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its flights to Pakistan***

***HongKong Air Cargo appoints Gul
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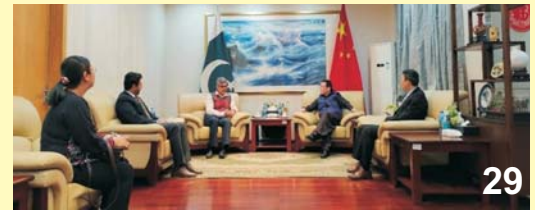
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Trade delegation arrives in Pakistan

Ethiopian Airlines resumes its flights to Pakistan

Ethiopian Airlines resumed its flights from Addis Ababa to Karachi on May 9th, 2023. The Airline used to operate its flights to Pakistan and it suspended its operation in July 2004. Now the airline has started operation again with four flights a week.

Ambassador of Ethiopia Jemal Beker Abdula on Friday May 5th said high-level official and business delegations from his country were arriving in Pakistan on May 9 to advance bilateral and multilateral cooperation in diverse fields.

"The delegations will reach Pakistan on a maiden Ethiopian Airlines flight, which is starting operations from Jinnah International Airport Karachi, where celebrations will be held to welcome high officials.

"The launch of Ethiopian Airlines' flights from Karachi to Addis Ababa was long in the making. It will open the gates for Pakistanis into Africa as well as Europe," the envoy said.

Speaking at a news conference that coincided with Patriots' Victory Day in Ethiopia, he said the 60-member delegation includes representatives of five major ministries, including Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Regional Integration, Ministry of Innovation Technology as well as high officials of the Investment Commission of Ethiopia and Industrial Park Development Corporation.

From the business side, he said it would represent multiple economic sectors of Ethiopia including agriculture and agro processing, pharmaceutical, textile, surgical equipment, sports, tourism, mining and ICT.

The ambassador said the official delegation would sign a memorandum of understanding with their counterparts in Pakistan in technology, tourism and other fields.

Announcing the official opening of the Ethiopian embassy in Islamabad, the envoy said trade agreements would also be signed between the business communities of both countries to boost the trade volume, which was minimal to this day.

He said two business forums were also being organised in Karachi and Islamabad to bolster bilateral trade by strengthening trade and commerce ties between the two countries.

He urged the Pakistani business community to increase bilateral trade between the two countries since ongoing development in Ethiopia's diverse economic sectors had really impressed



them during their recent visit to the capital city Addis Ababa.

Likewise, the business community of Ethiopia also wants to develop business and trade ties with their counterparts in the country.

Giving details about the operations of Ethiopian airlines, the ambassador said that the Pan African service would fly four days a week to Addis Ababa.

The only other destination Ethiopian airlines connected to the region was India.

"The Ethiopian airlines was one of the instruments to connect the two countries that have enjoyed cordial relations for many years, establish people to people, institutional and business linkages," Jemal Beker told journalists.

On the occasion, the ambassador also congratulated the people of Ethiopia on Patriots' Victory Day which was being observed in his country to honour the veterans of resistance movement against Italy.



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Hongkong Air Cargo appoints Gul Aviation as its GSA in Pakistan

Hongkong Air Cargo has appointed Gul Aviation as its GSA in Pakistan in March this year. Mr. Imran Peracha CEO Gul Aviation signed MoU with the management of Hongkong Air Cargo, Carrier Ltd., a division of Hongkong Airlines.

Gul Aviation is an appointed GSA's of many airlines in Pakistan for a long time. Gul Aviation established in 2002, providing comprehensive & Cargo General Sales and Services Agent (GSSA) solution to several leading airlines of the world, which cover a range of destinations spanning Europe, North and South America, South East Asia, Middle East, Far East and Africa.

It is very well connected with the market and enjoys excellent relations with local as well as with the Global Forwarders. This coupled with its extensive network in Pakistan, aggressive team and excellent reputation of the natural GSSA company gives a big competitive edge to the Airlines present. It has branch offices in all major cities of Pakistan and more than 100 employees

serve the industry.

Hongkong Air Cargo and Hong Kong Airlines signed the SPA agreements with 100 interline Partners for meeting its

customer and business Partners in the places where are out of its network, for producing the better international logistics solutions.



Mr. Imran Peracha CEO Gul Aviation with the officials of Hongkong Air Cargo



Sindh Chief Minister welcomes Ethiopian Airlines inaugural flight to Karachi

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Tuesday May 9th morning welcomed the maiden flight of Ethiopian Airlines at Karachi airport and said that the resumption of its Karachi operation will open new vistas of trade and commerce, investment and tourism between Pakistan and African countries.

The inaugural flight with 110 passengers, including three Ethiopian state ministers, landed at Karachi Airport. The flight that arrived here from Addis Ababa was given a water salute by the Civil Aviation Authority.

The chief minister received State Minister for Foreign Affairs Mesganu Arga, State Minister for Technology Fozia Amin and State Minister for Commerce Kassahun Gofe and other senior officers. The Ambassador of Ethiopia, Jemal Beker Abdulla, was also present on the occasion.

The CM was accompanied by provincial ministers Sharjeel Memon, Jam Ikram, Syed Nasir Shah, and his law adviser Murtaza Wahab.

The chief minister told the media that it was a great breakthrough that the Ethiopian Airlines started its commercial operation in Karachi on May 9. "This commercial operation of the airline is bound to boost trade between the two countries, promote tourism and help explore investment opportunities," he said added that this airline had opened the

gate to African countries.

Minister Arga thanked the chief minister for personally inaugurating the airline operations and hoped this would open new avenues for mutual cooperation, and increase trade and commerce, and tourism.

CAA justifies airports' outsourcing

Defending the government's move to outsource the country's three major airports, a spokesperson for the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Saturday 1st April said the decision was aimed at improving service quality at the airports and making them globally competitive.

The objective is to make our airports globally competitive by implementing best practices and exploiting their untapped revenue potential,' the official said in a statement.

The statement came a day after the Aircraft Owners and Operators Association of Pakistan condemned the move and planned to challenge it in court.

The CAA spokesperson, however, said no law of the land was being violated in this process, adding that complete adherence to the Public Private Partnership Authority (P3A) Act 2017 and P3A Regulations was being ensured.

He clarified that no decision had been made to outsource operations and land assets to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector arm of the World Bank, stating that IFC mandate was to provide transaction advisory services for outsourcing the airports. The official said no airport would be outsourced if the process adopted did not indicate 'appreciable growth in revenues and improvement in quality of service standards.'

Airports in private hands

THE government decision to 'outsource' the operations and land assets of the three main airports in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad is a welcome development, and anticipates a significantly large investment from Qatar.

That the government has decided to transfer these airports to private operators through public-private partnership, instead of going for outright privatisation, will help it circumvent long and tedious processes and avoid controversies associated with such policy actions in Pakistan. The Economic Coordination Committee has also approved the hiring of the International Finance Corporation the private sector arm of the World Bank Group as transaction adviser, which shows that the authorities are trying to expedite matters. Nonetheless, it is difficult to expect the whole process to conclude without any challenge from domestic airlines and the political opposition.

The trend to privatise, or transfer the management and operations of airports to private investors or private operators, has been growing worldwide since the early 1980s. This has both its advantages and disadvantages. But studies on such experiments elsewhere have shown that the benefits far outweigh the costs. The main benefit of any form of privatisation is the fact that it increases efficiency through investment in technology and the automation of processes to provide passengers reliable and less costly services. As the number of passengers travelling by air rises, the present infrastructure at Pakistani airports is coming apart. The situation requires massive capital investment in expansion and upgradation. With the government strapped for cash, private operators are in a better position to determine when and where to spend money to improve service delivery in order to facilitate the passengers without burdening taxpayers. The handing over of these airports to private operators should hopefully pave the way for more foreign airlines too begin flight operations in Pakistan or use one of the airports as their regional hub. If that happens, it will be a huge boost to the local tourism industry.



Aircraft owners, operators reject outsourcing of three airports

The Aircraft Owners and Operators Association (AOOA) of Pakistan has condemned the government's decision to outsource operations and land assets at three major airports to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) — the private sector arm of the World Bank Group — without following the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority rules.

The association in a statement issued here on Friday claimed that all the proceedings of outsourcing had been kept 'secret', thus making the whole process 'doubtful and dubious'.

No country outsources its money-making assets such as airports to a third country (Qatar) that does not run even its own airport and has outsourced it to a Singaporean company, being run by Indians, according to the AOOA press release.

Just last year Pakistani airports generated about Rs90 billion, it said, while over the next 30 years, the airports had a potential of generating more than Rs2,700bn. Yet "we are outsourcing them for Rs850bn," it said, adding that the AOOA-Pakistan would serve a legal notice to the government of Pakistan and the IFC, the World Bank, for malpractice and dodging law of the land.

The government on March 30 had kicked off the outsourcing of operations and land assets at three major airports to be run through a public-private partnership with a foreign country to generate foreign exchange reserves.

Meanwhile, an emergency meeting of the Officers Association and Joint Employees Union of civil aviation was held under the chair of Zareen Gul Durrani at Civil Aviation Authority Headquarters, Karachi, where serious concern was expressed over the government move to outsource the three airports.

The participants in the meeting declared that outsourcing would create problems for the CAA in particular and the country in general. They requested all civil aviation employees to organise protests, contact parliamentarians and appealed to President Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Chief Justice Umer Ata Bandial, and Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir to halt the move.

\$163m okayed to support Haj pilgrims via regular scheme

The Economic Cooperation Committee (ECC) of the cabinet on Monday 10 April approved a \$163 million additional foreign exchange financing requirement for the transfer of 28,679 intending pilgrims to the regular scheme from the sponsorship one.

As such, the ECC meeting, presided over by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, "decided that all received applications under regular haj scheme i.e. 72,869 shall be declared successful without balloting", according to an official statement.

The ECC was given a rundown by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony on arrangements and modalities for the Haj Scheme-2023. It said Saudi Arabia had allocated a Haj quota of 179,210 pilgrims and the cabinet had decided on March 9 to distribute this between government and private Haj schemes at a 50:50 ratio, and 50pc quota of each scheme shall be filled through sponsorship for which Haj dues were required to be remitted in US dollars from abroad.

The sponsorship scheme of 89,605 was expected to secure \$194m out of the total required \$284m. Thus, the ECC and the cabinet approved last month that the finance division will provide the remaining \$90m foreign exchange cover for Haj-2023.

Accordingly, applications for both regular and sponsorship schemes were invited on March 16 with the deadline of March 31. The regular scheme attracted 72,869 applications against the quota allocation for 44,190 seats. The last date for the sponsorship scheme was extended

till April 7, and the religious affairs ministry expected just up to 8,000 applications against 44,190 seats.

At the time of submission of the Haj Policy-2023 to the ECC and the cabinet, it was assumed that the sponsorship scheme will be fully utilised and will secure \$194m. Applicants of the sponsorship scheme are required to deposit their full Haj dues in US dollars out of which airfare and service charges are paid in Pak rupees.

In this way, the sponsorship scheme was expected to secure foreign exchange cover for the regular scheme also to a large extent.

In the changed situation, the ministries of religious affairs and finance decided that the remaining quota of the sponsorship scheme be shifted to the regular scheme and thereby all the applicants i.e. 72,869 (against 44,190 seats) be declared successful without balloting. Resultantly, 28,679 seats of the sponsorship scheme are required to be utilised through the regular scheme.

Therefore, the foreign exchange required to cover the regular scheme increased to \$213m of which \$50m had already been disbursed, hence the approval for \$163m additional foreign exchange cover.

The meeting also noted that the unutilised government Haj quota after the diversion of 28,679 applications into the regular scheme and collection of the sponsorship scheme will be either given to the private scheme or returned to Saudi Arabia, and in both cases, it will not generate additional demand for foreign exchange, the meeting was told.



A Saudi navy sailor carries a child as evacuees arrive at King Faisal Navy Base from Sudan, on Wednesday 26 April. A ship carrying 1,687 civilians from more than 50 countries including Pakistan fleeing violence in Sudan docked on the Saudi naval base, the foreign ministry said, the largest evacuation effort by the Gulf kingdom so far.

Etihad and Emirates sign interline agreement



The two major airlines of the United Arab Emirates have agreed to work towards a common goal: to boost tourism to the country. The Dubai-based carrier Emirates and the Abu Dhabi-based carrier Etihad have signed an agreement to expand their interline agreements to promote tourism in the UAE.

This will be accomplished by enabling one key feature that is going to be undoubtedly helpful to many tourists that are visiting the UAE, open jaw itineraries involving both major UAE airports.

Open Jaw UAE Tickets

In a couple of months, tourists will be able to fly into Dubai or Abu Dhabi and fly out of the other in a single ticket provided they're flying on Emirates or Etihad. This allows for someone to explore multiple parts of the UAE without needing to travel back to the airport they came in at or have separate tickets. A tourist can fly into Abu Dhabi on Etihad, explore the Emirate for a couple of days, then go to Dubai for some

more tourism, and then fly out of Dubai on Emirates.

Customers who are traveling into the UAE will also have the choice to travel from one city on both carriers' networks and return to another point served by either airline.

This agreement officially kicks off in the summer with a focus on passengers coming from Europe and China.

Increasing Cooperation

It's about time we see this level of cooperation between the two major airlines in the UAE. The two airports aren't that far from each other, and both serve as major transit hubs for passengers. There are even rumors about the two airlines merging that circulate every so often.

Both Abu Dhabi and Dubai command significant tourism numbers with each city offering different attractions. It's no secret though that Dubai is the more popular though. Hopefully, with the ease of open-jaw tickets there will be a greater balancing of tourism.

Perhaps in the future, as the interline agreement grows we will see additional

benefits added such as a chauffeur service between the two Emirate cities that go beyond airport pick-ups and drop-offs. There is a lot of potential in offering transportation services between the two cities as

part of this agreement. A significant portion of the infrastructure already exists. Both Emirates and Etihad offer chauffeur services for premium passengers and bus services between the two cities for economy passengers.

