircraft. Now it has 11 aircraft, a flying school and various other facilities related to aviation. Besides Hybrid Aviation, the Walton Airport has five organisations providing aviation and flying services, including Ultralight and Sports Flying Club and Airborne Aviation Flying School. Another organisation assembles and manufactures aircraft. The Lahore Flying Club has about 50 aircraft with the claim to be the biggest flying school of Pakistan. “Our trained

pilots are flying Airbus A380 in the Emirates,” Mohsin says, expressing the fear that the largest flying school closure without proper relocation would eventually result in closure of airlines in the country.

Flying clubs and aviation had suffered a blow in 2015 when a policy shift resulted in the shutdown of almost all flying clubs in the country.

Almost 200 pilots along with as many aviation engineers are trained here at the Walton Airport. Many private varsities are running aviation programmes, as UMT, Superior University, and University of Lahore and Institute of Space Technology in Islamabad send students for training and internship here. “The students get three-year training on grounded aircraft as well as flying aircraft. We produce about 60 pilots annually,” Mohsin claims.

Nimra Faisal, who has just completed her BS in Aviation Management, says she went to the Walton Airport for three years during her studies to get training, as airfield was essential part of her programme. She says students could not do training without simulation facility that was available only at the Walton Airport.

The government announced the closure of the Walton Airport and Lahore Flying Club on April 28, a couple of months after promulgating the Lahore Central Business District Development Authority Ordinance 2021 to develop a business hub on the club land.

Mohsin believes the airport closure plan is based on mala fide intention and its notification was issued to pave the way for an Abu Dhabi firm constructing a plaza opposite Qaddafi Stadium on Ferozepur Road. The skyscraper will be about 500 feet tall, whereas no building near the Walton Airport could go beyond 150-foot height.

Amid fears that the prime land might be given at cheap rates to government's blue-eyed persons who would resell it at commercial rates, he suggests there should be an open auction for the land after airport's relocation and a part of the earning should go to the Lahore Flying Club and other stakeholders, including owners of the land which had been acquired in the 1950s for the purpose of airport expansion. He demands the government first ensure relocation of the flying club to the new site with all facilities before the Walton Airport closure and enough compensation to all the stakeholders. “The Lahore Flying Club owns the land in the airport, it has buildings and hangers. It has right of flying club to be a part of negotiations regarding the Walton Airport happening between the federal and provincial governments,” he asserts.



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Restructure plan of PIA

Pakistan International Airlines laid a proposal plan according to which it will be restructuring. The airline will slash half of its workforce, cut unprofitable routes, and replacement of its fleet. PIA intends to become a leaner and efficient airline by 2023. It appears to be a revival plan.

The Pakistani Cabinet has approved the proposal of PIA. The 14,000 employed individuals working for the carrier will be cut out to half. The rotation in PIA includes a cut of long-haul routes, which brought loss to it. There will further be no expansion in the fleet. PIA operates a fleet of 27 aircraft.

Moreover, the prime minister's advisor commended that the state plans to outsource the management contract of PIA. Or sell a 26% stake in the airline after improvement in the balance sheet. The restructuring plan is to overcome the loss in revenues from the past.

Challenges met by PIA

PIA is the national flag carrier of Pakistan. Due to various reasons, it had been facing a visible downfall. In the year 2020, PIA endured a loss worth 35.5 billion. Particularly, the pandemic served a major role in the deprivation of the airline. Most of the countries imposed a ban on carrier's entry due to Covid-19.

The airline is stagnant in terms of success and a struggling position. Previously, the hindrance in approval of the revival plan was due to the protests by employees. The adamant interference of political bodies was another obvious reason for the denial of the plan. Now, the carrier is coherent about its revival.

Future Goals

PIA is operating a fleet of three types of aircraft with an average fleet age of 14.7 years. It will turn into a leaner fleet. The state is planning to make PIA profitable by 2023. The flag carrier airline is ready to step up as an efficient organization.

"This time there are no grandiose plans to become like Etihad or Emirates or Qatar."

Dr. Ishrat Hussain, the prime minister's advisor, said,

PIA aims to show excellence in its operations. The future goal is to focus only on its own performance.

PIA launches Karachi-Skardu flights

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has started direct flights from Karachi to Skardu to promote tourism.

A spokesman for the PIA said an Airbus A320 flight from Karachi-Skardu-Karachi being operated to facilitate the residents of northern areas.

He said the Airbus flight for Skardu would take off from Karachi after making sure that the weather conditions are clear and the routine flight from Islamabad has landed in Skardu.

In case of bad weather conditions, the airbus flight will be diverted to Islamabad instead of returning to Karachi, the spokesman said, adding the flight time from Karachi to Skardu would be 2-1/4 hours.

He said the PIA was also planning to start flights between Lahore and Gilgit. Another flight from Lahore to Chitral may also be started in the next phase.

The spokesman said PIA was also planning to start flight operations from Karachi to Chitral and Karachi to Gilgit.

He said it will be for the first time that flights for northern areas will be operated from Karachi and Lahore, instead of only from Islamabad. The aim to expand the flight operations to northern areas was to

promote tourism in the country in the light of Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision.

The spokesman said PIA had planned to operate a safari flight from Islamabad to Skardu after Eidul fitr.

Plan to split PIA into two firms

The federal cabinet recently discussed a plan to split the national flag carrier Pakistan International Airlines into two companies and returned the matter to the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) for some changes.

The plan was originally approved by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif during his last tenure. In 2015 the then government managed to convert the Pakistan International Airlines Corporation into a company through legislation. However, the plan could not be implemented then because of strong protests of PIA employees as well as opposition parties, who opposed the move that could lead to the privatisation of the airline.

In recently meeting, the cabinet in a bid to pull out cash-strapped PIA from the financial crisis discussed dividing the organisation into two companies new and the old PIAs.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told media in the evening that the cabinet had in principle approved the plan to divide the national carrier into two companies, but sent the summary to ECC again for a few changes.

Earlier in the media briefing, he did not provide much detail about the plan as he said the cabinet was apprised that the operational losses of PIA had come down from Rs57bn to Rs1bn, which he said was a great success of the present management.

"The real problem of the PIA, however, is its loan which caused an overall loss of Rs460bn," he added.

He said that the PIA's aircraft-to-employee ratio was 450, which was highest in the world. "The previous governments of the PML-N and PPP had ruined the national institution by making political and unnecessary appointments," he alleged.

Earlier this month, the ECC had approved a restructuring plan of the PIA that includes splitting the entity into two, slashing about 25 per cent of the total staff, etc.

In the ECC meeting, Prime Minister's Adviser on Reforms and Austerity Dr Ishrat Hussain had presented a plan for amortisation of Rs457 billion worth of liabilities by FY2023. Of this, the ECC had approved absorbing about Rs202bn of liabilities as federal government equity in PIA during the current fiscal year, for being a non-cash transaction.



PPP criticize smelting PIA in to two companies

PIA plan meanwhile, in a separate statement, PPP's parliamentary leader in the Senate Sherry Rehman expressed concern over the government's plan to split Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) into two companies. 'The Tabahi Sarkar (destructive government) has literally crashed PIA by compromising several Pakistani pilots with clean licences, got the airline grounded in EU capitals after the 'Licencegate', sold PIA assets abroad via crony shell firms and are now cannibalising 'old PIA' to create new business ventures. This is a new low,' she said. Ms Rehman said that about 2,000 PIA employees had been forced to take voluntary redundancy and now the plan was to lay off half of its 14,000 employees.

'The Tabahi Sarkar is Awam Dushman (people's enemy) in unprecedented ways as all they do is to sack people in Covid times, instead of creating jobs. If this is their revival plan for PIA then we shudder to think what they will be doing next,' she added. 'Why did the government recently mislead the people by claiming PIA losses have been brought down? If this was the case then what losses are they talking about now? The national flag carrier posted a net loss of Rs34.6 billion (\$226 million) in 2020, its loan has caused an overall loss of Rs460bn, the iconic Roosevelt Hotel in New York has been sold and our profitable international routes were given to competitors,' she said. PIA, she said, was still reeling from the government's blows, and now employees were being cited as the problem, when in fact it was the sheer incompetence of this government which was to be blamed. The statement from Ms Rehman came a day after Minister for Information Fawad Chaudhry told reporters that the federal cabinet had discussed a plan to split the national flag carrier into two companies and returned the matter to the Economic Coordination Committee for some changes. Mr. Chaudhry had also blamed the previous PPP and PML-N governments for the PIA crisis, alleging that they had made recruitments in the airline on political grounds. Ms Rehman said that PIA flights had been banned in Europe and the US because of the aviation minister's 'callous statement'.

Qatar Airways told to compensate passenger over 'faulty' services



A consumer court has ordered Qatar Airways to pay Rs550,000 as compensation to a passenger for providing faulty services.

Judge Mukesh Kumar Talreja of the Consumer Protection Court (South) also slapped a fine of Rs25,000 on the management of the Gulf airline to be deposited in the government treasury within 30 days.

The court also ordered the Qatar's flag carrier to improve its services with regard to reasonable standards as set out by the governing laws.

In case of default, the defendant shall be punished with imprisonment for a term not less than one month, which may extend to three years, or with a fine not less than Rs50,000, which may extend to Rs200,000, or with both, in terms of Section 33 (2) of the Sindh Consumer Protection Act, 2014.

The airline was told to comply with all the directives within a period of 30 days.

These directives came on a complaint filed by Obaid Hussain Qureshi, who took the airline to the court through its regional manager in Pakistan over faulty services.

The complainant stated that on Oct 7, 2020 he departed from Karachi through the defendant airline for London, where he had already arranged his accommodation till Nov 3.

On Nov 4, the complainant was due to fly back to Pakistan, but the airline

cancelled the flight and subsequently caused a delay of 23 hours without giving any prior notice or intimation to him, the counsel told the court.

The counsel argued that such a sudden change/delay in the flight caused serious financial and mental torture to the complainant as he had neither accommodation nor travel facilities in London and had to bear extra charges for his meals, hotel accommodation and airport transportation.

The court was informed that the complainant issued a legal notice to the defendant airline, which never replied.

He asked the court to order the airline to pay him damages of Rs2 million on account of expenses borne by the complainant in the head of accommodation and travelling, mental shock and distress as well as expenses incurred on litigation.

On the other hand, the defendant counsel submitted that the delay in the flight was due to the coronavirus pandemic and maintained that such circumstances were beyond their control.

However, he maintained that the complainant was duly intimated about the change in the flight schedule 14 days in advance both personally as well as through his travel agent.

The representative said there was no proof of consequential damages in lieu of mental torture, agony or shock caused to the complainant and pleaded to dismiss the complaint.

CAA revokes permission for Dubai-Peshawar flight

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has revoked permission to a private airline for flying from Dubai to Peshawar after it carried on Sunday 16 May 27 passengers who had tested positive for Covid-19.

It was the second time this month that the government's coronavirus SOPs had been violated by the private airline after it transported 24 coronavirus positive patients on May 10 from Dubai to Peshawar.

CAA spokesman Saad Bin Ayub said the National Command and Control Centre informed the authority that the private airline had again been found breaching Covid-19 protocols by bringing 27 passengers from Sharjah to Peshawar on May 16 who had tested positive via Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) on May 16.

He said the airline's negligence had not only endangered the lives of other passengers travelling in the flight in addition to the healthcare workers and airport staff, but also caused the spread of the pandemic.

He said that other airlines had been strictly following the Covid-19 protocols.

Following the serious violations of Covid-19 protocols, the CAA decided to revoke the authorisation issued to the airline's flight PA611 Dubai-Peshawar on May 17. It also warned that any further violation shall entail more stringent penal action.

On May 1, the CAA had issued fresh operational protocols for inbound passenger flights, directing all international airlines to ensure that standard operating procedures were followed in letter and spirit by all passengers and crew.

The CAA had said that all passengers would also be required to undergo RAT upon arrival at the respective airports in Pakistan and non-compliance shall result in strict punitive action.

The measures have been taken to ensure safety of passengers and crew (cockpit & cabin) and to minimise the risks associated with Covid-19.

ICAO Marks Earth Day 2021 with New Eco-Airport Publications



The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has released two publications as part of its Eco-Airport Toolkit e-collection focusing on climate resilient airports and water management at airports. Each publication provides States with practical information for decision makers engaged in green airport planning and design.

Salvatore Sciacchitano, ICAO Council President highlighted: "The pace of innovation in all aspects of aviation is unparalleled, and ICAO has been helping drive the green recovery of aviation by promoting an ambitious decarbonization path for the sector including the promotion of pioneering efforts to support the development of airport infrastructure projects."

ICAO said it continues to engage with all stakeholders to facilitate the acceleration of greener technologies and initiatives, including the development of electric and hydrogen planes, new processes for generating sustainable aviation fuels and clean energy, and modernized, more sustainable infrastructure solutions.

According to ICAO, a series of its

monthly pre-stocktaking webinars have been held to collect and share these green solutions, moving toward the 2021 ICAO Stocktaking Event which will take place from 31 August to 2 September 2021, followed by a green recovery policy day on 3 September 2021.

Jane Hupe, ICAO Deputy Director for Environmental Protection stressed: "Following a request from the 40th Session of the ICAO Assembly, and inspired by several announcements for zero carbon emission by 2050, ICAO is currently assessing the feasibility of a climate global long-term aspirational goal for international aviation, along with realization roadmaps."

Celebrated yearly on 22 April, Earth Day has been held since 1970 to remind us of the unique environmental challenges, and to continually make smart investments in sustainable technology, forward-thinking public policy, and in environmental awareness and education. The theme for Earth Day 2021 is "Restore Our Earth", which focuses on natural processes, emerging green technologies, and innovative thinking that can restore the world's ecosystems.

Fang Liu, ICAO Secretary General noted: "The earth's environment is our future, and this is a defining moment to protect it. The science says we need to do more, the technology says it is possible. This requires all of us to work together as a global community in an unprecedented manner, coming together every day in the spirit of Earth Day, to make the dream of a sustainable world a reality."



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Civil Aviation denies the request of Heathrow Airport to increase charges

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has denied the request of Heathrow Airport to increase its airport charges by 10%. However, CAA allowed Heathrow to increase airport charges in a limited way.

Heathrow airport requested to increase its charges by £2.6 billion (\$3.9 billion). But CAA considered it to be "disproportionate and not in the interest of the consumer." The CAA has instead allowed Heathrow a smaller increase.



The CAA has failed to deliver. This undermines investor confidence in the UK-related businesses and puts at risk the government's infrastructure agenda.

-Heathrow Airport Authorities.

New CAA steps to curb Covid

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has introduced fresh measures making it mandatory for all passengers travelling to Pakistan to submit complete information

through "Pass Track App" as part of the continuing measures to curb the spread of Covid-19 in the country.

