

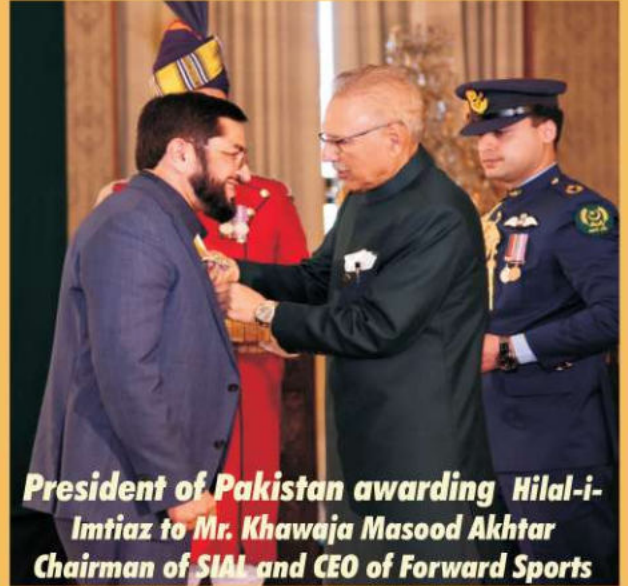
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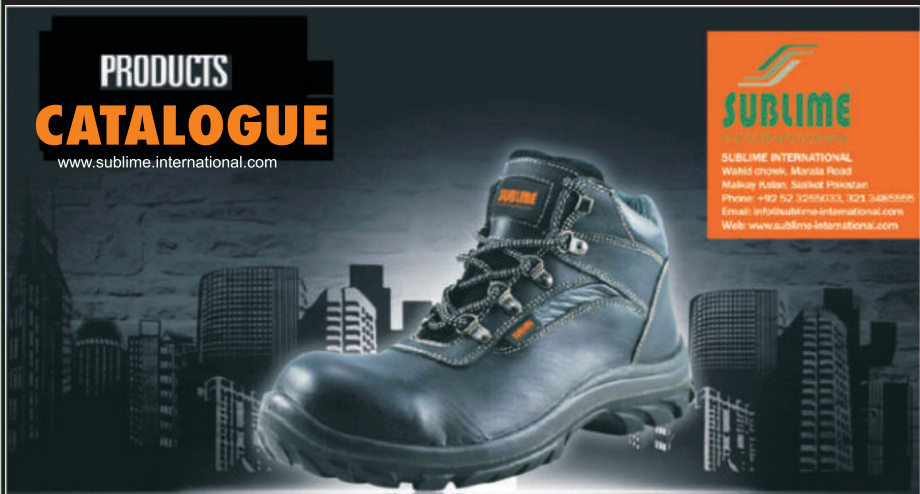
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Sialkot International Airport

ہم جناب خواجہ مسعود اختر (پیئرین بیل) کو "ہلال امتیاز" اور جناب ریاض الدین شیخ (پیئرین اتحاد فوٹر ڈگروپ) کو "ستارہ امتیاز" ملنے پر دل کی اتھاہ گہرائیوں سے مبارکباد پیش کرتے ہیں۔

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Pilots fleeing Pakistan due to major pay cuts, Senate body told

The Senate Standing Committee on Aviation was on Thursday 30 March informed that a significant number of pilots have recently fled the country as a result of major salary cuts in the form of high taxes.

PIA's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Amir Hayat informed the committee that 15 pilots had recently left the country and that a Supreme Court appeal for hiring young male staff for the national flag carrier had not yet been entertained.

The committee's chairman Senator Hidayatullah remarked that the future of aspiring pilots was in jeopardy. He asked Senator Saleem Mandviwalla to take up the issue with the FBR through the Senate Finance Committee.

The Senate committee was briefed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CIA) about the reasons behind the decline of routes of foreign airlines.

CAA's Director General Khaqan Murtaza said 31 international airlines had applied for operations to and from Pakistan with a total tally of 576 weekly frequencies from all international airports in Pakistan and there had been no substantial decline in the upcoming summer schedule.

A plea filed in Supreme Court for hiring young male staff is yet to be entertained, says official

The committee inquired as to why the foreign airlines were not permitting passengers to purchase tickets in rupees. Mr Murtaza stated that passengers were buying foreign airlines' tickets from remote locations using VPN or some other means and it costs relatively less than the tickets bought in Pakistan.

The committee directed the CAA to submit a detailed report on the matter in the next meeting.

The committee also discussed the cancellation of licences of PIA pilots. The committee was told that 141 pilot licences were declared suspended by the CAA. The breakup showed that 18 pilots were not PIA employees while 18 were terminated from service upon suspension/cancellation of licences by CAA, 16 were deceased and separated, two pilots were on stay order whose decision was pending and the remaining 87 were cleared by CAA afterwards.

The matter related to PIA employees appointed on fake degrees was also taken up. The PIA chief said that individuals charged with having fake degrees had

been penalised with termination; however, the Senate special committee on affected employees restored the appointment of the employees.

Senator Hidayatullah stated that the direction of the Supreme Court was crystal clear in this regard and should be strictly followed.

He said the employees appointed on fake degrees should not be reincorporated at any cost.

In addition, Senator Mandviwalla pointed out that a huge bulk of pilots was leaving the country due to major cuts on their pay in the shape of heavy taxes.

The PIA chief told the meeting that recently 15 pilots had left the country and a petition relating to the hiring of young workforce for the PIA had been filed in Supreme Court which was yet to be entertained.

According to a Senate handout, the panel also deliberated on the matter of two Airbus A320 worth around \$20 billion grounded in Indonesia from the last one year.

The PIA chief informed the members

that re-delivery work on both the aircraft had been completed by around 82 and 92pc, respectively, and the aircraft will arrive in Pakistan by the end of June.

The committee was also briefed about the properties leased to different companies by CAA. Mr Murtaza stated that a major bulk of properties had been leased to PIA at a nominal cost and the leased agreements of the properties had not been revisited since long.

According to latest figures, PIA owes Rs 150 billion to the CAA, he said.

About frequent cancellation of flights between Quetta and Islamabad, the CAA chief said Quetta Airport was undergoing restoration and daytime operations will begin by the end of May. However, the night-time operations cannot be carried out because a letter of credit (LC) worth around 457,000 euros for the procurement of necessary machinery had been declined by the government.

The meeting was also attended by Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman, senators Mohsin Aziz, Faisal Saleem Rehman, Dilawar Khan and officials from different departments.

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AirSial launches of International operations AirSial starts its flights from Lahore to Jeddah

AirSial Limited has started its international operations by operating direct flights to Jeddah from Lahore & Islamabad initially and plans from Karachi, Sialkot and Peshawar in the 2nd Phase, the airlines offers 4 Weekly flights from Lahore and Islamabad each. These flights will be operated by using Airbus A320 aircrafts having an all-economy configuration of 180 seats. AirSial currently operates on fleet of 5 Airbus 320 aircrafts.

AirSial started its flight operations in December 2020 with three aircrafts Airbus A320. The airlines added more two Airbus A320 aircraft in October last year to start international flights after successful domestic operations to major cities of Pakistan i.e. Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta.

Moving on, “we shall be adding Riyadh, Dammam, Medina, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Muscat, said the Chairman in



a Message, Alhumdulillah, we are extremely proud that the day has come when AirSial expands its wings to launch of the international operations. Honorable members of Sialkot Chamber of Commerce, all EBODs and the entire team of AirSial, are now seeing this “Dream to come true” as they have all worked tirelessly to make this day possible, many congratulations all around. Furthermore, we hope that the addition of AirSial on the Saudi Arabia routes would definitely cater to the high rising passenger demand on this particular route. I would like to share that this is just the beginning and InshaAllah we shall be adding various international routes with the passage of time, Mr. Fazal Jilani – Chairman AirSial Limited, said.



Chairman AirSial alongwith others cutting the ribbon to inaugurate the international flights.

About AirSial

AirSial Limited is a visionary project of Sialkot Chamber of Commerce. Taking the lead from the exceptional success of Sialkot International Airport Ltd (SIAL), the members of the Sialkot Chamber of

Commerce and Industry conceived the idea of AirSial Limited in August, 2015 to make it another success story.

AirSial is a licensed airline to provide scheduled passenger and cargo services in both domestic and international markets.



Group photo taken on the occasion shows Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman flanked by Mr. Qaisar Iqbal Baryar Sr. Vice Chairman, Mr. Ameen Ahsan CEO, on his left, Mr. Umar Mir Vice Chairman and Mr. Tariq Amin COO AirSial on his right.



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

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

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



Govt starts outsourcing of three major airports

The government on Thursday 30 March kicked off outsourcing of operations and land assets at three major airports to be run through a public-private partnership, a finance ministry statement said, a move to generate foreign exchange reserves.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) has approved the hiring of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) — the private sector arm of the World Bank Group — as a transaction adviser to outsource Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad airports to the private sector for at least 25 years.

The committee's meeting, presided over by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, deferred a summary submitted by the power division on implementing an agreement signed between the government and K-Electric on the pending issue of payment of duties and taxes. It also approved a series of supplementary grants, mostly for political schemes, under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“The outsourcing of three airports has been initiated within the scope of public-private partnership ... to engage private investor/airport operator through a competitive and transparent process to run the airports, develop appertaining land assets and enhance avenues for commercial activities and to garner full revenue potential,” the ministry said.

Officials said there had been a difference of opinion among cabinet members over the appointment of IFC for outsourcing airports that whether this should go through the privatisation process under the privatisation law or through the public-private partnership law.

The federal cabinet decided in December that outsourcing the operation of these three airports would be completed expeditiously by engaging leading international financial institutions under the Public-Private Partnership Authority (P3A) Act.

The act provides for hiring an international financial institution as a transaction adviser through direct contracting with the approval of the P3A's board.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) contacted many institutions but only the World Bank's IFC agreed to advisory service and finally reached an agreement

for a transaction adviser early this month for a fee of about \$4 million.

To clarify the situation, a ministerial committee told the ECC that there had been no decision in the past about privatising these airports and therefore it was never considered under the privatisation law.

The committee was informed that the outsourcing of the three airports had been initiated to find a suitable private sector airport operator through a transparent, competitive process to run the airports, develop appertaining land assets, enhance avenues for commercial activities to realise the true revenue potential of these vital assets and subsequent revenue transfer to the CAA and improve passenger service and satisfaction.

The option was suitable under the P3A law for commercial transactions between an implementing government agency and a private party. Some neighbouring countries, particularly Middle Eastern parties, had shown interest in taking over the airports.

Based on these considerations, the ECC allowed the hiring of the IFC to prepare a transaction structure under the public-private partnership mechanism against fees linked to various transaction milestones, which could be subsequently recovered from the concessionaire at the time of awarding the concession, as in the case of success fee to avoid any cost to the CAA.

The committee also approved three summaries of the petroleum division for the declaration of commerciality and field development plan over Hilal and Iqbal discoveries to Mari Petroleum Company Ltd, second two-year renewal over Kirthar exploration licence block to Polish Oil and Gas Company Ltd from Aug 28, 2022, and extended well testing over Ghazi-1 discovery to Mari Petroleum.

The meeting also approved about Rs7.3bn worth of three supplementary grants, including Rs607.6 million to power division development schemes in Sindh, Rs1.69bn to the Ministry of Housing and Works for development schemes under SDGs Achievement Programme in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh, and another Rs5bn to the housing ministry for executing development schemes in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

PIA adds 11 more destinations to its network



The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has added 11 destinations to its network by a code-share arrangement with Malaysian Airlines.

A spokesman for PIA said on Friday 10 March that the national flag carrier had entered into a commercial arrangement - Special Prorate Agreement (SPA) — with the Malaysia Airlines for destinations in Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, and Vietnam.

Pakistan and Malaysia share long-term relations and the commercial agreement between the two airlines will further increase people-to-people contact as well as trade opportunities between the two countries and beyond, said the PIA spokesman, Abdullah H. Khan.

This partnership between PIA and Malaysian Airlines allows PIA to access 11 destinations through its counterpart's hub in Kuala Lumpur, he said.

Attractive fares for these destinations with convenient flight timings at Kuala Lumpur and Pakistan are being offered for the convenience of passengers.

The spokesman said the arrangement also fulfills the long-standing demand of Pakistani expatriates in Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland.

The 11 additional destinations added to PIA network include Sydney, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Auckland, Singapore, Bangkok, Phuket, Jakarta, Manila and Ho Chi Minh City.

Passengers can book their flights through PIA call centre and the airlines' travel partners.

Aviation ministry asked to persuade foreign airlines to resume operations

The Senate Standing Committee on Aviation on Friday 3 March took up the issue of international airline routes being cut due to the non-remittance of ticket sales to them in foreign currency and decided to recommend to the aviation ministry to hold a meeting with all the airline heads and persuade them to resume regular operations to the country.

The meeting of the committee was held at Parliament House. The members were briefed on various issues being faced by the aviation sector in Pakistan.

The meeting was presided over by Senator Hidayatullah and attended by senators Saleem Mandviwala, Syed Mohammad Sabir Shah and Faisal Saleem Rehman along with senior officers from the Ministry of Aviation.

Reviewing the matter of cutting international airline routes due to non-remittance of ticket sales in foreign exchange, the committee decided to send recommendations in writing to the ministry to call a collective meeting with all airline heads in order to dispel the negative opinion built about Pakistan and convince them to resume operations as usual.

Matters taken up by the committee included payment of pensions and emoluments to former employees of the CAA who retired in 2014, 2022 and 2023, issues faced by retired employees related to house grants, medical and leave encashment, setting up of counters of different agencies at all airports to facilitate passengers.

The meeting was informed that the retired employees were supposed to be paid pensions and other emoluments according to the CAA Pay and Pensions Regulations 2014 (amended 2019). However, instead, they have been paid according to the CAA Service Regulations 2000.

The CAA inadvertently kept granting pension increases in line with the federal government's decisions till 2019. This resulted in over-payment to the pensioners the disbursement of which amounted to Rs272 billion.

The committee stressed the need for

stringent investigations to probe the matter and formed a subcommittee for the purpose. Directions were given to the subcommittee to submit a report within 30 days.