It shouldn't be a significant lift to start offering services like hotel-to-hotel or bus station-to-bus station services for passengers with qualifying tickets. It solves the challenge of needing to drag luggage from one city to the other.

PIA denies impact on operations due to non-payment of salaries

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has dismissed reports that its operations would be affected as employees were considering a strike over non-payment of salaries, but the national flag carrier agreed that it faced financial difficulties this month 'due to the country's economic situation, made worse by a few necessary payments.

A PIA spokesperson said the airline had paid the salaries of Group 1 to 4 staff on time.

However, the salaries of officers and other officials have been delayed for a few days, he said, but added that they would be paid in the next few days.

The spokesperson clarified that PIA officers, including pilots, were fulfilling their responsibilities with 'complete dedication and persistence', and that the airline was fully functional and operational.

'The attempt by some elements to publish the news about influencing the operation is baseless and misleading,' he added.

The Senate Standing Committee on Aviation was informed in a recent meeting that many pilots were fleeing the country because of salary cuts in the form of high taxes.

The PIA's chief executive officer informed the committee that 15 pilots had recently left the country and that a Supreme Court appeal for hiring young male staff for PIA had not yet been entertained.

The committee's chairman, Senator Hidayatullah, said the future of aspiring pilots was in jeopardy and asked Senator Saleem Mandviwalla to take up the issue with the Federal Board of Revenue in the Senate Finance Committee.



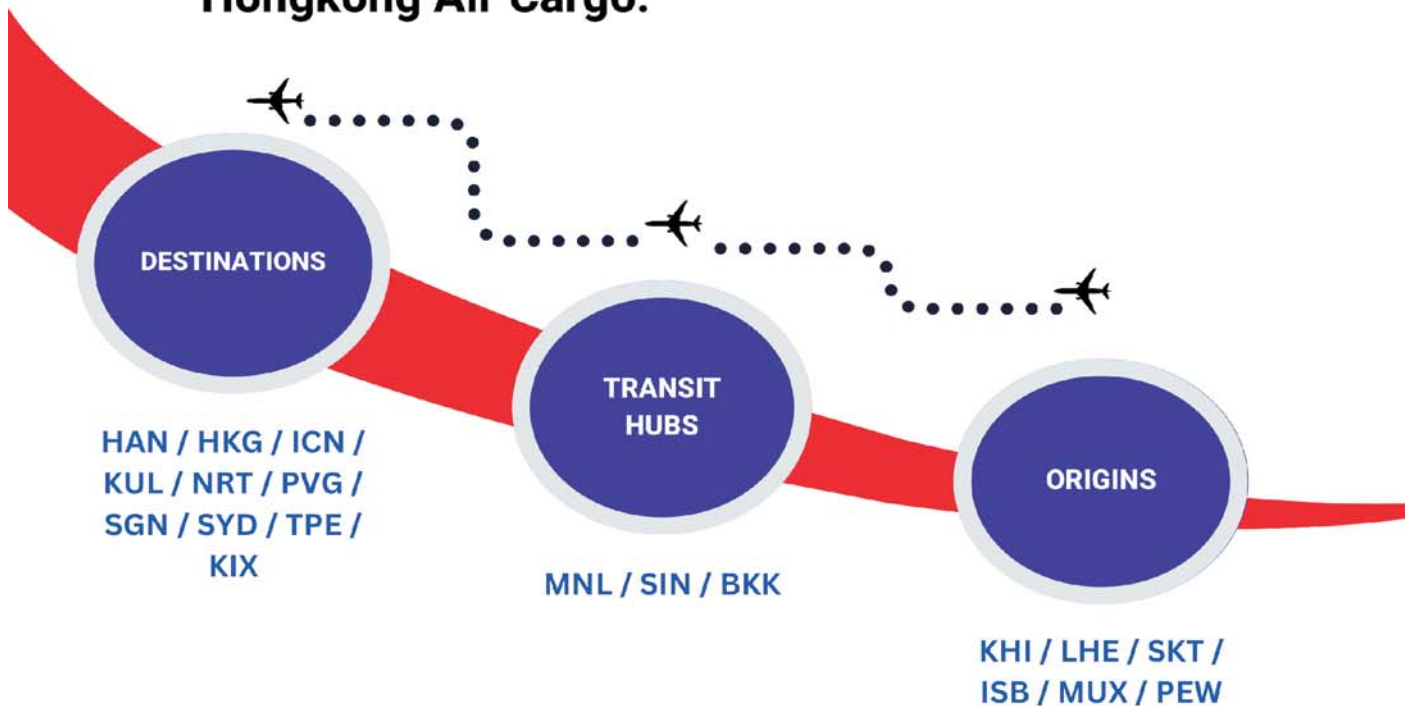


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India's Go First airline files for bankruptcy



Indian airline Go First filed for bankruptcy on Tuesday 2 May, blaming “faulty” Pratt & Whitney engines for the grounding of about half its fleet. The move marks the first major airline collapse in India since Jet Airways filed for bankruptcy in 2019, and underscores the fierce competition in a sector dominated by IndiGo and the recent merger of Air India and Vistara under the Tata conglomerate, according to media reports.

Go First's total debt to financial creditors is 65.21 billion rupees (\$797 million) as of April 28, it said in a bankruptcy filing, according to Reuters. The company has not defaulted on any of these dues as of April 30, but has defaulted on payments to operational creditors, including 12.02 billion rupees (\$146.9 million) to vendors and 26.60 billion rupees (\$325 million) to aircraft lessors, it said in the filing.

Go First said in a statement its filing with the National Company Law Tribunal comes after Pratt & Whitney, the exclusive engine supplier for the airline's Airbus A320neo aircraft fleet, refused to comply with an arbitration order to release spare leased engines to the airline that would have allowed it to return to full operations.

An issue with Pratt & Whitney engines that safety authorities had warned could shut down a plane's engine mid-flight has dogged Indian airlines for the past few years. Pratt & Whitney has been quoted in Indian media as saying it has been affected by industry-wide supply chain pressures and that it expects those to ease later this year, which would support increased output of new and overhauled engines.

Go First, owned by the Wadia Group and formerly known as GoAir, also said on its website that it had cancelled flights scheduled for May 3 to May 5 due to “operational reasons”.

RECARO's BL3710 economy-class seats enter into service on IndiGo's A321neo



RECARO's BL3710 economy-class seats have entered into service on IndiGo's A321neo aircraft. This seat programme marked the first time that IndiGo selected RECARO as a seating solution partner since the airline's founding in 2006. Deliveries of the BL3710 will be installed on a fleet of 75 A321/A320neo aircraft. Each A321 can seat 232 passengers on the award-winning economy class seat.

Outfitted in a customised trim and finish, the lightweight seat features numerous comfort features, including integrated neck support, an ergonomic backrest and generous living space. The bestselling BL3710 was unveiled in 2019, built specifically for short and medium-haul flights and has earned accolades from Red Dot Design and iF Design.

“It's great to see the BL3710 flying for the first time with IndiGo, as it will elevate the passenger experience for their travellers,” said Dr Mark Hiller, CEO of RECARO Aircraft Seating and RECARO Holding. “This project marked the first of many collaborations with IndiGo and I look forward to supporting their mission of offering efficient service and reliable

products for many years to come.”

The slim design, weight of less than 10kg per pax and small number of parts reduces waste and advances the sustainable goals of both IndiGo and RECARO. Maintenance of the BL3710 is backed by the strong RECARO customer service team, which ensures support through the entire lifecycle of the seat. IndiGo customers can look forward to enjoying a comfortable and relaxing flight, with plenty of legroom and a range of features designed to enhance their overall travel experience.

Dublin Airport reports record 2.83 million passengers in April

Dublin Airport reported a record 2.83 million passengers in April, an increase of 18% year-on-year, and taking the hub to almost 9.5 million passengers in 2023. Over 250,000 people flew via Cork Airport, a 30% increase and enough to prompt the airport's management to revise its yearly forecast up to 2.6 million passengers, which would take it back to pre-Covid traffic. The April figures were buoyed by a very busy Easter period which saw record numbers travelling through Dublin Airport. Once again it was a very smooth month for our security operation, with 96% of passengers safely through screening.



New uniforms inbound for Air New Zealand

DSL Travel renews and expands long-term relationship with Sabre to support aggressive expansion plans

A leading software and technology provider that powers the global travel industry, has announced a long-term renewal, and expanded agreement, with one of Indonesia's largest and fastest growing travel agencies. Jakarta-headquartered DSL Travel will continue to be part of Sabre's extensive Global Distribution System (GDS), as well as supporting wider growth in the Indonesian travel market through Sabre's intuitive agency workflows.

DSL Travel will continue to access Sabre's marketplace of over 400 airlines, 750,000 hotel properties, and hundreds of tour operators, rail, car, and cruise providers, providing opportunities to create and sell personalized packages for individual, and groups of, travellers. Through Sabre's browser-based Sabre Red Web workspace, DSL will also be giving its expanding network of sub-agencies the ability to conduct business anytime and anywhere, while ticket issuance is centrally managed and controlled by the wholesaler.

"As Indonesia renews its focus on quality tourism, it is vital that we have the right technology to create significant growth opportunities for our own business, for our agency partners, and across the wider Indonesian travel

ecosystem," said Doni Usman, director and owner of DSL Travel. "Through Sabre's GDS, we can ensure we have seamless access to the industry-leading content needed to create the experiences our travellers want, while using the Sabre Red Web agency workspace to exponentially expand our own network of travel agencies."

Founded a decade ago, DSL Travel offers comprehensive travel services, including international and domestic airline ticketing and hotel reservations, custom-made corporate and leisure tour packages, and airport transfers, as well as specialising in Umrah and Hajj pilgrimage packages.

"Our renewed and enriched agreement with DSL Travel is a testament to their confidence in Sabre, our technology, and our expertise, to support them in their ambitious growth plans," said Brett Thorstad, Vice President, Sabre Travel Solutions, Agency Sales, Asia Pacific. "We're excited to continue to be part of DSL's transformative journey as they enter their second decade, and we look forward to enabling them to grow their business, create enhanced traveller experiences, and expand their reach within, and outside of, Indonesia, through our advanced technology and the Sabre marketplace."

Turkiye launches its first aircraft carrier



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan addresses the audience during a ceremony before the launch of TCG Anadolu, an amphibious assault ship, on Monday 10 April.

Turkiye launched its first aircraft carrier on Monday 10 April, aiming to extend its drone capabilities from land-based to naval operations amid increased regional tensions as war rages in Ukraine on the other side of the Black Sea.

The TCG Anadolu can handle only light aircraft, chiefly helicopters and jets that can take off from shorter runways. It is 232 metres long and 32 meters wide, and can carry some 1,400 personnel — one battalion of soldiers — combat vehicles and support units to operate overseas.

"This vessel will allow us to conduct military and humanitarian operations in every corner of the world, when needed," President Tayyip Erdogan said at the launch ceremony in Istanbul.

"We see this vessel as a symbol that will consolidate Turkiye's regional leadership position," he said.

The amphibious assault ship was built in Istanbul's Sedef Shipyard by a Turkish-Spanish consortium, based on the design of Spanish light aircraft carrier Juan Carlos I. Ankara's original plan was to deploy F-35 B-model fighter jets, which can take off from shorter runways, on its largest warship.

But its plans had to change after the United States removed Turkiye, a Nato ally, from its F-35 program over Ankara's purchase of Russian S-400 defence systems in 2019. Turkiye then converted TCG Anadolu into a drone carrier.



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FIA asked to stop harassing former PIA employees

The Public Accounts Committee on Wednesday 5 April directed the Federal Investigation Agency to stop harassing individuals in a case involving former employees of the Pakistan International Airlines.

“Services of these 800 or so individuals have been terminated. They have suffered enough,” said Chairman Public Accounts Committee (PAC) MNA Noor Alam Khan after requesting members to revisit some of the audit paragraphs.

The apex parliamentary body discussed the matter while taking up audit paras of the Finance Division for year 2021-22.

Revisiting the paras, some members were of the view that recoveries should be made from the former PIA employees who had submitted fake degrees at the time of induction.

PAC seeks audit of all institutions, directs FIA to recover Rs44bn from Byco

The PAC members also called for action against PIA staff that recruited these pilots without ascertaining the documentation first.

However, MNA Noor Alam Khan informed the committee that there were no dues pending against the individuals in question.

The member responded that a precedent should not be set as this would be a sole case where former PIA employees had been given relief on compassionate grounds.

The committee handed over the recovery audit objections related to a petroleum company headquartered in Karachi, Byco, to the FIA.

“You have to recover Rs44 billion from Byco Company,” the chairman directed the FIA officials. MNA Noor Alam Khan also directed the agency to investigate how did the company manage to change its name and seemed to be back in business.

“These recoveries have to be made, especially when the government is heavily in debt,” MNA Khan said.

The committee also withdrew instructions given earlier to place officials of a private company on the Exit Control List (ECL) and to unblock their identification.

MNA Khan also informed the committee he wrote to the prime minister regarding the institutions that have not been audited. “All institutions that have not held departmental accounts committees (DACs) have been asked to conduct audits. This message is for all departments and divisions,” said Noor Alam Khan.

Before reviewing the audit objections for the year 2021-22 related to Finance Division in the meeting, the Ministry of Finance had requested an in-camera meeting, and Noor Alam Khan obliged.

Nonetheless, some of the audit objections included the issuance of supplementary grants without the approval of the National Assembly amounting to a little over Rs440 billion.

Further objections included lapses due to the non-surrendering of the final budget of 28 grants to the tune of Rs32.343 billion, which, the audit department believed, indicated that there were no internal controls to watch the flow of expenditure in the ministries/divisions.