It will also be helpful in streamlining data submission and tracking through relevant platforms for passengers travelling to Pakistan. The CAA has mandated that effective May 1 submission of complete requisite information and data through Pass Tack App will be compulsory for all inbound passengers.

The CAA said this stipulation will be a mandatory requirement and no exception shall be allowed.

It will be the prime responsibility of airline operators to ensure that all passengers travelling to Pakistan submit complete information through the Pass Track App prior to commencement of travel. Cases of non-compliance will be dealt with strictly in accordance with rules and regulations.

Additionally, the requirement of submission of health declaration form will cease from May 1 upon coming into effect of the mandatory requirement of submission of information / data through Pass Track App.



Covid 19 impact on Heathrow Yield

Heathrow Airport is known as London Heathrow (LHR). It was known as London Airport until 1966. It is a major International Airport in London, England. Heathrow is the second busiest airport in the world by international traffic. It is the hub for British Airways.

This coronavirus pandemic had a great impact on the airport and airline industry. Thus, due to less traffic operated at airports, it caused a great revenue loss. According to Yahoo finance, it lost more than £2 billion (\$2.8 billion) last year due to the downturn.

Heathrow Airport's yield of 2021, of £19.363, decreases by £4.20 (18%) compared to 2020. It had its maximum yield in 2019. There is a reduced passenger forecast in 2021. However, London Heathrow Airport can cover these losses by increasing airline fees in a limited way.

Increased airline charges

Heathrow airport has applied to recover £2.6 billion (\$3.9 billion) at the end of this year. The airport will regain it in the form of Regulatory Asset Base (RAB) adjustment. This is an addition to an immediate £800 million (\$1.1 billion) adjustment.

The airport will regain its losses by increasing airline charges. Thus, CAA only granted permission to recover £300 million (\$417 million). This allowance is granted for the airport to reopen their terminals for summer and invest to benefit their consumers.

However, the airport felt let down by this decision.



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Gulf Air resumes flights operation to Sialkot

Gulf Air resumed its flights to Sialkot. The airlines was operating flights from Sialkot to its hub Bahrain before covid 19. it suspended its operations in March 2020 last year. Now the airlines has resumed its flight in the same month to the historic city of Pakistan Sialkot to Bahrain and provides connection to onward destinations. Gulf air already operates its flights from and to Lahore Karachi, Islamabad, Multan and Faisalabad.

Sialkot is one of the oldest and most important cities in Pakistan and has the sights to prove it. The foundations of its ancient fortress go back thousands of years and the city is the birth place of national hero Allama Iqbal. It's quite an old-fashioned city, but also a friendly and enchanting one. In fact, Sialkot might just be Pakistan's most charming destination.

Culture

Head to Sialkot's century-old Clock Tower, the focal point of the Saddar Bazar, to witness its bustling streetlife. Here you'll experience the bustle of the city first-hand as throngs of locals barter for daily essentials at shops, markets stalls and traditional food stands. Heading south will bring you to the Main Bazar, the place to go for some delicious breakfast phanien a traditional deep-fried dough.

Sialkot has a diverse religious history and sacred monuments from many faiths abound. The Baba Beri Sahib is a centuries-old Sikh shrine where Guru Nanak is said to have stayed. The city is also home to the ShawalaTeja Singh Temple, which is over a thousand years old. Then there's the Imam Ali-ul-Huq Shrine dedicated to the man credited with converting Sialkot to Islam in the 13th century, as well as Sialkot Cathedral a handsome red-and-white church built during the British Raj.

Sialkot is a major manufacturing city, so if you're here on business or simply interested in learning more about the city's



economic lifeblood head to the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce to discover just how important the city is as global supplier of sporting goods, clothing, surgical tools and musical instruments.

People and Traditions

The people of Sialkot are friendly and welcoming towards foreigners. Its success as a hub of business and trade owes much to the hospitality of its citizens, as well as an enviable resilience that has produced some fascinating quirks. For instance, during the British Raj era, the subcontinent's first bagpipe factory was opened here and many bagpipe bands continue to perform around the city to this day.

Weather Sialkot's climate sees cool to mild winters and scorching hot summers, with temperatures dropping considerably at nighttime. In December and January, temperatures can vary from about 5°C to 20°C, while May and June see lows in the mid-twenties and highs reaching 40°C. Low humidity makes the heat easier to deal with but watch out for monsoon season in July and August.

Sialkot has many nice green areas well-suited to leisure activities. Gulshan-e-Iqbal's is one of the nicest, with waterfalls, boating lakes and fairground rides. It's also home to the Sialkot Hockey Stadium, where you can see one of Sialkot's most popular sports being played. Or head to the other side of the city to enjoy Pakistan's national pastime, cricket, at Jinnah Stadium. On the other hand, families with young children will want to visit the Sindbad Amusement Park.

If you fancy getting away from the city, take a trip out to the MaralaHeadworks. This impressive feat of engineering helps regulate the flow of the Chenab River but is also a sanctuary for many endemic and migratory birds. It's the ideal place for picnics or fishing. Sialkot also provides easy access to other major Pakistani cities, particularly Lahore and Islamabad.

Explore

Sialkot boasts several fascinating landmarks with a rich history, beginning with the Sialkot Fort. Most of the ruins date back to the 2nd century, but one of its walls is thought to be about 5,000 years old. The 2nd-century reconstruction was led by Raja Salban, who, according to legend, ordered the torture and murder of his own son, Puran. The prince's arms and legs were cut off and he was thrown into a well, only to be rescued and reborn as a revered spiritual leader. Traveling to Sialkot's northeastern outskirts will take you the site of this legend, Puran's Well.

Learning about a city's local heroes is your gateway to understanding its people. Sialkot's most beloved son is the great poet Allama Iqbal. Visit his birthplace on the Old Town's Iqbal Road. It's now a museum that covers the life of Pakistan's "Spiritual Father". Fans of the poet can also make their visit industry other places in the city.



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GULF AIR

Gulf Air launches 'A Class of Our Own' new slogan

Gulf Air recently launched its new slogan 'A class of our own' during the 2021 Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix.

The airline said the new slogan is a celebration of Gulf Air's achievements of the past 70 years.



Gulf Air's acting chief executive officer Captain Waleed AlAlawi said: "Our unique Falcon Gold class, which blends in the conventional business and first class, and our upgraded economy class in the new fleet, which can be classified as premium economy comparing to some of our competitors, they both represent why we are 'a class of our own'. After a challenging 2020, we've had an exciting and ambitious first quarter of 2021 which included the unveiling of the new Bahrain International Airport passenger terminal building and our own brand new Falcon Gold lounge. Arabian hospitality is at the core of our business and with our boutique strategy being applied along every step of our passengers' journeys, we will always be a class of our own."

Oman Air and EgyptAir sign codeshare agreement

Oman Air has signed a codeshare agreement with EgyptAir. The codeshare agreement on flights between Muscat and Cairo was signed as part of both airlines' commitment to work toward a strong restart for air travel to overcome the effects of the spread of Covid-19.



Abdulaziz Al Raisi, chief executive officer Oman Air said: "Egypt has a remarkable, long-standing history in the MENA region and enjoys a strong international presence as a Star Alliance member. The codeshare agreement with Oman Air offers guests from Muscat more options for discovering Egypt, whether for business or leisure, and plays a vital role in the travel restart endeavours of both airlines."

Amr Abu El-Enein, EgyptAir Holding chairman & CEO, said: "Signing this agreement between two partners with special attributes like EgyptAir and Oman Air will further add more benefits for both airlines' customers. EgyptAir was the first airline in MENA to join IATA and our deep industry expertise has allowed us to successfully overcome many obstacles throughout our history."

IATA / IATAN ID Card benefits for Travel Agents expanded

Montreal - The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is expanding the benefits available to the travel agent community through the ID Card and the Agent Experience platform.

Eligible travel professionals (in possession of an IATA or IATAN ID card) can already access benefits such as special offers for flights, hotels, car rentals, sightseeing, ground transportation, familiarization trips and IATA training courses.

An additional 180,000 worldwide hotel properties with attractive rates have been added to the portfolio for travel professionals, through a new partnership with hotelbeds.com.

Additionally, travel professionals based in the US can also purchase select gift cards and receive up to 10% discount, or up to 50% discount on merchandise items. Bloomingdales, Foot Locker, TJ Maxx, Barnes & Noble, Sony, Dooney & Bourke, Fitbit and Bose are just a few brand names that will be made available on the AgentExperience platform.

"Travel Agents are an integral part of our industry and will play an important role as we rebuild the travel value chain in a post COVID-19 pandemic world. As we are preparing for the restart we are pleased to be expanding the non-travel benefits of the program and hope that all IATA/IATAN ID Card holders will soon be able to make use of the travel related advantages once again," said Harsha Krishnan, Head of Travel & Tourism at IATA.

See further information on how to sign up for the IATA/IATAN ID Card, the only industry credential recognized worldwide for travel professionals.

250 pilots, crew members

vaccinated: PIA

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) with an aim to fly with totally vaccinated crew has launched a massive vaccination drive and has so far vaccinated nearly 250 pilots and crew members. A PIA spokesman said the vaccination drive is under progress and the airline has set a target to get it completed by the middle of May 2021.

He said PIA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Air Marshal Arshad Malik had expressed the hope that with rapid vaccination being done for all crew followed by frontline workers, the national flag carrier would be the first carrier in the country to operate with all vaccinated crew. "PIA considers the health and safety of its passengers, crew and employees of paramount importance and this initiative shows our commitment in adhering to global health and safety standards."

He said PIA had already been taking necessary precautionary measures against Covid-19 and disinfected its aircraft regularly.

Emirates and Flydubai build on Dubai's connectivity



Emirates and Flydubai build on Dubai's connectivity

Emirates and Flydubai are working together to reach 168 destinations by the end of May.

Since the revival of their strategic codeshare partnership in early September 2020, close to 500,000 passengers have flown on the Emirates-flydubai combined network, taking advantage of optimised schedules, connections and baggage transfers through Dubai, all on a single ticket. Top destinations booked through the codeshare include Kabul, Kathmandu, Kyiv, the Maldives and Zanzibar.

His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, chairman and chief executive of Emirates Group and Chairman of Flydubai, said: "The Emirates and flydubai partnership continues to grow steadily to offer travellers even better connectivity to Dubai, and through Dubai to an extensive global network."

His Highness added: "We are seeing strong customer take-up and are excited to take the partnership to the next level by expanding services to new destinations. The close collaboration between Emirates and flydubai also benefits Dubai as a business, leisure, and aviation hub with enhanced connectivity and travel flows from the combined network of both carriers as it continues to safely welcome visitors from around the world. We're confident that both airlines will rebuild their networks even better, as they chart the path to recovery."

Even vaccinated people still have to wear masks on planes and in airports. Here's why



Fully vaccinated people do not have to wear masks indoors or out, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said, but that relaxed guidance hasn't changed how you travel through airports. Don't forget your mask if you're planning to fly.

The CDC said recently the risk of vaccinated people contracting the coronavirus was very low and those who are fully vaccinated no longer have to wear masks. However, it said masks should still be worn on public transportation.

"At this point the federal mask mandate for transportation sectors remains in effect," Patricia Mancha, spokesperson for the Transportation Security Administration, said when reached by email.

President Joe Biden issued executive orders in January requiring the wearing of masks in federal buildings and on public transportation. In late April, the public transportation mandate was extended through Sept. 13.

Biden's orders apply to anyone older than 2 years traveling through airports and on commercial planes, trains, public maritime vessels (including ferries), intercity bus services and other forms of public transportation.

Those who violate the federal mandate can face fines. The TSA can fine someone \$250 for a first offense and \$1,500 for repeat offenses of not wearing a mask at a security checkpoint.

Do I have to wear a mask in an Uber or Lyft?

Yes. The Uber and Lyft ride-sharing companies require drivers and riders to wear masks.

You can connect with Arizona Republic consumer travel reporter Melissa Yeager through email at melissa.yeager@azcentral.com. You can also follow her on Twitter and Instagram.

Canada bans flights from India, Pakistan



Passengers arrive at Toronto's Pearson airport in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

Canada suspended all passenger flights from India and Pakistan on Thursday 22 April for 30 days, Transportation Minister Omar Alghabra announced, citing increased Covid-19 cases detected in travellers arriving from these countries.

"Given the higher number of cases of Covid-19 detected in air passengers arriving in Canada from India and Pakistan... I am suspending all commercial and private passenger flights arriving in Canada from India and Pakistan for 30 days," Alghabra told a news conference.

"This is a temporary measure, while we assess the evolving situation and determine appropriate measures going forward," he added. It will not apply to cargo flights, Alghabra said, particularly to ensure the continued shipment of vaccines, personal protective equipment and other essential goods.

India, which is undergoing an alarming surge being blamed on a "double mutant" variant and super-spreader events, reported more than 300,000 new cases of Covid-19 in a single day.

Health Minister Patty Hajdu said that overall only 1.8 per cent of travellers to Canada have tested positive for coronavirus.

While India accounts for 20 per cent of recent air travel to Canada, more than half of all positive tests at the border were from flights arriving from the country, she said, adding that "a similarly high level of cases... have also been linked to Pakistan".

"It is a significant volume," she said, "and given the epidemiological situation in India, it makes sense to pause travel from that region while our scientists and researchers (try) to better understand this variance of interest, to better understand where the trajectory of the cases in that region are going".

Ban on non-essential flights

Ban on non-essential flights

Health Canada data showed 18 flights from Delhi and two from Lahore, to Toronto or Vancouver, in the past two weeks had at least one passenger onboard who was diagnosed with the illness.

Canada had last December briefly suspended flights from Britain over concerns about outbreaks of a Covid variant.

The parliament voted unanimously to urge the government to ban non-essential flights from Covid hotspots where variants have surged, including India and Brazil.

Alghabra said there are currently no scheduled flights between Canada and Brazil, but added that "we will not hesitate to ban travel to other countries if the science bears that out". Several dozen cases of the variant of the virus initially declared in India have already been identified in Canada, according to media reports.

Some countries have taken similar steps to prevent worsening outbreaks due to this variant: the United Arab Emirates announced recently that it will suspend all flights from India.

FlyDubai celebrates three years of holidays



Flydubai is celebrating the third anniversary of its holidays division at this year's Arabian Travel Market (ATM).

Since its launch in 2018, holidays by Flydubai online portal has become a one-stop shop for customers to browse for and book their holiday packages including flights and hotels with the option to add ancillary services. holidays by Flydubai now offers affordable packages from 41 source markets across the Flydubai network and a wide range of hotels for customers to choose from.

SudhirSreedharan, senior vice president of commercial operations (UAE, GCC, Africa and the Indian Subcontinent) at Flydubai, said: "We fully realise that the way people travel has changed. As travel restrictions gradually

ease, we can see that customers are starting to plan their holidays again. 66% of UAE residents surveyed by us in February said that they were likely to travel soon, either in the next one to three months (41%) or in the next four to six months (25%), indicating an intent to travel during the summer. Destinations on our networks such as Tbilisi in Georgia, the Maldives and Colombo in Sri Lanka are proving popular as are countries that have recently opened up to tourism including Albania, Armenia and Serbia."

