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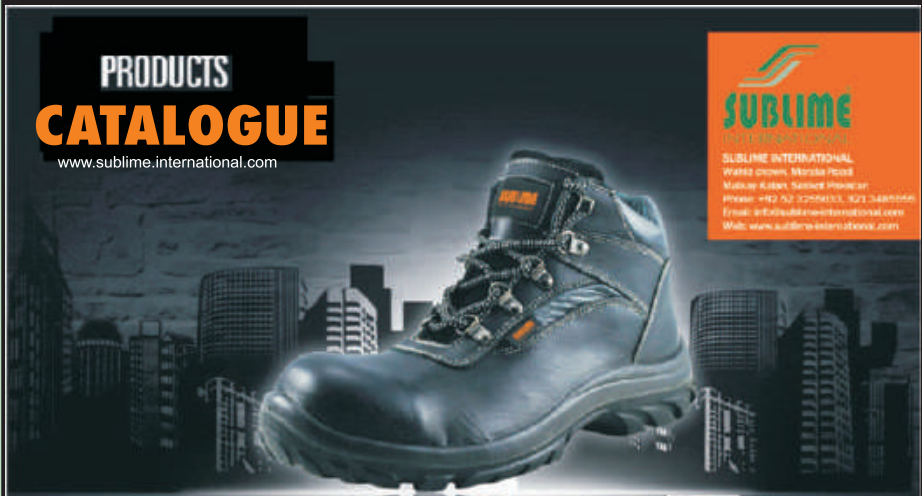
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Mr. Sohail Saeed Barlas has been elected as the Chairman, and Mr. Muhammad Daud Sair as the Vice-Chairman of Sialkot International Airport (SIAL) for the year 2023-24. The new leadership aims to bring fresh perspectives and drive further growth and development at the airport. Under their guidance, the airport is expected to enhance its operations, infrastructure, and passenger services. Efforts will be made to attract new airlines and expand existing routes, fostering increased connectivity for travelers. The focus will also be on improving the overall passenger experience, ensuring safety and efficiency throughout the airport's facilities.

Lawmakers concerned over SC 'meddling' in PIA affairs

The Senate Standing Committee on Aviation maintained that the Supreme Court has nothing to do with the management of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and directed the PIA to share the court's decision that allowed it to recruit 205 new professionals, including 80 pilots.

The meeting held at Parliament House on Thursday 6 July was chaired by Senator Hidayatullah. It discussed the Supreme Court's recent decision, which allowed the PIA to recruit 205 skilled employees, including pilots, cabin crew and IT experts.

The PIA officials informed the committee that the court allowed the PIA to recruit cabin crew, IT professionals and 80 pilots on contract for one year.

The PIA officials informed the meeting that one of the major obstacles in the implementation of the decision was that \$15,000 to 20,000 were required for the 8-10 month training of pilots and there was no legal binding which barred the pilots from joining other airlines after the initial contract.

Standing committee asks PIA to resolve problems faced by Balochistan passengers

During the meeting, Senator Saleem Mandviwalla termed the former aviation minister's claim of "fake pilots" as "ill-advised". He said the ex-minister was misinformed which caused serious damage to the PIA and the country. He suggested that the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) should resolve the issue in line with its rules without interference from the Federal Investigation Agency and the court of law.

The PPP senator said that the whole matter regarding the pilots should have been taken up by the CAA according to its rules as he believed that there was no need for registration of FIRs. "Even a student pilot jailed," he added.

The Senate committee adopted the report of the sub-committee constituted to resolve the issues of licences.

Balochistan flights

The committee members expressed concern over the cancellation of flights from Balochistan. It asked the PIA management to resolve the issue faced by people travelling to and from Quetta. The Senate body was briefed by the representatives of PIA on the details of

flights cancelled from airports of Balochistan in the last two months.

The PIA officials apprised that 49 flights were delayed in April and nine flights were delayed in June. However, the delay was caused due to financial and crew constraints and the flights would be normalised after the completion of post-Haj operations, the officials assured.

Senator Saleem Mandviwalla suggested that PIA work with private airlines so that the passengers from Balochistan could be accommodated. The committee resolved to invite private airlines to the following meeting and advised the PIA to draw up a workable plan for Balochistan.

Moreover, the committee expressed dissatisfaction with the details of employees submitted by the PIA. Senator Hidayatullah directed that complete details with experience and present posting of employees should be submitted in the next meeting.

Additionally, the Senate committee took up the matter of PIA employees'

appointments on fake degrees.