Similarly, objections were also raised on unjustified demand for supplementary grants creating undue pressure of Rs863 billion on the national exchequer.

French court acquits Air France, Airbus over 2009 crash

Air France and plane manufacturer Airbus were acquitted on Monday 17 April over the 2009 crash of a Rio-Paris flight after a French court ruled their errors could not be proven to be the cause of the

disaster.

While the ruling was expected after prosecutors recommended to the Paris court not to seek a conviction, it was still a huge blow for families of victims who have waged a 14-year campaign for justice.

The two France-based companies went on trial in October to determine their responsibility for the worst aviation disaster in Air France's history, which left all 228 people on board flight AF447 dead.

Prosecutors said as hearings in the eight-week trial wound up in December it was “impossible” to convict the two aviation giants, which were charged with involuntary manslaughter but denied the charges. If convicted, the two companies would have risked a fine of \$250,000 as well as significant reputational damage.

As the verdict was read out, relatives of the victims present in court stood up, appearing stunned, then sat down again. Ophelie Toulliou, who lost her brother in the accident, said she was dazed by the “injustice” of the verdict.

Saudi Arabia public investment fund eyeing a stake in flynas



The Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund (PIF) is planning to invest in flynas with Goldman Sachs advising flynas shareholders on the potential stake sale to the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, reports Bloomberg. The move comes on the backdrop of Saudi Arabia's efforts to make the country a top tourism destination with the government pushing more funds in aviation sector. flynas was also planning a potential listing since 2008 and even hired Morgan Stanley, Citigroup Inc. and NCB Capital for a potential deal, but the IPO will be delayed if the sale to PIF is confirmed, sources claim.

Planespotting at New York JFK Airport: everything you need to know

Home to various airlines and aircraft, New York JFK offers an unbeatable planespotting experience - where can the best shots be found?

When it comes to planespotting, some airports offer a truly international experience. As host to airlines from all six inhabited continents, New York John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) is surely one of those. This worldwide hub welcomes a wide variety of aircraft, from the Embraer E175s from regional carriers such as American Eagle, up to the mighty Airbus A380 belonging to major international airlines, including Emirates (and soon to be Lufthansa, too).

When planespotting at New York JFK, the main carriers one can expect to see are, perhaps unsurprisingly, Delta Air Lines, JetBlue, American Airlines, and its fellow oneworld member, British Airways. There is also a significant presence from other European carriers - New York JFK is one of the primary Transatlantic routes for most major European flag carriers and is expected to experience a record-breaking summer.

While the airport may have recently lost its title as the US airport with the most Transatlantic destinations - that accolade now sits firmly with one of United Airlines' hubs, Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR) - there is much more variety at New York JFK. Throw in some airlines from further afield, such as Philippine Airlines and Uzbekistan Airways, as well as over 100 different cargo airlines, and New York

JFK really is a plane spotter's paradise.

With that in mind, where are the best places in and around the airport to capture the most remarkable shots?

Parks surrounding New York JFK

Local parks make for a great location to partake in some planespotting, as well as a relaxing environment to spend the day surrounded by nature. Although there is no shortage of green spaces close to New York JFK, which ones offer the best aircraft views?

Bayswater Park - Situated on the opposite side of Jamaica Bay to the airport, the waterfront backdrop makes for a unique perspective. From here, the best views are of aircraft arriving and departing on runways 04L, 04R, and 31L.

Brookeville Park - Inside the park is a small mound just to the side of the school football field. This elevated area offers planespotters unbeatable views of aircraft arriving on runway 22L and departing on runway 04R.

Inwood Park - Another park situated across the water from runway 31L; it provides a close-up experience of the afternoon arrivals, which is the time when many Transatlantic widebody flights touch down at New York JFK.

Planespotting from an airport hotel

Several hotels surrounding New York JFK offer a different perspective on the airport's operations, and are perhaps more suited for the cold and rainy days.

Hilton Garden Inn Queens/JFK Airport - Located to the west of the airport,

this airport boasts a number of rooms overlooking the airfield and runways 13L/31R. Planespotters should request a room on a higher floor to maximize photography opportunities.

TWA Hotel - Day passes can be purchased for this hotel's rooftop pool and bar. Situated just outside T5, it offers unbeatable views of aircraft taxiing, landing, and departing.

IATA lists Priorities for the Air Cargo Industry

"Air cargo is a different industry than the one that entered the pandemic. Revenues are greater than they were pre-pandemic. Yields are higher. The world learned how critical supply chains are. And the contribution of air cargo to the bottom line of airlines is more evident than ever. Yet, we are still linked to the business cycle and global events. So, the war in Ukraine, uncertainty over where critical economic factors like interest rates, exchange rates and jobs growth are concerns that are real to the industry today. As we navigate the current situation, air cargo's priorities have not changed, we need to continue to focus on sustainability, digitalization, and safety," said Brendan Sullivan, the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) Global head of cargo, at the 16th World Cargo Symposium which held in Instabul, Turkey.

He highlighted three priorities to enable the air cargo industry to maintain momentum against the backdrop of a challenging operating environment. These priorities are; Sustainability, Digitalisation and Safety.

On sustainability, Sullivan noted that it is a critical priority and the aviation industry's license to do business. At the 41st ICAO Assembly, governments agreed to the Long-Term Aspirational Goal (LTAG) of net zero carbon emissions by 2050, in line with the industry's commitment adopted in 2021.

Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) is critical to achieving this goal, 65% of carbon abatement will come from SAF, however, production levels remain challenging. IATA called for government incentives for production.

"SAF is being produced. And every single drop is being used. The problem is



that the quantities are small. The solution is government policy incentives. Through incentivizing production, we could see 30 billion liters of SAF available by 2030. That will still be far from where we need to be. But it would be a clear tipping point towards our net zero ambition of ample SAF quantities at affordable prices,” said Sullivan.

IATA outlined three other areas where it was working to support the energy transition of the industry, these areas include; Supporting effective carbon calculations and offsetting, Expanding the IATA Environmental Assessment and Developing environmental, social and governance (ESG) related metrics.

Sullivan further discussed digitalization stating that air cargo needs to continuously improve its efficiency. The area with greatest potential is digitalization. IATA outline goals such as: 100% airline capability of ONE Record by January 2026, ensuring digital standards are in place to support the global supply chain and ensuring compliance and support for customs, trade facilitation and other government processes that are increasingly digitalized.

Finally Sullivan stated that “Alongside sustainability and efficiency is safety. The agenda for air cargo continues to be dominated by lithium batteries. A lot has been done. But, quite honestly, it is still not enough.” The three safety priorities outlined by IATA for air cargo are: Stopping rogue shippers, Accelerating the development of a test standard for fire-resistant aircraft containers with a fire involving lithium batteries and Ensuring recognition from governments.

Value of Air Cargo

“Air cargo is a critically important industry. It helps build a better future for the people of the world. It's an industry that saves lives, delivering aid and relief to those in need. The industry mobilized to support those affected by the earthquakes in Syria and Türkiye. Working together to ensure that air cargo remains a reliable and efficient means of providing support to those in need, while simultaneously strengthening our global supply chains and contributing to the sustainable development of our economies is essential,” concluded Sullivan.

Global GSA Group: The beating cargo management heart of Europe

Europe is where Global GSA Group was first established – in the Netherlands, back in 1995. It has since developed into an internationally active airline representative, reaching well beyond Europe's borders and ranking among the world's top 5 global GSAs. Yet, Global GSA Group's presence in Europe is both its core strength and its favourite challenge.

“Europe is such a multifaceted continent. Our airlines face tough competition and a great deal of capacity in the market, which lead to low yields in comparison to other large and important regions,” says Ismail Durmaz, Chief Executive Officer of Global GSA Group. “On the other hand, there is huge cross-border potential, and it is easy to truck to other countries. Global GSA Group has been active in this market for almost 30 years, and we have every conceivable strategy in place to provide the optimum support to our airlines. Our steep and continuing growth curve is testimony to the fact that they work, too.”

From high touch to high-tech

Global GSA Group today employs 224 staff (a healthy mix of 58% women and 42% men), in 25 European countries. That number is soon set to grow to 26, with the opening of its first office in Malta in the summer. 2023 will also see the teams in Belgium, the Nordics, Italy, and United Kingdom expand to meet the group's increasing number of airline customers.

“China Southern was our first airline partner in Europe. Now, we serve 52 airlines, here,” Ismail Durmaz explains. “And it is fascinating to see how the air cargo market is changing. CMA CGM Air Cargo is our most recent customer, bringing a whole new angle into the business.” Two key drivers ensure the group's ongoing business success: the first

is the right processes and digital tools. Global GSA Group recently partnered with CargoTech and deploys the latest in digital optimization and efficiency solutions.

Global GSA Group celebrates “remarkable” 2022

The second driver is its people. “As a group we have implemented a strategic approach to attracting, maintaining,

and developing our staff. We aim to increase the number of employees with certain skills and certifications and provide ongoing training to keep up with these new developments in our field,” Ismail Durmaz emphasizes. Employees have access to a number of training and development programs, from on-the-job training, to mentoring, online courses via the company's own internal platform, workshops, seminars, conferences, fairs, and events, tackling every aspect of air cargo: dangerous goods, sales techniques, management, accounting, statistics, security, IATA, digital tools, and sustainability. A dedicated Global GSA Group training team develops and carries out training on site, ensuring that the content is always up to date.

“There's a saying: 'If you want a job done well, do it yourself!'. When an airline outsources its cargo management to us, we strive to modify that saying to 'If you want a job done exceptionally well, give it to Global GSA Group!’” states Ismail Durmaz. “Our role as a GSA is to provide the ultimate all-service airline representation in the air cargo market, while fully maintaining the airline's unique identity. Each and every one of our employees has three winning passions: cargo, innovation, and top-quality service. And, since Europe is where Global GSA Group began, any airline partnering with us can be certain that they are buying into unparalleled local expertise coupled with a proven successful global management vision. Despite the air cargo market suffering a significant downturn in the first quarter of this year, Global GSA Group is proud to have performed above market, ensuring that our partner carriers' market shares increased. Our company motto is 'We make the impossible possible', and that is what we live up to, every day.”



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IATA welcomes telco agreement to extend 5G mitigations but 'more is needed'

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) welcomed the agreement by AT&T Services, T-Mobile, UScellular, and Verizon to extend until 1 January 2028 the voluntary mitigation measures for 5G C-band transmissions at 188 US airports. These mitigation measures, which were put in place in January 2022, concurrent with the rollout of 5G C-band operations at or near US airports, include lowering the power of 5G transmissions and had been set to expire 1 July 2023. However, while the agreement is a welcome stop-gap development, it is by no means a solution. The underlying safety and economic issues around 5G C-band deployments by telecommunications services providers (telcos) have only been kicked down the road.

"Airlines did not create this situation. They are victims of poor government planning and coordination. Industry concerns about 5G, expressed for many years in the appropriate forums, were ignored and over-ridden. Half-measure solutions have been foisted upon airlines to implement at their own expense and with little visibility into their long-term viability. This extension is an opportunity for all stakeholders, including telcos, government regulators, airlines and equipment manufacturers, to work together for a fair and equitable solution," said Nick Careen, IATA's Senior Vice President Operations, Safety and Security.

The activation of 5G C-band operations in January 2022 threatened enormous disruption to the US air transport system because of the potential risk of interference with aircraft radio altimeters (radalts) that also use C-band spectrum and are critical to aircraft landing and safety systems. This was only addressed at the eleventh hour when AT&T and Verizon agreed to a voluntary power limit for 5G C-band transmissions near airports. Even with this agreement, however, the continuing risk of interference with aircraft radalts was seen as so significant by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that airlines were only permitted to operate at affected airports in low visibility (Category 2 and Category 3) conditions through one of

two methods:

Alternative Means of Compliance (AMOC) under which avionics and aircraft original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) establish that specific aircraft / radalt combinations provide sufficient resilience against interference to continue to utilise low visibility landing procedures at the affected airports.

Modifying existing radalts or replacing them with newer models at their own expense, to enable unrestricted operations at agreed 5G power levels.

In May 2022, the FAA informed airlines that, as of 1 July 2023 the AMOC process would end. In its place, a blanket requirement defining a minimum performance level for radalts for low visibility landing procedures was to be established. Radalts not meeting the minimum performance level would have to be replaced or upgraded at airline expense. The cost of fleet wide radalt upgrading is estimated at more than \$638 million.

Several airlines began the radalt upgrade process shortly after the May 2022 communication from the FAA, even though the FAA did not issue a formal notice of proposed rulemaking until January 2023. Even then, supply chain issues make it unlikely that all aircraft can be upgraded by the 1 July deadline, threatening operational disruptions during the peak northern summer travel season.

The latest agreement by the telcos to defer until January 2028 full power-up of 5G C-band transmissions near airports buys time but does not address underlying issues.

The retrofits required by 1 July 2023 are a temporary fix as they are not sufficiently resilient in the face of full power 5G C-band transmissions. New 5G tolerant radalt standards are being developed but are not expected to be approved before the second half of 2024. Following that, radalt makers will begin the lengthy process to design, certify and build the new devices for installation in thousands of existing aircraft, as well as for all new aircraft delivered between now and 2028. Four-and-a-half years is a very tight timeframe for the scale of this undertaking.

"Many airlines have indicated that

despite their best efforts they will not meet the 1 July deadline owing to supply chain issues. But even for those that do, these investments will bring no gains in operating efficiency. Furthermore, this is only a temporary holding action. Under current scenarios, airlines will have to retrofit most of their aircraft twice in just five years. And with the standards for the second retrofit yet to be developed we could easily be facing the same supply chain issues in 2028 that we are struggling with today. This is patently unfair and wasteful. We need a more rational approach that does not place the entire burden for addressing this unfortunate situation on aviation," said Careen.

All details about the 68 aircraft flypast for King Charles coronation



The full flypast will see over 60 aircraft, including the iconic Red Arrows and historic Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, put on a spectacular show over London.