"Travel might not be as simple as it used to be but some of the initiatives we have rolled out is encouraging more people to book a holiday package. We are offering the option to tailor your travel experience to suit your needs and include travel insurance and any added extras in one booking. We are seeing bookings being made from customers that may not have considered the advantages of a holiday package before," added Sreedharan. email in the coming weeks.

Gulf Air delays delivery of Boeing and Airbus jets for 6-8 months



Gulf Air 787-9 Dreamliner

As a result of operating at between only 50% and 60% of pre-pandemic levels according to Bahrain's state carrier, Gulf Air has agreed with both Boeing and Airbus to postpone the delivery of currently ordered jets for between six and nine months. While no specific models were mentioned, Gulf Air had previously indicated it was in negotiations with the two planemakers over delaying delivery of Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners and Airbus A320neo jets.

Back in April, acting CEO Waleed Abdulhameed Al Alawi commented that: "We had to go renegotiate the delivery dates. We haven't cancelled anything." Zayed bin Rashid al-Zayani, a government minister, also confirmed that

no orders had been cancelled, while also telling reporters at the Arabian Travel Market exhibition in Dubai: "It is very difficult because you are bound by your destinations. We have the fleet. We have the crew. We would like to fly to as many as places as we can, but we have to factor in demand."

Zayani also confirmed that Gulf Air would still take delivery of six jets this year, twice the number that were delivered last year. Asked if Gulf Air was receiving "government support," he replied: "Who isn't?" According to a government bond prospectus seen by Reuters news agency, the carrier received 36 million dinars (US\$95.6 million) from the Bahrain government last year.

Gulf Air launches free Covid insurance



Bahrain based Gulf Air is now offering complimentary Covid-19 travel insurance coverage to all ticket holders.

Cover includes health and quarantine expenses for customers who are diagnosed with Covid-19 during their journey.

It automatically covers all tickets booked, including redemption tickets, on Gulf Air flights for travel until 10 November 2021.

The policy covers repatriation assistance, medical and hospitals costs abroad as well as quarantine accommodation costs.

Gulf Air's Acting Chief Executive Officer Captain Waleed AlAlawi said: "As the current global situation continues, travel needs to be simplified and enhanced with tools to make the passenger's journey worry-free. The COVID-19 insurance coverage will provide a better experience to everyone flying with us".

Gulf Air currently operates to London, Paris, Frankfurt, Athens, Bangkok, Manila, Singapore, Dhaka, Colombo, the Maldives and destinations in India and Pakistan, as well as across the Gulf region and North Africa.

The airline is also adding Mykonos and Santorini beginning from the first week of June and restarting Istanbul this month.



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DHL Express adapts network for e-Commerce



As the COVID-19 pandemic pushed consumers online, the explosive growth of e-commerce was a central driver of DHL Express' shipment volumes growth in Asia including Vietnam and Malaysia.

To tackle the surge in demand, DHL Express has replaced its Hong Kong-Ho Chi Minh-Penang route with a direct flight from its Central Asia Hub in Hong Kong on an Airbus A300 aircraft to Penang five times a week.

As a result of increased shipment volume from Vietnam, the Airbus A330 will also serve Ho Chi Minh City directly from Hong Kong six times a week.

These two dedicated flights will not only add cargo capacity but will equally shorten the transit times to and from these two cities. In addition, DHL Express will upgrade the aircraft shuttling between Hanoi and Hong Kong from a Boeing 737-400 to Boeing 737-800, which will offer greater capacity as exports from Vietnam continue on its growth trajectory.

"The findings in our recently launched white paper attest to the surge across B2C and B2B e-commerce shipments that we are witnessing as tech-savvy digital natives begin to make up the bulk of merchants and consumers across the world, and also in Asia. This has driven a shift in expectations about e-commerce customers want top quality service, speed, reliability, convenience and flexibility," said Ken Lee, CEO, DHL Express Asia Pacific.

"By dedicating flights to Ho Chi Minh City and Penang, and upgrading our aircraft for Hanoi, our customers in these markets will continue to enjoy the quality service that they have come to expect from us as we seek to deliver their shipments within a day."

Asia is taking the lead in the growth of e-commerce. However, Southeast Asia is driving much of the development, and the e-commerce market is anticipated to be worth \$172 billion by 2025.

According to the 2020 study by Google, Temasek and Bain & Company, suppliers are also finding ways to sell online with Malaysia and Vietnam having seen a respective five and six times jump in online-selling related Press release Page 2 of 3 queries on Google.

Both markets are seeing strong sustained e-commerce growth year-on-year with 87% in Malaysia and 46 percent in Vietnam, respectively.

Plying a Ho Chi Minh City-Hong Kong route, the A330 aircraft will offer an air cargo load of up to 62 tonnes per flight, carrying shipments such as fashion apparel, garments accessories and materials, and electronics.

An A300 with 54 tonnes of capacity will be dedicated to serve Penang where electronic components and parts make up the bulk of goods flown.

Pakistan to slash international flights by 80% to curb COVID-19



A man receives a dose of a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine, at a vaccination center in Karachi, Pakistan April 28, 2021.

Pakistan will reduce the number of international flights into and out of its airports by 80% to help curb rising COVID-19 cases, the government said recently.

The restrictions will come into effect on May 5 and will run to May 20, Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority said in a statement, though it did not specify which flights or destinations would be affected by the measure.

The controls will be reviewed on May 18, the government said in a statement endorsed by the National Command Operation Center (NCOC), which oversees Pakistan's response to the pandemic.

The restrictions will be applied to chartered and private flights as well as scheduled services.

All international passengers upon arrival at Pakistani airports on remaining

services would be required to undergo rapid antigen testing (RAT) and will also have to show an RT-PCR test conducted within 72 hours before boarding a Pakistan-bound flight.

Passengers with a negative COVID test will still undergo self-quarantine at home for 10 days, and those found positive will be shifted to a self-paid facility for the same period of time. Inbound passengers will also need to download an app on to their phones to help monitor their movements.

There will be exemptions on these controls for children younger than 12 years old, disabled persons, high-level international dignities and Pakistani deportees.

Pakistan has seen record deaths in recent days from the coronavirus and stricter restrictions on movement and gathering in public are planned for the upcoming Eid holiday, though the level of infections has not yet reached the level in neighbouring India.

Officials are worried the country's healthcare system, already under strain, could reach breaking point if more contagious variants of the virus begin to spread, as has happened in India.

Plane's emergency door flies off during takeoff

The emergency door of a small plane flew off and onto the runway at Minneapolis Airport as it was about to take off.

The Boutique Airlines plane was speeding down the runway when the door separated and a passenger's bag was also sucked out of the plane.

Tom Yon was sat just feet away from the door and described it as a 'scary' moment.

He estimated the plane was traveling at about 100 mph on the runway.

"If there had been a person sitting on the plane with a baby on their lap, I don't know what would have happened."



The Metropolitan Airports Commission confirmed the incident and said the takeoff was quickly aborted.

The damaged door was recovered from the runway. The small plane was traveling from Minneapolis to Ironwood, Mich. and no injuries were reported.



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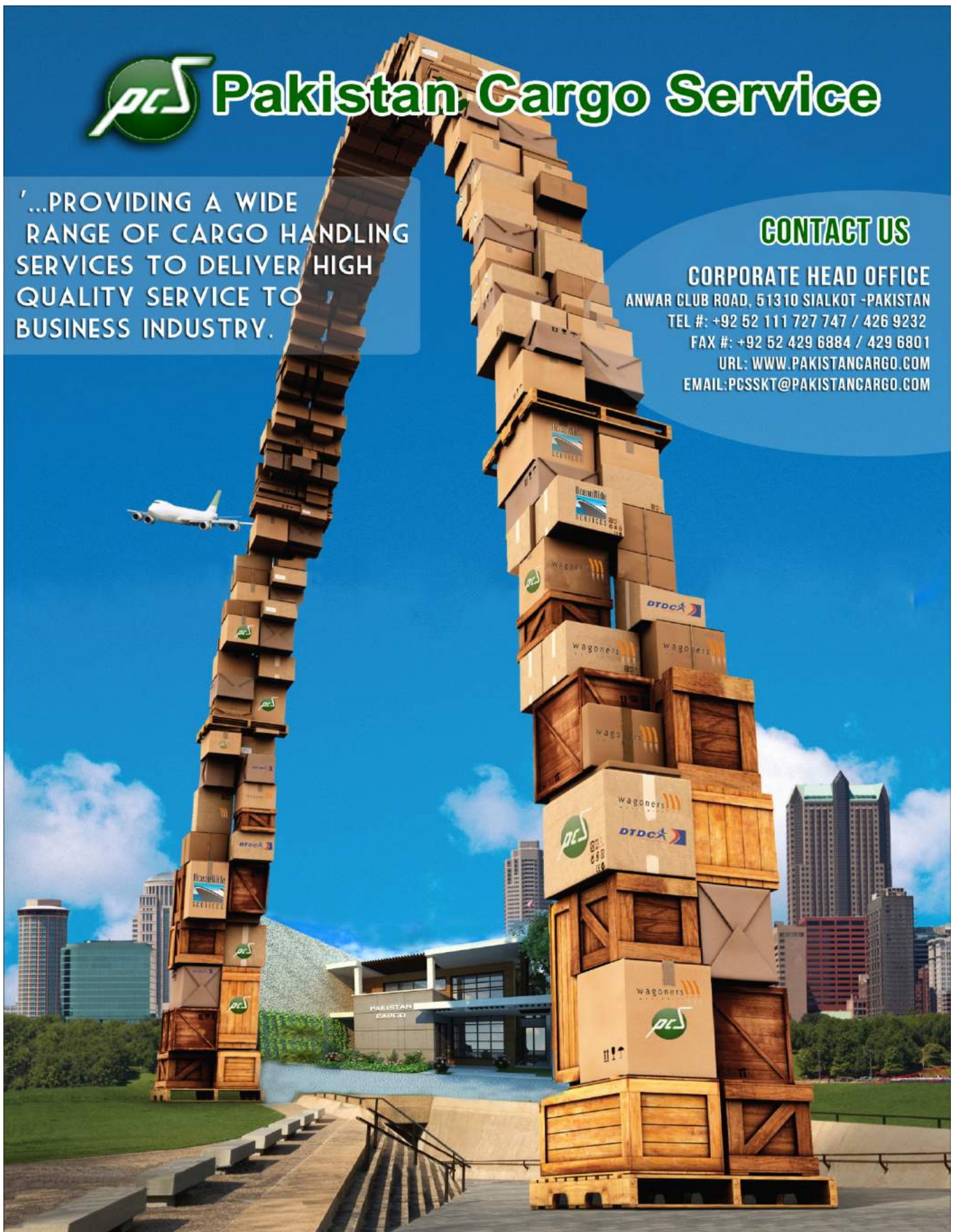
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Introduction of Airbus A318

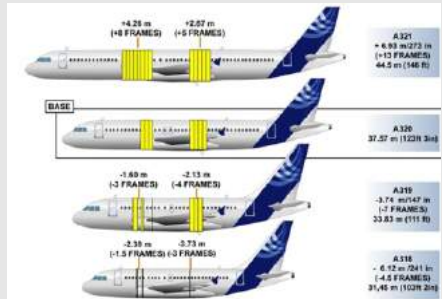
Airbus A318 is the least produced variant of the A320 Family. One of the interesting facts about this variant is the size. It is the smallest of all the Airbus commercial aircraft productions. The aircraft made its formal entry into service in July 2003. The US-based ultra-low-cost carrier Frontier Airlines was the first operator of the Airbus A318. Air France was the largest operator of the Airbus A318 as of January 2019. The A318 is also sometimes referred to as the *Baby bus*.



Airbus A318 the 'Baby Bus'

The Airbus A318 is a single-aisle 2 x 2 seat configuration commercial airliner. It can accommodate 107 to 132 passengers and has a maximum range of 5,700 km. The aircraft was brought in the market for short-range flights. The A318s are operating in two types of variants: the A318-100 and the A318 Elite.

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Reduction in frames of aft and fore of the wings of the Airbus A318

Power Plant and Flight Control System

The A318 is powered by CFM International or Pratt and Whitney turbofan engines. The aircraft shares a similar flight control system as its predecessors have been using onboard.

This feature yet again resolves the aircrew training currencies while shifting from one variant to another. It also helps in saving maintenance costs due to similarities in components.

Was Airbus A318 ever needed?

The initial idea of bringing this smaller version of a commercial aircraft was coined in the late 90s to respond to the increased market demands of short hauls travel. The aim was to bring a smaller jetliner for 100 plus a few, seating capacity.

What Happened then?

A consortium of Aviation Industries of China (AVIC), Singapore Technologies Aerospace (asta), Airbus, and Alenia was initially planned to launch this aircraft. Two versions AE316 and AE317 were part of this project. Interestingly, Airbus also had the A31X project running in parallel, independently on the same lines.

The joint project faced many impediments due to disagreement between the Chinese and Airbus sides about the seating capacity. The former wanted to launch a bigger aircraft with more seating capacity whereas, the latter did not want to. Market research at the time showed that airlines needed short-range aircraft with a seating range of 70-80 passengers.

The Final Go!

Amidst disagreement between the two parties, the project got held in between. Nothing moved further in this direction. Ultimately, Airbus took the final initiative and went on with the development of A318; based on the A31X project.



An all Premium Class of Airbus A318 Variants

The Airbus A318 has been in use in two different variants. The A318-100 and the A318 Elite.

Airbus A318-100

An Airbus A318-100 has a typical seating capacity of between 90 and 110 passengers. The variant has four models. So with an aircraft available in four sizes, the A318 offers unbeatable fuel efficiency,

exceptional operational reliability, and complete passenger satisfaction and comfort. Although the aircraft has the smallest fuselage, the level of comfort is phenomenal. With the widest single-aisle cabin available, passengers can enjoy more personal space and relax in comfortable 18-inch-wide seats. The A320 also has plenty of overhead locker space.



Airbus A318-100

Airbus A318 Elite

The A318 Elite is purely a corporate business jet with all the luxuries and amenities onboard. Unlike an A318-100, the A318 elite accommodates 18 passengers. As a result, the OEM has been able to enhance its range from mid to long-range. With a limited seating configuration, the aircraft can include a separate office, dining room, and bedroom. The A318 offers spacious internal and external luggage storage. Eight people can also have their own sleeping quarters.



Cabin of an A318 Elite

The Differentiating Capability of Airbus A318

Steep Approach Capability

The A318 has a unique capability that differentiates itself from other members of the A320 family. The aerodynamics of the aircraft has been modified in a manner where it can actually make steeper approaches to runways, unlike any other jet aircraft. For making such approaches, the onboard flight computer system is programmed to synergize the deployment of the aircraft's moving surfaces including

the slats, flaps, speed brakes, and landing gears.