The FIA officials informed the meeting that challan in 15 cases against the 260 nominated employees have been submitted; however, the Special Committee on Affected Employees directed the withdrawal of cases.

Senator Hidayatullah maintained that employees having fake degrees should not be spared at any cost and that the recommendation of the standing committee should be implemented.

Senator Dr Afnanullah Khan inquired about the number of active pensioners drawing pensions from Pakistan International Airline Corporation (PIAC) and how much pension is being given to widows of employees.

The PIA officials informed that as of now, 15,000 employees were drawing pensions, out of which 5,000 are widows who have been paid Rs2,000 to 3,000 every month. While expressing concern, the committee recommended that the pension of widows should be increased to at least Rs5,000.

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New body to steer PIA out of turbulence

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has formed a high-level committee that will work out a plan to restructure and revive Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), which has continued to be in bad shape over the years.

The reputation of the national flag carrier, facing cumulative losses of Rs635 billion by the end of September, has further suffered in recent weeks because of five particular incidents in different continents.

And this happened when the company's standing had already been at the lowest ebb following question marks raised by a former aviation minister on the qualifications of pilots operating its aircraft globally.

As if that was not enough, the inter-agency acrimony in the aviation chain — including the Civil Aviation, PIA, and the Airport Security Force — is making things murkier.

Things worsened to the extent that ministers for finance and aviation warned these agencies on Tuesday 27 June to resolve their issues mutually, including those relating to changes to the aviation law, within a week or else the government might be compelled to outsource not only the airports but also their security operations.

Twelve internationally renowned firms, including the one operating London Heathrow Airport, have shown interest in airport service contracts.

It was highlighted that amendments to the aviation law should be passed by the parliament by mid-July in line with international standards so that global aviation regulators could send their inspectors in August for on-ground verification of operational systems and standards needed for reviving PIA's operations to the United States, United Kingdom and Europe. If this didn't happen, Pakistan would have to wait for

another year for the inspections.

These operations were stopped about three years ago after a controversy erupted over pilots' professional degrees and other aircraft safety standards.

The gradual build-up of events and challenges over time landed at the office of the prime minister, who set up a high-level committee on Wednesday to work out the restructuring, reformation and revival of the flag carrier.

The panel, led by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, has been asked to present workable solutions immediately after Eidul Azha on the way forward, according to an official statement. The committee will deliberate on different options for restructuring and reviving PIA.

The committee also comprises



Aviation Minister Khawaja Saad Rafiq, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, Commerce Minister Naveed Qamar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Government Effectiveness Jahanzeb Khan and the aviation secretary.

Earlier this week, the government disbursed Rs4bn in emergency funding to PIA to meet international obligations, although it was seeking about Rs23bn immediate bailout.

This was despite the fact the government had enhanced about two months ago the guarantee limit to over Rs263bn to help the airline arrange commercial funding.

On Monday 26 June, the airline

reported to the government that under a Dec 30, 2017, decision of the prime minister, the markup on PIA's debt was to be picked up by the government for five years (from July 2018 to June 2023) and its payment was to be made directly to the lenders.

Consequently, payments of markup on government guarantee loans of PIA had been made to the lenders from July 2018 to November 2022.

In last year's budget, the Ministry of Finance allocated Rs15bn for the fiscal year 2022-23 against the demand of Rs31.5bn, of which Rs14.69bn was utilised up to November 2022.

The markup from December to June amounting to Rs23.26bn was sought from the Ministry of Finance with the request to disburse additional funds of Rs22.9bn but in vain, except the Rs4bn this week.

The PIA management claimed that the holding of additional markup payment support had exacerbated the already persistent cash flow problem.

Until now, PIA had been, with severe difficulty, making markup payments from its available operating cash flows. However, it had now reached a point where it was unable to make any further payment, it said.

According to PIA, diverting operational cash flows to markup payments has led to delays in payments due in relation to the airline's core operational obligations.

This includes payments in relation to various services without which flight operations are not possible, such as payments against the lease of aircraft and airport services. Of the PIA's fleet of 31 aircraft, 13 are on lease.

PIA has confirmed that AerCap, one of its lessors, impounded the B-777 aircraft on May 29 in Kuala Lumpur. It was later released under court order after making overdue payment and pledging PIA receipts through the clearing house of the International Air Transport Association.

Another lessor, Willis Lease Finance Corporation, filed a lawsuit for non-payment in a US court and PIA had to remove two A-320 aircraft engines and was forced to return to Willis to avoid any adverse court decision.