Regarding issues faced by retired

Dollar-starved Pakistan struggles to pay international airlines: report

The global air transport body has warned of an 'aviation crisis' in Pakistan as airlines are struggling to recover \$290 million due to a severe financial crisis, the Financial Times reported on Thursday 17 March.

Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) has said it was trying to pay the airlines on time and has been in contact with relevant authorities over the issue.

The Financial Times, while quoting the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said it has become "very challenging" for carriers to serve Pakistan as they struggle to repatriate their dues which are paid in dollars.

The IATA, which represents some 300 airlines comprising 83 per cent of global air traffic, said \$290m were stuck in Pakistan as of January up by almost a third since December.

"Airlines are facing long delays before they are able to repatriate their funds," Philip Goh, the IATA's Asia-Pacific head, was quoted as saying by FT. "Some airlines still have funds stuck in Pakistan from sales in 2022."

"If conditions persist that make the economics of operation to a country unsustainable, one would expect airlines to put their valued aircraft assets to better use elsewhere," Mr Goh added.

While talking to media, PCAA DG Khaqan Murtaza confirmed airlines were facing some delays in the repatriation of their payments but added that the authority was in contact with the State Bank and the finance minister for timely payments to the airlines.

In December 2022, the global aviation body said Pakistan has blocked \$225m it owed to international airlines, making it one of the top markets where airline funds have been blocked from repatriation.

The development coincided with Pakistan's balance of payment crisis with

employees related to house grants, medical and leave encashment, the committee stressed the need for the matter to be taken up by the subcommittee as well. A special audit was recommended as well.

Considering the matter of setting up counters of different agencies at airports to facilitate passengers, the committee recommended that training may also be imparted to sensitise the staff.

fast-depleting foreign exchange reserves, standing at a low mark of \$4.3bn.

The ongoing crisis has also hit the aviation industry where airlines sell tickets in local currency but repatriate dollars to pay for expenses such as fuel costs.

The FT, citing data from an aviation analytics company Cirium, shared that foreign airlines have been reluctant to return to Pakistan, with fewer total flights scheduled for March 2023 than the same month in 2019.

"If you can't take money out of a country, then there's no point in you even going there," said Mark Martin, chief executive of aviation consultancy Martin Consulting, in the FT report.

Last month, Virgin Atlantic announced the suspension of its operations in Pakistan.

Although the airline said that the decision was part of its plan to revamp operations, the FT, citing a person familiar with the matter, said the decision was based on the economics of the route.

Earlier this month, the Senate Standing Committee on Aviation recommended the aviation ministry meet with the airline heads and 'dispel the negative opinion about Pakistan' and convince them to resume operations as usual.



Relief supplies are being loaded on the 7th cargo flight bound for Turkiye, at Allama Iqbal International Airport.



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ICAO Council adopts updated aviation



The ICAO Council has updated a range of international aviation environmental standards as it continues to make progress during its 228th session. A new amendment to Annex 16 of the Chicago Convention helps to importantly clarify the monitoring, reporting, and verification requirements relating to the ICAO Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA).

The same amendment defines a new CORSIA offsetting threshold for smaller airlines, confirms the offsetting calculation to be applied by new operators that don't qualify as 'new entrants', and formalises alignment adjustments relevant to related and recently updated ISO Standards, and the outcomes of the 41st ICAO Assembly last October.

Additional progress was made by the Council on new Annex 16 amendments to address aircraft noise and aircraft engine emissions, relating mainly to their conformity and applicability requirements.

"The progress achieved this week in this area re-affirms States' commitment to their Strategic Objective on Environmental Protection, including by addressing the climate crisis and the aviation sector's readiness to address challenges relating to local air quality and aircraft noise," ICAO Council President Salvatore Sciacchitano underscored.

ICAO Secretary General Juan Carlos Salazar noted in turn that "The effective cooperation among the government and NGO experts in ICAO's Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection (CAEP), in addition to the tremendous support it has received from the Air Navigation Commission, were critical to the successful adoption of this important set of amendments."

The new Annex 16 amendments were adopted by Council with an effective date of 31 July 2023, and an applicability date of 1 January 2024.

Riyadh Air, Saudia to buy 78 Boeing 787s worth \$37bn

Riyadh Air and Saudia reached agreements to purchase 78 Boeing 787 Dreamliner planes to support Saudi Arabia's expanding aviation plans, Boeing announced on Tuesday 14 March.

The order — which could reach as many as 121 planes with options — constitutes the fifth largest by commercial value in Boeing's history.

The contracts are part of "a blueprint for economic and social reform that is opening Saudi Arabia up to the world," said Reema bint Bandar Al-Saud, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States. While Boeing did not provide an estimate of the total value of the order, the White House said it could reach \$37 billion.

"We are particularly pleased that Boeing was able to finally conclude these deals with Saudi Arabia after years of discussions," said White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre.

"This partnership is another milestone in eight decades of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and American industry."

Boeing Chief Executive Dave Calhoun said the order showed the huge demand for widebody airplanes around the world as tourism continues to rebound, and is the latest in a series of big 787 orders.

All customers, "specifically Riyadh Air, are all built into that schedule", Calhoun said. "We have a lot of confidence that we can meet it and that was an important part of this deal."

Aim to launch flights to more than 100 destinations around the world by 2030

Riyadh Air, which is owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, agreed to purchase 39 Dreamliners, with options for 33 more jets. National carrier Saudia will buy 39 Dreamliners with options for 10 more.

"Vision 2030"

The new airline, Riyadh Air, "aims to launch flights to more than 100 destinations around the world by 2030," the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported.

The Gulf kingdom is pursuing ambitious aviation goals as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's wide-ranging "Vision 2030" reform agenda, including more than tripling annual traffic to 330 million passengers by the end of the decade.

It also wants to move up to five million tonnes of cargo each year.

Last November, officials announced

plans for a new airport in the capital Riyadh — spanning 57 square kilometres — that is set to accommodate 120m travellers per year by 2030 and 185m travellers by 2050. The capacity of the existing Riyadh airport is around 35m travellers.

The new airline is the latest in "a huge package of projects" that will "consolidate our country's position as an international hub for aviation and a global logistics centre", Saudi transport minister Saleh Al-Jasser said on Twitter. Tony Douglas, former head of Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways, has been appointed CEO, SPA said.

Sunday's announcement said Riyadh Air would operate a "fleet of advanced aircraft", but did not specify how big the fleet would be or from where it would be sourced.

The kingdom's busiest international airport is currently in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah, where flag carrier Saudia is based. Known as the "Gateway to Makkah", the city welcomes millions of Muslims performing the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages each year. Officials have in recent years tried to position Riyadh, in central Saudi Arabia, as a rival to business hub Dubai.

Oman Air increases Moscow frequency as a part of summer schedule



Oman Air recently increased the frequency of flights to Moscow as part of its summer schedule. The airline is planning to deploy its widebody A330 on this route to offer maximum comfort and convenience to its guests, the airline said in a statement. The non-stop flight from Muscat will depart at 15:35 and arrive in Moscow at 20:55, while the return sector will depart from Moscow at 23:20 and arrive in Muscat at 06:30. Meanwhile the airline celebrated its 30th year of operation in March 2023, the first flight of Oman Air took off in 1993 between Muscat and Salalah.

Etiihad Airways marks significant milestone

Etiihad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, has achieved a significant milestone as the first of its cadet pilots successfully completed 'Base Training' on an actual Boeing 787 Dreamliner as part of its Multi-Crew Pilot License (MPL) programme.

'Base Training' flights are used to train cadet pilots on take-off and landings under the supervision of a qualified instructor. After this step, the cadet pilots will further progress their training on the most efficient and advanced wide-body aircraft in the market, the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. Launched in October 2020, the Boeing 787 Dreamliner MPL programme was developed in collaboration with IATA and the GCAA and has been designed to meet the growing demand for highly skilled pilots in the industry.

To achieve the highest proficiency standards, the programme trains cadets to become fully qualified Boeing 787 Dreamliner pilots through an accelerated and highly advanced curriculum that capitalises on leading industry learning techniques and technology.

The programme provides pilots with structured training tailored to meet the requirements of the airline, its aircraft and operational environment. It includes theoretical knowledge and simulator training, as well as on-the-job flight training with some of the most experienced instructors on this aircraft type.

Mohammad Al Bulooki, Chief Operating Officer at Etihad Airways said, "Etihad's UAE national cadet pilots are the first to complete this significant milestone on one of the world's first Boeing 787 Dreamliner MPL programmes".

"This achievement is a testament to Etihad's commitment to continuously invest and develop our UAE national talent by adopting state-of-the-art training methodologies. Through this programme, Etihad's cadet pilots will receive the most advanced training in commercial aviation as we prepare for our continued growth in 2023 and beyond".

The base training flight was successfully flown by Second Officers Aya Saleh Alaudhli and Abdulla Rasheed Alsheebani under the supervision of Captain Suraj Weerasekera.

Amsterdam Schiphol Airport plans to cut late-night flights



Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport plans to cut late-night flights to reduce noise pollution.

National broadcaster NOS reported on Monday 3 April that Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport plans to cut late-night flights as part of attempts to reduce noise pollution, citing a spokesperson for the airport.

Plans for the airport to be rolled out in the coming two years include closing it almost completely between midnight and 5 a.m., the report citing CEO Ruud Sondag said.

A spokesperson for Schiphol could not immediately be reached to confirm the report, which said the airport is also planning to ban noisier airplanes and private jets.

The Dutch government announced plans to cap flights at 440,000 per year in June 2022, below pre-COVID-19 levels of 500,000, following a years-long campaign by environmental groups over noise pollution and carbon dioxide emissions.



ATR are using 100% Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF).

ATR set for growth in 2023

European airframer ATR says it is set for growth for the first time in several years in 2023 as the effects of the COVID pandemic and subsequent tough economic climate ease off.

The global ATR fleet is now back close to pre-COVID numbers at around 1,200 ATR aircraft in operation and 2022 saw the company deliver 22 new aircraft and 11 pre-owned aircraft.

Other milestones in 2022 included ATR performing the first 100% SAF powered flight and around 150 new routes were created globally using ATR aircraft.

The company is targeting 40 deliveries in 2023 as it seeks to ramp up production of its turboprop airliners to 80 per year in the next few years.

ATR Chief Executive Officer, Nathalie Tarnaud Laude, said: "The goal for 2023 is to maintain our position as the leading regional aircraft manufacturer, by targeting at least 40 deliveries, with the ambition to ramp up production to 80 aircraft in the coming years.

"With their unbeatable economics, latest technologies and unrivalled environmental performance, ATR aircraft are what customers need to operate their routes profitably, despite inflation and energy uncertainty.

"What drives us is that sustainable regional aviation has the power to improve lives globally, providing vital connections to communities and economies, which translates into Gross Domestic Product increases and employment."

ATR is also seeking to break into what it sees as underserved markets such as the United States as well as seeking to increase its footprint in the freighter market.

Shipping & Logistics

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Emirates and United Airlines officially begin codeshare partnership



Emirates and United Airlines have officially activated their codeshare partnership, enabling customers of both to access more destinations across the globe.

The partnership, which went into effect on March 30, 2023, will offer Emirates customers the opportunity to book flights to more than 150 cities via United Airlines hubs. These include Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD), Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH), and San Francisco International Airport (SFO). Meanwhile, United States (US)-based customers "planning trips to Dubai and beyond have a myriad of choices and can utilize United's services to easily connect to Emirates operated flights bound for Dubai, via Chicago, Houston or San Francisco," Emirates noted in a press release on March 30, 2023.

United Airlines also launched direct flights between Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR) and Dubai International Airport (DXB) on March 25, 2023.

"The partnership unlocks a host of popular destinations accessible from Emirates gateways such as Atlanta, Austin, Denver, Minneapolis and Phoenix," Emirates added.

Interestingly, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL) and Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport are Delta Air Lines' hubs, while Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (PHX) is a major hub for American Airlines.

"Emirates passengers planning trips to destinations such as Detroit, can fly direct from Dubai to Chicago or Houston, and simply connect on a United flight to the final destination, while enjoying the hassle-free flight benefits," the release continued.

Detroit Metropolitan Airport (DTW) is another Delta Air Lines hub.

"We are extremely delighted to activate this historic partnership with United and significantly expand our

British Airways becomes the first airline in the UK to launch a visual guide to flying

To mark World Autism Acceptance Week, British Airways has announced a partnership with Learning Rose, an organisation that develops support material for people with autism.

Through the partnership, British Airways has become the first airline in the UK to produce a Visual Guide to Flying. The Visual Guide is endorsed by the National Autistic Society and is designed to help customers prepare for their trip and make them feel as comfortable as possible during their journey. Each section of the guide, which can be downloaded from ba.com, describes a different part of the flying experience, using simple icons and text to describe the sights, sounds and smells passengers can expect. The Visual Guide is the first initiative as part of the airline's partnership with Learning Rose.

In addition to the Visual Guide, the partnership also includes colleague training and support and bespoke colleague consultation sessions to ensure the airline's staff have help on hand to always ensure best practice.

Learning Rose was founded by Rebecca Taylor, whose son has autism, mitigated echolalia and sensory modulation dysfunction. Rebecca previously worked at British Airways as cabin crew, before founding Learning Rose to help others gain a better understanding of autism through designing support materials to enhance the lives of those with autism and other disabilities.

Rebecca Taylor, Founder of Learning Rose, said: "I am really proud to partner with British Airways to create a newly updated and expanded Visual Guide and provide additional training and support for the airline's colleagues. I know from both my experience working as cabin crew and from travelling with my son that flying can

sometimes be overwhelming for people with autism, so I am delighted to be working with British Airways to help ease any travel anxieties that people with autism may face."

footprint in the U.S. United's vast network across the Americas will help us to offer more choice to our customer base from across the globe, and meet demand from across segments including the leisure, VFR, corporate travelers and students who can now connect seamlessly to and from a broader network of more than 150 domestic points," commented Adnan Kazim, the Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) of Emirates.