Why there is a need for a Steeper Approach?

Runway lengths are not the same at all locations. Some runways are shorter than the others. To manage flight operations at such airports, an aircraft with turbofan engines is difficult since it causes runway excursions (aircraft overshooting the runway length beyond the standardized stopping distance). For a normal descent, the glide slope is generally standardized at 3 degrees. However, an A318 can make a decent approach at the glide slope of 4.5 5.5 degrees which is quite high viz landing speed considerations. Due to the A318s smaller size, it was a manageable affair for the OEM.



A simulated approach of an Airbus A318 for the London City Airport

A test flight was conducted in May 2006 to validate the aircraft's steep approach and short runway performance by making a landing approach at the London City Airport. The reason being, steep approaches are required at the London City Airport. European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) formally certified a modified control software enhancement, specifically for the Airbus A318 design to allow the aircraft to perform steep approaches. For the record, A318 is the largest commercial aircraft certified by EASA for steep approach operations.

Read more: Airbus Commercial Aircraft Division

Last Word

Although the A318 is a smaller version of the A320, it also has some unique characteristics. Unfortunately, the aircraft could not continue in production due to the factors not in control of the OEM as it was launched just after the 9/11 attack. Due to air travel restrictions and limited flight operations after the September 11 incident, it could not be utilized in the desired manner. Similarly, there were cost issues related to fuel due to high fuel consumption engines and additional landing charges that the airlines had to bear compared to the size of the A318 with aircraft of similar configurations.

Airlines urge governments to reopen transatlantic travel

The decline of transatlantic travel between the UK and U.S came primarily from heavy travel restrictions and border control to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the grounding of commercial aviation in March 2020, travellers from the US have been barred from entering the European Union and citizens from European countries have also been restricted from entering the US.

A year later, after regaining a somewhat firm footing from the instability of the pandemic, hopes for a return of transatlantic travel are collecting, reignited by an effort from the chief executives of leading UK and US passenger airlines to move governments to reopen the transatlantic channel.

On May 11, 2021, an open letter addressed to US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and UK Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps, put forward a proposal to hold a summit between US-based and UK-based carriers and their respective governments to explore the safe reopening of transatlantic travel in "a manner that aligns with public health objectives."

The letter, signed by the chief executives of Airlines for America, American Airlines (AIG) (AAL), British Airways, Delta Air Lines, JetBlue Airways, United Airlines, and Virgin Atlantic, urges for a summit ahead of the G7 Summit which will be held in Carbis Bay, Cornwall from June 13, 2021. The executives expressed the need for a reopening of the transatlantic channel in support of "continued economic recovery of both nations" following the success of vaccination programs in both the US and UK.

In the US, 42% of the adult population have been vaccinated and 59% have received at least one dose. Across the Atlantic, 27% of the adult population in the UK has been vaccinated and 62% have received at least one dose as of May 2021. It is projected that by the end of July 2021 all U.S. and UK adult populations will be vaccinated.

The opening of the channel is said to be beneficial for both passengers and the air transport industry on both sides of the Atlantic.

Over 22 million passengers traveled between the US and the UK in 2019, of which 4 million of those passengers flew for family-related activities. In 2019, the transatlantic travel corridor was one of the busiest airspaces in the world with over 1,300 flights per day. Today that number

nears about 500 flights per day with loading capacities of up to 20%.

The air transport industry is confident in the safe restart of long-haul travel across the Atlantic hinged on safety measures and testing capacities established into travel channels since March 2020.

The industry also aims to re-establish the economic benefits and trade activity between the two nations which in 2019 recorded trade valued at \$273 billion with approximately 900,000 tons of transported cargo.

Agreements and collaboration between airlines and governments will be the key foundation to a sound recovery of long-haul travel and the approaching summer season will be vital for airlines on either side of the pond. Potentially 70% of pre-COVID travel could be recorded by the end of the year if the UK-US travel ban is lifted, generating approximately \$3 billion for both nations. However, if restrictions were to continue beyond June 2021, a further cash hemorrhage is to be expected on both sides of the Atlantic.

Russian actress will fly to the ISS for the first film to be shot in space



Russian actress, Japanese entrepreneur cleared for space station visits.

Russian actress Yulia Peresild and filmmaker Klim Shipenko will join cosmonaut Anton Shkaplerov for a Soyuz flight to the International Space Station on Oct. 5 to shoot scenes for an upcoming movie, the Russian space agency announced Thursday 13 May.

"At the end of 2020, an open competition was announced for the lead role in the first feature film to be filmed in space," Roscosmos said on its website. Peresild, 36, and Shipenko, 37, were selected "based on the results of medical and creative selection." Training will begin in June.

"They will have to go through, among other things, tests on a centrifuge, a vibration stand, to make introductory and training flights on an airplane in zero gravity, to undergo parachute training," Roscosmos said. The training and the flight will be covered by Russia's Channel One television network.

Air cargo is the difference between life and death for airlines



THE air cargo industry is at the threshold of a giant leap into digital transformation as passenger airlines discover its vital cash-generating contribution to their survival during the pandemic, admits industry body the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Willie Walsh, the association's new director general and chief executive, insists that, having come through this [crisis], people will better appreciate the very significant financial contribution that cargo has made to their businesses. "It has been the difference between life and death for many airlines," he says. "The cash generated by cargo has been very important through all of this."

That recognition will lead to widespread greater awareness and preparedness to invest some of the cash that cargo generates into its digital transformation. "Providing digital solutions have got to be a key priority. Cargo has lagged significantly behind the passenger [business] when it comes to digital solutions. Cargo has made some good progress but we need to accelerate this, we need to do more. Not just because of the efficiency it will give us, [but also for] the improvements in [delivery] times, the improvements in [reduced] costs, and also a significant improvement in [the availability of] data."

Better data enables air cargo businesses to operate more efficiently and also improve their environmental performance. "Better data enables us to assess the risk in a better way and that enables us to improve our safety performance," Walsh underscores.

Henk Mulder (below, right), head of digital cargo at IATA, insists that COVID has underscored how much the world is now dependent on digitalisation for lives, for the economy and also now for air transport services. "In terms of the tipping point, we are seeing more companies active in this area. We are also seeing that the agenda of the airlines is changing. When it comes to prioritisation, this is on the top of the list of most airlines and, as a result, this then will impact their

customers, their supply chains and their IT suppliers."



Henk Mulder, head of digital cargo at IATA

Despite, the obvious benefits, digitalisation does not necessarily mean a lot of [financial] investment any more. "I think the technologies that we are seeing today, the technology itself, is now very, very accessible. This is not like the archaic systems that we used to operate 30 to 40 years ago," Mulder points out.

He has been successfully promoting the benefits of IATA's ONE Record data-sharing programme, which creates a single record view of the shipment. The initiative has attracted an impressive list of air cargo businesses which are involved in numerous pilot projects worldwide. They include Air Canada Cargo, Air France/KLM Martinair Cargo, Cathay Pacific Cargo, Etihad Cargo, IAG Cargo, Lufthansa Cargo, Singapore Airlines, Swiss World Cargo, Virgin Atlantic Cargo, Qatar Airways Cargo, DHL, DB Schenker, Dnata, Swissport, Geodis; and digital disruptors Descartes, IBS Software, Nallian and Nexshore; as well as Frankfurt, Heathrow and Hong Kong airports.

Walsh confirms that ONE Record is about creating a single standard. "And we know in our industry that a single standard is very important. If everybody is working from the same basis, it clearly makes the industry more efficient. Data can be exchanged in a more efficient way. And I am absolutely convinced that money will be made available [for this]. Every airline is continuing to invest in projects even through this crisis because they recognise that they have to prepare their businesses for the future. The awareness of the contribution that cargo makes [to the airline business] is much greater today than it has ever been. That contribution is likely to continue to be at a much higher level than is traditional for the next few years," he adds.

The IATA chief executive is

convinced that funds are available to make the necessary investment. "Without question the benefits from digitalisation are very significant and will benefit the industry in all key areas: it will improve environmental performance, it will improve safety performance, it will improve the efficiency of our business. It can improve revenue generation. More data makes you more efficient [and] enables you to utilise that valuable space in the cargo hold of the aircraft in a better way," he says.

IATA's figures confirm how extraordinarily well airfreight has been performing during the pandemic. Brian Pearce (below, right), chief economist at the airline body, also points to the critical role the airfreight industry has played in "sustaining connectivity" on many long-haul routes and in particular across the previously price-driven trans-Atlantic market. "The passenger revenues on all these markets are now much, much less than before," he reports. "Cargo is [now] providing between 40 per cent [of revenues] and, on the Middle East-to-Asia market it is 65 per cent of total revenues and that's sufficient to more or less make those [passenger aircraft] flights either cash positive or at least break even," he confirms.

Before last year, cargo typically generated 10 or 15 per cent of an airline's revenues. "That changed radically last year. Last year, cargo was responsible for some 35 per cent of revenues. Therefore, cargo is expected to play a critical role this year for many airlines' [bottom lines]," Pearce states.



Brian Pearce, chief economist at IATA

Although air cargo services are enjoying really strong demand at the moment, this is not true on all trade lanes, Pearce says. "There is quite a bit of

variation in cargo-tonne-kilometres flown on different trade lanes,” he observes. “The strong markets [currently] are Middle East to Europe, and Middle East to Asia. But, also, the north Pacific region has been really strong, reflecting the fact that we are seeing a very strong Chinese economy, a very strong US economy and that’s generating a lot of trade. By contrast, Europe had repeated economic lockdowns and the economy [in that region] is weaker. So, some of the key trade lanes there have not been quite as strong,” Pearce points out.

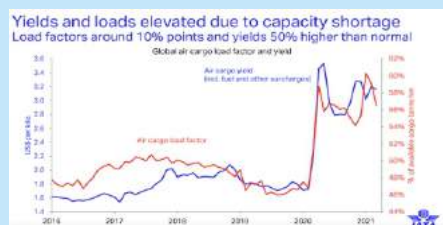
Nevertheless, IATA’s data shows that cargo load factors have been remarkably high across the world “some 10 percentage points higher than they would normally have been,” Pearce asserts. “There has been a really severe capacity shortage in the industry because typically 50 per cent or so of cargo would be carried in the holds of passenger aircraft which, to a large part, have been grounded because of the travel restrictions and that’s led to very high loads on the aircraft that have been able to fly,” he explains. “It also meant that yields have been very high, and that’s clearly benefited the revenues of those airlines that have been in that business or have pivoted to it.”

That’s why IATA is expecting air cargo to continue to outperform other modes of transport [with] volumes to grow by another 13 per cent, he predicts. Not surprisingly, the association’s regular survey of airfreight bosses currently reveals they are “pretty confident” about the next 12 months.

Walsh observes: “It has been a challenging period for airlines, but cargo has performed well and the outlook for cargo [therefore] remains positive. 2020 was a very difficult year, 2021 has been challenging, maybe not on the same scale, but still very challenging for airlines. We will see an improving [business] environment given the accelerated roll-out of [COVID-19] vaccines.

“So, what has been a great year for cargo, is a terrible year for airlines. Great credit goes to everybody involved in the transportation of airfreight for what you have been able to do to ensure that airlines have continued to supply critical capacity through this period,” Walsh concludes.

This IATA chart illustrates the high



load factors and yields for air cargo amidst the pandemic.

Russia orders end to huge military drills near Ukraine



PERSONNEL of Russian airborne forces line up before boarding transport planes during drills at a military aerodrome in the Azov Sea port of Taganrog on Thursday 22 April.

Russia’s defence minister on Friday 23 April ordered an end to military drills near Ukraine involving tens of thousands of troops and dozens of warships that had exacerbated tensions with the West.

The announcement came as President Vladimir Putin invited Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky for talks in Moscow following weeks of renewed fighting in the east of Ukraine between government troops and pro-Moscow separatists.

But the Russian leader appeared to shoot down Zelensky’s proposal to meet in war-torn eastern Ukraine, saying talks over the years-long conflict should be conducted directly with separatists.

Earlier in the day Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu oversaw massive drills in Moscow-annexed Crimea and said soldiers would begin returning to their permanent bases.

“The troops demonstrated their ability to ensure the reliable protection of our country,” he said after flying over the Opuk firing range in a helicopter.

“I’ve made a decision to wind down the checks in the Southern and Western military districts,” he said, adding the troop pullback should be completed by May 1.

The announcement came after the West repeatedly called on Putin to pull back troops.

Shoigu, who had arrived in Crimea earlier in the day to oversee military drills, said Moscow closely watched Nato movements and would remain vigilant.

Both armed with binoculars, Shoigu and the army’s general chief of staff Valery Gerasimov oversaw the drills from a viewing platform as helicopters flew overhead.

The ministry released dramatic footage of the land and sea manoeuvres that showed troops practising amphibious landings, jets streaking through the sky and infantry fighting vehicles traversing green fields.

Both Nato and Ukraine’s Zelensky welcomed Russia’s announcement, with Ukrainian leader saying on Twitter that “the reduction of troops on our border proportionally reduces tension”.

“Any steps towards de-escalation by Russia would be important and well overdue,” said a Nato official.

“Nato remains vigilant and we will continue to closely monitor Russia’s unjustified military build-up in and around Ukraine.” In Moscow, Putin said Zelensky was welcome in Moscow “any time”.

“If President Zelensky wants to start repairing relations, then we of course welcome it,” he said.

But the Russian leader also said that if Zelensky hoped to resolve problems stemming from fighting in eastern Ukraine, then he should first meet with leaders of the breakaway regions in Donetsk and Lugansk.

Zelensky had this week invited Putin to hold talks in Ukraine’s east, saying millions of lives were at stake.

Timothy Ash, senior emerging markets strategist at London-based Bluebay Asset Management, said Putin was “playing games” and it was hard for the Ukrainian leader to accept direct talks with separatists.

“Everyone knows this is a state vs state conflict but Putin is trying to imply this is a civil war in Ukraine,” Ash said. Kiev said one more soldier had died of shrapnel wounds when “Russian armed forces” shelled Ukraine’s positions.

Some 30 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed since the start of the year, compared to 50 in all of 2020.

The West and Ukraine have accused Russia of sending troops and arms across the border but Moscow has denied the claim.

Russia’s buildup of troops on the Ukrainian border led to concern in Kiev and the West of a repeat of Russia’s 2014 aggression, when Moscow annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine.

The EU estimated this week the number of Russian troops along the Ukrainian border at more than 100,000.

Shoigu has described the movement of Russian troops as training exercises in response to “threatening” Nato actions.

He said Russia was closely watching Nato activity including the massive Defender Europe 2021 exercises.

Moscow said some 10,000 Russian troops and over 40 warships and other vessels were participating in the Crimea exercises.