Thirdly, PIA reported that the insurance broker Allianz issued a termination notice, and without payment of over dues, insurance cover would not be available, resulting in the suspension of PIA operations in entirety.

Saudi Arabia's aviation regulator, the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA), has also issued a notice for payment of the full outstanding amount of \$48 million to avoid suspension of operations, including Haj flights.

The pilgrims have already travelled to the kingdom and their repatriation operation would not begin until GACA payments are made, PIA said.

Moreover, recently IATA issued a final warning for payment of its outstanding dues of \$2.8m by June 21. Failing to comply within notice could have resulted in the suspension of PIA's IATA membership and, thus flight operations.

This payment was made on June 23, but the existing cash flow problem remained unresolved and could cause greater risk in the near future.

An official statement said the aviation minister briefed the prime minister about the proposed route map and reformative measures for the uplift of the national flag carrier.

The prime minister appreciated the efforts of the minister for the PIA's revival and believed the airline had the capacity to overcome the losses for which it should expand the fleet from 27 to 49 to avoid the crisis.

Mr Sharif said PIA had lost the Europe and US routes owing to irresponsible statements by the previous government, inflicting the loss of billions of rupees and recalled that the incompetent ministers of the previous government had victimised international investors, Chinese firms and Turkish businesspeople.

Calling the reformation process inevitable, the prime minister told the meeting that the PIA could only progress if run by professional and administrative experts purely on a profit-and-loss basis.

He said the government was heading towards a mechanism in which its role would be confined to making policies and facilitating investors, businesses and companies.

PIA post-Haj operations



Religious Affairs Minister Talha Mehmood gives a gift to a passenger at Islamabad airport on Sunday 2 July.

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) commenced post-Haj operations, with four flights from Saudi Arabia reaching Pakistan on Sunday 2 July evening while three more were expected to arrive in the early morning.

The first flight carrying 394 pilgrims touched down at the Islamabad International Airport at 3pm. Religious affairs minister Senator Talha Mehmood, who arrived on the same plane, welcomed the passengers at the airport and also distributed gifts among them. The airport management along with the PIA, Federal Investigation Agency, and Customs had made "special arrangements to welcome the pilgrims".

During the month-long operation, at least 82,000 pilgrims are expected to come back from Saudi Arabia after performing Haj. They will be brought back by the national flag carrier as well as Airblue, Serene Air, and Saudi Airlines.

A PIA spokesman said that the national airline operated four flights on Sunday 2 July from Saudi Arabia to Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar.

At least 82,000 pilgrims to return A PIA flight, PK832, carrying 432 pilgrims landed at the Karachi airport. PK760 carrying 323 passengers arrived at the Lahore airport whereas PK740 carrying 276 passengers arrived at the Peshawar airport on Sunday 2 July.

Similarly, PK732 was likely land to at the Karachi airport at 4am, PK746 at the Lahore airport at 6am, and PK742 at the

Karachi airport at 7:45am. The spokesman said the PIA's on-time departure ratio of the pre-Haj flights stood at 94 per cent.

He said that the PIA management was making all efforts to ensure that the ratio of on-time departure remained above 90 per cent and added that special arrangements at the Jeddah Haj terminal had been made for the return of pilgrims. He further said that special teams of the PIA were present at Jeddah and Madina airports to guide pilgrims. More than 1.8 million people took part in the first unrestricted Haj since Covid-19 struck in 2020. About 2.5m, the most on record, joined the pilgrimage in pre-pandemic 2019.



Govt looking to outsource Islamabad airport only

The government on Monday decided to restrict the outsourcing of airports only to Islamabad International Airport (IIA) for the time being and continued to extend about Rs21.4 billion worth of 14 supplementary grants even a day after the passage of the federal budget.

A steering committee meeting on outsourcing of airport operations, presided over by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, appeared to be as confused as the transaction adviser — International Finance Corporation of the World Bank — was unclear if the outsourcing was planned for all the three major airports — Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi.

The participants were also uncertain about the financial matters pertaining to the IFC's advisory services.

Informed sources told Dawn that it was finally concluded that outsourcing of airport operations to a foreign entity should be restricted to IIA in the first go to be followed with others in due course with subsequent approval process.

IFC “gave a presentation to the committee which took decisions as to the future roadmap for moving forward for outsourcing of the first airport in order to improve service delivery and match best international practices,” said an ambiguous brief public statement after the meeting.