Calum Laming, Chief Customer Officer at British Airways said: "At British Airways we welcome more than half a million customers who require special assistance each year and we're fully committed to making sure our service is accessible to all. We're always looking for ways to improve the experience for customers with visible and non-visible disabilities. Our partnership with Learning Rose is just one of the many initiatives we have in place to make flying as stress-free as possible and we're looking forward to further strengthening and enhancing our partnership going forward."

British Airways was the first UK airline to be awarded the renowned Autism Friendly Award by the National Autistic Society and the first to formally recognise the sunflower lanyard scheme, partnering with Hidden Disabilities Sunflower.

Customers are able to liaise with the airline's specialist accessibility team to ensure every journey taken is as straightforward and stress-free as possible. The dedicated customer care team can discuss and arrange appropriate assistance for each individual, whether this be assistance through the airport and on board, pre-allocation of seats or updating a booking to ensure cabin and ground crew are aware of any support that customers may require.

Customers also have the option to add any requirements to their booking in advance of travelling through the 'Manage My Booking' tool on ba.com and there are dedicated check-in areas at London Heathrow Airport for those requiring additional assistance.

IATA: Strong growth continues in pax demand; Cargo demand rose above pre-pandemic levels



The International Air Transport Association (IATA) announced continued strong growth in air travel demand, based on February 2023 traffic results. Total traffic in February 2023 (measured in revenue passenger kilometres or RPKs) rose 55.5 percent compared to February 2022. Globally, traffic is now at 84.9 percent of February 2019 levels.

Domestic traffic for February rose 25.2 percent compared to the year-ago period. Total February 2023 domestic traffic was at 97.2 percent of the February 2019 level. International traffic climbed 89.7 percent versus February 2022 with all markets recording strong growth, led once again by carriers in the Asia-Pacific region. International RPKs reached 77.5 percent of February 2019 levels.

IATA Director General Willie Walsh at the 2021 annual general meeting in Boston.

“Despite the uncertain economic signals, demand for air travel continues to be strong across the globe and particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. The industry is now just about 15 percent below 2019 levels of demand and that gap is narrowing each month,” said Willie Walsh, IATA’s director general. “People are flying in ever greater numbers. With the Easter and Passover holidays we are expecting large numbers of travellers to take to the skies in many parts of the world. They should do so with confidence that airlines have been rebuilding resiliency that suffered owing



to the pandemic. Other participants in the air travel value chain, including airports, air navigation service providers, and airport security staff, need to have the same commitment to ensuring our customers can enjoy smooth holiday travel,” said Walsh.

International Passenger Markets

	World share ¹	RPK	February 2023 (% year-on-year)		
			ASK	PLF (%pt) ²	PLF level ³
TOTAL MARKET	100.0%	88.6%	55.7%	9.8%	77.8%
Africa	2.1%	87.9%	62.3%	10.3%	75.6%
Asia-Pacific	22.1%	108.4%	61.2%	17.1%	79.2%
Europe	30.7%	44.1%	27.9%	8.9%	75.2%
Latin America	8.4%	23.7%	21.1%	1.7%	81.1%
Middle East	9.8%	70.8%	37.6%	19.4%	79.8%
North America	28.9%	25.1%	19.0%	3.8%	77.3%

Asia-Pacific airlines had a 378.7 percent increase in February 2023 traffic compared to February 2022, maintaining the very positive momentum of the past few months since the lifting of travel restrictions in the region. Capacity rose 176.4 percent and the load factor increased 34.9 percentage points to 82.5 percent, the second highest among the regions.

European carriers posted a 47.9 percent traffic rise versus February 2022. Capacity climbed 29.7 percent, and load factor rose 9.1 percentage points to 73.7 percent, which was the lowest among the regions.

Middle Eastern airlines saw a 75.0 percent traffic increase compared to February a year ago. Capacity climbed 40.5 percent and load factor pushed up 15.8 percentage points to 80.0 percent.

North American carriers' traffic climbed 67.4 percent in February 2023 versus the 2022 period. Capacity increased 39.5 percent, and load factor rose 12.8 percentage points to 76.6 percent.

Latin American airlines had a 44.1 percent traffic increase compared to the same month in 2022. February capacity climbed 34.0 percent and load factor rose 5.8 percentage points to 82.7 percent, the highest among the regions.

African airlines' traffic rose 90.7 percent in February 2023 versus a year ago. February capacity was up 61.7 percent and load factor climbed 11.4 percentage points to 75.0 percent.

Domestic Passenger Markets

	World share ¹	RPK	February 2023 (% year-on-year)		
			ASK	PLF (%pt) ²	PLF level ³
Domestic	42.1%	25.2%	17.4%	4.9%	77.9%
Dom. Australia	1.0%	72.0%	38.8%	15.1%	76.7%
Domestic Brazil	1.3%	1.3%	0.3%	0.6%	70.8%
Dom. China P.R.	6.4%	38.2%	22.0%	8.8%	73.8%
Domestic India	2.0%	42.9%	52.4%	3.7%	81.8%
Domestic Japan	1.2%	161.4%	33.8%	36.8%	75.1%
Domestic US	19.3%	10.2%	10.7%	0.8%	76.8%

Japan's domestic traffic surged 161.4 percent in February compared to a year ago and now stands at 89.9 percent of pre-pandemic levels.

US airlines' domestic demand rose 10.6 percent in February and was 0.7 percent ahead of February 2019 levels.

Air Cargo Above Pre-pandemic Levels



IATA also released data for February 2023 global air cargo markets showing that air cargo demand rose above pre-pandemic levels. Global demand, measured in cargo tonne-kilometers (CTKs), fell 7.5 percent compared to February 2022 (-8.3 percent for international operations). This was half the rate of annual decline seen in the previous two months (-14.9 percent and -15.3 percent respectively). February demand for air cargo was 2.9 percent higher than pre-pandemic levels (February 2019)—the first time it has surpassed pre-pandemic levels in eight months.

Capacity (measured in available cargo tonne-kilometers, ACTK) was up 8.6 percent compared to February 2022. The strong uptick in ACTKs reflects the addition of belly capacity as the passenger side of the business continues to recover. International belly-capacity grew by 57.0 percent in February year-over-year, reaching 75.1 percent of the 2019 (pre-pandemic) capacity.

Several factors in the operating environment should be noted:

The global new export orders component of the manufacturing PMI, a leading indicator of cargo demand, continued to increase in February. China's PMI level surpassed the critical 50-mark indicating that demand for manufactured goods from the world's largest export economy is growing.

Global goods trade decreased by 1.5 percent in January; this was a slower rate of decline than the previous month of -3.3 percent.

The Consumer Price Index for G7 countries decreased from 6.7 percent in January to 6.4 percent in February.

Inflation in producer (input) prices reduced by 2.2 percentage points to 9.6 percent in December (last available data).

“The story of air cargo in February is one of slowing declines. Year-on-year demand fell by 7.5 percent. That’s half the rate of decline experienced in January. This shifting of gears was sufficient to boost the overall industry into positive territory (+2.9 percent) compared to pre-pandemic levels. An optimistic eye could see the start of an improvement trend that leads to market stabilisation and a return to more normal demand patterns after dramatic ups-and-downs in recent years,” said Walsh.

February Regional Performance

Air cargo market in detail - February 2023					
	World share ¹	February 2023 (% year-on-year)			
		CTK	ACTK	CLF (b-pts) ²	CLF (level) ³
TOTAL MARKET	100.0%	-7.6%	8.8%	-7.9%	45.8%
Africa	2.0%	-3.1%	4.7%	-3.9%	46.8%
Asia Pacific	32.4%	-6.0%	19.9%	-12.8%	46.4%
Europe	27.8%	-13.3%	-1.3%	-6.4%	37.4%
Latin America	2.7%	-2.7%	27.6%	-11.2%	36.1%
Middle East	12.0%	-8.1%	9.3%	-6.4%	44.5%
North America	28.1%	-3.2%	2.8%	-3.5%	45.0%

¹% of industry CTKs in 2022 ²Point-on-year change in load factor ³Load factor level

Asia-Pacific airlines saw their air cargo volumes decrease by 6.0 percent in February 2023 compared to the same month in 2022. This was a significant improvement in performance compared to January (-19.0 percent). Airlines in the region benefitted from China's reopening, which saw restrictions lifted and economic activities resumed. Available capacity in the region increased by 19.9 percent compared to February 2022 as more and more belly capacity came online from the passenger side of the business.

North American carriers posted a 3.2 percent decrease in cargo volumes in February 2023 compared to the same month in 2022. This was a solid improvement in performance compared to January (-8.7 percent). Notably, the region saw a significant increase in international demand in February which boosted its market share in international cargo traffic to beyond pre-pandemic levels (21.7 percent in Feb 2023 versus 18.2 percent in Feb 2019). Capacity increased 2.8 percent compared to February 2022.

European carriers saw the weakest performance of all regions with a 15.3 percent decrease in cargo volumes in February 2023 compared to the same month in 2022. This was an improvement in performance compared to January (-20.4 percent). Airlines in the region continue to be most affected by the war in Ukraine. Capacity decreased 1.5 percent in February 2023 compared to February 2022.

Middle Eastern carriers experienced an 8.1 percent year-on-year decrease in cargo volumes in February 2023. This was a slight improvement to the previous month (-11.8 percent). Capacity increased 9.3 percent compared to February 2022.

Latin American carriers reported a 2.7 percent decrease in cargo volumes in February 2023 compared to February 2022. This was a drop in performance compared to January which saw a 4.6 percent increase. Capacity in February

was up 27.6 percent compared to the same month in 2022.

African airlines saw cargo volumes decrease by 3.4 percent in February 2023 compared to February 2022. This was an improvement in performance compared to the previous month (-9.5 percent). Notably, the Africa to Asia route area experienced significant cargo demand growth in February, up 39.5 percent year-on-year. Capacity was 4.7 percent above February 2022 levels.

Emirates unveils new modernized livery



The world's largest Airbus A380 fleet is getting a new look, as Emirates recently revealed a new livery. The Dubai, United Arab Emirates-based carrier — which is also the world's largest Boeing 777 operator — announced that its aircraft will sport a new signature, distinctive livery.

A Refreshed Look

While the livery's overall colors and branding largely remain the same, Emirates has modernized several aspects of its livery. Perhaps the most notable change can be seen in the flag of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the tail, which now has a 3D artwork effect to give the appearance that it is flowing.

Winglets on the Airbus A380-800s will now be painted red on the outside with the Emirates logo on it in white. From a passenger's perspective, the insides of the winglets will feature the colors of the UAE flag.

The “Emirates” lettering across the fuselage is now more prominent, with the airline noting that it is bolder and 32.5% larger. The airline's website URL has also been dropped from the design. On the underside of the fuselage, Emirates has retained the red branding that allows its aircraft to be easily identified from the ground.

First Livery Change in Over Two Decades

This is the third livery that Emirates aircraft have worn since the airline's founding in 1985. The overall theme of the livery has remained constant throughout the years, but the look has evolved with each iteration of the livery. The carrier's original livery debuted with its launch in 1985 and was designed by British design company Negus & Negus. The livery had its first refresh in 1999 with the delivery of Emirates' first Boeing 777-300 at that year's Dubai Airshow.

Emirates rolled out its latest livery update on an Airbus A380-800 registered as A6-EOE. The aircraft's first flight in the new livery took place on March 17, 2023 when it operated flight EK51 from Dubai International Airport to Munich Airport. The airline plans to apply the new livery to 24 aircraft this year, which will be followed by a gradual rollout to the rest of its fleet of approximately 250 aircraft in the coming years.

“Aircraft livery is the most instantly recognisable brand real estate for any airline. It's a visual representation of our unique identity, something we wear proudly, and display in all the cities we fly to around the world,” Emirates President Sir Tim Clark said in a press release. “We're refreshing our livery to keep it modern, without losing the key elements of our identity such as the UAE flag on our tailfin and the Arabic calligraphy.”



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Trukkr raises \$6.4m, gets lending licence

Trukkr, a fintech platform for Pakistan's trucking industry, said on Tuesday 7 March it had raised \$6.4 million in a funding round and also received a non-banking financial company (NBFC) licence.

Trukkr offers Pakistan's small- and medium-sized trucking companies a transport management system and supply chain solutions, and is unique in providing fintech to digitise the largely unbanked and undocumented industry.

The seed funding round was led by US based Accion Venture Lab and London-based Sturgeon Capital. Haitou Global, Al Zayani Venture Capital and investor Peter Findley also participated in the round, Trukkr said in a statement.

The company's business model is similar to Kargo in Indonesia, Solvento in Mexico and Kobo 360 in Africa, but has been adapted to the market in Pakistan.

Trukkr said less than 5pc of trucking companies using its platform have access to financial services, often having to wait up to 90 days for payments and leaving them unable to cover expenses such as fuel, tolls and truck maintenance.

Sheryar Bawany, Trukkr CEO and co-founder, told Reuters that it was looking to launch financial products at a "reasonable risk adjusted spread" to the benchmark Karachi Interbank Offered Rate (Kibor).

Co-founder Mishal Adamjee said there are some 20,000 drivers on Trukkr's platform, servicing 100 of the biggest companies in the country including Shan Foods, Artistic Milliners, International Industries Ltd and Lucky Cement.

Adamjee told Reuters that Pakistan's \$35 billion a year trucking industry is growing at 10pc annually despite limited rail and water freight infrastructure.

Investor Accion Venture Lab said the Covid pandemic had shown how much the world relied on global supply chains.

"We want to bet on a company striving to tackle inefficiencies in a market filled with opportunities," it said in the statement.

According to the Board of Investment, projected demand for freight

transport will double by 2025 and increase six-fold by 2050 to 600 billion freight tonnes-kilometre, particularly as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor kicks in.

Other freight marketplace startups in Pakistan include Truck It In, BridgeLinX and Freightix.

Logistics startup raises \$3.7m

Logistics startup Trax has raised \$3.7 million in seed funding from a consortium of strategic investors, a press release said on Friday 24 March.

The round was co-led by US-based Amaana Capital, making its second direct investment into Pakistan, and UAE-based Tricap Investments.

PNO Ventures committed to the round, as did angel investors, including Omer Ismail — CEO of One, a Walmart-backed fintech — and Silicon Valley tech entrepreneur Jahanzeb Sherwani.