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Mian Naeem Javed, Chairman SIAL grieyed

Industrialist, Religious and Social Personality Prof. Late Amin Javed's widow and the mother of Chairman Sialkot International Airport Limited Mian Naeem Javed, Director SIAL Mian Usman Javed, Mian Noman Javed, Mian Aleem Javed passed away on 2nd May 2021 in Sialkot. Funeral prayers were offered by a large number of people. The funeral prayers were led by Mian Naeem Javed, while Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Siraj-ul-Haq addressing the gathering praised the services of the late Amin Javed and his wife.

Speaking on the occasion, Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Siraj-ul-Haq said that in Pakistan at this time "we need to advise each other that elders should be respected and parents special be respected". In a society where parents are respected, God Almighty Allah blesses the people. He said that "I testify that the great mother we are attending the funeral of today was the great woman. She was always busy reciting the Holy Quran, cooperating with the poor and the oppressed. And the great thing was that Allah Almighty had given her the consciousness of servitude. She also had a desire and aspiration and always talked about the religion of Allah to prevail in Pakistan. And so she used to advise others. When I came here three months ago, I saw the book in front of her was the Qur'an. She passed away suddenly. I can understand the pain and suffering of their children because when my mother passed away a few months ago, I realized that the sky was broken and there was no shadow left for me. There is a little to regret because if there was any shade and support for a child in the universe after Allah, it is the mothers. The Holy Prophet said not once but three times above all that your mother has a right on you the first. God told in Quran that "no equal is to god but you respect your parents after god. He said whose parents were alive they had a great advantage and whose were not(died)pray for them.

A large number of people including prominent political personalities of Pakistan, the directors of SIAL, and other members of the business community of Sialkot participated in the funeral prayer and conveyed their heartfelt grief to Mian Naeem Javed and Prayed to Allah Almighty to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant courage to the bereaved family to bear the loss with fortitude. Among the prominent personalities who attended the funeral prayer was Farid Paracha of Jamaat-e-Islami, Mian Maqsood, Javed Qasuri,

Mian M Asif, Dr. Shakeel Thaker, Anker Junaid Saleem, Sohail Azizi, Pof. Dr. M Arshed Chairman AirSial Fazal Jilani, Vice Chairman SIAL Afzal Shaheen Choudhry, Directors SIAL, and others.

The Flyer International and its staff also expressed their deep sorrow and grief over the demise of Mian Naeem Javed's mother. The Flyer prays and requests to all to pray and make dua for the departed soul.



Ameer, Jamaat-e-Islami Siraj-ul-Haq addressing on the funeral Prayer of the widow of late Prof. Amin Javed and mother of Chairman SIAL Mian Naeem Javed.



Mian Naeem Javed leading the funeral prayer of his mother in Sialkot.



Former President SCCI and CEO Forward Sports Mr. Masood Akhtar Khawaja and Vice Chairman SIAL Ch. M. Afzal Shaheen inaugurating the Water Filtration Plant at Sambrial by the cooperative of Forward Sports and SIAL.

Turkish Airlines to fly to Newark for first time in 27 years

Turkish Airlines' Istanbul to Newark service is going ahead in just four days' time. Relaunching after 27 years, it effectively replaces JFK's third-daily service, with near-identical timings. The B787-9 and B777-300ER operate at first, before the A330-300 takes over until winter.



Istanbul-Newark will have a block time of 10 hours and 55 minutes and nine hours and 45 minutes back.

The 5,014-mile route has the following schedule until winter, with all times local:

TK29: departs Istanbul at 18:40 and arrives at 22:35

TK30: departs Newark at 00:05 and arrives back at 16:50

Initially operating four-weekly, it will become once-daily from June 14th. Clearly, the timings mean that it is all about point-to-point (P2P) New York demand and connections over Istanbul rather than over Newark, an important Star Alliance hub. MAX Alternative C-

This route joins Vancouver, which Turkish Airlines inaugurated on May 2nd. Like Newark, this was also delayed from last year. Simple Flying had a good look at Vancouver earlier this month.



Turkish Airlines served Newark 27 years ago.

Returning after 27 years

This Newark service effectively replaces Turkish Airlines' third-daily New York JFK operation, which ended in October 2019. The timings, above, are almost a mirror image of what it had to JFK.

Newark was originally announced in 2019 to begin on May 25th, 2020, on a once-daily basis using A330-300s. For obvious reasons, it was postponed until January 1st and then postponed again. But this will not be the first time the airline has served Newark.

From October 1992, it operated both Istanbul-Brussels-Newark and Istanbul-Newark, both twice-weekly. From the following August, it was non-stop only, before ceasing in October 1994. It will now return after 27 years.



The A330 will serve Newark from June until the end of October.

A mix of aircraft

At first, the route will be operated by a combination of B787-9 (three-weekly) and B777-300ER (once-weekly). The 787s have a 300-seat configuration with 270 in economy and 30 in business, while the B777s will have 349 seats: 300 in economy and 49 in business.

However, it'll revert to being entirely by A330-300s, with 289 seats, from June 3rd. JFK is mainly by the B777, so each Newark flight will have nearly half the number of premium seats. From winter, Newark will become a wholly B787-9 route.

Now 13 destinations in North America

The addition of Newark means that Turkish Airlines now has 10 destinations in the US and 13 across North America. Qatar Airways also has 13, while it's 12 for Emirates and five for Ethiopian Airlines. In order of capacity this year, Turkish's 13 are:

1. New York JFK
2. Los Angeles
3. Chicago O'Hare
4. Washington Dulles
5. San Francisco
6. Miami
7. Toronto
8. Houston
9. Boston
10. Atlanta
11. Newark
12. Montreal
13. Vancouver

When combined with JFK, the greater NYC area will have these timings from Istanbul in mid-June: 07:30 to JFK; 14:30 to JFK; and 18:40 to Newark.

The addition of Newark means that 13 destinations are served across North

America, including San Francisco, as shown here.

Nearly 900,000 passengers

Across all airlines, Turkey to the US had some 866,000 round-trip P2P passengers in 2019, booking data via OAG Traffic Analyzer reveals. Of these, New York was naturally by far the highest, with about 187,000. Turkish Airlines and Star Alliance were hugely dominant.

Additionally, connections over Istanbul were crucial. From just JFK alone, Turkish Airlines had over 370,000 transit over its hub, with Tel Aviv, Ankara, Tirana, Izmir, Tbilisi, Lahore, Pristina, Dhaka, Lagos, and Skopje the top-10 markets. Connections across Turkey was the biggest country market, followed by Israel and Pakistan.

First TIR shipment reaches Uzbekistan

The first-ever shipment under the Convention on the International Transport of Goods for traffic-in-transit of goods across the border has reached Uzbekistan from Pakistan in 48 hours via Afghanistan.

Islamabad signed the Convention on International Transport of Goods Under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention) in August 2015, which is a multilateral treaty that entails no payment of Customs duties and taxes. Pakistan ratified the convention in January 2016.

An official statement quoted Commerce Adviser Abdul Razak Dawood as saying that the long-term vision of the government for trade and economic relations with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Central Asian Republics (CARs) is that we want to make Pakistan a hub for trade, transit and trans-shipment.

He said that connectivity with trading partners is vital for viable trade relations. He said that the structure and efficiency connectivity networks enable access to markets and should be considered a facet of the trade competitiveness.

This will ensure that Pakistan leverages its geo-strategic location in the region to enhance its international trade. He said that the current engagement with Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, are steps towards implementation of this vision, he added.



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Turkey announces tariff for ECO freight train



The US sanctions on Iran have emerged to be another issue that may further delay resumption of the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) freight train.

To the extent of route (Derince-Kapikoy) originating and passing through its territory, Turkey has announced tariff /charges for Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad freight train.

However, schedule for resumption of the train which is called ECO (Economic Cooperation Organisation) is yet to be agreed and finalised by Pakistan, Iran and Turkey due to various issues, media has learnt.

According to a report submitted by the quarters concerned in the Turkish government (railways, foreign and logistic affairs) at a recent meeting held by the ECO secretariat virtually, the container tariff for export, import and transit had been set as 0.18 Euro per km and 0.23 Euro per km for each 20 and 40 feet loaded container, respectively. Similarly, 0.09 Euro per km and 0.12 per km tariff have been set for 20 and 40 feet for each empty container, respectively.

In addition to this, 10 Euro per wagon as customs formality charges will also apply. Similarly, for loaded containers, 5.50 euro per ton (minimum charges based on 14 tones per wagon) and, for empty containers, 5.60 euro per ton (minimum charges based on seven tonnes per wagon) will also be charged. Likewise, 20 Euro per wagon will also be charged for passing Bosphorus (Marmaray).

For conventional wagon tariff (export, import and transit), 0.010 euro per ton and km will be charged according to actual weight of the goods, not less than 7,000kg per axle of the wagon. The additional charges, which include 10 Euro per wagon (customs formality charges), 5.60 euro per ton (ferry charges for Lake Van) and 20 Euro per wagon for passing Bosphorus (Marmaray) will be charged.

“Since the wagons to run along the ITI corridor will be exempted from RIV

rental fee, the aforementioned prices are valid until further notice,” reads the report.

As per current scenario explained in another report, having analysis of sea freight versus ITI train, shared in the meeting, the train operations strained due to the fact that High Value Customers comprising large export industries have shown their

hesitancy to route shipments through ITI Train due to the L/C (Letter of Credit) conditions/restrictions by the consignee banks in the wake of US sanctions.

However, the low value customers who are mainly commercial importers or medium size local companies and are commodity-based cargo don't account for such restrictions and have shown their willingness to avail ITI route provided there is significant freight margin. Secondly, ITI operations are obliged to move only consignments from Turkey to Pakistan and vice versa, and there is no Iran cargo available as E- Form issuance is withheld for Iran exports (due to sanctions).

The report suggests a way forward stating that to avail the lower unit transportation cost and high-capacity utilization, concurrent two-way traffic is necessary. But, current ITI Freight Pricing Model with identical rates for both sides' haulage cannot guarantee a two-way traffic.

According to Pakistan Railways record, the first train from Islamabad to Istanbul was inaugurated on Aug 14, 2009. Similarly, the first train from Istanbul to Islamabad dry port reached on Aug 13, 2010. Eight trains have been dispatched from Pakistan to Turkey, with the last leaving the Lahore dry port on Nov 5, 2011. Since the launch of the service in 2009, Turkey has sent six trains to Pakistan, with the last one reaching here on Dec 9, 2011. Later the ITI train service suspended for an indefinite period due to various issues. However, after a gap of nine years or so, the ECO secretariat started making efforts in October last year to resume the train operation from March 4 this year. However, it delayed due to various issues.

First CPEC hydropower project near completion, says Asim



A view of the under-construction 720MW Karot hydropower project.

: The chairman of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Authority (CPECA), Asim Saleem Bajwa on Wednesday 12 May said that 88 per cent of work on the Karot hydropower project had been completed.

The first of its kind project under the CPEC, being built on River Jhelum, is expected to be completed in April 2022, media report quoted him as saying.

Sharing details of the Karot Hydropower Project through a tweet, Mr Bajwa said the investment in the project amounted to \$1,780 million while 5,000 local people were directly employed for its construction.

The 720MW Karot hydropower project was due to be completed in 2020. It has the capability to generate 3.249 billion units of clean electricity per year for the national grid.

The project is being developed on the Build-Own-Operate and Transfer (BOOT) basis at an estimated cost of \$1.98bn including a development cost of \$1.698bn and interest during construction of \$243m by Karot Power Company Private Ltd, comprising M/s Three Gorges South Asia Investment Ltd and Associated Technologies (Pvt) Ltd of Pakistan.

The project is being constructed on a concrete gravity of 91 metres high dam with a crest length of 320 metres near the village of Gohra. The dam's reservoir will be approximately 152m cubic metres in volume, with a length of 27 kilometres. Around 72 homes and 58 businesses were expected to be relocated due to the project while 2.8km of the Karot-Kotli road and 8.9km of the Azad Pattan-Kahuta road were also expected to be relocated.

Work on CPEC project progressing: Chinese envoy

Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Nong Rong on Monday 19 April said that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project was well on course to its completion.

Talking to reporters at China Window during his visit to Peshawar, Mr Nong said in its first stage the CPEC focused on energy and infrastructure projects which were successfully completed.

He said that most of energy projects built under the CPEC had been completed and China provided one-third of Pakistan's electricity requirement during the Covid-19 pandemic at the lowest price.

The ambassador said that under the CPEC's infrastructure component Lahore's Orange Line Metro had been completed. He said that some cargo for Afghanistan was coming through Gwadar port.

He said they were constructing and planning several new projects and more and more good news was in the pipeline.

Mr Nong said that some students from Pakistan could not go back to their classrooms in China due to restrictions related to Covid-19, but they could



Chinese Ambassador Nong Rong addresses a press conference here on Monday 19 April.

continue their education online. He said that the cooperation between the two countries on the provision of vaccine was going very smoothly.

50 schools damaged during militancy in Khyber to be rebuilt He said that he also visited the Rashakai Special Economic Zone (SEZ) which was very important among the CPEC projects. He said both sides had attached great importance to this SEZ.

Mr Nong also met KP Chief Minister Mahmood Khan. They inaugurated a project for reconstruction of damaged schools in the merged districts.

In the first phase of the project, 24 schools for boys and 26 for girls, which

were fully damaged during militancy in Bara tehsil of Khyber district, will be reconstructed.

The project's estimated cost is Rs2.323 billion, out of which Rs868 million will be provided by Pakistan, while \$10.29m will be contributed by the Chinese government.

On the occasion, the secretary of the elementary and secondary education department and the Chinese officials concerned signed a document for implementation of the reconstruction project. Earlier, the chief minister and the Chinese ambassador were briefed about different aspects of the reconstruction project.

CM Khan thanked the Chinese government for its support to the KP government in the reconstruction of damaged schools.

Speaking on the occasion, he said the CPEC was a great example of Pak-China friendship. He said the Rashakai SEZ would be inaugurated soon which would boost industrial activities in the province and create employment opportunities. Mr Nong said the Chinese government wanted to further strengthen its ties with Pakistan.

Chinese Ambassador visits Challenge Textile Factory

Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Mr. Nong Rong visited the Challenge Textile Factory, set up with a Chinese investment of 60 million on Lahore-Multan Road near Sundar.

Karen Chen, Managing Director of the company, Chinese Consulate General in Lahore and Qamar Bobby, a well-known Pakistani businessman and friend of Prime Minister Imran Khan, who has been instrumental in bringing Chinese investment to Pakistan, warmly received the Chinese Ambassador.

The company's managing director Karen Chen briefed the Chinese ambassador on the investment.

Talking on the occasion, Chinese Ambassador Mr. Nong Rong said that Pakistan and China are not only neighbors but also brothers and after C-Pack, Pakistan has gained historical significance and Chinese investment will create thousands of jobs in Pakistan for the youth.