The Coronation flypast will feature aircraft from across the UK Armed Forces. From the RAF there will be several models of helicopter, Spitfires, a Lancaster, Hurricanes, 18 Typhoon FGR4s, an Envoy IV and many more from our fleet, covering the past, present and future of the RAF.

The Coronation of King Charles and the Queen Consort will take place on Saturday 6th May at Westminster Abbey. After the service they will return to Buckingham Palace where they will conclude ceremonial events on the balcony along with other members of the Royal Family to watch a large formation Flypast.

It will feature the first flypast involvement of the RAF's new Envoy IV CC1 aircraft which will lead the 9 Hawks from the Red Arrows, the RAF's Aerobatics Team, to conclude the flypast.

Gul Group hosts staff annual picnic at the Farmhouse



The picnic was held to interact all employees with each other outside work place and relax as they played games and enjoyed the meals. With addition of more fun to this event, Organized a live barbeque setup at the resort along with music which was highlights of the event. Staff also enjoyed indoor games, like Snooker, Carrom Board, and Cricket, Football as outdoor as well,

Lost baggage containing gold, currency, retrieved and reunited the passenger

A lady passenger who had returned from Manchester in an early morning flight earlier, lodged a complaint that while leaving the airport, she had lost/forgotten her bag in the parking lot. She recounted that the bag contained six tolas of jewelry set and 1100 British Pounds in foreign currency. Knowing that acting fast is essential, airport vigilance staff right away began scouring CCTV footage for clues. Sure enough, and soon enough, a gentleman was seen picking up the bag from a luggage trolley left in the parking number 12 around 05:00am; same luggage trolley the lady had used before exiting the airport a little earlier. IIAP complaint cell then coordinated with the relevant offices and managed to trace the passenger living in Abbottabad who had also landed in Islamabad by Umrah flight that early morning. Once the contact was made, the Abbottabad resident was cooperative enough to scurry to Islamabad airport along with the bag and all of its contents. Later, the bag was handed over to its very happy rightful owner in the presence of her spouse in the Airport Manager's office. The couple thanked Airport management for their honesty and diligent efforts for successfully retrieved and reunited the passenger.



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The journey to sustainable aviation

Like most, the aviation sector has pledged to reach Net Zero by 2050. From the International Air Transport Association's (Iata) commitment to 'Fly Net Zero' to the declaration from the International Aviation Climate Ambition Coalition at COP 26, the air transport industry is not short of promises to dramatically reduce its carbon footprint.

Compared with other sectors, aviation is a relatively small contributor to global greenhouse emissions - in 2019 it was estimated to account for around 2.5% of the world's CO2 emissions. However, it is also one of the fastest growing, and there is little doubt that every major airline and aerospace manufacturer in the world now has its environmental impact front and centre.

This topic is not creeping but is vertiginously ascending the corporate priority ladder. But what does the flight path to a more sustainable future look like for the industry? And how realistic are the lofty goals that have been set?

The first, and most obvious, conclusion is that there is no silver bullet. Potential solutions abound (more on those below), but there is no answer likely to single-handedly push aviation to net zero. The second is that pressure groups and activists aside, intermediate decarbonisation goals are linked to commercial aims – stating the obvious, the more efficiently an aircraft burns fuel the better for all concerned.

Blue-sky thinking: net-zero aviation is more than a flight of fantasy

Longer term, however, the aviation industry may need assistance from both its insurance, and other financial, partners in de-risking the transition as the costs



associated with change are a significant, but not insurmountable, barrier to progress.

Clearing the runway for sustainable aviation fuels

The sector certainly abounds with initiatives to aid the transition. The first

likely to have a tangible effect is Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAFs), with many airlines looking to increase their usage (10% is a commonly selected target). As part of the 'Fit for 55' package, which sets out an initial target of a reduction in emissions by 55% in 2030 (compared with the level of 1990), the EU will require every flight leaving its airports to carry a minimum amount of SAF (2% in 2025 and 5% by 2030).



Meanwhile, the US wants to increase the production of SAFs to three billion gallons per year by 2030. While these commitments and progress are welcome, the production of these alternative fuels remains small.

SAFs can be split into three buckets – those recycled from waste products (for example, from used cooking oil), those created directly from crops, and synthetic fuels (created by processing recovered carbon dioxide with green electricity). With the commercial aviation world requiring approximately 95 billion gallons of traditional kerosene aviation fuel in 2019, according to Iata, the recycled or grown SAFs suffer from a lack of available resources (short of diverting all global agriculture towards the endeavour) while large-scale production of synthetic fuels will require cheap, high volume green electricity.

The price of SAFs is double that of fossil fuels today, so the dramatic ramp-up of SAF production will require significant capital expenditure. Initially, government incentives are likely to offset the price premium. It will be worth the time, cost and effort. SAFs can result in an 80% reduction of lifecycle emissions (as the only true emissions come from processing steps). The technology is proven and certified (having already been used on over 200,000 flights) and no changes are

required to existing aircraft – SAFs can be used interchangeably with kerosene.

There is also a key role for insurers to play in helping their clients de-risk the transition to SAFs – supporting the construction of new infrastructure and the adoption of different fuels. For example, ensuring the construction of SAF manufacturing facilities, or the installation of SAF refuelling infrastructure at airports. Insurers may

even be able to assist their clients with hedging to allow airlines to protect themselves against SAF price fluctuation in future.

Ready for take-off? Electric and hybrid aircraft

While SAFs will be the short- to medium-term workhorse, perhaps the more exciting future developments are the new air travel technologies that remain nascent but capture the imagination more than a simple fuel switch. The electric aircraft revolution is firmly underway with more than 200 global companies developing concepts. Several have even completed test flights and the appeal is obvious: electric aircraft have no climate impact during operations. They are a thrilling proposition.

However, the biggest issue remains technological maturity – in particular battery density and the associated range. Batteries will need to be at least five times denser than current lithium-ion batteries and it is not currently thought that true electric aircraft will ever have a range greater than 500 to 1,000km – although it is estimated that half of all global flights are shorter than 500 miles. They also remain relatively far off with 2040 probably a realistic date for entry into service. There will also be an arduous process of certification of such new types

of aircraft, with regulators (quite rightly) needing to know that the new technology is safe before allowing consumer usage – more on this below.

So what for the long haul? The answer may rest with hybrid aircraft. A concept familiar with road vehicles, but likely to be a blend of electric technology and hydrogen propulsion rather than involving traditional fossil fuels. This is certainly the approach being taken by Airbus, which hopes to develop the world's first zero-emission aircraft by 2035, with its three ZEROe concepts.

The aircraft is powered by hydrogen combustion through modified gas turbine engines. In addition, hydrogen fuel cells create electrical power that complements the gas turbine, resulting in a highly efficient hybrid-electric propulsion system. While not as efficient as pure electric aircraft, hybrid aircraft will be able to provide a range out of reach of electric alone. They will also be able to carry a greater number of passengers and offer a realistic alternative to kerosene-powered long-haul routes.

Such hybrid aircraft may seem like the nirvana, but they are not without drawbacks. Hydrogen storage and usage of course brings safety concerns. While hydrogen processing has been used for years in oil refineries and the fertilizer industry, aviation represents a new road to travel. Happily for its passengers, the aviation world is safety obsessed. All parts of the industry (transport, storage, usage etc.) must pass rigorous safety tests. Current aviation protocol is based on the fossil fuel-powered jet engine – a technology that has been around for decades. There will need to be a wholesale shift from regulators and companies to embrace a new safety environment.

Insurers can of course help by providing cover for new and test products and assisting their clients in de-risking the evolution to new technology. This could include ensuring electric and hybrid aircraft types through their testing phases and as they move into service or creating an insurance safety net for a company's R&D operations. Such a technological leap is not without risk and companies (both manufacturers and end users) will hugely benefit from the support of their trusted partners as they adapt for the future.

Don't forget about marginal gains and design efficiencies

While they are the future, both electric and hybrid technologies will not be available tomorrow and, along with SAFs, there are shorter-term more mundane gains to be made from the aviation industry. One of the key areas for such gains is operational efficiency and there is nothing to stop all aircraft

operators from looking at this side of their business and making changes now. A combination of operational levers can drive emission reductions at scale.

Examples can include pre-flight via mission tailoring and fuel planning (i.e. ensuring the right aircraft is being used for the right flight); on the ground via traffic management (to reduce the time engines



Sustainable flying: International aviation climate ambition reflects airlines' net-zero goal

are on in traffic); during approach and descent via better air traffic management (to reduce holding time) and adapting climb and descent procedures (to spend longer at optimal cruise altitude); during cruise via dynamic routing (responding to changing weather patterns); and after flight via preventative maintenance and cleaning.

There are plenty of airlines already embracing these marginal gains. Over 40 airlines have partnered with Sky Breathe – big data technology that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to analyse billions of data records from all types of data sources, including flight data recorders, operational flight plans and Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting Systems (ACARS), before combining them with environmental data from actual flight conditions (such as payload, weather conditions, Air Traffic Control (ATC) constraints, etc.). It then identifies the most relevant saving opportunities and provides a series of recommended actions which it claims can reduce total fuel consumption by up to 5%.

There are also improvements that can be made to existing aircraft designs to drive fleet efficiencies. This mostly comes through the incremental introduction of enhancements (for example, wingtip, blended winglets, or increased wingspan) and improvements to engine efficiency. None of these improvements will drive the industry to net zero, but they will all play a vital role in reducing the emissions intensity of the aircraft and inch aviation further on its journey towards a more

environmentally friendly future.

This is the broader picture in a nutshell. There are many exciting developments each with a part to play. Some will grab the headlines and appear to be futuristic leaps; others will go unremarked but are just as important. No one development can help the industry singlehandedly. Instead, aviation will look at multiple solutions and there is risk and barriers to each. Given the uncertainty, insurers and other financial partners have never had a more important time to support their clients as they take the steps necessary for a net zero future.

Turkish Airlines carried its one billionth passenger

Turkish Airlines, which distinguishes itself with its achievements in passenger numbers, carried its one billionth passenger from Istanbul Airport to Adiyaman Airport.

Aiming to always provide its passengers with quality, safe, and comfortable travels, Turkish Airlines welcomed its one billionth passenger, Mustafa Balci, at Istanbul Airport with a special ceremony and gifted him one million miles.

About being the one billionth passenger with his ticket to Adiyaman, Mustafa Balci said, "It is a great honor for me to be the one billionth passenger of Turkish Airlines and to be rewarded with a special gift for it. This experience will be an unforgettable memory for me."

Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board and Executive Committee Prof. Dr. Ahmet Bolat stated, "Turkish Airlines, founded in 1933, carried its one billionth passenger today. We are filled with great pride and happiness for carrying our one billionth passenger. Our brand, which has reached one billion passengers in 90 years, aims to reach its two billionth passenger in 2031, 8 years from now. I would like to thank all our passengers who have shared this joy with us and all my colleagues who have contributed to this success."

Flag carrier, which aims to maintain the highest level of comfort for its guests with its quality service approach, continues its work in line with its passenger satisfaction-focused strategies.

IATA global traffic at 88% of pre-pandemic levels

In March, global traffic hit 88% of 2019 levels, driven largely but a resurgent Asia-Pacific region.

It has been a long three years, but if a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels is the goal, the finish line is within sight. According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), global passenger traffic in March reached 88% of 2019 levels.

Yesterday, IATA released its March 2023 Air Passenger Market report, which showed that March traffic increased by 52% year-on-year. IATA measures passenger traffic using revenue passenger kilometers (RPKs), which are calculated by multiplying the number of revenue-paying passengers aboard an aircraft by the distance the aircraft traveled.

Domestic traffic rose 34% year-on-year and made up 42% of global traffic in March, whereas international rose by 69% and accounts for 58% of global RPKs. Total March 2023 domestic traffic reached 99% of March 2019, while international traffic has recovered to 82%. Globally, traffic is now at 88% of March 2019 numbers.

Some key markers look positive

In yesterday's report IATA Director General Willie Walsh said that the calendar year's first quarter ended strongly for air travel demand and that domestic markets have been near pre-pandemic levels for months, but two key waypoints were met for international travel in March.

"First, demand increased by 3.5 percentage points compared to the previous month's growth, to reach 81.6% of pre-COVID levels. This was led by a near tripling of demand for Asia-Pacific carriers as China's re-opening took hold. And efficiency is improving as international load factors reached 81.3%.

"Even more importantly, ticket sales for both domestic and international travel give every indication that strong growth will continue into the peak Northern Hemisphere summer travel season."

However, Walsh also said that a lack of capacity compared to demand means some travelers may not get a seat in the summer season. He attributes "a part of that" to labor shortages impacting many parts of the supply chain, specifically causing delays in aircraft deliveries.

Unsurprisingly, he also let rip about cancellations caused by actions of air traffic controllers and others, primarily in Europe, that are "unacceptable and should

not be tolerated by the authorities."

How are the regions faring?

Asia-Pacific has copped a hiding for months, firstly because of its draconian COVID lockdowns and then for the slow pace of easing travel restrictions. IATA's March report said that the region's airlines had a 283% increase in traffic year-on-year, continuing the robust momentum since travel restrictions were lifted. Capacity rose by 161.5%, and load factors climbed 26.8 points to 84.5%, the second highest of all the global regions.

The highest load factor by region was from North America at 84.8%, an increase of 9.8 percentage points from March 2022. North American carriers reported traffic growth in March of 52% year-on-year, while capacity increased by 34%. Latin American airlines added 33.4% more capacity and saw traffic rise by 36.5%, returning a load factor of 82.8% for the month.

European Airlines saw a similar increase, with traffic rising by 38.5%, capacity by 27% and load factor to 79.4%, the second lowest amongst the regions. Middle Eastern carriers returned the same load factor of 79.4%, with traffic growing by 43.1% and capacity by 30.5%. Outside of Asia-Pacific, African airlines had the highest year-on-year traffic growth at 71.7%, achieved by adding 56.2% more capacity but at the expense of the lowest load factor of 72.2%.