The investment will be used to accelerate the growth of Trax's logistics services and the introduction of new business verticals, such as fintech and technology solutions.

Launched in mid-2017, Trax has introduced logistics solutions that disrupt the extended payment cycles of legacy players. It has built the third-largest delivery network in Pakistan with access to 95 per cent of the population, served through over 100 warehouses, hubs, and retail centres nationwide.

IMC shuts plant

Indus Motor Company (IMC), the assembler of Toyota vehicles, has announced a complete shutdown of its production plant from March 24-27 due to insufficient parts and accessories. In a stock filing on Friday 24 March, IMC said the company and its vendors continue to face hurdles in importing raw materials and receiving clearance of their consignments from commercial banks on account of difficulties in opening letters of credit for raw materials.

World's first 3D printed rocket set for inaugural flight



The world's first 3D printed rocket on the launch pad in Cape Canaveral, Florida.

The world's first 3D printed rocket is scheduled to blast off from Florida on Saturday 11 March on the maiden flight of an innovative spacecraft billed as being less costly to produce and fly.

Liftoff of the rocket, Terran 1, had been scheduled for Wednesday at Cape Canaveral but was postponed at the last minute because of propellant temperature issues. The new launch window for the rocket built by California aerospace startup Relativity Space to put satellites into orbit is from 1pm to 4pm on Saturday.

Terran 1 is set to reach low Earth orbit eight minutes after blastoff on a voyage intended to gather data and demonstrate that it can withstand the rigors of liftoff and space flight.

If the rocket manages to attain low Earth orbit, it will be the first privately-funded vehicle using methane fuel to do so on its first try, according to Relativity.

Terran 1 is not carrying a payload for its first flight but the rocket will eventually be capable of putting up to 2,755 pounds into low Earth orbit.

The rocket is 110-feet tall with a diameter of 7.5 feet and 85 per cent of its mass is 3D printed with metal alloys, including the engines.

It is the largest ever 3D printed object according to the Long Beach-based company whose goal is to produce a rocket that is 95pc 3D printed.

Terran 1 is powered by Aeon engines using liquid oxygen and liquid natural gas — the "propellants of the future," according to Relativity, capable of eventually fueling a voyage to Mars. Vulcan rockets being developed by United Launch Alliance and SpaceX's Starship use the same fuel.

Made in Pakistan

Introducing Team Swift of the GIK (Ghulam Ishaq Khan) Institute of Engineering, KPK Pakistan, a group of talented and innovative individuals who are geared up and ready to compete in the AUVSI SUAS Competition 2023 in Maryland, USA.

With a passion for designing and manufacturing state-of-the-art unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), this team has already created six successful drones, including a quad copter that delivers medicine to remote areas.

Aside from their accomplishments in creating functional UAVs, Team Swift is also dedicated to showcasing their creations through airshows, demonstrating their versatility in various industrial applications. The team's members are continuously pushing their limits and exploring new frontiers in UAV design and application.



Furthermore, the team takes great pride in their inclusivity, with female members taking the lead in creating an aircraft for International Women's Day. This aircraft, along with their purpose-built UAV flown on Pakistan Resolution Day, is a testament to the team's

commitment to innovation and excellence.

With their extensive experience and expertise in UAV design and implementation, Team Swift of the GIK Institute is poised to make a lasting impact in the AUVSI SUAS Competition 2023 and beyond.



Picture shows (2nd-L) Mr. Huzaifa Ansari Team Manager with his team members.



Group photo shows Mr. M. Musa (Team Captain) M. H. Ansari (Team Manager), Mr. Ali Asad Jafry (Director Automation) with others.



Pakistani Students to Participate in SUAS competitions at Maryland, USA on 19-22 June 2023.

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The benefits of glass cockpits: a pilot's perspective



New pilots are sometimes called "children of the magenta line." This quip is an acknowledgment that many pilots who have recently completed their flight training have only known glass flight deck displays rather than conventional "steam gauges." The magenta line is the navigational path the flight management computer guides the autopilot to follow. Glass cockpits are starkly different from traditional flight deck displays and have certain advantages. Let's discuss some of the benefits of the modern flight deck.

Instrument scans

The layout of flight instruments on screens is highly intentional. The driving factor behind the placement of every important gauge is to make the "instrument scan" as intuitive as possible. There are six primary instruments: the airspeed indicator, attitude indicator, altimeter, heading indicator, vertical speed indicator, and turn coordinator. In a conventional flight deck layout, these instruments are known as the "six-pack." A pilot's ability to fly accurately, particularly during instrument flight without outside visual reference, depends on their ability to interpret these six instruments quickly.

Glass cockpits integrate these six instruments into a layout that is easier to read and interpret. This is achieved by the intentional placement of each reading and the style in which the information is presented. Conventionally, airspeed and



altitude are read from circular clock-like instruments with two arms. Both readings are displayed in modern flight decks as "tapes" that wind up and down in a vertical line. These instruments have been proven to take less time to interpret. They are integrated with the other four main instruments into a primary flight display, or PFD, positioned directly in front of a pilot.

Turkish Technic provides aircraft maintenance services for Emirates Airlines



Turkish Technic will perform base maintenance services on five Boeing 777s of Emirates' fleet © Turkish Technic.

Turkish Technic, the Istanbul-based maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) provider, has signed a base maintenance agreement with Emirates, one of the largest Boeing 777 fleet operators.

Under the terms of the agreement, Turkish Technic will perform base maintenance services on five Boeing 777s of Emirates' fleet. The base maintenance operation of the first Boeing 777 has already commenced at Turkish Technic's Istanbul Ataturk Airport facilities on April 1. The other aircraft within the scope of the agreement will undergo base maintenance operations in the upcoming months.

Commenting on the new agreement, Mikail Akbulut, CEO of Turkish Technic, said: "We are delighted that Emirates has entrusted us with the base maintenance operations for five of their Boeing 777 aircraft. As a leading maintenance, repair and overhaul provider of comprehensive aircraft and component services, we are committed to delivering the best-in-class MRO services for our customers. We believe this agreement marks the beginning of a long-standing partnership with Emirates."

Turkish Technic, an association of Turkish Airlines group companies, is one of the leading aviation services providers, where comprehensive maintenance, repair, overhaul, modification and

reconfiguration services are performed with a highly qualified workforce of 9.350 staff within Istanbul Ataturk Airport, Sabiha Gokcen Airport and Istanbul Airport facilities on two separate continents. Aside from its engineering and maintenance activities, Turkish Technic supports aircraft operators and owners globally with encompassing component pooling, design, certification and production services.

IT has never been easier and quicker to reach London from Luton Airport

Wizz Air, Europe's fastest growing and most environmentally sustainable airline globally*, is pleased to share lately news about the airport train which will transport passengers from Luton Airport Parkway station to London Luton Airport in under 4 minutes.

The Luton Airport Express train connects the airport terminal and the mainline railway at Luton Airport Parkway station. The new transport offers a perfect opportunity for travelers landing at Luton Airport to get more easily and quicker to their desirable destination.

It's never been easier to get to London Luton Airport. The fully electric Luton Airport Express offers sustainable travel from central London right to the airport. Catch the train from London St Pancras International and arrive at Luton Airport in as little as 32 minutes. With the new Luton Airport Express project now complete, London Luton airport is well-positioned to meet the increasing demand of its air travelers in the region and, delivering a significantly better passenger experience.

Heretofore, Wizz Air is successfully connecting London Luton airport with 27 countries, operating 63 destinations and 63 routes, carrying over 6 million passengers in 2022. Wizz Air is further expanding its operations from London Luton airport providing exciting travel opportunities and low-fare journeys for its passengers. The airline invites you to discover newly added routes to Amman, Bydgoszcz, Lodz, or Istanbul from Luton Airport, enjoying fast, easy access between railway station and the airport.

Iraqi Airways anticipates its 1st of 10 Boeing 787 Dreamliner delivery



Iraqi Airways A320 tail.

Iraqi Airways has announced that it is anticipating the arrival of its brand-new Boeing 787 Dreamliner, with the first of ten to be scheduled for delivery in the coming days.

Boeing has completed the assembly of Iraqi Airways first Dreamliner, the airline revealed in a post on social media on March 16, 2023. The message accompanied a photo of the brand-new 787 in the airline's livery.

The Boeing 787, registered as YI-ATC, was assembled in the manufacturer's Charleston factory in South Carolina, the United States.

According to the airline, the following step is for the two companies to arrange the date for the delivery flight. The air carrier has not revealed when that might happen.

Images of the aircraft in Iraqi Airways livery were also shared on social media.

In total, the airline has placed orders for ten Dreamliners: nine 787-8s and one for the larger 787 variant, the -9. All ten aircraft will be powered by General Electric GENx-1B engines, as CH-Aviation data shows.

Iraqi Airways is based at Baghdad International Airport (BGW) in Baghdad, Iraq. Currently, the airline operates a fleet of 36 aircraft, 19 of which are parked. It also has orders for 26 aircraft. Besides the ten Boeing 787s, the airline is also awaiting deliveries for one Airbus A220 and 15 Boeing 737 MAXs, according to CH-Aviation.

Free Singapore tour for transfer and transit passengers returns

Changi Airport Group (CAG), Singapore Airlines (SIA) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) re-launched the Free Singapore Tour today after a three-year hiatus due to Covid-19. Three of the existing tours available since pre-Covid-19 - the City Sights Tour, Heritage Tour and Jewel Tour - have been refreshed to include new points of interest. A brand-new Changi Precinct tour will introduce travellers to the interesting sights and sounds of the eastern region surrounding Singapore Changi Airport. Each tour lasts 2.5 hours and will be available daily, with plans to progressively increase to nine tours a day.

With transit and transfer passengers accounting for about 30% of passenger traffic at Changi Airport pre-pandemic, the tour was first introduced in 1987 to enhance the airport's attractiveness as a transfer hub and to entice transit and transfer passengers to visit Singapore as a holiday destination. In 2019, over 80,000 passengers went on the Free Singapore Tour. The top markets were India, Australia and Indonesia, with Indian and Australian travellers making up more than one third of the total participants.

New Changi Precinct tour to showcase eastern Singapore

The Changi Precinct Tour is a new itinerary that will bring participants to the eastern part of Singapore to visit local community spaces such as the Tampines heartland, and to admire the rustic charms of Changi Village and Changi Beach. It offers a glimpse of how local residents live, and tells the tale of Singapore's history on this part of the island, away from the usual hustle and bustle of Singapore's city centre.

Refreshed itineraries to offer travellers new experiences

At the Jewel Tour, in addition to visiting popular attractions like the Shiseido Forest Valley and the HSBC Rain Vortex, participants can now discover more about Singapore's food heritage through local brands such as Bee Cheng Hiang and Tong Garden, and sample local snacks at the same time. Another new component of the tour is a free guided walkthrough of a digital attraction - Changi Experience Studio - for participants to experience some of its airport-themed games and interactive exhibits.

New pit stops in the City Sights Tour include the Civic District, where travellers will get an introduction to Singapore's urban development through visits to various national monuments including the National Gallery Singapore, Anderson Bridge and The Padang. The bus route will also pass through the new Marina Bay Financial District enroute to Gardens by the Bay. The Heritage Tour, available from June, will feature places of interest such as the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple in Chinatown, Arab Street and Haji Lane, for participants to gain a more in-depth understanding of Singapore's unique and diverse multi-cultural heritage.

The refreshed itineraries also highlight sustainability features at some of the locations featured in the tours, to give participants an overview of Singapore's sustainability efforts. These include the Eco Community Garden at the rooftop of Our Tampines Hub (as part of the Changi Precinct Tour), environmental sustainability initiatives implemented at Gardens by the Bay (as part of the City Sights Tour) and Jewel (as part of the Jewel Tour).

Monster Day Tours has been appointed by CAG, SIA, and STB to run the Free Singapore Tours.

Mr Lim Ching Kiat, Executive Vice President of Air Hub & Cargo Development at CAG, said, "The Free Singapore Tour was very popular among our transit and transfer passengers prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and we are happy to bring it back with the resumption of travel. For travellers who choose to transit or transfer at Changi Airport, the Free Singapore Tour is designed to give them a glimpse of what Singapore has to offer, including the unique attractions and offerings at Jewel Changi Airport and the neighbouring Changi Precinct which has a rich cultural and historical heritage. Together with our partners, SIA and STB, we hope to welcome more passengers who fly through Changi Airport to enjoy a slice of Singapore through our new tours and world-class attractions and facilities."

Mr Lee Lik Hsin, Executive Vice President Commercial, Singapore Airlines, said, "We welcome the timely relaunch of the enhanced Free Singapore Tour, which offers a unique transit experience for our customers. We are

pleased to continue working closely with CAG and STB to promote the sustainable growth of travel to and through Singapore.”

Mr Chang Chee Pey, Assistant Chief Executive, Marketing Group, Singapore Tourism Board, said, “We are delighted to bring back the Free Singapore Tour through our long-standing partnership with CAG and SIA. It is imperative for us to refresh our tourism offerings to meet the demand for wellness and eco-conscious travel, and cater to travellers seeking deeper experiences. We hope that the tour will inspire transit and transfer passengers to plan a longer trip to Singapore in future, and discover much more of what our vibrant city has to offer.”

Book a tour in advance on new portal Advance booking is now available on Changi Airport's website. Transit and transfer passengers who wish to join the Free Singapore Tour must have a layover period of at least 5.5 hours but less than 24 hours. Participants will need to have a valid entry visa for Singapore to take part in the tours.

Sabre and American Airlines set to go live with NDC content

Sabre Corporation (NASDAQ: SABR), a leading software and technology provider to the global travel industry, and American Airlines, recently announced the availability of American's NDC offers through Sabre's global distribution system (GDS).

Starting on April 3, Sabre-connected travel buyers, agencies and developer partners will be able to shop, book, and service American's NDC content, including paid seats, through Sabre's Offer and Order APIs, the agency point-of-sale tool, Sabre Red 360, and the online booking tool, GetThere.