He said that more Chinese companies are ready to invest billions of dollars in various sectors in Pakistan that will bring an improvement in Pakistan's economy in the days to come and with this export of textile products from Challenge Factory will start in Pakistan. Chinese Ambassador Mr. Nong Rong visited various sectors of the textile factory, especially the canteen where he was

shown standard food being provided all workers. The ambassador appreciated the arrangements made at the factory.

Karen Chen, Managing Director, Challenge Group, briefed the Chinese Ambassador on this investment in the textile sector, saying that this international standard textile factory has been set up on Lahore Multan Road with an initial investment of \$150 million in which the employees get good salary as well as transport, food, accommodation and medical facilities free of cost.

"After the Chinese investment of \$60 million, our group will invest an additional \$150 million, and this company has initially employed 3,000 people, which will soon reach 5,000," said Karen Chen. She said that in future our group intends to set up Challenge Fashion Export Park on Lahore-Kasur Road for which 88 acres of land has been purchased on which work will be started soon and construction of this fashion export park will be started. After that, 20,000 more jobs will be created in Pakistan, which will help reduce unemployment in the country.

She said that our company has started exporting its textile products to Europe and other countries. It is a state-of-the-art company of international standard.

Karen Chen told the Chinese ambassador that the Pakistani people are very good and they supported us at every odd, which is a clear example of Pak-

China friendship. Because of the love of Pakistanis, we feel that Pakistan is our second home. There is a lot of talent that is why our organization is running well today and only 35 people working here are from China. The rest are all Pakistanis. He said that the Pakistani government supported us for every opportunity while business-friendly policies of PM Imran Khan's government have led to an increase in Chinese investment in Pakistan.

Leading Pakistani businessman Qamar Bobby, who played a key role in bringing Chinese investment to Pakistan said he was with Imran Khan during his visit to China and that Mr. Hong, a tycoon in the Chinese textile industry and chief executive of the Challenge Group of Companies committed to set up his business in Pakistan. The PM also invited Mr. Hong to visit Pakistan and he came to Pakistan with a delegation of Chinese investors.

As a result of his trust in the policies of Imran Khan's government, Mr. Hong set up the Challenge Textile Factory in Pakistan with an initial Chinese investment of \$60 million and initially, employed 3,000 people while the number has increased to five thousand.

Qamar Bobby said that the establishment of Challenge Fashion Export Park will boost the textile industry in Pakistan while more Chinese companies are ready to invest in Pakistan.

PM, Uzbek president agree to boost bilateral ties

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday 14 April said the Trans-Afghan Railway Line Project, agreed between Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan earlier this year, would transform the geo-economic dynamics of the entire Central Asian region.

The project would be the first step in linking the Central Asian transport network with Pakistani seaports of Gwadar, Karachi and Bin Qasim, the prime minister said while speaking at the virtual meeting with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

During the meeting, wide-ranging talks were held. The two leaders exchanged views on bilateral, regional and international issues. They also reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral relations with particular focus on political, trade, security and defence, and educational and cultural domains.

The two leaders reiterated their determination to maintain the momentum



Prime Minister Imran Khan at a virtual meeting with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

of high-level exchanges and enhance the upward trajectory of bilateral relations.

The prime minister underlined the importance of enhancing political and diplomatic linkages, fast tracking trade and economic cooperation, ensuring early finalisation of the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) and Transit Trade Agreement (TTA), increasing security and defence cooperation, and taking steps to deepen mutual collaboration in the fields of education, culture and tourism.

He also underscored the importance of rail, road and air connectivity and highlighted the enormous potential which existed in diverse fields to build an expanded and mutually-beneficial partnership. The prime minister highlighted Pakistan's economic and security paradigm and its shifting focus to geo-economics.

The two leaders also discussed important global and regional matters of mutual interest and agreed to continue supporting each other at all international and regional forums, including the UN, OIC, SCO and ECO.

The prime minister apprised the Uzbekistan president of the latest situation in occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

He also highlighted Pakistan's efforts to facilitate the Afghan peace process. Mr Khan stressed that this historic opportunity should be seized by Afghan parties to achieve an inclusive, broad-based and comprehensive political settlement in the war-torn country.

Mango growers upbeat about fruitful harvest

After over a year of the Covid-19 trauma and an unabated felling of mango trees, nature is finally being kind to growers of the fruit by offering them relief in the form of a good crop of all varieties.

According to mango growers, the crop is in a good condition due to the favourable weather at the time of flowering and fruit setting. On the other hand, the ongoing pandemic, now in its third wave, is hampering the marketing of the fruit owing to the many restrictions.

Although the export of mango will officially commence on or after May 25, a few growers from Sindh have begun harvesting the Malda variety, which has been received in a tasteless condition in the Lahore market due to early harvest.

However, so far, no policy has been announced about airlifting export consignments, as almost 80 per cent of the incoming and outgoing flights have been suspended.

"Sceptical about the outcome of exports, growers have started self-marketing. With an extended interruption due to the pandemic, it is an earnest demand of the mango growers to develop processing zones in mango-producing areas under the [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor] to add value to the 'king of fruit' and give it an extended shelf

life. Marketing in such times requires connectivity for communication between the growers and interested importers through webinars," said Mango Growers Association President Zahid Hussain Gardezi.

He said there were a number of complications in receiving export orders due to the unnecessary documentation made compulsory by the State Bank of Pakistan for financial transactions, which discouraged the activity.

"There is a need for one-window facilitation for the export of horticulture produce, as the process for a common mango grower to export his product is still not easy," he stressed.

He further said there were reports regarding the export of Pakistani mangoes to Central Asian nations, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, through the Punjab Investment Board, which is encouraging.

"Things will become clearer as soon as Sindh begins harvesting and exporting, which will establish the rules of business for movement of mangoes under a standard operating procedure," he added.

Mr Gardezi also said that every year, huge quantities of mangoes were wasted due to fruit fly because of which not only the growers suffered, but the export of

mangoes was also affected.

"It is suggested that growers be facilitated against fruit fly by drastically subsidising chemicals effective against it so they can be used from April to September every year in their orchards," he demanded.

Khwaja Muhammad Shoaib of Farmers Vision Forum said the reports from Sindh regarding mango production were not encouraging. It was being reported that the crop size was 50 to 60 per cent as compared to last year, he added.

"Predicting the size of the crop at the moment is impossible as the windstorm season will continue for a week. This year, the windstorm is late and the first storm of the season came today, which was very intense. So, any prediction will be immature at this moment. The quality and quantity of the crop will be judged on June 1. If there are more windstorms, the loss of fruit will increase, which will result in an increase in the quality of the fruit, as the size of a mango automatically increases when the number of fruits on a tree is less. And if the number of fruits on a tree is large, the size of the fruit will remain small," he explained.

Mr Shoaib said that reports from exporters were encouraging as they were saying that this year they have received better orders as compared to last year.

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Exports to EU rise by 17pc in 10 months

Pakistan's exports to the European Union (EU) grew by over 17 per cent in the first ten months of the current financial year, largely due to the Generalised System of Preferences-Plus (GSP+) scheme.

According to data compiled by the ministry of commerce, export proceeds to the EU's 27 member countries amounted to \$7.474 billion during the July-April period against \$6.367bn over the same period of the previous financial year.

Exports posted a paltry growth in terms of euros. The EU calculates trade figures on the basis of a calendar year January to December.

The GSP+ scheme became effective on Jan 1, 2014, and it will remain available to Pakistan for the next 10 years, till 2024.

Top export destinations for Pakistan are Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy and Belgium.

Recently, the EU parliament has suggested a premature end to the facility, but it's not yet clear whether it will be pursued aggressively or not.

Diplomatic relations of Pakistan with France became uneasy when some religious groups in the country demanded expulsion of the French ambassador over the issue of sacrilegious sketches.

In Brussels, France now plays a very important role after the exit of Britain from the EU and might expedite an early end to the GSP-Plus facility for Pakistan.

On April 29, the European parliament had adopted a resolution calling for a review of the GSP+ status granted to Pakistan in view of current events. The EU parliament called on the European Commission and the European External Action Service "to immediately review Pakistan's eligibility for GSP+ status and whether there is sufficient reason to initiate a procedure for the temporary withdrawal of this status and the benefits that come with it, and to report to the European Parliament on this matter as soon as possible".

Advisor to the Prime Minister on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood says the EU is a very important market for Pakistan. "We greatly appreciate the tireless efforts of our exporters for making this possible to increase exports to EU under very difficult conditions."

A product-wise analysis shows large variations. For example, exports of garments and hosiery to the EU witnessed a growth. The second biggest export category is home textiles and the third category is cotton and intermediary goods of textiles.

Other products exported to the EU included articles of leather, rice, sports



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.

goods (footballs), surgical goods, footwear, plastics, minerals, machinery, carpets, cutlery, chemicals, articles of rubber and pharmaceuticals.

Prior to the Brexit, Pakistan's major export destination was the United Kingdom. In the post-Brexit period, Pakistan's exports continued to grow by 31pc to \$1.709bn from July 2020 to April 2021 from \$1.309bn in the same period of the previous financial year.

The remittances from the UK also increased by 62pc during July-Mar FY21. The increase in exports to the UK is an encouraging factor. However, exporters fear they will lose the UK market following Brexit. London, however, has assured Islamabad of no change in the post-Brexit scenario which is evident from the statistics of export proceeds.

In terms of market penetration, the UK is now replaced by Germany under GSP-Plus and emerged the top export destination for Pakistani products. Country-wise data shows that the growth of 19pc came from Germany as its imports from Pakistan surged to \$1.279bn during the period under review as against \$1.079bn.

The second biggest market for Pakistan's exports is the Netherlands. Exports to that country went up by 21pc to \$1.04bn against \$0.861bn over the last year. Both Germany and the Netherlands have emerged as major export destinations for Pakistani goods under the GSP+ scheme.

The third biggest market for Pakistani export goods is Spain. Exports to that country posted a paltry growth of 2pc to \$738.75m this year as against \$719.79m. Spain had become Pakistan's third biggest market within the EU in the post-GSP-Plus period.

Exports to Italy increased by 4pc to \$640.11m against \$615.22m. The export proceeds posted a paltry growth but Italy is the fourth biggest market for Pakistani products in the EU.

Exports to Belgium increased by 12pc to \$523.11m against \$465.39m, followed by 14pc growth to France as

export value reached to \$337.02m against \$296.20m over the last year.

Pakistan's exports to France are negligible.

Exports to Poland grew by 23pc to \$256.63m against \$209.18m, followed by 32pc to Denmark as it grew to \$208.87m as against \$158m over the last year. The export proceeds to Sweden up by 21pc to \$132.08m against \$109.39m over the last year.

Export proceeds to the remaining 18 EU countries were far less in terms of value.

However, the increase in exports to all countries was posted in percentage terms. These countries included Austria, Ireland, Greece, Finland, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Malta, Slovakia, Lithuania and Luxembourg.

Pakistan, Turkmenistan to promote trade

Pakistan and Turkmenistan on Thursday 6 May agreed to work in various sectors to promote bilateral trade and mutual cooperation on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards for trade of agri products.

The understanding was reached in the second meeting of Pakistan-Turkmenistan Joint Working Group (JWG) on Trade. The Pakistani side was led by Additional Secretary Commerce (Trade Diplomacy) Humair Karim while the Turkmenistan side was led by Merdan Annagulyyev, the head of department for the Foreign Economic Relations, Ministry of Trade and Foreign Economic Relations.

The two sides agreed to work on mutual cooperation in SPS standards, banking sector, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, trade dispute resolution and establishing warehouses in Pakistan.

They also agreed to establish joint chamber of commerce and industry, exchange of information on trade, tariff and regulatory regimes and exchange of delegations of professionals and businessmen from information technology sector.

Mr Karim said that the existing bilateral trade is far below the potential. He said holding of meeting of this JWG is manifestation of the desire on both sides to strengthen and increase bilateral trade while removing the hurdles which hamper trade.

He shared the vision of the government to make Pakistan a trade, transit and trans-shipment hub. He also highlighted the importance of Pakistan as a hub for investment due to its access to world markets and ease of doing business.

EU parliament move to review trade ties with Pakistan

The European Parliament recently adopted a resolution calling for a review of trade relations with Pakistan and ending its eligibility for the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) status.

The resolution linked the review to Pakistan's blasphemy laws, in particular the case of Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel, who have been on death row since 2014 for sending 'blasphemous' text messages a charge they deny.

It was overwhelmingly passed 662 to 3 with 26 not voting.

The text called on the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to "immediately review Pakistan's eligibility for GSP+ status in light of current events".

It also said there is "sufficient reason" to initiate a procedure for the temporary withdrawal of this status and the benefits that come with it.

Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari reacted to the development. "We have issues to resolve but there has been more movement now on our HR Int Convention commitments than in previous govts. The way forward is dialogue & negotiations, which we have been doing, not extreme public positioning," she tweeted.

The EU's GSP allows products to come into the EU market from vulnerable developing countries without import duties. The scheme slashes tariffs to zero per cent for vulnerable low and lower-middle income countries that implement 27 international conventions related to human rights, labour rights, protection of the environment and good governance.

Pakistan was granted GSP+ in 2014 and the EU is one of its biggest trading partners.

The resolution noted that blasphemy cases incite harassment, violence and murder against those being accused. It also mentioned an "alarming increase" in accusations of blasphemy in Pakistan over the past years.

"Judicial procedures in blasphemy cases in Pakistan are highly flawed," the resolution said, adding that there are low standards of evidence.

It noted that "Pakistan continued to deteriorate in 2020 as the government systematically enforced blasphemy laws and failed to protect religious minorities from abuses".

The text of the resolution said "repeated and deceptive attacks against the French authorities" by radical groups and statements made by the government on the issue have escalated.

The resolution also noted that a ruling



In this Sept 2020 file photo, European Union lawmakers attend a plenary session at the European Parliament in Brussels

party member tabled a resolution in the National Assembly demanding a debate on the expulsion of the French ambassador and said "violent demonstrations and attacks against France [are] unacceptable".

"[The European Parliament is] deeply concerned by the anti-French sentiment in Pakistan, which has led French nationals and companies to have to leave the country temporarily," it said.

Though the resolution in itself is not formally binding, the Council of Ministers may endorse it and commit to policies or actions in the future.

Member of European Parliament (MEP) Charlie Weimers of Sweden co-authored the resolution. He tweeted: "Should Europe reward Pakistan's mob justice targeting Christians and its Prime Minister relativising the Holocaust? My answer is no."

In 2018, a member of the European Parliament called on the EU to withdraw Pakistan's GSP status due to the death penalty. "This position stands in contrast with European trade policy, especially evident in the trade benefit programme GSP+," Barbara Matera had said.