Strangely though, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) had decided on March 31 to kick off a 25-year outsourcing of operations and land assets at three major airports, to be run through a public-private partnership, to generate foreign exchange reserves, according to a then finance ministry's statement.

14 supplementary grants totalling Rs21.4bn approved

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

The IFC and Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) had subsequently signed transaction service agreement in the second week of April followed by visits of the technical teams of adviser to

the three airports.

The single bidder — IFC — was also given a step-wise payment structure besides a \$4 million success fee on completion of outsourcing at the rate of \$1.5m for each airport.

Passenger strips naked on Lufthansa flight, bites police crew, and delays flight



Passengers on a Lufthansa flight from Munich International Airport (MUC) to Sofia International Airport (SOF) were treated to an unwanted spectacle when a naked passenger delayed the flight by three hours.

Flight LH 1704 was due to depart MUC airport at 16:00 local time on June 23, 2023.

The Airbus A320 aircraft had not even taken off when a passenger, a 27-year old woman, reportedly started stripping off her clothes.

The aircraft then returned to the gate and a number of police officers were called inside the cabin to help restrain the passenger who had also been screaming.

German media outlet NTV reported that despite the officers' intervention, the woman would not calm down or cover up. One of the police officers then tried to wrap a blanket around the woman.

The woman then bit the officer on the left forearm. At that point, officers had to use “immediate coercion” and the passenger was forcibly removed from the aircraft. She was then taken to a local hospital by state police.

Virgin Atlantic ends Pakistan operations



Virgin Atlantic has ended its operations in Pakistan with the last flight carrier taking off from Islamabad to London's Heathrow Airport on Sunday, July 9, 2023. Virgin Atlantic began its operations at Islamabad airport in December 2020 with seven weekly flights. The airline initially operated four flights to Manchester and three to Heathrow Airport. Later the airline reduced its services to only three weekly flights to Heathrow Airport “As we continue to ramp up our flying programme in 2023, we've taken the opportunity to review our entire network and decided to make a few changes,” a Virgin Atlantic spokesperson said.





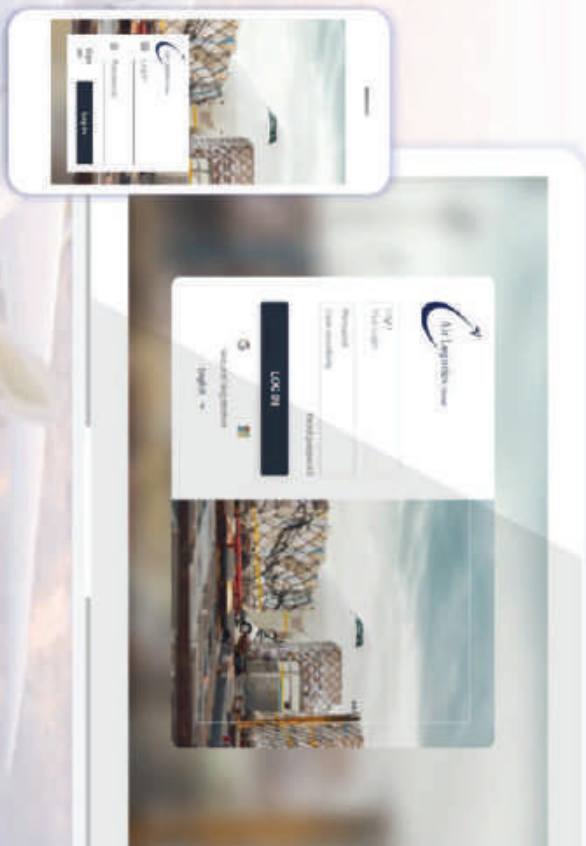
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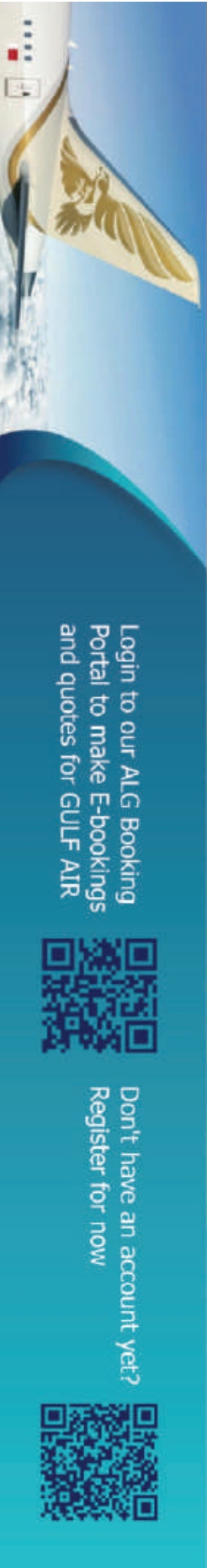
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Reimagining airports

AIRPORTS across the world have transformed themselves. No longer are they mere hubs for air travel; they now offer facilities where passengers can avail a plethora of amenities and activities as they wait to board their flights. But in Pakistan, we have yet to master the basics of passenger-centric airport management. This was the crux of the briefing the Civil Aviation Administration's managing director gave the Senate's Standing Committee on Aviation on Monday 5 June.