“We are committed to providing our customers with a modern, seamless retailing experience across all channels,” said Thomas Rajan, vice president, global sales at American Airlines. “Through Sabre's network of travel retailers, we'll be able to provide our enhanced, rich NDC content to travelers worldwide. This will open new business opportunities to American as well as our travel retail

partners, and deliver a better, more tailored experience to the customers we all serve.”

Travel buyers connected to the Sabre GDS will be able to choose enhanced offers from American such as the Main Select and Flagship Business Plus fares, ancillary products and the lowest fares available in these channels. They will also have access to more descriptive information on American's flight offers as well as seat selection enabled in the booking path.

“We are excited to reach this milestone with American Airlines and look forward to our ongoing collaboration to provide travel buyers with the offers and services their travelers want,” said Kathy Morgan, Vice President, NDC and Airline Supply, Sabre Travel Solutions. “While it is still early days for NDC bookings, making this rich NDC content from the world's largest airline available in Sabre channels is an important step towards the maturing and scaling of NDC distribution.”

Air India revises policies for new mothers

The airline has introduced many benefits for its female staff, including increasing the duration of maternity leave.

Air India has revised its policies for female staff, giving them more choices and support after childbirth. The airline has reportedly increased the duration of maternity leave as well as offered a chance for new mothers to opt for a more manageable flying schedule until their child reaches the age of one.

Quicker turnaround flights

A report by the Press Trust of India states that Air India has changed its policies for new mothers in its workforce, giving them a longer maternity leave of 26 weeks compared to the previous duration of 12 weeks.

Among the many benefits detailed in the new communication, female pilots can

request for flights with quicker turnaround times until their child reaches the age of one. This will, however, depend on the availability of such flights and schedules.

Returning Mothers Programme

The new rules are part of the carrier's 'MOMS – Returning Mothers Programme.' These have come into effect from April 1st and will also apply to new mothers who have opted for adoption or surrogacy.

The 'MOMS' in the programme title stands for 'Making Our Mothers Soar,' and under the new benefits, female employees can also get nutritional guidance and daycare facilities on a co-pay basis. The report quotes from the communication that said the company will also conduct counseling sessions to “address mental well-being, preparation for childbirth and plans to return to work for expectant mothers.”

Changing the culture

Under the Tatas, Air India is witnessing several significant changes, from fleet restructuring to a shift in customer service policies. Introducing a new working culture and procedures is also among the changes the company is going through.

Air India has already offered two voluntary retirement schemes to some of its employees, promising monetary benefits to those who opt for them. Around 1,500 employees went ahead with the scheme the first time around, and thousands more could opt for it again.

At the same time, the carrier has been hiring talents across all departments, from flying crew to all levels of management positions. In the last few months, several top to mid-level executives have joined the company for roles in departments like engineering, network planning, and revenue management. Many have made a shift from other airlines in India, lured by the growth prospects of an expanding Air India.

With ambitious growth plans for the next decade, Air India also wants to tweak the previous working culture and introduce new policies for its journey ahead.



Pakistan International Airlines' Pilot roster under fire



PIA Airbus A320 approaches Dubai.

The saga over pilot licenses recently reignited in Pakistan's parliament amid concerns that flight crews have begun to leave the national carrier over hefty taxes levied on their income. According to a Senate press release, 15 pilots have recently departed Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), potentially jeopardizing the chances of a sustainable talent pipeline. PIA has petitioned the country's supreme court in an effort to hire young males.

Pilot certification became a contentious issue for Pakistan in June 2020, following remarks made before the National Assembly during a preliminary result hearing on PIA Flight 8303, which crashed in Karachi in May. Speaking with lawmakers, aviation minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan claimed that of Pakistan's 860 pilots, 262 had fake licenses.

The allegations provoked intense political and media controversy and rippled across the industry, with many, including the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA), questioning the validity of the minister's statements. The International Federation of Air Line Pilots Association called the comments "on the brink of being reckless." The PCAA Standing Committee on Aviation said it would create a subcommittee to probe the matter in detail.

By the end of June, the PCAA had grounded 150 of PIA's 426 pilots. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) moved to suspend the Third Country Operator authorization of PIA and Vision Air while the UK and the U.S. issued similar bans. The UN Department of Safety and Security also removed Pakistan-registered airlines from its Recommended List.

Following a 10-day safety audit in December 2021, the International Civil Aviation Organization said the PCAA had addressed the Significant Safety Concern, "specifically in relation to the examinations conducted by the CAA and by delegated or designated training

organizations prior to the issuance of licenses and ratings."

Separately, EASA conducted its own 10-day safety audit and decided to extend the suspension amid concerns over the PCAA's certification and oversight capabilities.

In February 2023, the UK State Safety Partnership team—funded by the UK Department for Transport—completed a 12-day visit to Pakistan.

"Currently, all air carriers certified by the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority remain on the UK's Air Safety List due to safety concerns," said Andrew Dalglish, Chargé d' Affaires at the British High Commission Islamabad in a statement. "For removal from the Air Safety List states must demonstrate compliance with international safety standards. This is a comprehensive process requiring the provision of evidence, on-site assessments, and technical hearings."

In a statement to AIN, EASA said it held a remote audit with PIA on March 7. "The result of this assessment has been communicated to the operator and we are awaiting a response. Depending on the response received, next steps will be determined in close cooperation with the European Commission," a spokesperson said.

As Pakistan looks to resume flights to Europe and the UK, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) is calling on the Pakistan government to remove all barriers related to currency repatriation or risk an exodus of international airlines. The country owed international carriers over \$290 million in repatriable funds in January, largely due to sinking foreign

exchange reserves.

IATA's warning comes as Pakistan looks to secure \$1.1 billion in funding from the International Monetary Fund as part of a \$6.5 billion bailout agreement forged in 2019.

Sabre and Virgin Atlantic extend and expand global distribution deal



Travel software company Sabre and Virgin Atlantic have "reaffirmed their long-standing relationship with the renewal of their global distribution agreement", according to a statement by Sabre. Sabre is to "offer enhanced Virgin Atlantic content through its GDS marketplace, as well as the future ability to retail NDC offers" as part of an "expanded agreement" that will mean "richer access to Virgin Atlantic's broad range of products and offers" for hundreds of thousands of travel agencies "Sabre is a trusted, long-term partner and we look forward to further enhancing our collaboration, to help us elevate our global distribution strategy and support.



This image taken from a video released by the US military, shows the moment a US air force MQ-9 Reaper drone collided with a Russian SU-27 aircraft causing it to crash into the Black Sea. US officials said the unarmed drone was on a reconnaissance mission when it was intercepted by two Russian fighter jets. The incident has led to simmering tensions between the two nations; Moscow warned it would react in kind to any future US provocation.



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EULOGY OR A SWAN SONG

Prof. Safdar Sandal



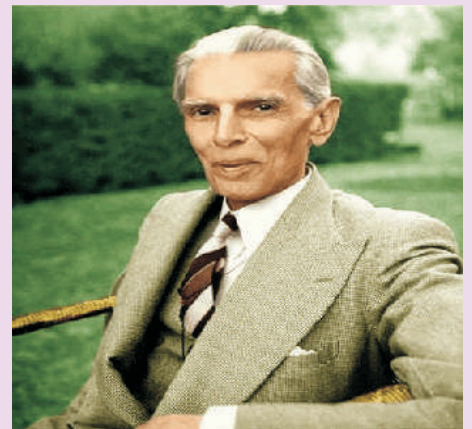
Most people bear feeble memories. It is very common among us to overlook the past or entirely ignore historical facts. We utterly disregard external and internal challenges, neglect weak economic policies and with absolute indifference to regional and global politics, either start drawing

concurrent to the economic and political turmoil in the country, partly due to the internal weak economic position post-Covid era, international recession and Russia-Ukraine war following soon after. I have noticed in the present economic and political crisis a voluminous attack of propaganda even on WhatsApp of mobiles in every pocket. This is from the ever hell-bent Modi's venomous India which is belligerent and fascist in its nature and which can never be a well-wisher of Pakistan.

In spite of all these problems, handicaps and obstacles, Pakistan is a realm where chances and opportunities of progress have surpassed any other state. Pakistan has never been evaluated holistically in the context of its distinct and specific circumstances. Biased opinions and unfounded philosophies are

not let you down in future too.

The extremely hostile environment, events and circumstance even at the time of creation of Pakistan in the 1940s made its survival unlikely however; Quaid and his sincere followers set waste to all the poisonous plans and desires. From its very existence, Pakistan had to face the challenge of choosing either America or Russia. Very complicated and precarious circumstances engulfed Pakistan to move towards American bloc. But Pakistan was soon made to obey and follow the anti-Russia stature of the US, for which Pakistan had to pay heavy costs, in terms of getting a natural political enmity from Russia which now has though abated but not completely finished, again due to strings in the hands of the US which it has always pulled diplomatically in its own interests.

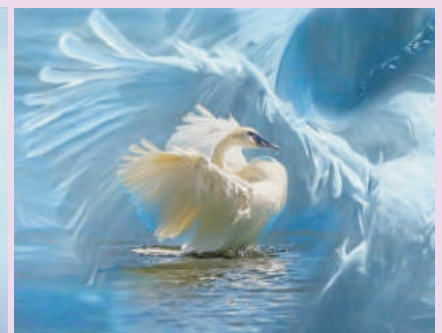


comparisons of Pakistan with the developed western states or with Bangladesh or Malaysia. The latter two have an unhindered growth owing to non-interference by any foreign element because of their geographical-position and a resultant stable government.

Pakistan's geo-geopolitical location, global impediments, a fervently implacable enemy-neighbour and intrusions by dictators locally, a frail democracy and consequent domestic unrest, are the real causes for its difficulties. New propaganda has been generated in every era to prove that we are inefficient, incompetent, dishonest and ill-disciplined. These are weapons of the enemy-state having been employed throughout and especially now,

propagated through organized means that breed disappointment and despair. Despite these hindrances, Pakistan is a state which has always withstood calamities and will

In the subcontinent-India too, Muslims had been extremely oppressed from time immemorial and made poor intentionally by the British- Raj lasting for two centuries after the downfall of the



1.(In Persian poetry and myth, a very rare bird 'Huma' is considered a bird of fortune. If it flies over the head of a person; extraordinary fortunes are showered on him by nature.)

2.(Swan' a bird in Greek mythology, sings its last very sweet song because of which it gets a fire and dies because of its own fire at the end. The phrase is thus famous as a 'Swan Song'.)

Performing Haj

Mughal Empire. Muslims were made inferior socially, in education, due also to the indigenous Muslim clergy who propagated against learning of English, boycotting it and by declaring as kafirs (non-believers) to those who disobeyed them. This had a historical *raison d'être* too since the Colonial British had snatched power from the Muslims whom they continued to consider as enemies. In this scenario, the credit goes to Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who took years of his life for convincing his people to learn English (and in return learn modern sciences and technologies of which the Muslims were deprived from centuries. Whereas, Hindus picked up the opportunity and progressed much more as compared to other people of the same soil. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan gauged the situation but he also had to brace the challenges of his own Muslim retrogressive opponents; Hindu's and the British's bias notwithstanding. Eventually he succeeded however in opening English teaching schools at Moradabad, Victoria School Ghazipur in 1863 and a Scientific Society for Muslims. His efforts culminated in the creation of 'Aligarh University' which in later years produced founders of Pakistan. Sir Syed Ahmed can therefore rightly be called the first founder of Pakistan. He upheld the 'Two Nation Theory' asserting that in India, there lived two separate nations; Muslims and Hindus since they differed very much from each other in social behavior, mentality superiority and economic living standards. Even their religions posed as ideologies of two opposite poles, never to be reconciled.

Most Pakistanis, also consisting of a vast migrant population were inferior in education, economic and technical skills. Above all they lacked practical training and capital for investment, forcing them to live in abject poverty. The fact remains that until 1960, household workers had no shoes to wear. Even if they had one, they preferred to save them for use on more important occasions. Mostly they were artisans, workers of every sort. But this factor proved to be 'a boon in disguise' as they emerged as high class industrialists and engineers to contribute to Pakistan's growth and development, in later years.

Since its very inception, Pakistan faced precarious global conspiracies too. No other nation has faced such challenges. Yet Pakistan moved on and demonstrated its undeniable geopolitical significance to the entire world. The United States encouraged non-democratic governments as its foreign policy, thus forcing Pakistan too with intermittent army dictators so that it could get its decisions and choices approved and implemented without any hindrance. The dictators followed their masters as their 'Master's Voice'. The result was lack of development. Pakistan has also always been under serious threat from a very intimidating and hostile neighbour which did not let it focus on economic front. The Afghan wars expanding over 30 years, proving to be the 'last straw' have greatly hampered growth of Pakistan, economically, politically and by having to accommodate unwillingly 3 million Afghan immigrant refugees due to American wars in Afghanistan. Saudi and Iranian rivalries too, had bad impacts on Pakistan.

The mindset set; political process was kept controlled and manipulated through politicians who followed the system with gratuitous support that allowed them to be corrupt, meaning thereby that many politicians of high status and caliber also got engaged in this lowly act. Ordinary Pakistanis suffered a lot, were kept deprived and betrothed only to the struggle for necessities of life. The children of the rich with unimaginable riches while children of the poor searching for bread-economy, is the present status quo. Even today slogans of Roti, Kapra and Makan remained unfulfilled dreams. State institutions fell to the mercy of nepotism and political interference. Extremely limited sources of income and rapidly spiking commodity prices forced corruption in the lower tiers. Ignorance in the 'state-of-the-art' technological advancements, have severely hampered us in educational and technological development. The literacy rate although far better than in the past but the current poverty rate can bring it down. Is this nation heading for a sweet-eulogy (of 'Huma' bird in Persian myth) or for a very sweet (Swan-Song). 'Swan' bird that gets fire at the end and dies as a result of his sweet song..!! (Greek mythology).