Emirates' first repainted Boeing 777 has taken to the skies. A6-ENV is on its way to Amsterdam Schiphol at the time of publishing, making it the first destination to see this repainted 777. Emirates announced a livery refresh after 24 years in the sky and already has one Airbus A380 carrying the colors. Here's more.

Second in the fleet

The Dubai-based super connector is one of the most recognizable international airlines thanks to its sprawling network. Now, the airline is showing off its new colors for only the third time. The first twin-engine aircraft to get the livery is A6-ENV, a Boeing 777-300ER that was first delivered to the carrier in October 2014, 8.6 years ago.

Data shows that A6-ENV was pulled from service on April 20th and towed to the airline's hangar to be repainted. Exactly two weeks later, the 777 is back in commercial service. On May 4th, it is flying as EK149 from Dubai International

Airport (DXB) to Amsterdam Schiphol (AMS), scheduled to land at 20:05 local time. The carrier shared the news over Twitter and invited fans to track the flight on FlightRadar24.com.

At the time of writing, the plane is roughly 80 miles west of Budapest, Hungary, entering the last 90 minutes of the journey. EK149 left Dubai almost 45 minutes late but made up the time during the flight, only landing a few minutes behind schedule now. Here's the old livery to jog your memory again.

What's changed?

At its core, the Emirates livery retains the same DNA. The UAE flag adorns the tail, while the airline's name is on both sides of the fuselage in massive gold letters. However, the livery looks far more modern. The most striking difference is the tail, which has a "dynamic and flowing 3D effect artwork," per the carrier.

The wingtips have been refreshed too, with the inside (passenger-facing) carrying the same dynamic UAE flag artwork and the outside featuring the Arabic calligraphy of Emirates, now on a red background. Finally, the bold Emirates text on the fuselage is 32.5% larger, the Arabic name has been retained next to the English one, and the emirates.com link has been removed from below the text.

The carrier plans to repaint the entire fleet, starting with seven A380s and seventeen 777s by the end of 2023. Two are now completed and expect to see more coming out of the hangar soon. So, how long does the process take?

Not done lightly

Airlines tend to be conservative with their livery refreshes, sticking to changes only every few decades and gradually rolling them out to the existing fleet. The reason is simple: repainting takes a long time. Emirates' first 777 was out of service for 14 days while applying the new livery, which needs several layers of paint. Similarly, the first A380 was out for 17 days while the crew worked on it.

Airlines slowly roll out their repainting schedules to reduce network disruption and minimize the cost of multi-million dollar jets not flying. It will be years before Emirates finishes its fleet repaint, but with much of its A380 fleet preparing to undergo a reconfiguration to include premium economy, it is a great time to paint the fresh livery as well.

About 70,000 drones registered in Russia

About 70,000 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are registered in the database of the Russian Federal Air Transport Agency, the regulator said.

"The Federal Air Transport Agency's database of unmanned civil aircraft has 70,000 UAVs registered with a maximum takeoff weight between 0.15 kg to 30 kg," the regulator noted.

The Agency received 54,500 applications for registration of drones over the last year.

"The Federal Air Transport Agency registered 37,300 unmanned civil aircraft over the period from January to December 2022, with 77% of UAVs belonging to individuals," the watchdog said.

Air Transat increases service to London Gatwick

Air Transat is increasing its services from London Gatwick to Montreal and Toronto in Canada for the 2023 summer season, including the re-introduction of its seasonal weekly direct flight to Quebec City. Increased services from Gatwick include daily flights to Montreal and double daily flights to Toronto. This comes as Air Transat celebrates 35 years since its first flight from Gatwick to Toronto.

The additions are complemented by the re-introduction of Air Transat's seasonal weekly direct service to Quebec City operating between June 24 and September 17 – the only UK air link to the Canadian city which launched for the first time last year.

Sonia Kurek, Commercial Director UK & Ireland for Air Transat, said: "We are delighted to see passenger levels continuing to grow, even after 35 years of operating transatlantic flights to Canada. Air Transat is well placed to satisfy the demand for travellers from the Southeast with increased frequencies for 2023. Passengers flying from Gatwick can also take advantage of onward connections across Air Transat's network throughout Canada, and onto Florida and California in the U.S. We look forward to welcoming passengers onboard our award-winning services."

Thai Airways expands distribution agreement with Sabre

A leading software and technology provider that powers the global travel industry, recently announced a renewed distribution agreement with Thai Airways. The flag carrier will also be using Sabre's robust data combined with its consultancy services to help it accelerate recovery.

The Global Distribution System (GDS) renewal ensures that Sabre-connected travel agencies will continue to have access to Thai Airway's content globally, while enabling the airline to retain its reach across Sabre's valuable network of global travel buyers and intermediaries. Meanwhile, Thai Airways will also be taking advantage of Sabre's extensive global booking data to help it identify recovery and growth opportunities.

"As we continue to ramp up operations and resume international flights, it is essential to us that we are able to continue to distribute our fares, offers and itinerary to travel agents, and their customers, across the world," said Mr. Korakot Chatasinga, Chief Commercial Officer, Thai Airways. "We're thrilled to have renewed our distribution deal with Sabre at the same time as being able to harness the power of Sabre's robust booking data and industry expertise."

Primarily operating from Suvarnabhumi Airport as well as its

secondary hub in Phuket, Thai Airways typically serves around 40 international destinations, and is a founding member of the Star Alliance, the world's largest global airline alliance. It has so far resumed a significant proportion of its pre-pandemic international flights, and is forging ahead with further recovery and growth plans. With Thailand surpassing its tourist number targets last year, and expecting further recovery, particularly from the Chinese travel market, Thai Airways is poised to play an important role in future industry growth.

"We're delighted that Sabre will continue to be a key part of Thai Airways' journey as the carrier, and the country, continue to experience strong travel demand," said Rakesh Narayanan, Vice President, Regional General Manager, Asia Pacific, Travel Solutions Airline Sales. "Our booking data includes detailed insights on itinerary, origin, connection, passenger type, length of stay and other booking patterns. However, it's important not just to have access to such data, but to be able to interpret and make the best use of it to support an airline's business strategy and growth. Sabre will be providing consulting services to help identify areas of potential opportunity for Thai Airways to increase efficiencies and enhance future revenue."





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CPEC-10 year's essay contest

(Professor Safdar Sandal)

The 'Essay Contest' will help strengthen Corridor's narrative. The 'Chinese Consul General Lahore' Mr. Zhao Shiren has said that in order to keep the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) narrative right and well, holding of essay competitions and similar programmes play a decisive role in nurturing a positive mind making. He vowed to continue such activity in future, as well, with conviviality of all relative departments of the two countries. The effort will enhance the progress of the multinational project manifold and is currently bearing the fruit to get ripened in the near future.

He expressed these views on the



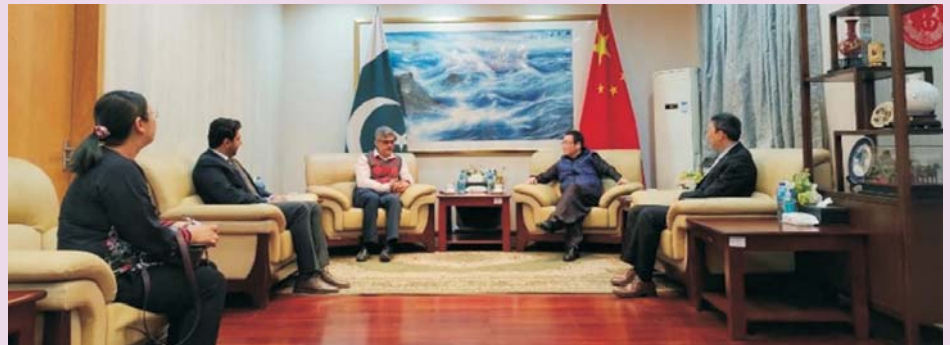
conclusion of 30-day nationwide essay competition held in connection with completion of CPEC's 10 years age and its grass root impacts in collaboration with 'Chinese Consulate in Lahore', the 'Institute of International Relations' and 'Media Research' (IIRMR) programmes. In a ceremony held at IIRMR office in Lahore, after the exam was held, the Jury announced top five winners and awarded cash prizes to honour them prestigiously for their extraordinary interest, ability and performance. At the end of the ceremony, the 'Chinese Council General Lahore' Mr. Shiren said, "my congratulations go to the five winners in recognition of their meritorious essays written with dexterity and mettle, as well as the other 275 participants in the competition, who hailed from different varsities, across the country. They were duly remunerations for their long journeys and costs for their stay in the city. He said, "Your



participation proves your dedication for their ideal 'CPEC' as a strong source for its development. The contest has proved as very meaningful and lucrative in many ways for our two countries and for the people of the whole connected region".

The decade of the CPEC's life in the country, has seen the projects making positive strides, especially in the key areas such as creation of the Gawadar port, energy-production, transportation-

that people of our two countries have become closer through exchange of cooperation and mutual learning. Through high quality development of the CPEC, China is working relentlessly with Pakistan to promote the building of a closer community of having a shared future in the new era. This is a second time for the 'Consulate General' to sponsor and collaborate with IIRMR in a befitting and fascinating manner with arrangement of holding "Essay Competition" said Mr. Zhao Shiren. Responding to it, both the Chairman 'IIRMR' Mr. Mohammad Mehdi and the President Yasir Habib Khan added that 'CPEC's 10 year competition', despite facing headwinds, has radiated a categorical message that 'CPEC' will continue to forge ahead as its basic essence is to set a tone of progress and prosperity for the life of the common man and multifarious properties for the country. They heaped praise for 'written expressions' of students saying, essays are manifestation of the fact that educated youth are not oblivious to CPEC, its



infrastructure and industrial cooperation, besides many other unseen benefits. Hazards involved though from the inimical sources. The project has continued to advance unhindered and delivered tangible results for the general public, thus paving the way for Pakistan's socio-economic growth and development. The beauty of the CPEC lies not only in each specific project but more in the fact

dynamics and results. Youth through their essays dispelled an impression as propagated by doomsayers that CPEC has nothing to do with lives of public. Essay competition is the bridge of friendship in socio-economic life of public.

Working geographical bridge is displayed with enthusiasm and unmatched vigour.



Pak-China border trade set to resume



THE Khunjerab border crossing was closed three years ago amid the coronavirus pandemic.

After remaining closed for three years, trade and travel activities between Pakistan and China through the Khunjerab Pass will resume on Monday 3 April.

All arrangements have been finalised on both sides to reopen the border point for bilateral trade and other activities under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Under an agreement, trade and travel activities between the two countries through the Khunjerab Pass start in April 1 and close on November 30, while there was a daily bus service from Sost Valley of Gilgit-Baltistan to Xinjiang province of China. The first trade activity between China and Pakistan under CPEC had started via the Karakoram Highway in November 2016.

However, to contain the transmission of coronavirus between the two countries, the Khunjerab Pass was closed as soon as in November 2019.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar told media that the federal government had been working for the revival of CPEC activities and all hurdles in the way of bilateral trade would be removed.

According to officials, the prolonged closure of Khunjerab Pass had caused immense financial hardships to the local business community, while thousands of workers had become jobless. During last three years, the Khunjerab Pass had been opened occasionally for emergency cargo transportation from China to Pakistan on specific days.

GB Home Secretary Rana Mohammad Saleem Afzal told media that the officials on both sides had agreed to reopen Khunjerab Pass for trade and travel activities from Monday (April 3)

and process of issuing border pass would start soon.

“Most important aspect is that it's CPEC route. CPEC consignments will enter Pakistan through Khunjerab Pass from China,” said the GB home secretary.

GB Collector of Customs Syed Fawad Ali Shah told media that the volume of trade between two countries would increase after the reopening of the Khunjerab Pass. He said all the required arrangements had been finalised for normal trade at Sost dry port, adding that he had held a meeting with traders, the port management and other stakeholders in this regard.

Mr Shah claimed that all stakeholders were happy and assured the administration of their cooperation in smooth trade activities at Sost dry port.

Haji Liaquat of the GB Importers and Exporters Association said the people affiliated with trade between the two countries were optimistic about the revival of economic activities in the region. He said GB people and government exchequer suffered losses worth billions of rupees owing to the prolonged closure of trade at Sost dry port. He said the authorities should also resolve issues being faced by the people associated with trade.

Revised import policy for livestock approved

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet on Wednesday 5 April approved amendments to the Import Policy Order 2022 to comply with new international guidelines on live animal trade.

The committee's meeting, presided

over by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, also approved a Rs300 million supplementary grant to the Ministry of Housing and Works for repairing and maintaining public buildings.

The import of live animals and animal products is regulated under the Import Policy Order (IPO), 2022, in line with guidelines issued by the World Organisation of Animal Health (WOAH), an intergovernmental body coordinating, supporting and promoting animal disease control.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research had sought changes to the text of paragraphs 5(2b), 6(5) and 6(6) of the order because the conditions and guidelines relating to trade in animals (cattle) had been revised by the WOAH in its latest Terrestrial Animal Health Code. The proposed amendments are in line with international regulations.

The ECC approved the proposed changes to the relevant IPO clauses under which the import of live cattle, meat and bone meal, and feed ingredients of animal origin are banned from countries classified by the WOAH as controlled bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) risk and undetermined BSE risk.

Under the changed paragraph 6(5) of the IPO, live cattle and commodities of bovine origin are importable from countries subject to the condition that the country, zone or compartment is classified by the WOAH in the latest edition of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code as negligible BSE status.

Besides, the state veterinary authority in the exporting country shall certify that the cattle being exported were born and raised in the country of origin or from cattle that have been legally imported.