According to the European Commission, the EU is Pakistan's most important trading partner. "As a result of GSP+, more than 78% of Pakistan's exports enter the EU at preferential rates. Around 80% of the textiles and clothing articles imported to the EU from Pakistan enter the EU at a preferential tariff rate. Around a quarter of these imports are bed linen, table linen and toilet and kitchen linen," a country profile on Pakistan said.

Baqir Sajjad Syed in Islamabad adds: Pakistan's Foreign Office expressed disappointment over the European Parliament's resolution.

While reacting to the development, the FO regretted that the discourse in the European Parliament was ill-informed about the context of blasphemy laws and associated religious sensitivities in Pakistan.

The FO statement also rejected the criticism of Pakistan's judicial system and

domestic laws as unwarranted and regrettable.

It noted that Pakistan is a parliamentary democracy with a vibrant civil society, free media and independent judiciary, which remains fully committed to the promotion and protection of human rights for all its citizens without discrimination.

"We are proud of our minorities who enjoy equal rights and complete protection of fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the Constitution. Judicial and administrative mechanisms and remedies are in place to guard against any human rights violations," the statement said.

It recalled the measures taken by the government for promotion of freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and inter-faith harmony.

The FO urged the international community to show a resolve to fight xenophobia, intolerance and incitement to violence based on religion or belief and work together to strengthen peaceful coexistence.

Record kinno exports fetch \$253m

Pakistan exported highest-ever 460,000 tonnes of kinno during 2020-21 amid strong demand as foreign buyers consumed the fruit for strengthening the immunity system against Covid-19.

Around 40 countries lifted Pakistani kinno which boosted exports by 30 per cent compared to 353,000 tonnes last year.

"Kinno exports have fetched \$253 million this season," Waheed Ahmed, Patron-in-Chief, All Pakistan Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) said, adding that export target for the current year was 350,000 tonnes to fetch \$210m.

He said despite record kinno sales, exporters had to sustain huge financial losses as dollar price fell sharply to Rs153 while they materialised export orders at Rs168. Pakistani kinno, however, could not get fair price due to lockdown in international markets while disproportionate increase in the cost of freight further multiplied the huge financial losses, the highest loss was sustained in the Russian market, he deplored.

He said exports of kinno were also made to Afghanistan and Iran after reopening of borders due to efforts of the ministries of commerce and interior. Exporters also made shipments to the United Kingdom after a long gap of seven years as the UK has left from the European Union.



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Shehroze Kashif becomes youngest Pakistani to scale Everest



Shehroze Kashif, 19, from Lahore, became the youngest Pakistani mountaineer to reach the summit of the 8,849-meter Mount Everest, the world's highest peak located in Nepal, on Tuesday 11 May morning.

Mr Kashif said in a post on his official Facebook page: "History has been made! Masha Allah I have summited the Everest."

Chhang Dawa Sherpa, the Nepalese mountaineer and the expedition manager of Seven Summit Treks, wrote on his Facebook page: "Huge congratulations to Shehroze Kashif, 19, on becoming the youngest Pakistani to have climbed the Mt. Everest (8848.86m)."

"This morning Kashif successfully climbed the Mt. Everest as a part of Seven Summit Treks - Everest Expedition 2021," Chhang Dawa said in the social media post.

According to a press release issued by Karar Haidri, secretary of Alpine Club of Pakistan, at 5.02am today (Tuesday, May 11, 2021), Pakistan's youngest climber Shehroze Kashif successfully climbed Mount Everest.

Shehroze Kashif had started climbing at the age of 11, beginning his adventure with the scaling of Makra peak (3,885m). He then climbed Musa Ka Massalah peak (4,080m) at age 12, Chembra peak (4,600m) at age 12, Minglik Sar Shimshal (6,050m) at age 13, K2 Gondogoro La K2 Base Camp (5,585m) at age 14, Khurdopin Pass (5,890m) at 15, Broad Peak (8,047m) at 17, Khushar Gang-Alpine Style (6,050m) at 18, and finally Mount Everest (8,849m)

at age of 19. His expedition to the Broad Peak (8,047m) earned him the title "The Broad Boy".

Shehroze Kashif and his team had established the base camp on April 8.

Raising Pakistani flag on the world's highest mountain was Mr Kashif's dream. Pakistan mountaineers Nazir Sabir, Hasan Sadpara, Samina Baig, Mirza Ali and Col Abdul Jabbar Bhatti have so far summited Everest.

Mountaineers, politicians, diplomats, social workers and media personnel have congratulated Kashif on his success, and prayed for his safe return from the peak.

Foreign tourists exempted from travel restrictions

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has exempted foreign tourists from the ban imposed on tourism activities and travelling from May 8 to May 16 due to alarming situation of Covid-19 pandemic.

Latifur Rehman, the spokesman for tourism department, told media that visit of foreign tourists to different areas of the province and Gilgit-Baltistan was already scheduled that was why they were exempted from the ban.

"The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is pleased to exempt foreign tourists/foreign tour groups from the ban imposed on tourism and travel from 8th to 16th of May," says a notification issued by the tourism department.

The notification states that tour operators and hoteliers catering to these individuals should ensure standard operating procedure for Covid-19 and negative PCR tests of these foreign tourists and tourism workforce, keeping health, safety and security as foremost priority.

It is pertinent to mention here that on May 1, the provincial government decided to close all business activities and enforce a complete ban on travel on the occasion of Eidul Fitr with effect from May 8 to May 16 due to alarming situation of Covid-19 pandemic. However, the essential services were exempted from these restrictions.

Sources in the home department told media that tourists from several countries had already taken permission from the government for visit to different areas of the province prior to imposition of the ban.

They said that such tourists either reached the province or they were on way to their destinations. How the tourists would stay there if all hotels and rest houses were closed due to the pandemic, they questioned.

Tourists from Italy, Ukraine, Belarus, Canada, the United States, the Netherland, Poland and Germany would visit different areas of the province and Gilgit-Baltistan during the lockdown, sources said.

The tourism department has also shared the list of the tourists and tour operators with the provincial home department to provide them security and fulfil their other needs.

"Kindly communicate this information to the administration of the respective districts for further necessary action to facilitate these foreign tourists during their mobility and stay," says a letter sent by Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation to the provincial home department.

The spokesman for tourism department said that government also directed the deputy commissioners in Malakand and Hazara divisions to make proper arrangements for provision of food to the tourists during the lockdown as all hotels and restaurants would be closed.

Now the foreign tourists will be free to visit Kalash valleys of Bumburate, Birir and Rumbur to participate in the five-day Kalash spring festival Chilimjush, which is scheduled to be started on May 12.

Besides foreign visitors, the spokesman said, only people of Kalash community and locals would be allowed to participate in the festival while visitors from rest of the country would not attend the festival owing to the restrictions imposed in the wake of the pandemic.

On May 1, the government had notified that there would be complete ban on tourism activities from May 8 to May 16. All tourist resorts, public parks and hotels at the tourist spots would be closed, it had said.

Similarly, all tourist resorts, public parks, hotels, restaurants, shopping malls and transport would remain closed.

Gwadar: a tourist destination with no French fries



The stunning beauty of the Makran Coastal Highway with its majestic topography and the glittering blue sea is wasted in Pakistan.

We are packed for Eid, said Muhammad Asif Muneer, managing director of the budget-friendly Gwadar Tourist Hotel. The pandemic may have sucked the life out of Karachiites' entertainment, but it provided a boom for Gwadar's tourism where the city dwellers are flocking to escape the confines of their homes.

Estimating the weekly capacity of the motel strip across the scenic marine drive to be around 2,000, Mr Muneer guesses that Gwadar receives around 20,000-25,000 visitors a month during the peak season when all places to stay are accounted for. The well-heeled may opt for Pearl Continental Gwadar that has witnessed a 200 per cent increase in the number of guests in the last four to five months, according to its finance manager Waqar Baig.

Other than the lockdown, the photos of the Gwadar Stadium by the International Cricket Council have also drummed up interest and made it a popular tourist spot, right up there with the Princess of Hope and the Sphinx.

Budget-friendly

A family of four travelling by car from Karachi to Gwadar for a four-day, three-night stay could comfortably cover their expenses in about Rs50,000-55,000. This includes two-way fuel costs of around Rs14,000-16,000. Except for a PSO pump in Gwadar, all the fuel stations along the way sell Iranian oil. Last month, the price of Iranian fuel was Rs100 per litre compared to the official price of Rs110 though rates fluctuate daily. The drive itself is beautiful with rugged terrains and a vista of the blue-green sea that brings peace to eyes weary with the polluted urban setting.

The middle-income group can find family-friendly hotels for around Rs6,000 per night. While restaurants are scarce in Gwadar, the food available at hotels is pleasant. But families with kids be warned, French fries are a delicacy not easily found.

While Karachiites may make up the bulk of Gwadar tourists, there is also a lot

of interest from Punjab, say event organisers Zahra Tuba and Syed Osama bin Shehzad from Travel Tucker. Though Punjab has easy access to the beauty of the mountains, it lacks beaches, making the Makran coastline an attractive destination.

The event organisers take groups of about 200 people to the Ormara beach from Karachi and provide comfortable rooms in a hut, good food, rung (throwing of coloured powder), fireworks and live music. Trips to Gwadar comprise about 35-60 people. After Eid, they have planned four small trips and one mega event a month, indicating the developing tourism along the beaches of Balochistan.

However, the stunning beauty of the Makran Coastal Highway with its majestic topography and the glittering blue sea is wasted in Pakistan.

Wasted potential

"There are not enough visitors for me to purchase milk for tea," says the chai wala at Sunset Park, near PC Gwadar. A green park with slides and swings for children overlooking a cliff with crashing waves, it is an ideal spot for families but fairly deserted. Similarly, the marine drive in front of the tourist strip is beautiful and well-lit at night but sparsely populated.

Considered one of the best places in the world for hot air ballooning, the unique formations of Cappadocia, Turkey, attracted 3.7 million visitors in 2019, according to media reports. While Pakistan is similarly blessed with rock formations dating back hundreds of years that would make for an incredibly beautiful spot for hot air balloon enthusiasts and other adventurers, its visitors barely number in thousands.

One cannot lament enough the lack of infrastructure. The basics of any long drive such as reliable petrol stations, rest stops with washrooms and the internet are all missing. Only Iranian petrol is available, many a time poured in with a can covered with a cloth as a strain.

If travellers hope to sing along to music while driving, they must download songs because the internet is practically non-existent from Karachi onwards.

Washrooms in particular are a challenge. We can arrange for everything, laments Ms Tuba, but the lack of restrooms is an impediment to travel for many beautiful places such as Moola Chotok in Sindh. Even if the private sector could come together and develop rest spots, travel would receive a boost, she suggests.

The highway from Karachi to Gwadar is beautiful but the road is narrow with a single lane for two-way traffic. It requires

a lot of concentration to avoid high-speed incoming traffic from the opposite direction, especially at night when there are no lights.

Though the interest in Gwadar and its surrounding beaches has generated traction, it may be short-lived due to the lack of amenities. Without internet access, restaurants and activities, there is not much to do beyond a day or two. A bit of effort from the government and the private sector could make Balochistan a tourist hotspot of the south. But if the province is as ignored in tourism as it is in other sectors, this potential too would be wasted.

KP govt moves to lease out 19 rest houses

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority on Friday 7 May advertised 19 government rest houses in different parts of the province for the purpose of leasing them out to private parties.

The expressions of interest seeking potential bidders for leasing the rest houses were issued with the bids likely to be opened on June 29.

In Aug 2019, the government had handed over 169 rest houses of different departments in the province to the tourism department to promote tourism and increase tourist facilities on the directives of the prime minister.

Officials told media that the tourism department initially conducted a survey of 169 rest houses handed over to it by various departments, and categorised them for outsourcing in different phases.

They said that of 169 rest houses, 47 were ready for operationalisation in the first phase, 80 required major repairs, while the others were occupied by different government departments.

The officials said a technical committee headed by the finance minister during its first meeting on March 6, 2020, decided to advertise those properdes for outsourcing to the private sector.

They said that the first advertisement for the leasing of 48 rest houses for a period of 10 years and it was published on Aug 17, 2020.

An official said that after evaluation, no bid was found to be completing technical requirements. He said that 84 rest houses, which required minor repairs, were also advertised but initially, no party could meet technical qualifications.

The official said that in the meanwhile, the government also transferred five other rest houses in

Nathiagali, including Governor's House, Chief Minister's House, Karnak House, Police Rest House and Hamala House, to the tourism department for outsourcing.

He said that the authority advertised the Karnak House and Police Rest House on Jan 11, 2021.

The official said that 14 firms applied for the bidding of the Karnak House.

He said that the highest bid quoted by Rockwood Resort was Rs4,650,000 and the award of contract was scheduled for May 10, 2021.

The official said that for the Police

Rest House, 11 firms took part in the bidding and the highest bid was quoted Apical Ways at Rs6,450,000. He said that the award of contract was scheduled for May 10.

The official said the 19 rest houses were advertised for leasing out to private parties and their pre-bid meeting was likely to take place on May 26, while the technical bid would open on June 28.

He added that the bid evaluation report was due to appear by July 12, while the financial bid opening was likely to take place on July 28.

The official said the tentative award of contract would take place on August 10.

He said that 28 rest houses were re-advertised on Feb 1, 2021, and 11 firms took part in the bidding very soon.

The official said that the 28 rest houses were in the process, which was likely to be finalised.

He said that the Hamala Rest House was advertised for lease on May 6, its technical bid would open on June 24 and the tentative award of contract was likely to take place at the start of August.

Hunza cyclist completes 2,800km trip



Abid Baig lifts his bicycle on reaching the Khunjerab Top.

A cyclist from Gilgit-Baltistan has completed 2,800 kilometres solo tour from Balochistan to Khunjerab Top to highlight and promote ecotourism and biodiversity in Pakistan.

Abid Baig, 31, from Hunza claims to have performed the longest and the fastest ever solo cycle ride in Pakistan.

Mr Baig recently started the journey from Hingol National Park Balochistan situated at the sea level. He paddled 2,800 kilometres distance covering Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Gilgit-Baltistan in 10 days and 11 hours, and arrived at the Khunjerab Top situated at 15,400 feet.

A warm reception was given to him at various points of GB.

Civil society members, government officials, including senior minister Ubaidullah Baig received the cyclist when he arrived in Gilgit.

He also received a hero's welcome on his arrival in his home town of Hunza, with people dancing on traditional music to celebrate his achievement.

Talking to media, Abid Baig said he had already taken part in many cycle race competitions in Pakistan, including the Tour de Khunjerab cycle race in 2019.

He said the basic aim of the tour from

Balochistan to Khunjerab was to promote ecotourism and biodiversity in Pakistan.

He said raising awareness about sensitive and fragile environment and responsible tourism was the need of the hour to ensure a greener Pakistan.

"I started my journey from sea level where temperature was above 40 degrees Celsius, and when I arrived at Khunjerab the temperature was minus 14 degree Celsius.