FOR millions across the Muslim world, performing Haj is the dream of a lifetime, and many people save money for the pilgrimage for decades. Yet, due to the prevailing global economic situation, their hopes may remain unfulfilled, as matters of the spirit are also affected by harsh earthly economic realities. For Pakistan's intending hajjis, the pilgrimage has become dearer by a few hundred thousand rupees this year, as under the government scheme, pilgrims will end up paying around Rs1.2m to get to the holy land. It is also of concern that, under the new Haj policy, 50pc of Pakistan's total quota of just over 179,000 hajjis has been allotted to overseas Pakistanis. Designed to save precious foreign exchange, this scheme will allow Pakistanis settled abroad to proceed on the pilgrimage themselves under Pakistan's quota, or sponsor relatives in this country, without balloting, by sending foreign currency from overseas. While the move may make economic sense and prevent the flight of foreign currency, it will mean that less spaces are available for people wanting to go for Haj from this country, who do not have relatives abroad to sponsor them.

As per Islamic injunctions, only those who can afford the journey are supposed to go on Haj. But constant price rises and economic shocks mean that only the rich are able to fulfil this pillar of faith. Those with knowledge of the situation present different explanations for the high Haj costs. The foremost is the weak rupee, and the strong dollar. Moreover, while the Saudis have reduced some costs, the kingdom has jacked up taxes, which means more expensive food, hotels etc. Airfares have also gone through the roof, while there is a shortage of hotel rooms in Madina. In order to facilitate pilgrims of all economic strata, the Saudi government, as well as Muslim states, need to put in maximum efforts to make Haj affordable, and not another opportunity to make money.

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Islamabad, Beijing commit to expanding CPEC

Pakistan and China have reiterated the commitment to expand China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and include third parties in the project to enhance regional connectivity and cooperation.

The two sides “reaffirmed their commitment to CPEC that remained a major pillar of bilateral cooperation and a symbol of ever-deepening friendship”, according to a statement issued by the Foreign Office after the third round of Pakistan-China Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) in Beijing.

“The two sides reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral relations, and agreed to expand and reinforce political and security cooperation, bilateral trade, economic and financial cooperation, cultural exchanges, tourism, and people-to-people ties. Pakistan and China will also enhance high-level engagements and dialogue mechanisms and make the channels of communication even more robust,” the FO said.

The Pakistani delegation was led by Foreign Secretary Dr Asad Majeed Khan while the Chinese side was led by Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong.

The two sides agreed to continue engagements and dialogues and make communication channels even more robust.

The foreign secretary thanked the Chinese side for economic support and humanitarian assistance during the devastating floods in 2022.

The Chinese vice foreign minister reaffirmed his country's support for Pakistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and economic security, according to the statement released on Sunday 19 March.

“The two sides exchanged views on a range of regional and global issues of mutual interest and expressed satisfaction over their close cooperation and engagement on important regional developments including in Afghanistan,” it said.

'Across-the-board support'

In a meeting with Dr Khan, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang said China was ready to work with Pakistan “to advance friendly cooperation and

promote the construction of CPEC”, according to APP.

The Chinese foreign minister reiterated Beijing's commitment to the strategic and cooperative partnership between the two countries and agreed to

extend “across-the-board support” to Pakistan.

Dr Khan said Pakistan and China would also strengthen coordination on international and regional affairs and consolidate ties, according to the statement.

They also agreed to build on the consensus reached during the visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to Beijing in November 2022.

Merchandise exports shrink 19pc in February



PERSISTENT political and economic instability have discouraged foreign buyers from placing orders, especially amid skyrocketing prices and shortages of raw materials due to import restrictions, on the back of fast-dwindling foreign exchange reserves. Exporters are unsure of timely deliveries and are therefore losing market to regional competitors.

Pakistan's exports of merchandise shrank for the sixth month in a row dipping by 18.67 per cent year-on-year to \$2.30 billion in February, stoking fears of massive layoffs in the industrial sector.

In the first eight months (July to February) of 2022-23, exports were down 8.65pc at \$18.79bn compared to \$20.57bn in the corresponding period last year. The drop shows the government would find it difficult to achieve the export target this fiscal year.

Imports dipped 31.51pc to \$4.009bn in February compared to \$5.85bn over the corresponding month of last year. In the first eight months, the imports fell 23.56pc to \$40.09bn this year from \$52.45bn over the corresponding period last year.

Between July and February FY23, the trade deficit decelerated 33.18pc to \$21.30bn from \$31.87bn over the corresponding months of last year.

In February trade deficit fell 43.56pc to \$1.70bn on a year-on-year basis.

The export proceeds are declining mainly because of internal and external factors raising fears about the closure of industrial units, especially textile and clothing.

The exports started posting negative growth in the first month of the current

fiscal year — July — barring August when a slight increase was recorded because of the backlog of the preceding month. Export contraction is a worrisome factor, which will create problems in balancing the country's external account.

Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers & Exporters Association ex-chairman Ijaz A. Khokhar told media that the government will have to come up with some measures to reverse the industry closure.

He said buyers have withheld their orders mainly because of political and economic uncertainty in the country. Mr Khokhar suggested the government should come up with clear statements to give signals to foreign buyers that their orders will be delivered on time. “This is a very tough condition”, he said, adding the government will have to support small and medium enterprises. He said a further increase in the interest rate on Thursday will make it almost impossible for SMEs to get access to credit.

The government recently discontinued subsidised electricity to the export sector. This will further add to the cost of the export sector and will render it uncompetitive on the world markets, especially against its rivals from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Mr Khokhar said buyers are shifting toward Bangladesh, Vietnam and other countries. The government will have to play a role in this uncertainty, he said, adding ministers should give positive messages to international buyers.

Buyers are sceptical about Pakistan's economy after rating downgrades by the international rating agencies in the past few months.

Exporters believe that one of the main reasons behind falling exports was the exchange rate instability. The discontinuation of duty drawbacks on local taxes and levies by the government has also created liquidity issues for the export sector.

Exports to Middle East fall 12pc

Pakistan's exports to the Middle East shrank 11.87 per cent on a year-on-year basis to \$1.491 billion in the first eight months of FY23 mainly driven by a substantial decline in exports to the United Arab Emirates.

The exports to the region saw a mixed trend with an increase to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, while a decline to other countries of the region, data compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan showed on Saturday 25 March.

The UAE has emerged as the leading country for Pakistan's export of goods as nearly 64pc of the total exports to the region go to the UAE market alone, however, it suffered a decline of 19.91pc to \$0.945bn in 8MFY23 from \$1.180 over the corresponding months last year (FY22).

Out of seven UAE states, the bulk of exports was destined for Dubai amounting to \$856.27 million during 8MFY23 against \$996.32m in the corresponding months last year, showing a decline of 14pc.

Pakistan's top export products to UAE include rice, bovine carcasses and half carcasses, men's/boys' cotton ensembles, guavas, mangoes, etc.

Similarly, Pakistan's top sectoral exports to the UAE include cereals, articles of apparel and clothing, meat and edible offal etc.

The second biggest market for Pakistan's exports in terms of value is Saudi Arabia. However, the exports witnessed an increase of 15pc to \$300.61m in 8MFY23 from \$260.26m in the preceding fiscal year.

Pakistan's exports to Saudi Arabia have stagnated at around \$500m in the last decade, showing that no significant growth was seen in the market access as compared to the UAE.

Pakistan's top exports to Saudi Arabia include rice (semi- or wholly milled), bovine carcasses and half carcasses, tents, textile materials, etc.

Pakistan's exports to Qatar dipped 3pc to \$119.17m in 8MFY23 from \$122.87m during 8MFY22, which include rice, bovine carcasses, potatoes, onions, guavas, mangoes, etc. However, one of the most exported goods to Qatar during 7MFY23 remained footballs as Pakistan was the official football supplier to the FIFA World Cup 2022 held in November in Doha, Qatar.

Easing of import curbs sought

Curbs on the import of raw materials have brought the production of Dawlance — a wholly owned subsidiary of Europe's second-largest manufacturer of home appliances, Arcelik A.S. Turkiye — to “almost zero” since the beginning of 2023.

Speaking to media on Wednesday 8 March, company CEO Umar Ahsan said the arbitrary import curtailment measures have “shattered the confidence” of the Turkish sponsor, which acquired the manufacturer of white goods in 2016 for \$243 million.

The privately held company has joined a steadily growing number of firms that've either shut down their plants or scaled back operations because the country has run out of dollars to pay for the import of industrial raw materials.

Foreign exchange reserves of the central bank are hovering around \$3.8 billion, barely enough for even one month of import cover.

Dawlance started facing import-related problems in May 2022 when banks refused to open letters of credit (LCs) for items under HS Code Chapters 84 and 85, which deal with mechanical and electrical equipment. This problem lasted until August 2022 when the central bank instructed the company to make do with a quota of 38 per cent of its preceding year's imports.

The company claims it received even that “small quota” neither in full nor on time.

Subsequently, the central bank instructed all commercial banks towards the end of December that they prioritise the LCs for essential items like food and energy only.

“Each product that we make has hundreds of components. The entire production line comes to a halt if we're out of even one of those components,” said Mr Ahsan.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and commercial banks resorted to a “pick-and-choose” exercise while deciding which of the LCs of Dawlance should be entertained, he said.

“Had they consulted us, we might've at least tried to limit the damage,” he said, noting that its production plants have been sitting idle for over two months now.

In a formal statement, the company also demanded that the government should consider it “a special case” as most of its products are essential for food preservation and hygiene.

Elaborating on this demand, the company CEO said the Turkish giant acquired the Pakistani firm seven years ago with a “stated objective” that its Pakistani units would be turned into “export hubs”. The Turkish firm sells its output in about 150 countries but maintains manufacturing operations in only eight, including Pakistan.

“Arcelik has been taking this company in that direction. That's why we've not announced any dividend in the last six years despite profits,” he said, adding that randomly imposed import curbs will deter the foreign sponsor from turning the company into an export-oriented firm. Mr Ahsan said he made his case for opening raw material imports in a meeting of the Senate's standing committee on finance on Wednesday 8 March. Committee chairman Senator Saleem Mandviwalla asked the SBP governor to “look into resolving the issues” faced by the Turkish investor, he said.



Labourers work at a factory that makes handicraft with salt stones.

Rs 40,000 reduction in Haj package likely, says official

The expenses for this year's Haj are likely to come down by Rs40,000 per person following "successful negotiations" with the Saudi government, an official said on Monday 27 March after a meeting of the Senate's standing committee on religious affairs.

"If the rupee remains stable, the Haj package under the government scheme will come down to Rs1.13 million from Rs1.17m, for the northern region, and to Rs1.12m from Rs1.16m for the southern region," the religious affairs ministry official said.

The northern region consists of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while the southern region comprises Sindh and Balochistan.

The price difference is due to lower air fares from the southern region.

In reply to a query over reasons for a jump in Haj expenditure this year under the government scheme, the official cited the Saudi government's decision to raise charges for several services, including food and rents for accommodation in Makkah and Madina.

The charges for food have gone up from Rs 53,440 last year to Rs100,238, and Haj dues from Rs302,303 to Rs356,066, he explained.

However, the official added, the key reason for the hefty package was the rupee's declining value.

The number of Pakistanis allowed by the Saudi government to perform Haj is 179,210. Sixty per cent of the quota was usually assigned to the government Haj scheme and 40 per cent to private operators, but the ministry of religious affairs has decided to give 50 per cent of the quota to the latter this year.

In fact, the sitting minister for religious affairs, Mufti Abdul Shakoor, had reversed the arrangement last year by granting 60 per cent quota to the private operators.

At the same time, the ministry has earmarked half of the 89,605 quota for government scheme for the "Sponsorship Scheme". Under this arrangement, 44,802 seats have been reserved for those who make payment for the Haj package in US dollars.

Publication of holy Quran

Earlier, the Senate committee unanimously passed a bill aimed at ensuring the disposal of damaged pages and copies of the Holy Quran in a proper manner as well as to stop the use of sub-standard paper for the purpose.

The Publication of the Holy Quran (Elimination of Printing and Recording Errors) (Amendment) Bill proposes the establishment of a board to supervise an error-free printing, publication and recording of the Holy Quran, including the uploading of copies on internet.

The bill proposes to disallow the printing of the holy book's Arabic text in newspapers, greeting cards, posters, brochures and other advertising material. Publication of a translation of the text only will be permitted if the bill is adopted by parliament.

The committee directed the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) to ensure enforcement of laws related to sanctity of the holy Quran.

The CII's Director General said the Quran Board would be constituted after passage of the draft law. "The bill will become a guideline for amending laws at the provincial level," he added.

The meeting was attended, among others, by Senators Anwar Lal Din, Bahramand Khan Tangi, Maulvi Faiz Muhammad and Naseebullah Bazai.

China fully reopens borders to foreigners

By allowing all categories of visas to be issued from Wednesday 15 March, China will reopen its borders to foreign

tourists for the first time in the three years since the Covid-19 pandemic erupted.

The removal of this last cross-border control measure imposed to guard against Covid-19 comes after authorities last month declared 'victory' over the virus.

Tourist industry insiders do not expect a massive influx of visitors in the short run or significant boost to the economy. In 2019, international tourism receipts accounted for just 0.9 per cent of China's gross domestic product.

But the resumption of visa issuance for tourist marks a broader push by Beijing to normalise two-way travel between China and the world, having withdrawn its advisory to citizens against foreign travel in January.

Areas in China that required no visas before the pandemic will revert to visa-free entry, the foreign ministry said on Tuesday. This will include the southern tourist island of Hainan, a long-time favourite destination among Russians, as well as cruise ships passing through Shanghai port.

Visa-free entry for foreigners from Hong Kong and Macau to China's most prosperous province, Guangdong, will also resume. Chinese events open to foreign visitors such as the China Development Forum in Beijing later this month and the Shanghai Autoshow in April are gradually resuming.

In 2022, just 115.7 million cross-border trips were made in and out of China, with foreigners accounting for around 4.5m. By contrast, China logged 670m overall trips in 2019 before the arrival of Covid, with foreigners accounting for 97.7m.



The resumption of visa issuance for tourists marks a broader push by Beijing to normalise two-way travel between China and the world.

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Gandhara reveals love, life, and belongings



The Lahore Museum is hosting the exhibition “Love, Life, and Belongings,” which features the works of seven artists.