Moreover, feeding meat and bone meal and greaves of ruminant origin to ruminants is banned and effectively enforced at least two years before the birth of said categories of animals being exported, and meat and meat products were not derived from specified risk material for the BSE disease.

Likewise, para 6(6) would now read that live animals, other than cattle, and products of animal origin containing no other tissues from cattle are importable regardless of the BSE status of the exporting country; pets (cats, dogs, fancy birds, etc.) are importable from controlled and undetermined BSE risk status country and the products of animal origin are importable from controlled and undetermined BSE risk status country subject to the certification by the veterinary authority in the exporting country.

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Pakistan bigger exporter of basmati to Europe than India

The Ministry of Commerce told a Senate panel on Friday 7 April that the European Union has not given any preferential access to Indian basmati rice.

Replying to lawmakers' questions during a meeting of the Senate Committee for Commerce, the ministry's secretary said that at present, Pakistan was exporting more basmati rice to European markets than India.

Basmati rice is a shared production of India and Pakistan. In the recent past, it became a source of a contentious trade battle between the two nations after India applied for an exclusive trademark that would grant it sole ownership of the basmati title in the European Union.

On the request while Australia has also rejected a similar request from India. Legal proceedings are still ongoing in the United States, he added.

Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) Chief Executive Officer Zubair Motiwala briefed the committee on export diversification efforts and increasing exports to Africa.

He said TDAP wanted to promote the export of dates, pink salt, and mangoes which have now been registered under Geographical Indication (GI) tags.

Efforts are being made to increase the export of seafood as well, he added.

Briefing on the efforts to boost trade, the commerce secretary told the meeting that a grand exhibition was organised in Dubai while the private sector was being supported by the commerce ministry to participate in an exhibition held in Germany.

The committee was informed that 197 international trade fairs and 10 local trade fairs were organised during the last four years to promote exports.

Bushra Rehman of the Canada-Pakistan Chamber of Commerce informed the committee that Pakistan's single-country exhibition would be held in North America in August. A total of 57 Pakistani companies will participate in this exhibition. The exhibition needed more support from the ministry and TDAP, she added.

The commerce secretary told the meeting that the production of dates has been greatly affected due to last year's floods.

He said 300,000 tons of dates were exported annually, but this year only 5pc

Pakistan's exports fall 15pc for seventh month in a row

Pakistan's exports of merchandise shrank for the seventh month in a row dipping by 14.76 per cent year-on-year to \$2.36 billion in March, reflecting fear of massive layoffs in the export sector of the country.

In the first nine months (July to March) of 2022-23, exports were down 9.87pc at \$21.04bn compared to \$23.35bn in the corresponding period last year, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on Monday 3 April.

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

Imports dipped 40.25pc to \$3.82bn in March compared to \$6.40bn over the corresponding month of last year. In the first nine months, imports fell 25.34pc to \$43.94bn this year from \$58.85bn over the corresponding period last year.

Between July and March FY23, the trade deficit decelerated 35.5pc to \$22.9bn from \$35.50bn over the corresponding months of last year. In March, the trade deficit fell 59.75pc to \$1.46bn on a year-on-year basis.

Trade deficit decelerates to \$23bn in first nine months

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.

The drop especially in textile and clothing, which constitutes more than 60pc of total exports shows the government would find it difficult to achieve the export target this fiscal year.

The declining textile exports are a result of the federal government's lack of strategy and inability to prioritise effectively - it seems they are simply running the government on a day-to-day basis, Patron in Chief Pakistan Textile Exporters Association Mr Khurram Mukhtar told media.

He said the root causes of the export decline include working capital shortages, and refunds being stuck such as sales tax,

of them will be exported. The committee's chairman said that the export capacity of the country should be prepared and provided to the committee in the next meeting by preparing a report on our current situation and comparison with different countries.

deferred sales tax, income tax, drawbacks of local taxes and levies, technology upgradation fund, and duty drawback.

Unfortunately, the faster refund system is not functioning as intended, with refunds now taking 3-5 months to process instead of the promised 72 hours. Additionally, the sector is facing a substantial increase in financial and energy costs, the exporter further lamented.

Without addressing these issues, it will be impossible for the textile industry to compete regionally on cost and get back on track with exports, Mr Mukhtar said. It's particularly concerning that the largest employer in the country is being neglected by the government.

Mr Mukhtar stressed the need for a dialogue between industry leaders and the government, with the right priorities identified and addressed.

Pakistan Apparel Forum chairman Jawed Bilwani said that it has become difficult for exporters to place orders for the import of raw materials and other inputs procured locally. He said the State Bank of Pakistan has created hurdles in opening letters of credit which led to a decline in exports.

He said buyers have withheld their orders mainly because of political and economic uncertainty in the country. He suggested the government should come up with clear statements to give signals to foreign buyers that their orders will be delivered on time. "We have no choice but to give assurances to buyers to meet their demands", he said.

Mr Bilwani lamented that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has cancelled four meetings with exporters.

He said the foreign exchange reserves of the country can only be built through an increase in exports.

He predicted exports will fall by 17pc in April. He said the government discontinued subsidies on electricity and gas for the export sector on March 1 which has rendered Pakistani exporters uncompetitive on the world markets.

Exporters believe that one of the main reasons behind falling exports was the exchange rate instability.

Chinese envoy credits CPEC for social, economic development

Chinese Consul General in Lahore Zhao Shiren has hailed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a transformative infrastructure project that paved the way for socio-economic development in the country.

He was speaking at the concluding ceremony of an essay competition held in connection with the completion of 10 years of CPEC on Wednesday 5 April. The competition, titled 'CPEC 10 years and its grassroots impacts' was held in collaboration with the Chinese Consulate in Lahore and the Institute of International Relations and Media Research (IIRMR).

Mr Shiren said projects launched under the CPEC have made positive strides and key areas such as Gwadar Port, energy, transportation and industrial cooperation have progressed and delivered tangible benefits for people.

The beauty of CPEC lies not only in specific projects but in the fact that it brought closer the people of China and Pakistan through cultural exchange and mutual learning, he added.

Through high-quality development of the CPEC, China is working with Pakistan to build a community having a shared future in the new era of development,' he added.

He said the essay competition and similar programmes play a decisive role in setting the CPEC narrative right.

In the ceremony, prizes were distributed among Tehniyat Mobeenu Haq, Rabia Zahoor, Faiza Naz, Haris Masood and Kamran who secured the top five positions in the competition. IIRMR Chairman Muhammad Mehdi and President Yasir Habib Khan said CPEC would continue to progress as its essence was to put people on the path of development. -Staff Reporter

Govt to prune Haj quota due to dollar shortage

The crises for the government emanating out of acute shortage of forex reserves seem to keep coming, as empty coffers are now set to impact arrangements for the upcoming Haj.

The ministries of finance and religious affairs are mulling solutions as the country has no dollars to pay Haj expenses to Saudi authorities.

The development came after Finance Minister Ishaq Dar chaired a meeting to review progress on Haj Scheme, 2023 on Saturday 1st April. Mr Dar was informed that against the earlier anticipated amount of \$90 million, the total requirement for Haj expenses will be around \$270-280m, to be paid in USD.

One of the options under consideration was to surrender around 40,000 seats out of the quota of 179,210 assigned to Pakistan by Saudi authorities for this year's pilgrimage.

The government would be forced to take this drastic measure as its scheme to pay Haj expenses in US dollars failed to get traction among the pilgrims.

Ministry considers surrendering 'leftover' seats; 'sponsorship scheme' fails to get traction

Under the 'sponsorship scheme', announced in light of the dollar shortage, the government expected to raise between \$150-180 million, reducing the reliance on the central bank's reserves to pay for Haj expenses.

The meeting was informed that not only 15 per cent of seats offered in the sponsorship scheme have been availed. The religious affairs ministry had divided the quota of 179,210 individuals equally between private sector Haj operators and the government's scheme.

Of the government's share of 89,605 seats, 45,415 were earmarked for the sponsorship scheme — for pilgrims willing to pay for the package in US dollars.

However, only 6,000 individuals have applied under the sponsorship scheme, according to the religious affairs secretary. The ministry had opened 13 foreign currency accounts in different banks and even extended the deadline up

to April 4 to facilitate the beneficiaries of the sponsorship scheme.

On the other hand, 72,869 applications have been received for the regular scheme against 44,190 seats.

The religious affairs ministry has suggested accommodating pilgrims availing the regular scheme on the unutilised quota of the sponsorship scheme, but only if the finance ministry assures of covering the expenses in USD.

The finance minister assured the religious affairs ministry that pilgrims will be facilitated in every possible manner.

No balloting for Haj this year: Dar

No balloting for Haj will be conducted this year as the number of applications received for Haj was far less than the seats available.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar on Thursday 6 April announced that all Haj applications under the government scheme would be accepted without balloting.

In a brief address at the state-run electronic media along with Minister for Religious Affairs Mufti Abdul Shakoor, Mr Dar said as many as 72,869 applications had been received under the government's regular scheme against a quota of 44,190.

The finance ministry planned to accept all applications of intending pilgrims, he said, adding that the extra foreign exchange reserves for Haj pilgrims would be provided with the support of the State Bank of Pakistan.

He asked the intending pilgrims to pray for the progress and prosperity of the country.

As per the Haj quota distribution, the government had allocated around 45,000 seats under the sponsorship scheme.

Under this scheme, the applicants were to pay Haj dues in dollars, but only around 6,000 applications were received by the government under this scheme and around 10,000 seats remained vacant due to limited interest shown by the people.

Buddhists celebrate Vaisakh Day in Taxila



Visitors look at artifacts displayed at Gandhara Art Village during Vaisakh festival in Taxila on Sunday 7 May.

Vaisakh Day, also known as Vaishakh Purnima in the South Asian Buddhist tradition, is the night of the full moon in the month of May and is the most sacred day to millions of Buddhists.

According to Buddhist traditions, Gautama Buddha was born on the night of the full moon in the month of May in 564 BC. When he attained the state of nirvana at the age of 35, it was the month of May and the night of the full moon.

Interestingly, when he died at the age of 80, it was still the month of May and the night of the full moon.

About 250,000 years ago, Vaisakh Day was celebrated in Taxila when Ashoka came to Taxila from his capital Magadh. Ashoka, whose empire extended from Burma to Central Asia, was seen as a sort of dervish. He wrote that he was “deeply pained by the killing, dying, and deportation that take place when an unconquered country is conquered.” This is why Ashoka renounced military conquest and other forms of violence, including cruelty to animals. He shared his new outlook on life through edicts carved into stones and pillars located around at pilgrimage sites and along busy trade routes. The edicts are considered among the first examples of writing in Indian history.

In addition to his edicts, Ashoka built stupas, monasteries, and other religious structures at noteworthy Buddhist sites.

To commemorate the day, a celebration was organised by Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC), in collaboration with the Gandhara Resource Centre Pakistan (GRCP), Centre for Culture and Development in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Tourism Punjab. Following ceremonial proceedings, the participants proceeded to the Gandhara Art Village Taxila, for an enlightening seminar with a fruitful exchange of ideas and insights.

During the seminar, High

Commissioner of Sri Lanka retired vice admiral Mohan Wijewickrama emphasised on the profound importance of the Gandhara heritage of Pakistan for Buddhists around the world. Ambassador of Nepal Tapas Adhikari touched upon the cultural significance of Gandhara for Nepal, as the birthplace of Buddha.

Rana Aftab, managing director of PTDC, expressed his optimism towards the growth of religious tourism in Pakistan.

He said that Pakistan was proud to be the custodian of historic Buddhist relics and monasteries and expressed hope for a

strengthening of mutual cooperation and friendship between Pakistan and the Buddhist world.

Addressing participants, Zaildar Ahsan Shah, member advisory board, Pakistan Research Centre for a Community with Shared Future said the event showcased the cultural diversity, religious harmony and immense potential for religious tourism in the country. “Through collaboration and international support, Pakistan aims to preserve and promote its ancient Buddhist legacy, reinforcing its commitment towards fostering global understanding and peace,” he added.

A Pakistani Buddhist from rural Sindh, Munawar Lal addressed the challenges faced by the Buddhist community in Pakistan and emphasised on the need for international support for Buddhist countries.

Sikh pilgrims complete visits to gurdwaras



A group of Sikhs on a shopping spree in the city.

As many as 2,470 Sikh Yatris (pilgrims) are set to return to Lahore 10 April Monday after attending different events related to Baisakhi festival, including the April 14 main ceremony held at Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hasan Abdal, on Sunday 9 April.

After night stay in Lahore, the pilgrims will return to India via Wagah-Attari land route 11 April (Tuesday), according to officials of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB).

On the last leg of their visit to Pakistan the Sikh pilgrims visited Gurdwara Rorri Sahib at Aimanabad, Gujranwala district, and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur, Narowal district. Special arrangements related to their accommodation, food, security, medical treatment and transportation were made for the pilgrims during their visit.

On reaching Kartarpur Narowal, Kartarpur Corridor Project CEO Abu Bakr Aftab Qureshi and Auqaf Deputy Secretary Rana Tariq, along with other officials and local Sikh leaders received the pilgrims.

Party leader Sardar Amarjit Singh and

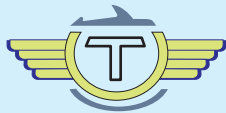
deputy leader Balonedar Singh, Joginder Singh Kaur, Parjeet Singh and others said on the occasion that the Kartarpur Corridor project would be remembered in the history. “We cannot express our feelings in words while seeing Kartarpur Sahib Gurdawara,” said Mangal Singh, one of the pilgrims. “We appreciate ETPB for making excellent arrangements to facilitate us,” he added.

The pilgrims also expressed deep sorrow and grief over the death of the Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Mufti Abdul Shakoor in an accident and prayed for him.