"I came across deserts, green pastures and snow-capped mountains during my trip. This diversity can only be experienced in Pakistan," Mr Baig said. He said Pakistan was safe country from Balochistan to Gilgit-Baltistan to travel and visit. "People across Pakistan are hospitable, welcoming and peace loving," he added.

Mr Baig said promoting a green Pakistan was the main objective of his tour.

Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid Khan met the cyclist in his office and appreciated his effort. He also presented a souvenir to Mr Baig in recognition of his achievement.

GB Assembly Deputy Speaker Nazir Ahmed also congratulated the young cyclist on his achievement

International ski mountaineering begins in Nagar

An international ski mountaineering began in Nagar district of Gilgit-Baltistan on Friday 7 May, with a five member team from the US and Poland climbing two unnamed peaks and then descending from the summits successfully on the first day and on Saturday 8 May.

The team also plans to climb and descend two more peaks.

The name of their expedition is 'Nagar Ski Exploratory'.

The team is led by American skier Mr Luke Smithwick.

Other members are Ms Sarah Halvorson, Ms Kirsten Halvorson and Mr Bjorn Halvorson from the US and Mr Bartek Golebiowski from Poland.

Team leader Luke Smithwick told media on Sunday 9 May that they had climbed two peaks, one 4,209 meters and the other 4,587 meters, and then skied from their summits successfully.

We are planning two more peaks in Nagar,' he said. 'We are going to attempt to climb and ski from the summit of a 5,504-meter peak in the valley,' he added.

Nagar has a lot of skiing potential both for Pakistani and international skiers,' he concluded.

Murree rest houses given to tourism department

The Forest Department has handed over its three rest houses in Murree to the Tourism Department under an agreement for promoting tourism while generating revenue through the existing government infrastructure.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the two departments here on Thursday 22 April. Forest Minister Sibtain Khan, Tourism Adviser Asif Mahmood, Tourism Secretary Ehsan Bhutta, Forest Secretary Javed Iqbal Bukhari, and others attended the ceremony.

Under the MoU, the rest houses will be upgraded by providing a hostel, children's play area, food-street, and other amenities to attract visitors and the revenue will be divided between both the departments.

It was said on the occasion that different public rest houses have been given to the TDCP to be opened to the public. Also, floating restaurants would also be established at the Kalabagh area in the Indus River to promote domestic tourism.



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Sikh pilgrims descend on Kartarpur for Besakhi Mela

The 322nd Besakhi Mela celebrated at Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur on Monday 19 April. For the first time ever, Indian Sikh pilgrims were able to spend a night at the gurdwara where they were allowed in only after adopting all coronavirus standard operating procedures (SOPs).



Besides the 818 Sikh pilgrims from India, yatrees from Pakistan, Dubai, the US and Canada were set to participate in the festival here.

Sardar Inder Jait Singh, a member of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, said that on arrival at Kartarpur, the Sikh pilgrims welcomed by officials and members of the committee, the gurdwara administration and Evacuee Trust Property Board. The pilgrims were showered with petals and presented with bouquets of flowers.

For the first time in history, the Indian Sikh pilgrims stay a night at Gurdwara Darbar Sahib for which all arrangements had been made. Earlier, these pilgrims came to Kartarpur in the morning and return to Lahore and Nankana Sahib in the evening. On their arrival here, food, fruits, tea and drinks were also offered to the pilgrims.

Strict security arrangements had also been completed for the Besakhi Mela. Unauthorised people would be barred from entering the gurdwara. Security personnel

deployed on all highways leading to it. A medical camp had also been set up to facilitate the pilgrims. Rescue 1122 also performed its duties to deal with any emergencies.

Scientists claim discovering first pregnant Egyptian mummy



Polish scientists said on Thursday 29 April they have discovered the world's first pregnant Egyptian mummy while carrying out scans on the 2,000-year-old remains kept at the National Museum in Warsaw.

"My husband Stanislaw, an Egyptian archaeologist, and I looked at the X-ray images and noticed a familiar sight for parents of three children in the belly of the dead woman a little foot!" Marzena Ozarek-Szilke, an anthropologist and archaeologist at the University of Warsaw, told journalists.

Further analysis revealed the whole foetus and scientists working on the Warsaw Mummy Project believe the woman was between 20 and 30 years old

Narowal Deputy Commissioner Zaheer Hassan said a facilitation desk had been set up for the pilgrims where they will also be provided facemask and sanitisers. Each pilgrim must possess a negative PCR test report conducted at least 72 hours earlier in order to enter the gurdwara. He said social distancing will be strictly followed and body temperatures checked at the entrance to the premises.

and was 26-30 weeks pregnant.

"We do not know why the foetus was not taken out of the belly of the deceased during mummification," said Wojciech Ejsmond from the Polish Academy of Sciences, another project participant. "That is why this mummy is truly unique. We have not been able to find any similar cases. This means that 'our' mummy is the only recognised in the world with a foetus," he said.

Ozarek-Szilke speculated that there may have been an effort to "camouflage the pregnancy... or, perhaps, it had some significance related to beliefs and re-birth in the afterlife". Based on an analysis of the hieroglyphs on the sarcophagus, the mummy was originally thought to be of a male priest who lived between the first century BC and the first century AD.

Scientists now believe it could be even older than that and are looking into the possible causes of death.

The mummy has not been opened but one scan showed the woman had long curly hair down to her shoulders.

The research has been published in the latest issue of peer-reviewed Journal of Archaeological Science.

"This is the first known case of a pregnant embalmed body... It opens up new possibilities of researching pregnancy in ancient times and practices related to maternity," the article said. The scans were carried out by Affidea, a medical analysis company, using equipment provided by GE, both project backers.

The mummy was brought to Poland in the 19th century and became part of the antiquities collection at the University of Warsaw.

It has been kept at the National Museum since 1917, where it is on show to the public alongside the sarcophagus.



The Tamed Lion of Punjab Maharaja Duleep Singh

(Prof. Safdar Sandal)

The last Sikh ruler of Punjab Maharaja Duleep Singh born in Lahore (1838) was the son of the one-eyed "Lion of Punjab", the warrior Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh who had extended his suzerainty besides Punjab over Kashmir, (present) Khaiber Pakhtunkhwa, parts of Afghanistan and beyond, up to Tibet. But soon after his death, his young son, Duleep Singh, enthroned while only at 10 years of age, innocently got succumbed to the pressure



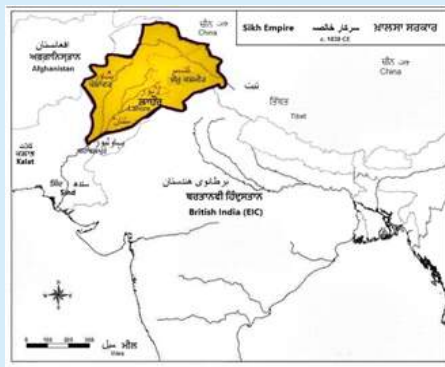
and impeccable manners made him a good favourite of Queen Victoria, who encouraged him to find a wife. This he did later

however, but by falling in love with a lady in Egypt: a missionary woman in Cairo named Bamba and establishing her as his Maharani in a Suffolk (England) home. Bamba had a mixed blood in her veins consisting of an Arab-Abyssinian Coptic slave woman and a German missionary man Mueller, without their getting married, the act being quite common. When the charm of that life wore off and Maharaja Duleep Singh's pension, who was completely Anglicized intentionally, fell too short of his royal living; Maharaja Duleep Singh struggled to make both ends meet and in fact realized that his pension was nothing in front of his empire and demanded that it be doubled, which in such cases of forlornness, was discarded. The queen was annoyed too because Duleep had not accepted her advice and choice for marriage. The Maharaja then started protesting against the British Empire for having stolen his kingdom and later for their cold shouldering to him. But all this was too late; his protests bore no fruit. He met a sad and broken-hearted death at a short age of 55 years and with that he became the last Maharaja of Sikh Empire. He died on October 22 in Paris, France but buried in Elveden Church in England. It is interesting to note that he had first been



of the British and was pitifully made to sell his empire to them in a tricky way, as always had been managed

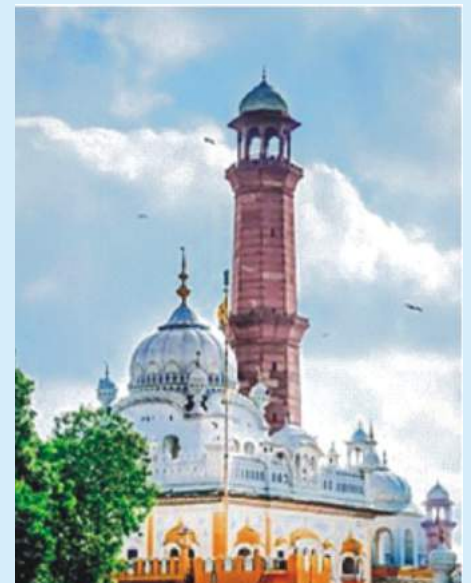
by the British during their nefarious rule



in India. The younger 'Lion Maharaja Duleep Singh' was thus tamed by them like a cub. He was only in his teen age when the British snatched his empire (1849), removed him and also looted the famous 'Kohinoor Diamond' which was later sent by them to Queen Victoria in England, as the most precious booty.

After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 and at the age of five, Duleep Singh was proclaimed Maharaja of the Sikh Empire, with Maharani Jind Kaur as 'Regent' as Maharaja was yet very young.

On 13 December 1845 the British declared war on the Sikhs and, after winning the First Anglo-Sikh War, retained the Maharaja as a nominal ruler, but replaced the Maharani by a 'Council Regency' and later imprisoned and exiled her. Over thirteen years passed before Duleep Singh was permitted to see his mother again. Duleep Singh was double-talked into signing away his kingdom to the British; he was sent to England in compensation with an enormous pension, separated from his mother Maharani Jind Kaur for a very long time, hers being the only child. Duleep Singh's good looks





converted to Christianity (Protestant) under the influence of the British and married a Coptic Christian woman, but several years later when he gained self-realization and estimation, he got reconverted to his ancestral religion i.e. Sikhism and died as a Sikh.

Maharaja Duleep Singh was nicknamed the 'Black Prince of Perthshire'. He was Maharaja Ranjeet Singh's youngest son, the only child from Maharani Jind Kaur. Maharaja Ranjeet Singh had eight sons, but astoundingly he recognized only two of them as his legitimate ones. According to him only Kharak Singh and Duleep Singh were his real 'biological' sons and the rest would be from the attendants of the palace!! (the writer is unable to comment on the veracity of this claim). Duleep Singh however lived a life of great turmoil and misery. Before coming back to India for a short time, he had moved back to Moscow- Russia and had to relinquish 'Royal Hotels' and reside in economical hotels because of lack of funds and the stoppage of the British pension. He sought the help of Czar to oust the British from India. Despite his desperate efforts of long years, the Czar could not offer him the needed help and a prestigious attendance too. During all this period Maharaja Duleep Singh was constantly spied upon, by the personal of the British Embassy in Moscow. Even during his short stay of his home country India, the spying on his movements and activities continued unabated by the British regime in India. He was a betrayed Maharaja all along his life. The Sikh

community however, always showered their loyalty on him and all Punjabis in fact; Muslims and Hindus did the same, their annoyance with the British Raj existing apart, as the main cause of their acrimony and the snatching away of their first-ever Punjabi rule.

After the close of the Second Anglo-Sikh War and the subsequent annexation of Punjab on 29 March 1849, Duleep Singh was deposed at the age of ten and was sent from Lahore to Fatehgar with tight restrictions on whom he was allowed to meet and whom not. No Indians, except trusted servants, could meet him in private. As a matter of British policy, he was to be Anglicized in every possible respect. His health deteriorated and he was often sent to the hill station of Lindour near Mussoorie in the lower Himalaya for convalescence; at the time about four day's journey. He would remain there for weeks at a stretch in Landour and at a grand hilltop building called 'The Castle', which had been lavishly furnished to accommodate him. His mother had effectively ruled when he was very young and he managed to meet her on 16 January 1861 in Calcutta after 13 years and returned with her to the United Kingdom. During the last two years of her life, his mother told Maharaja about his Sikh heritage and the vast Empire which once had been his to rule. A mother's and a son's feelings at this juncture can only be imagined.

Back in England, in 1858 the lease of Castle Menzies where he lived, expired and Duleep Singh rented a house in

Auchlyne. He was known for a lavish lifestyle, shooting parties and a love of dressing in Highland costume and soon had the nickname "the Black Prince of Perthshire". At the same time, he was known to have gradually developed a sense of regret for his circumstances in exile, including some inner repentance about his conversion to Christianity too and his forced departure from Punjab, the country of his rule. His mother stayed in Perthshire - Scotland with him for a short time. When in exile, he sought to learn more about Sikhism and was eager to return to India. Though his previous efforts in this direction were thwarted by his handlers, he eventually got bored with his exile and expressed a wish to go back to India but it was suggested by the East India Company Board that instead he take a tour of the European continent which he did at the cost and behest of the British Government, in the company of Ada Douglas Wetherill, first his mistress and later on his second wife. (It was feared that if he comes to India permanently, there could be a possible turmoil and an insurgency). They visited together Russia and then Paris, to where originally she belonged to. Maharaja Duleep Singh died in Paris in 1893 at the age of 55. He was buried in Elveden (England) Church in 1909, against his wishes and the will that he be buried in India only and by observing Sikh rituals, as he was no more a Christian. But none was of his wishes were honoured. He had eight children in total and six were from Bamba and two from Ada Wetherill. A life-size bronze statue of the Maharaja, showing him on a horse, was unveiled by H.R.H. the then Prince of Wales in 1999 at Butten Island in Thetford (District Norfolk, England), a market town which had greatly benefitted from his and his son's generous acts. Maharaja Duleep Singh was very fond of shooting and he got the fourth-best- shot position in the UK shooting competition.

A film with the name of "The Black Prince" was released in 2017 about the life and struggles of Maharaja Duleep Singh. "From thee all human actions take their springs, the rise of empires, the fall of kings". (Samuel Boyse)

A grandeur view of the 'Samadhi of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh' (father of Duleep Singh) with the 'Mughal Badshahi Masjid' in the rear both built once on the banks of old Ravi River (now called Budha Dariya) near the 'Shahi Qila'- Lahore-Fort.

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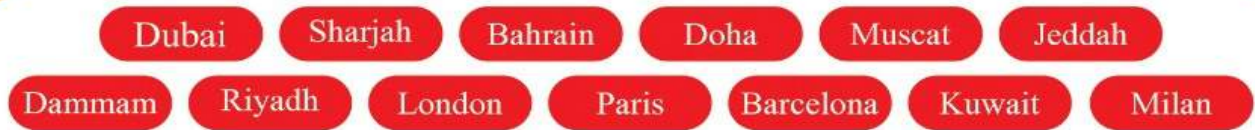
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