The artworks are the result of the Gandhara Artist Residency in Taxila, where the artists stayed and drew inspiration from Buddhist art and history to create their Gandhara-inspired works.

Aisha Moriani, Muhammad Ashraf, Rabiya Asim, Sumbul Natalia, Sumera Jawad, Dr. Khaleequr Rehman, and Amina Cheema are among the artists.

According to Sumbul Natalia from the National Arts College, religious fanaticism throughout history caused the Buddha sculptures at the Julian monastery of Taxila to have their heads smashed. These headless Buddhas informed her big time, which resulted in his art pieces in mixed media, which all show headless Buddhas. She did an installation of broken sculptures with an audio device that would help the visitor hear the sound of smashing sculptures.

“Found Objects and Sound Installation” is another artwork by Sumbul that's part of the exhibition. She has used stones found at artisans' workshops in Taxila and turned them into art pieces. The sounds of smashing stones were made part of the artwork, with headphones available to hear the audio of smashing stones. Sumbul says that her installation is also related to her mixed media pieces, smashing of heads of Buddhas.

Council of Museums, in collaboration with the Lahore Museum



Dr Rehman, a urologist, has four art pieces, including a sculpture, at the exhibition.

Speaking to media, he says he has been in love with Gandhara art since his student days at Mayo College when he would visit the museum almost daily to see Gandhara art on his way back home. He says his work blends Gandharan art with modern concepts.

Four “Neo Gandharan Plates” by Dr Rehman are on show. Each plate features carvings of various contemporary images. The decorative plates from Gandhara served as inspiration for these pieces, however they included diverse images. One of the primary figures in Gandhara art, Buddha, is shown in his stone sculpture looking through a window. The work inspired by schist sculptures has been carved from grey and white marble.

Sumera Jawad's works, drawings of female figures on Taxila stones, get inspiration from the complex representation of women in Buddhist Gandhara. According to Buddhist tradition, women can't ascend to the status of a Buddha, and through her works, Sumera has tried to investigate the representation of women in the sculptures found in Gandhara. With her drawings of seductive female bodies on the stones, she has interpreted the representation of women in her way.

Muhammad Ashraf has a large-scale drawing made with graphite on tracing sheets. Besides, he is showcasing two portraits of Buddha based on art pieces in Taxila Museum in which he has used graphite on golden hand-made paper he had purchased from India in 1992.

The exhibition will continue till March 26 (all days except Friday).

The residency and exhibition are presented by the Center of Culture and Development and the International Council of Museums, in collaboration with the Lahore Museum.

Unesco takes steps to save Makli necropolis, Mohenjo Daro from natural disasters

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) announced recently that a detailed needs assessment and identification of short- and long-term measures for the rehabilitation and strengthening of Makli necropolis and Mohenjo Daro against future natural disasters would be carried out by a team of Unesco experts this month.

Under the World Heritage Centre Emergency Assistance, the Unesco is conducting damage assessment of the World Heritage Sites of Makli and Mohenjo Daro in Sindh, in collaboration with the Sindh Culture, Tourism, Antiquities, and Archives Department.

Heavy monsoon rainfall caused widespread flooding in Pakistan resulting in significant loss of lives, livelihoods, and shelter. The natural disaster also severely damaged cultural heritage sites in the country.

Soon after the visit of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Director of Unesco, Islamabad, Youssef Filali-Meknassi, Unesco mobilised \$350,000 from the World Heritage Emergency Assistance and the Heritage Emergency Fund to assist in the needs assessment and recovery of cultural sites and displaced cultural professionals in Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

In January, Youssef Filali-Meknassi, accompanied by National Project Officer Mariam Farooqi, visited the Makli necropolis in Thatta for an initial

assessment of the damages caused by heavy rainfall, and the urgent stabilisation measures carried out by the site management team.

A two-member team comprising Unesco National Professional Officer Jawad Aziz and a consultant and expert on conservation on earthen architecture Thierry Joffroy visited Mohenjo Daro to assess the impact of the rainfall, and meet local authorities to plan next steps for the stabilisation and recovery of the site.

The team identified that rainwater drainage systems were unable to handle the increased volume of heavy rainfall during the monsoon season, resulting in extensive structural damage.

The initial visit identified urgent short-term measures to ensure stabilisation against further damage, and long-term interventions to protect the site against new risks created by the rainfall.

In January 2023, the Unesco team comprising Cristina Menegazzi, culture and heritage expert, and Mr Jawad Aziz, National Professional Officer, accompanied consultant Thierry Joffroy for a second visit to Mohenjo Daro to guide the Mohenjo Daro management team on stabilisation of the affected structures.

Alongside government officials, students from selected universities were also invited to gain valuable field experience in conservation methods.

The Unesco team inspected the circular drain around the site which has been blocked with silt, mud and wild growth at many places and not functioning properly. The team also visited the conservation laboratory on site, where water and soil are tested before being used for conservation work.

The Unesco team also visited the Great Bath to examine the tunnel drain of the Bath which was damaged due to the runoff water coming from the southern side and recommended that only the wall should be stabilised to prevent further damage at the moment. Archaeological records must be consulted to understand the original structure before any long-term restoration work was carried out, advised the team members.



STUDENTS of the Fine Arts Department of A.U. University paint a decorative wall at the mouth of a cave. Experts on the Mohenjo Daro valley visit Mohenjo Daro. According to the Archaeological Department, the painting depicts the natural culture of the first province of Pakistan as well as Sindh, Balochistan and A.P. The artwork is still in progress with the community responsible against 50 students and faculty members, site field class. The mural is behind the wall on the left side of the image. This was one of the most remarkable areas of the valley to Indian visiting before the conquest. That was why the wall was built. This wall will provide protection to humans and prehistoric from 'India's invasion' — text attributed by 'Sindh Times'.

PATA Gold Awards 2023 open for submissions

Organisations and individuals making outstanding contributions towards the successful promotion of the travel and tourism industry throughout the Asia Pacific region are encouraged to submit entries to the PATA Gold Awards 2023. The deadline for submissions is May 31, 2023.

Now in its 39th year and sponsored by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) for the 28th consecutive year, the PATA Gold Awards set industry standards for excellence and innovation. The PATA Gold Awards Presentation will take place during PATA Travel Mart 2023 in New Delhi, India.

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) will present two Grand Title Winners for best of show entries in the following broad categories: Marketing, and Sustainability and Social Responsibility with 25 Gold Awards to be bestowed.

Ms Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, Director of MGTO, said, "Now that the pandemic appears to be behind us and we have our eyes set on tourism recovery, it is with renewed enthusiasm that we look forward to seeing how industry stakeholders in the Asia Pacific are marketing their destinations and blazing new trails on sustainability and social responsibility in post-COVID. As Macao is stepping into a new chapter of diversified tourism, we are honoured to support the PATA Gold Awards and continue to help bring a positive influence across our region."

"We are sincerely grateful to MGTO for sponsoring the PATA Gold Awards 2023 and for their continued commitment to a responsible and sustainable tourism industry. These awards provide us with the perfect opportunity to recognise and reward the very best the Asia Pacific travel industry has to offer," said PATA Chair Peter Semone. "The winners of these awards set industry standards for excellence and innovation and serve as examples for others to follow. We look forward to receiving entries from both organisations and individuals worldwide that demonstrate excellence in conception, creativity and fulfilment, and celebrating the winners at PATA Travel Mart 2023."

Benefits of Participating:

- Exposure to PATA's panel of experts curated globally.
- Brand and project exposure to PATA's extensive and diverse members across all public and private players in the Asia Pacific travel ecosystem.
- International media exposure through press releases and other promotional channels.
- Coverage on PATA's marketing, social, and electronic direct mail (EDM) channels reaching key players in the public and private travel sector across Asia Pacific and beyond.
- Complimentary access to PATA Travel Mart 2023 hosted in New Delhi, India.

Judged by an international panel of experts, the Gold Awards recognise exceptional achievement in two broad categories with 25 Gold Awards and two Grand Title Winners on offer:

1. Marketing (14 Gold Awards and one Grand Title Winner)
2. Sustainability and Social Responsibility (11 Gold Awards and one Grand Title Winner)



Sraiki community dance as they celebrate Saraiki Ajrak Day, better known as Saraiki Culture Day, organised by the Pakistan Saraiki Party.



Artists of Kalash community perform a tableau during two days exhibition 'Her Hunar' at Pak China Friendship Centre in Islamabad.



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Heer in English

One of Punjab's most revered folktales, the love story of Heer and Ranjha, turned into a great epic when, in the 18th century, the master poet Waris Shah decided to retell it in verse.

Although the story has been told over centuries in Punjabi, Persian, Sindhi, Hindi and Urdu by many poets and prose writers, such as Hari Das Harya, Gang Bhatt, Damodar Das and Ahmad Yar Khan Yakta among others, it is Waris Shah's Heer that remains incomparable.

Like all such tales from the pre-printing press era, many verses continued to be included in the main text by poets and singers who would read and recite the long poem. Eminent scholar Sharif Sabir is credited with the latest and most authentic version of Heer Waris Shah, made available to us as recently as 1986.

Poet Syed Waris Shah (1722-1798) spiritually subscribed to the Chishti order of Sufism and was a student of Makhdoom Hafiz Ghulam Murtaza in Kasur. He rendered the tale of Heer Ranjha in his own unique way, where he used the story to define the feelings of separation and belonging, love and longing, pathos and ecstasy and satisfaction and guilt.

Full of drama, loaded dialogue, insightful depictions of the human psyche and inherent social behaviour towards each other in a community, Heer Waris Shah presents the social history of the tumultuous 18th century agrarian Punjab.

Through his characters, Shah time and again challenges the hypocrisy and fake religiosity of the mullah [cleric] and qazi [judge]. His depiction of the two lovers, Heer and Ranjha, celebrates nonconformity and purity of heart. All his other characters, such as Kaidu, Sehti, Ajju Kehra, etc are somewhat universal characters in human society.

Poet Najm Hossein Syed once wrote: "Written commentaries on Heer are rare, and critical introductions rarer. It does not form part of any regular curricula. But despite these disadvantages — perhaps because of them — Waris Shah's long poetic drama is certain of its audiences for generations."

Sarwat Mohiuddin has applied her command over both Punjabi and English languages to give us select stanzas of Heer Waris Shah in English, published under the Literary Heritage Series of the Oxford University Press, Pakistan.

In order to attract a younger readership, the language of the translation is simplified to some extent. The volume, illustrated with watercolour paintings depicting the tale's main characters and



also Punjab's rural 18th century landscape, has just come out and was launched at the 14th Karachi Literature Festival, held earlier this month.

Just last year, 2022, was Waris Shah's 300th birth anniversary. How unfortunate that an event such as that could not be befittingly marked beyond an urs [celebratory death anniversary] at his birth place, Jandiala Sher Khan, and a couple of seminars. It should have been a year-long celebration across cities and towns in Punjab and beyond.

The translation of Heer Waris Shah in English that I was familiar with before, was done by Sant Singh Sekhon in the 1970s. It was published from Ludhiana, Indian Punjab. It is an almost word-to-word translation of considerable merit, with annotations and meanings appended to the translated text.

Fiction writer and playwright Sekhon was both an academic and a political activist. He was born in 1907 in Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), but moved to his grandfather's village in Ludhiana after Partition.

Of Marxist persuasion, Sekhon fought for elections in India on a number of occasions, but continued with his literary work all along. He had started writing in English, but later on switched to Punjabi. However, he remained a professor of English literature at the Punjabi University, Patiala. Sekhon, suitably decorated by the Indian state for his phenomenal literary career, passed away in 1997.

Mohiuddin has attempted to do a

translation in metre, though I am not sure if metres are translatable. But there is an inherent rhyme she tries to create in English which does come close to our own rhyming patterns and she has done that quite successfully.

Mohiuddin is a person of many talents. She has made a name for herself as a poet in Punjabi and Urdu with multiple collections of verse behind her. She has also been a serious translator of literature from different languages into Punjabi and Urdu, including something as inaccessible to Pakistani readers as poems from Hungary.

In this particular translation of Heer, Mohiuddin's desire to pass her passion on to the next generation is ostensible — passion for her language, her land and her literary tradition. She has dedicated the book to the coming generations who, in her words, are the natural heirs to our rich heritage.

Let me share a few stanzas about the time when Dhido Ranjha seeks jog [asceticism] and faqr [indigence] from Guru Balnath. "At Tillan Jogian Ranjha pleaded 'Oh please/ Accept me great Guru Balnath/ I come from far, have nowhere to go/ I beg you to show me the path.'"

"Accomplished and able are you my 'Murshid'/ Allow me to be your disciple/ In earnest faith and trust in you/ I humbly ask for your guidance."

Later on, after Guru Balnath has unsuccessfully tried to dissuade Ranjha, Waris Shah writes: "Guru gently asked him to come sit close/ Commencing the ritual of 'Jog'/ Picked razor himself, started shaving his head/ Shedding lineage and pride with it."

"Then pierced his ears, put earrings in them/ Covered body with soot all around/ Identity buried in ashes so that/ No traces would ever be found."

Reading and imbibing from our classics — from Heer Waris Shah to Mirza Sahiban by Hafiz Barkhudar, to Saiful Mulook by Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, to the works of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Rehman Baba, Mast Tawakkuli and Khawaja Fareed among others — can turn us into a more inclusive, insightful, forgiving and tolerant society.

Even Heer Waris Shah begins with: "All praise be to Allah, Who/ Ordained love as core of life."

The columnist is a poet and essayist. He has recently edited Pakistan Here and Now: Insights into Society, Culture, Identity and Diaspora.

His latest collection of verse is Hairaan Sar-i-Bazaar.

Do we have enough laws to protect wild, exotic animals?

A leopard, probably on an evening stroll, strayed into a residential area last month, forcing wildlife officials armed with tranquiliser darts to capture the animal in a frenzied effort, lasting more than five hours.

In videos posted to social media of the Feb 16 incident, the young male cat slipped between cars before knocking down a man and leaping over a garden fence. Before being captured, it ran amok in the streets of Islamabad's DHA neighbourhood and even injured four people.