The Yatris had entered Pakistan by crossed the Wagah-Attari border on foot on April 9 to celebrate Baisakhi festival at Gurdwara Panja Sahib (Hasanabdal), Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib, Gurdwara Dera Sahib (Lahore) and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib (Kartarpur), Narowal.

The pilgrims groups were led by Amarjit Singh Bhalipur, the party leader of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), India, Balwinder Singh, the deputy party leader, Joginder Kaur, the deputy party leader SGPC, Kulwant Singh, the deputy party leader SGPC, Harjeet Singh, secretary SGPC, Panj Pyaray Sahiban, Mangal Singh, Joga Singh, Sandeep Singh, Jatinder Singh, Jarmeljit Singh, Baljinder Singh, deputy party leader of Bhai Mardana Society, Surjit Singh of All India Danga Peer Welfare, Punjab, and Inderjeet Singh, the party leader of Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee.

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King Charles III crowned in Britain's first coronation since 1953



Britain's King Charles III and Queen Camilla travel in the Gold State Coach back to Buckingham Palace from Westminster Abbey after their coronations, on Saturday 6 May.

Charles III was crowned monarch of the United Kingdom and 14 Commonwealth realms on Saturday 6 May at Britain's first coronation for 70 years, during a ceremony steeped in a millennium of ritual and spectacle.

Charles, 74, became the oldest sovereign yet to be crowned at London's Westminster Abbey after a lifetime as heir to his late mother, Queen Elizabeth II. At 12:02pm local time (5:02pm PST), Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby placed the solid-gold St Edward's Crown on Charles's head as a sacred and ancient symbol of the monarch's authority.

Welby also crowned Charles's wife, Camilla, 75, capping a remarkable transformation from her role as royal mistress to queen consort and now queen.

Cries of "God Save the King" rang out from the 2,300-member congregation, which included royalty and government leaders from worldwide.

Shehbaz, other world leaders attend lavish ceremony

Trumpet fanfare sounded at Westminster Abbey, along with gun salutes across Britain and beyond.

Returning to Buckingham Palace in the day's second horse-drawn parade, the royal family appeared on the balcony to applause and more chants of approbation from tens of thousands of well-wishers braving a spring downpour.

Some had camped out for days. A ceremonial fly-past was scaled down due to the weather.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also joined a galaxy of foreign royals, officials and heads of the states and governments at the coronation.

The premier, who arrived at the Westminster Abbey along with other foreign dignitaries, met different world leaders on the sidelines, including the presidents of Brazil, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Zambia, Mauritius, Malta, the secretary

general of Commonwealth, and UK Minister of State (Development and Africa) Andrew Mitchell.

On Twitter, Mr Sharif said that during his address at the Commonwealth leaders' meeting on Friday 5 May, he made a case for reenergising Commonwealth with a focus on youth empowerment.

"I shared with the world leaders the details of our Youth Programme that is based on four Es: Education, Employment, Engagement and Environment. Women and members of minority communities are a special focus of the loan scheme," he tweeted on Saturday 6 May.

Meanwhile, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said that during the Friday event, Mr Sharif had extended an invitation to King Charles to visit Pakistan.

Changes

King Charles pledged "I come not to be served but to serve" during the Anglican service, much of which would have been recognisable to the 39 other monarchs crowned at Westminster Abbey since William the Conqueror in 1066.

But while many of the intricate rituals and ceremony to recognise Charles as his people's "undoubted king" remained, the sovereign sought to bring other aspects of the service up to date.

Female bishops and choristers participated for the first time, as did leaders of Britain's non-Christian faiths, while its Celtic languages — Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Irish Gaelic — featured prominently.

As king, Charles is the supreme governor of the Protestant Church of England and has described himself as a "committed Anglican Christian".

But key elements of the service recognised that Charles heads a more religiously and ethnically diverse country than the one his mother inherited in the shadow of World War II.

In another change, the coronation themes mirrored his lifelong interest in biodiversity and sustainability.

Ceremonial vestments from previous coronations were reused, and the anointing oil — created from olives on groves on the Mount of Olives and perfumed with essential oils — was vegan.

Charles was anointed out of sight of the congregation behind a three-sided screen in front of the abbey's High Altar, to the strains of Handel's soaring anthem "Zadok the Priest", sung at every coronation since 1727.

Commonwealth Corner inaugurated in Clifton park



British Deputy High Commissioner Sarah Mooney and Commissioner Muhammad Iqbal Memon plant a sapling on Saturday 6 May.

British Deputy High Commissioner Sarah Mooney along with Karachi Commissioner Muhammad Iqbal Memon on Saturday 6 May planted saplings at the 'Commonwealth Corner' established at Salman Farsi Park in Clifton to mark the coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla.

Speaking on the occasion, the British diplomat lauded the administration and people of the city for the concept of establishing Commonwealth Corner where 56 trees were planted on the occasion of the king's coronation.

She said that it was a perfect moment for her to start the day's celebration on the commemoration of the king's coronation.

Thanking Commissioner Memon, she said that it was a gift which would last forever. "Tomorrow when I write to the king, and include photographs and footage of this even, it would be something he will incredibly be proud of," she said and added: "In a day full of pageants what we have done here today is something which he will treasure."

Talking to the media, the commissioner said that as many as 56 trees were planted in the park, keeping in mind the number of Commonwealth countries so that these countries could be represented.

Earlier, Ms Mooney, accompanied by Head of Mission Martin Dawson, formally inaugurated the Commonwealth Corner established by the city administration to express goodwill towards the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth on the occasion of the King's coronation.

Same to Same



If you don't count the crowns and the thrones and the palaces and castles and the lands and the titles and the estates and the carriages and all the jewels and treasures they've stolen from us in history shistry, the royal family is just like us all.

Okay, I admit not all of us have our faces on pound notes and BBC doesn't show our dastaar bandis, but in everything we are exactly alike. Same to same dushmanis, same sarhial saas and baaghi bahu, same fights and bag biting on the inside, same dikhava on the outside, same aasteen ke saanps, same petting order with some who more important and more richer and some who are ghareeb rellies and who know their place and look grateful.

But one thing I will say for the UK ki royal family bhai: they might be total fails at making good marriages, but they really know how to do tabahi weddings. Again, like us only.

Actually, they are not just good wedding planners, they are the world's top event managers. Better even than Jalal Salahuddin or the couple in Made in Heaven. Just look how nicely the family did the queen's janaaza (though they did leave her lying around for a little too long if you ask me; I was so scared she might go bad). But they did her quls nicely and look how nicely they did William's shaadi and Meghan Market's shaadi.

Obviously I don't know the details about how much of food they gave and whether they distributed leftovers among the poors and how many jorras and sets were in the burry for the daughters-in-law and fruit and mithai for the in-laws and whether they gave jewellery also or just jorras to the samdhans — vaisay whatever they gave to Meghan tau I think they must have snatched back since long time back, including the fruit and mithai.

The festivities around the coronation of King Charles only drive home how

similar the British royal family is to us desis...

Also I don't know if the dance numbers were any good or what the moonh dikhaai was, but they ordered designer wedding jorras for the brides and foreign ke flowers in the church and took out their carriages and had 'A-list' guest list with lots of celebs and bore politicians.

And now look how nicely they've done Prince Charles, sorry King Charles ki coronation. With so much of dhoom dhaam and gaana bajana. Only problem was king was a little, you know, aged.

And the queen, she tau poor thing was a proper burrihiya. Even with her crown and gown and all, she still looked like a



Illustration by Sheece Khan

little burrihiya. Queens don't look like queens, unless they are young and glamorous. Kings should also look handsome but, chalo, they can get away with having a little bit of grey hair and a few wrinkles, because it makes them look dignified and successful, but their wives must always look young and fresh baba.

Like Cinderella and Snow White. Only witches have grey hair and wrinkles. If you don't believe me, open any story book and see for yourself. I tau couldn't stop thinking about Diana Marhooma and how glam she would have looked on the throne. Obviously I know she would have been older now but, still, she would have been a blonde and beautiful celeb. Like Cate Blanket and Local Kidman.

Hai bechaari Diana. Went so young and without seeing anything. Not her sons' weddings. Not her grandchildren. And now not even her coronation.

And also like all good desi family events, there was lots of politics behind the scenes na. Furgy was invited but only to the gaana bajana afterwards, like we invite distanced rellies only to the wedding and not to the mehndi.

And I think so there must have been a bit of too-too main-main between Anne and Queen Kamila because Anne looked so sarhial — but then when does she not? Meghan wasn't invited, in case, like Magnificent at Sleeping Beauty's naming party, she puts a curse on them and puts everyone to sleep. Vaisay the King and Queen tau I could imagine, would like nothing better than to go to sleep with their hot water bottles and their flannel ke pajamas.

And even if Meghan had been invited and she'd arrived dressed to the mines, the gora newspapers would have said just look how shameless she is overdressing so much, trying to outstage our beloved Kate.

And if she'd come in a simple sa jorra, they would have said look how she didn't bother this much even.

Just like Janoo's sisters, Psycho and Cobra, do to me. So same to same, them and us.

The writer is a columnist and a satirist and has published six books previously, including the bestselling Social Butterfly series.

Shalimar Express resumes after eight months

The Karachi-to-Lahore Shalimar Express, which had ceased to function since Aug 27 last year when heavy rains followed by flooding had affected many Pakistan Railways' operations, was brought back to the railway track on Monday 1st May amid much fanfare.

More upbeat news about this train, restored after a long gap of eight months and three days, is that till May 15, its fares have been slashed by 20 per cent. After that, from May 16 till May 31, the fares will still be cheaper by 10pc.

Shalimar Express, which departed from the Cantonment Railway Station at 6am sharp on Monday 1st May, had been decorated with foil strips, ribbons and balloons. It was showered with rose petals by the railway staff as it chugged out of the station.

The train comprises 19 coaches of which 11 are economy, one is a dining car, one a brake van, two are business coaches, one an air conditioned parlour coach while two are air conditioned standard coaches. It has a capacity for 1,198 passengers. The train that left Karachi on Monday 1st May had 942 passengers.



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11,000 stolen artefacts seized in Europe crackdown



A view of a marble bust believed to represent Salonia Matidia, niece of Roman emperor Trajan, which was among the stolen artefacts that were recovered during a crackdown on international art trafficking, at an unknown location in Spain.

Law enforcement officials across Europe arrested 60 people last year in a crackdown that retrieved over 11,000 trafficked artworks and artefacts including ancient books, sculptures and coins, Interpol said recently.

As part of an annual operation codenamed Pandora VII, forces led by Spain's Guardia Civil police swooped on the art criminals from September 13 to 24 last year in a slew of European nations, the international police cooperation body said.

The items recovered included 77 ancient books in Italy stolen from a monastery, thousands of historic coins in Poland, and 48 religious sculptures and other artefacts in Portugal, believed to have been nabbed in a string of church robberies in the 1990s and early 2000s.

In all, police from 15 countries took part: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden.

France-based Interpol oversaw coordination between the different forces, along with the EU law enforcement cooperation agency Europol.

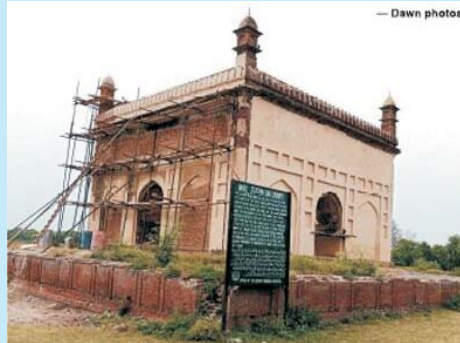
"Some 130 investigations are still

ongoing, as a result of which more seizures and arrests are anticipated as investigators around the globe go after those spoiling and destroying cultural

heritage," Interpol said in a statement.

Pandora operations to recover stolen art and artefacts have been carried out every year since 2016.

16th century Dak Chowki of Wazirabad being restored



The Punjab Archaeology Department has launched the restoration of the remnants' of a 16th century building of Dak Chowki in Wazirabad.

The mail station is located on the Grand Trunk GT road as it makes its way north across the river Chenab. It was established in the 1560s during the rule of Sher Shah Suri, the founder of the short-lived Suri dynasty which collapsed only 11 years after his death.

The purpose of the building was to serve as the post office. The square shaped building is built over a raised platform.

Suri Dak Chowki Wazirabad had been in deteriorated condition for decades where there is no roof/dome on the structure. One corner burj is missing while lime plaster, brick masonry and flooring have decayed at places.

The official sources said the then Gujranwala commissioner who also later served as secretary tourism, Ehsan Bhutta, took the initiative to restore the historical building to its original state according to archaeological standards.

It is crucial to respect such historical sites and take steps to ensure their longevity, says an official of the archaeology department in the region. Restoring them to their original glory not only provides an opportunity to learn about the past but also serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving our heritage for future generations, he adds.

According to a signpost on site, the post office was established not just for the mail but also to gather intelligence on activities within the district. Such post offices were generally incorporated within caravanserais (rest areas for travellers), given their association with



travel, but this particular station is a stand-alone structure as there is no evidence of a caravanserai on site.

In its heyday, the building likely would have contained stables and at least several well-rested horses to serve as points on a relay conveying mail from one station to another up and down the GT Road. In his book Gujranwala: the Glory that Was, Salman Rashid notes that in the past, a grove of trees about 200 meters from the building once housed the remains of the horse stables, which are now completely effaced.

At the first glance, the profile of the building is reminiscent of typical tombs of the period as building typologies of the period could easily be employed for a variety of purposes. In the plan, it is laid out as a four-cornered structure with arched openings facing the four cardinal directions. A dome once towered overhead but it collapsed at some indeterminate point in the past. The remains of three ornamental brick turrets remain on the eastern and northern sides of the structure, along with the heavily degraded traces of some of the original stucco coating.

Imran Zahid, an engineer of the archaeology department, said the major components of the restoration project had been the underpinning work with special size brick and kankar lime plaster. There are bricks on edge flooring as per the original design with tiles of special size. Provision for gratings in openings, brick tile on edge flooring with standard size brick, construction of boundary wall with iron fencing, electrification, illumination of the tomb and provision for public facilities like benches, dustbins etc are also a part of the structure.

Recreating Mohenjo Daro

The arrival and rapid usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools has led to much debate. However, one aspect of AI which has quickly caught the attention of the world is its ability to craft and render accurate representations of different time periods, cities and cultures. The ability to properly use AI tools for this purpose is a skill which many are now in the process of learning, and it looks like 34-year-old Rahmatullah Mirbahar is fast becoming a master of it.

Mirbahar, a resident of Thatta, recently received great praise on a variety of social media platforms and local news channels for his beautiful AI imaginings of the city of Mohenjo Daro. The rich, vibrant pictures give us a glimpse into what Mohenjo Daro would have looked like during its heyday, from the 25th-19th century BCE, when it was an exciting, bustling city.

Mirbahar's phone has not stopped ringing ever since his images became viral on the internet. "I always read about Mohenjo Daro in books," he reveals, "but I really wanted to see what the great site would have looked like at that time. Then I realised that AI could help me visualise it."

"I used AI technology for the first time to try and bring this ancient civilisation to life. Since AI collects information on a whole host of topics from a variety of sources, I simply had to feed in the exact commands needed to render the images. Naturally, this is not a hundred percent accurate, but it is quite close!"

Rahmatullah Mirbahar's Artificial Intelligence-generated images of Mohenjo Daro are more than just a viral sensation. They reveal just how much Pakistan has to gain if it embraces AI technology

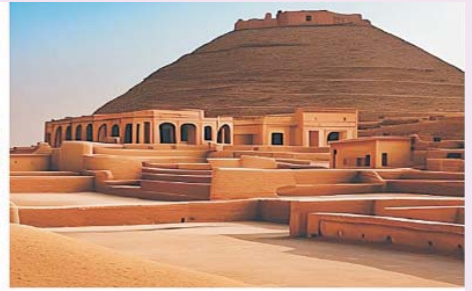
An avid photographer, Mirbahar works primarily as a computer operator in the provincial health department. "I am also a professional photographer," he says, "and I have done photography centred on Sindh's heritage and ancient buildings. When I decided to use AI tools to depict Sindh's ancient culture and heritage, the results turned out to be quite impressive. The truth is, if this technology can make such beautiful images of cities, buildings and societies, then why should I limit myself to photography? My skills can now extend beyond my camera."



Rahmatullah Mirbahar AI Arts



Rahmatullah Mirbahar AI Arts



Mirbahar learnt how to use AI for this purpose by watching YouTube tutorials. The main roadblock confronting Mirbahar when using AI was that the information pertaining to Sindh and its cultural history was fairly limited online. The presence of Sindhi literature and texts is not only hard to come by online but even harder to try and feed into online AI tools.

In particular, freely available AI software is riddled with limitations. It is meant for beginners and has a small database, meaning that the final results are lacking in quality. In order to avoid this pitfall, Mirbahar is paying 60 dollars each month so that he can use more advanced AI software to make these images and hone his skills.

However, Mirbahar feels that this monetary investment will pay dividends in the future. According to him, "This is just the start of AI use in Pakistan. I am currently using AI to develop images of Bhambhore, a site famous for the story of Sassui Punnu, the Makli graveyard, and Harappa and Taxila. In the future, I intend to work on videography, filmmaking and animation as well."

But, in order to actualise his upcoming projects, Mirbahar will need more advanced computers and professional training. He is already receiving online training about the usage of AI, which serves as a testament to his dedication for this craft.

"In my early school days, when I first bought a computer," Mirabahr says, "my parents discouraged me from getting it.

They said it was a waste of money and that it would bring no benefit. However, I decided to keep working on the computer and develop my skills on it. It was simply my passion and no negativity, even from within my own home, was going to dampen my enthusiasm. When I first made the images of Mohenjo Daro, I was hesitant about sharing them online. However, the response since then has been amazing."

More than four different AI programmes can be used for this purpose. Mirbahar has been using the software Midjourney for his AI images, which he is willing to pay for because the image results are high quality and the programme's database is all-encompassing.

Mirbahar is the pioneer of AI image generation in Sindh and has opened the door for many exciting possibilities. Given the fact that AI technology is in its infancy, Mirbahar is at the forefront of what could prove to be a new technological and artistic frontier in Sindh and Pakistan. Many youngsters are already inspired by what Mirbahar has achieved and are rushing to jump aboard this exciting bandwagon.

"AI is a complex technology which we in Pakistan have very limited access to right now. Most economically developed countries not only have advanced AI technology but are investing significant money and resources into furthering its usage and application. The best thing about basic AI is its accessibility. It's a

level playing field because, as long as you are interested and have access to the internet, there is no reason why you can't acquire this skill set.

"If you want to create images just for fun, then you can watch a few YouTube tutorials to make what you want. But if you want to become an expert, then you will need to work hard and be patient."

However, Mirbahar bemoans the ignorant attitude of the Sindh government when it comes to providing a technology-based education. "Our society lacks a scientific approach," he laments. "Last year, a delegation from the Google team visited Sindh. The Sindh government had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Google, which would facilitate the technological training of school children. The goal was to teach courses about the Google Digital Garage and cloud computing. However, we have not seen any development or follow-up about this at any school since. It is our government's job to make sure that our students learn these skills at an early age so that they can be of use later on."

AI is not just limited to animation or image development. It can be used in the field of medicine and even in the agricultural sector. In Punjab, farmers are already using AI technology for better crop production and to gather data from tube wells.

Ali Hassan Mallah, a digital creator and app developer, believes that Pakistan should start thinking about adopting AI in more fields. "In a country like ours, AI could prove to be a great revolution on the financial, social and cultural fronts," says Mallah.

"AI can help us read the Indus script. It can help decode it since deep learning is one of the main components of AI. Such developments can take place alongside a combination of software and hardware advancements, known as the Internet of Things [IoT]. As long as AI makes decisions to aid human comfort, it is a good thing. But if it starts to dictate decisions, then that could lead to chaos."

Given the numerous benefits of having AI knowledge, Mirbahar is eager for the younger generation to learn AI usage, since they can earn a handsome amount of money if they become skilled enough. But, most importantly, effective usage of AI can help change the lives of millions.

For Mirbahar, his AI-generated images of Mohenjo Daro are just the start of his AI journey.

Food lovers throng Peshawar's Namak Mandi on Eid

People flocked to the Namak Mandi Food Street here on the third Eid day on Monday to have the traditional chapli kebab, barbecue, mutton karahi, pulao and paye with kehwa.

The visitors to the place, which is located on the backside of the historic Qissa Khwani bazaar, included both locals and tourists, who enjoyed food sitting in hammock charpoys.

"My Eid is incomplete with chapli kebab and mutton karahi from my favourite food place [Namak Mandi] and that's why I'm here with family," Prof Mohammad Naeem Khan of the Swabi University said.

He said he had come here after a gap of three years due to the rising incidence of the coronavirus and would have the aromatic green tea of the Qissa Khwani Bazaar.

He said he had also bought chapli kebab weighing five kilograms and three packets of Peshawari pulao for an Eid party at home.

Also, scores of food lovers visited other food streets of Peshawar on Eid days and said they had traditional food like mouth-watering chapli kebab and mutton karahi.

Food sellers said the demand for chapli kebab tangibly went up during Eid holidays amid pleasant weather.

They said many people ordered chapli kebab in large quantities for home as well.

Arif Ahmad of the famous chapli kebab shop said his Jalil Ahmad got the business from his father in 1950, while his all six sons carried it forward.

"Hopefully, our next generation will take it over from us," he said.

He said his grandfather started chapli kabab setup with a single frying pan 73 years ago and the business had expanded across Peshawar and even to Islamabad.

"We have six shops, two each in Firdous and University Road, one each at Gulbahar and Faqirabad, and one in Islamabad's Melody Food Street," he said.

He said most of the popular meaty dishes were introduced in the Indian subcontinent by invaders including Mughals, Turks and Afghans.

"Before marching towards central India, invaders stayed in Peshawar region and introduced chapli kebab recipe, which later gained worldwide fame due to its appetizing aroma and delectable taste," he said.

Mr Arif said that the chapli kebab's recipe gained popularity in other parts of the region from Karachi to Lahore to Quetta in the current Pakistan and Jalalabad and Kabul in Afghanistan and Amritsar, Lucknow and Delhi in the current India.

He said that Peshawar had more than 3,500 chapli kebabs shops and they were mostly located in Firdus, Bakhshu Bridge, Warsak Road, Ring Road, Nothia, Namak Mandai, Hastnagri, Ramadas, Faqirabad and Board bazaars, attracting foodies in large numbers during Eid days.

"Besides chapli kebab, the takeaway service of traditional cuisines, including Peshawari pulao, paye, dampukht, namak mandi karahi, lamb chops, barbeque and other traditional foods are also popular," he said.

The kebab maker said people sent those food items to family members and friends in the UAE, Saudi Arabia and other countries.

Child specialist Dr Riaz Malik said Namak Mandi was his favorite food place in Peshawar where he had been coming over for the last six years to have mutton karahi and barbeque due to its unique taste.

"Visit to Namak Mandi gives us an opportunity to spend some time with old friends on Eid days. The orders generally take close to an hour to prepare with customers enjoying tea ahead of the meal here," he said.

Dr Malik urged the provincial government to convert the place into a full-fledged food street like Lahore's Gawalmandi to create job opportunities and promote quality traditional food.



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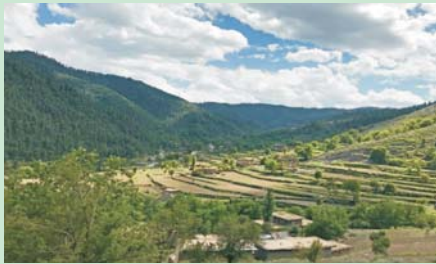
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Picturesque Tirah witnesses decline in number of tourists



A scenic view of Tirah valley in Khyber tribal district.

The number of tourists to the picturesque Tirah valley has considerably declined in recent months owing to shortage of facilities and an impending security situation, according to locals.

They said that only a small number of young joy seekers made it to Bagh-Markaz, the valley's business centre, during Eidul Fitr in comparison to previous years when the region was opened for outsiders after the construction of a road.

Blessed with abundant natural beauty and consisting of thick forests, crystal clear water springs and green meadows, the valley offers a variety of sightseeing to tourists. The region was closed to the outside world for decades till 2014-15 when the people, who were displaced owing to militancy and subsequent military operation, returned to their homes after nearly a decade due.

The lush green Arhanga top on border with Orakzai, Kalawooch Daman, Bhutaan Sar, Haidar Kandaw, Dwa Thoe, Than Darra, Takhtakai heights and parts of the Kukikhel-inhabited mountainous areas with sharp cliffs and deep gorges are the region's main attractions for visitors that were yet to be developed and made approachable to outside tourists.

The residents of Tirah told media that only four hotels were constructed during the last three years to accommodate outsiders. These hotels are situated in Islamdin Pir-Chattai Sar, Sarrokha locality at the entry of the valley and two more at the main Bagh-Markaz.

They, however, regretted that the condition of roads in the valley and those leading to tourist resorts was not good while some of those locations could only be reached on foot.

Qari Naurang, a resident of Luzaka Darra, a beautiful valley near the border of Kurram district, said that depositing of Computerised National Identity Cards with security forces at the entry points of Tirah from Bara, Kurram and Orakzai sides was the first obstacle to outsiders that needed to be done away as it restricted the free movement of tourists in the valley.

He said that a ban on entry of Kukikhel to Tirah for unspecified security apprehensions too was not only a setback for tourism but also against the basic rights of free movement of every citizen of the country.

Mr Naurang said that shortage of hotels or rented accommodation facilities was also a major reason of decline in the number of tourists as local customs and traditions did not allow outsiders to establish a camp or pitch a tent for night at any site of their choice in the valley.

Fazal Rabi, a young social activist, said that the valley was also in need of electricity and mobile and internet service alongside foolproof security.

He said that recent incidents of terrorism, armed patrolling of suspected militants and subsequent actions by the law enforcement agencies also scared away potential visitors from visiting the valley and surrounding areas.

The recent decline in number of tourists, especially during Eid holidays, has also disappointed traders and shopkeepers of Bagh-Markaz as they were expecting additional earnings from tourists along with creation of some part time jobs for unemployed local youth during these days.

Haji Sher Mohammad, the leader of local traders, said that Tirah was as beautiful as other tourist resorts of the country including Swat, Murree, Nathiagali and Naran but it faced shortage of the required facilities.

He said that tourists from different parts of the country were interested in exploring the hidden beauty of Tirah but the current security situation and lack of facilities were stopping them from visiting the valley.

He said that provision of required

facilities by the government would ensure an upsurge in tourists' arrival in the valley but would also provide job opportunities to locals alongside enhancing chances of better earnings for traders and transporters.

International Dance Day celebrated



The Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi has organised a programme to celebrate International Dance Day.

Famous artists and groups, including Nighat Chaudhry, Mohsin Babar and Farrukh Darbar (Kathak); Wahab Shah & Co. and Mani Chao (Bharatanatyam); Abdul Ghani and Khurram (Fusion); Kaif Ghaznavi, Iram Basheer and Abdul Sattar (semi classical) enthralled the audience with their wonderful performance.

Culture and Education Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah said that dance was our tradition and it was the tradition of Bulleh Shah. "Our nature is full of dance. For 5,000 years, we have the testimony of the dance in the statue of the dancing girl of Mohenjo Daro.

Arts Council president Ahmed Shah said: "The blood of our body dances. But we people don't dance. It's not a problem of religion, it's a problem of culture. We don't have the freedom to be happy, it's our basic right to be happy."



A dance performance at Alhamra on the eve of the International Dance Day



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