The wild episode has once again turned the spotlight on urban areas encroaching on natural habitats, and the practice of keeping big cats as pets — wildlife officials initially assumed that the leopard was a pet and had escaped from captivity, but they later said it came from the wild as it showed no signs of being domesticated.

However, reports have earlier suggested that several people in upscale areas keep wild animals as pets, as some owners see big cats — such as leopards, lions and tigers — as symbols of wealth and power.

Other wild animals kept as pets in Pakistan include snakes, iguanas, pangolins and birds, some of whom are from other countries.

The DHA incident — that made some wildlife officials name the leopard 'Deeaitchay' — has also called into question the laws, or a lack of them, governing the captivity of wild and exotic animals.

The existing laws are sometimes unclear, not comprehensive, and differ from province to province. Wildlife officials and organisations have called for more comprehensive laws in this regard.

Islamabad and Punjab

The Islamabad Wildlife (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management) Ordinance 1979 (IWO) prohibits killing and capturing wild animals, restricts their hunting, transfer and import, and empowers authorised officers to search any place without a warrant if someone keeps a wild animal.

The ordinance also gives a long list of protected animals — those that “shall not be hunted, killed or captured” — ranging from birds like pelicans, flamingos, geese, and swans to mammals like barking deer,



A May 20, 2019, file photo shows Bilal Mansoor Khawaja, a private zoo owner, with his white lion in Karachi.

otters, pangolins and leopards.

But the IWO apparently has no jurisdiction if someone wants to keep lions and tigers, which are not native and not described as wild under laws.

However, all provisions concerning wild and foreign animals have now been included in the draft Islamabad Nature Bill, said Vaqar Zakaria, a member of the Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB).

“We have been tabling it (the bill) in the parliament for the last three years, but it just doesn't seem to come into the priority of things,” he told media.

Mr Zakaria said the IWMB — a government body operating under the Ministry of Climate Change and was set up in 2015 under Section 4 of the Islamabad Wildlife Ordinance — had not issued a single licence for any naturally occurring wild animal since its inception.

There is no official data on how many people in Islamabad own wild or exotic animals. However, IWMB Director Tariq Bangash said in February that several people in Islamabad and upscale areas of Rawalpindi were keeping wild animals, including leopards, as pets.

As for Punjab, the provincial government issues permits for exotic animals such as lions and tigers.

However, Mr Zakaria regretted that if you mistreat a pet lion or a tiger in Punjab, the wildlife department cannot do much. “There's nothing in the law that says that you should not be mistreating an animal. It stops there,” he said but added that the

province was modifying laws to enable the department to keep a check on how the animals are kept.

Sindh

Sindh enacted a new wildlife law in July 2020 to protect 326 species of birds, 107 species of crawling animals and 82 species of other animals.

The legislation — called the Sindh Wildlife Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management Act 2020 — came almost 50 years after a previous law that protected only 45 kinds of birds and animals.

The act also makes provisions, among other things, to set up a national park, game reserve, and wildlife sanctuary; regulate hunting; import and export captive breed animals; and offences and penalties.

Under the act, the lawful possession of any wildlife species has been attached with several stringent conditions, unlike the past practice of granting a two-liner official permit for setting up a mini-zoo, and that too without mentioning any specific species.

For instance, lawfully possessing exotic big cats is attached with 39 conditions, including one under which the owner is required to get the DNA certification for the animal, which can only be done at a handful of institutes across the country.

Besides, under the 2020 law, no new application for importing big cats will be entertained. The permit also bars citizens from keeping big cats in residential areas,

and an applicant must acquire a no-objection certificate from the relevant union council, town committee and cantonment board.

Meanwhile, a wildlife expert told media that there might be more than 100 captive big cats in Sindh, most of them in Karachi.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Officials in KP said the provincial government had introduced stringent rules to control private breeding facilities.

A wildlife official said the provincial government notified the Breeding Facility Rules last year, which provides for registration of all such facilities with the department and paying taxes for the animals being kept.

These rules were passed under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Wildlife and Biodiversity (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management) Act, 2015.

The official said that illegal breeding facilities would be heavily fined and closed under the rules, which only allowed keeping birds and herbivores, and discouraged the captivity of carnivores.

Balochistan

The provincial government enacted the Balochistan (Wildlife Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management) Act 2014 in March of that year.

The legislation provides a comprehensive list of wild animals in its Schedule III that must be protected. These animals — including big cats, reptiles like marsh crocodiles, snakes, etc. — shall not be hunted, killed, trapped, captured, traded, possessed or kept as pets.

“No official permit has been issued to anyone in Quetta to keep these as pets,” Niaz Khan Kakar, Balochistan’s forest and wildlife conservator, told media, adding that under Section 25 of the act, all such pets would be confiscated.

More laws needed

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Pakistan, which has previously flagged several cases of big cats kept in residential areas and their open displays in public places, has stressed the need for provincial wildlife departments to establish a separate cell for handling and rescuing animals as soon as possible.

The Fund has also called for strict laws to be implemented against the illegal trade of wild animals and the practice of keeping them as pets. It stressed the need for new laws in the country that prohibit keeping wild animals, such as tigers and lions, as pets.

Manzoor Ali in Peshawar and Saleem Shahid in Quetta also contributed to this report.

FIFA says 2026 have record 104 matches

The 2026 World Cup will have 104 matches instead of the traditional 64 games due to the expanded format with 48 teams taking part, global football governing body FIFA said on Tuesday 14 March after its Council meeting in the Rwandan capital Kigali.

The 2026 edition, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico, will be the first edition of the quadrennial tournament where 48 teams are taking part. The final will be held on July 19.

The new format will also stick to drawing four teams in a group after a proposal for a three-team group was shot down over fears of collusion. However, the number of groups will increase from 12 to 16.

The original plan for the 2026 edition had a total of 80 matches but the decision to increase the number of games to 104 was approved by FIFA’s council.

Traditionally the top two teams from each group advance to the last 16 but the 2026 edition will also have the eight best third-placed teams moving into the knockout round of 32.

“The FIFA Council unanimously approved the proposed amendment to the FIFA World Cup 2026 competition format” FIFA said. “The revised format mitigates the risk of collusion and ensures that all the teams play a minimum of three matches, while providing balanced rest time between competing teams.”

The decision comes after a dramatic group stage at the tournament in Qatar convinced FIFA that a rethink was needed.

“The groups of four have been absolutely incredible until the last minute of the last match,” FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who is expected to be waved in for a new four-year term as president as he stands unopposed for re-election at Thursday’s FIFA Congress, said in December.

The 32-team World Cup in Qatar last year had a total of 64 matches completed in 29 days. The last time Mexico (1986) and the United States (1994) hosted a World Cup, there were only 24 teams.

The tournament has had 32 teams since the 1998 edition, with eight groups of four and the finalists playing seven games each. But teams reaching the summit clash in 2026 will now play eight matches in total.

Club Competition

FIFA said a 32-team Club World Cup will be played every four years from June 2025, confirming the announcement made

by its president Gianni Infantino in Qatar last year.

Confederation champions from 2021-2024 will be eligible to play in the Club World Cup, which means Chelsea and Real Madrid have already qualified.

Should either club win the Champions League again, a club ranking calculation based on sporting criteria will be used to determine which other team will qualify.

The current version of the FIFA Club World Cup — an annual competition with seven teams — will be discontinued after 2023, with a new yearly club competition approved from 2024.

“This competition will feature the champions of the premier club competitions of all confederations and conclude with a final to be played at a neutral venue, between the winner of the UEFA Champions League and the winner of intercontinental play-offs between the other confederations,” FIFA said.

FIFA said clubs will have to release players for the World Cup from May 25, 2026 unless they are in a major final -- such as the Champions League showpiece -- for which clubs will have until May 30 to allow players to join their national teams.

“With 56 days, the total combined number of rest, release and tournament days remain identical to the 2010, 2014 and 2018 FIFA World Cup editions,” FIFA added.

A newly structured international calendar was also approved with nine-day windows in March and June for two games each, a 16-day window for four matches in September-October followed by another nine-day two-match window in November.



Visitors show interest in nutrition and food show at the eight-day University of Agriculture Faisalabad spring Festival which started on Wednesday 1st March. The festival also showcases a book fair, agriculture products display, buffaloo beauty and milking contest, Gur Mela, greyhound races, tent pegging, Lyallpur art and literature festival, fancy birds show and a flower and landscape exhibition.

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Sajid to summit three peaks without oxygen



Sajid Ali Sadpara

Mountaineer Sajid Ali Sadpara has reached Nepal with a mission to summit the world's three highest mountains in Alpine style — without supplemental oxygen.

Before his departure, Mr Sadpara told media that he was going to climb Kangchenjunga (8,586 m), Dhaulagiri (8,167 m) and Makalu (8,481m) peaks.

They are the world's third-, seventh- and fifth-highest mountains, respectively. The climber said his mission will be completed in three months.

Mr Sadpara has already summited K2 (8,611m), Gasherbrum-I (8,080m) and Gasherbrum-II (8,035m), in Pakistan and Manaslu (8,163m) in Nepal without supplemental oxygen.

Alpine style is a 'self-sufficient' summit in which climbers are not supported by high-altitude porters from base camp to the summit. They manage everything, from carrying food, tent, ropes and to setting routes themselves.

Mr Sadpara, son of famed mountaineer Ali Sadpara, aims to climb all of the world's 14 eight-thousanders without supplemental oxygen.

He has made a name for himself in the Alpine community with his summits of the most daunting peaks at a young age. He climbed K2 — the world's second-highest mountain — twice, one time without supplemental oxygen. In 2022, he summited the Manaslu peak without supplemental oxygen, becoming the first Pakistani to achieve the feat.

Earlier, he also set records by when he summited both Gasherbrum-I and Gasherbrum-II peaks in three days and 18

hours without supplementary oxygen.

In February 2021, he survived when his father Muhammad Ali Sadpara, Iceland's John Snorri and Chile's Juan Pablo Mohr went missing while attempting to summit the K2 during the winter season.

Their bodies were found in May, over five months after they went missing.

Mr Sadpara described the search for the bodies of his father and other missing climbers as “the most challenging and extraordinary mission” of his life.

Thailand tourist hotspot becomes the world's most polluted city

A POPULAR tourist hotspot destination of northern Thailand Chiang Mai, is now being ranked top world's most polluted city on Tuesday 28 March, The Telegraph reported.

Chiang Mai, attracts millions of tourist every year. It is home to 120,000 people competing with megacities like Dhaka, Delhi and Shanghai for the worst air quality.

“The haze has been very bad this year,” says Pat, a local taxi driver, as he navigates a winding mountain pass. “I think now we have four seasons: summer, winter, rainy, and the haze”, The Telegraph quoted him as he saying.

Form hundreds internationally cities, Chiang Mai led the ranking with a 'very unhealthy' 177 on Tuesday 28 March night, according to IQAir — an air quality index.

The city draws tourist attention to explore the lush forest, mountain hikes and hillside villages nearby. Prof Chaicharn Pothirat, a pulmonary consultant and professor of medicine at Chiang Mai University (CMU) said: “In Chiang Mai, the haze is seasonal.” “But over the last 20 years, the intensity and duration has become worse and worse”, he added. A retired hunter and farmer in Pa Tung Ngam, Prasong Ranea says majority of people linked with agribusinesses, they use fire to clear land for next crops cycle, while some hunters set fire to promote growth in certain areas.

Chiang Mai is competing with megacities like Delhi and Shanghai for the worst air quality.

“Even when the government imposes zero burning [rules], people continue,” he

“First, the summit of K2 itself was a dangerous adventure and the burial of my father above eight thousand metres was heartbreaking,” he said.

“It was impossible to take the bodies back to base camp so we decided to bury them on the mountain.”

Now, Sajid Sadpara said his mission to summit all 14 peaks above eight-thousand metres altitude without supplemental oxygen would be the fulfilment of “his father's dream”.

For him, climbing was something he was born to take up.

“When you get an environment where you listen and practise only to become a mountaineer, you definitely become one,” he explained while talking about his father's training.

told The Telegraph. “Many have no other way; they can't afford machines or think it's the best way to hunt.”

There is economic consequence in Chiang Mai to the pollution, with some business reporting a significant drop in booking during the peak of burning season.

“At the start of March, it was a problem — tourists were not coming, I would say I had a 50 per cent drop in bookings,” says Mr Tee, owner of Chiang Mai Tee Tours, perched in his booth on a sidestreet in the city's old town. “I [have] worked in tourism for 30 years... and I think tourists are becoming more aware of the pollution.”

Medical practitioner believes the haze has been linked to serious health problem including heart disease, stokes and lung cancer.

“I tell my patients to leave”, says Prof Pothirat at the Maharaj Nakorn Chiang Mai Hospital. “As a daily practitioner, I can see that health is deteriorating — especially in the last few years.”

“Most people cannot afford to relocate at this time of year, but I tell my patients who are foreigners or have relatives in the south to leave to protect themselves”, he told The Telegraph.

The situation in Chiang Mai highlights the need for a coordinated effort from governments, business and individuals to address the issue of air pollution.

While measures such as banning burning and promoting alternative land-cleaning methods may help, the problem is complex and requires a multi-faceted approach.



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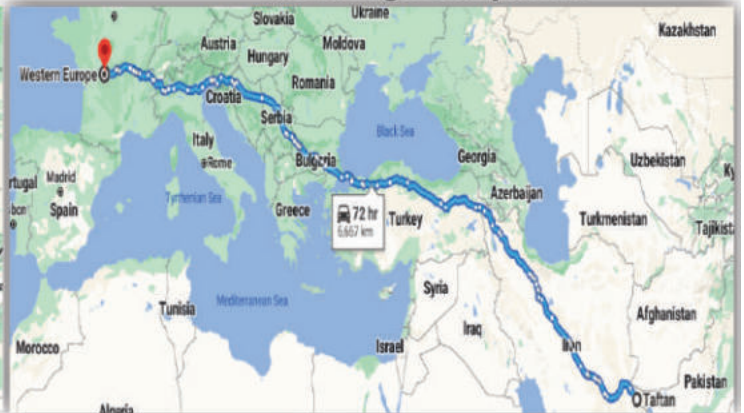


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