According to the CAA head, representatives of various agencies deputed at airports, particularly Customs, the Airport Security Force and Anti-Narcotics Force, were involved in harassing, threatening and shaking down passengers.

He said such an "aggressive atmosphere" made it feel "as if we live in a cantonment". While people's personal accounts about the unprofessional activities of officials posted at airports abound, the state needs to take notice when the head of the aviation regulator brings up these issues in a Senate briefing. Some senators shared their own experiences of run-ins with unfriendly airport officials.

Indeed, grim-faced immigration officers, Customs officials looking to make an extra buck under the table, and unfriendly security staffers do not exactly present a welcoming picture to travellers local and foreign. Moreover, the multiple layers of security and often harsh questions from airport officials give the feel of a police state, where passengers, incoming or outgoing, have to 'prove' their innocence before these unwelcoming state representatives. Whether it is local travellers, expats returning to visit family, or the foreign tourist brave enough to make the trip to Pakistan, all travellers need to be provided a welcoming and professional atmosphere at our aviation hubs. While the transport of illegal and dangerous items cannot be allowed, and officials should keep an eye out for those travelling on fake documents, these cannot be excuses for treating ordinary travellers as suspects, or worse, extorting money from nervous ones.

A greeting accompanied by a smile can go a long way in projecting a 'soft' national image, as opposed to the scowling, probing faces that currently meet passengers. Moreover, the CAA must also work on revamping

infrastructure at Pakistan's airports to improve the passenger experience. Perhaps privatisation of airport facilities can help bring positive changes in

management, while those running aviation-related security agencies need to inculcate a culture of respect for the passenger within their personnel.

CAA chief slams airport security agencies for 'harassing passengers'

Khaqan Murtaza, the director general of Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA), on Monday 5 June criticised Customs, Airport Security Force (ASF) and Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) and accused them of harassing passengers at airports.

The DG CAA said this while addressing the Senate Standing Committee's meeting on Aviation held at Parliament House, Islamabad. The DG CAA alleged that they continue to collect money by harassing passengers at Customs, ASF and ANF, taking passengers to the side, sending them to jail and threatening to miss flights.

Senator Hidayatullah, chaired the meeting, which was attended by Senator Saleem Mandviwalla, Senator Syed Muhammad Sabir Shah, Senator Umer Farooq, Senator Faisal Saleem Rahman, senior officers of the Ministry of Aviation, including DG CAA and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). The meeting exposed the lack of coordination among agencies at airports and pointed out impolite attitudes with passengers, some participants had experienced.

"You will not find any uniformed armed personnel at any airport in the world," the DG CAA said, adding, "It looks like an aggressive atmosphere that is unheard of elsewhere. It feels as if we live in a cantonment."

Committee Chairman Hidayatullah also raised concerns about the 'attitude' of the ANF at the airport. He asked how an expatriate will feel when he lands and finds four personnel standing in different uniforms in front of him.

"It is not sensible to harass a passenger coming from abroad," he said.

Senator Syed Muhammad Sabir Shah also shared his own experience with ANF officials at IIAP, saying that once he was going abroad when one of the ANF officials shouted at him, asking, "Who are you?"

The DG CAA mentioned that a team of 25 officials from the UK's Department for Transport recently visited Pakistan and expressed satisfaction with the security checks. "With the installation of 39

scanning machines, we will meet international standards."

Matters taken up by the committee included bidding process of the Allama Iqbal International Airport, remittances due to ticket sales not being allowed to remit foreign exchange, action against those appointed in PIA on fake degrees, setting up security agencies counters in one place at different airports and distance of the Islamabad Airport building from the parking lot.

During the deliberation on the bidding process of the Allama Iqbal International Airport, the committee was informed that the lowest bidder, M/s Sinohydro, was selected after a rigorous bidding process based on the lowest bid. However, the bidder is now attempting to withdraw from the contract.

Regarding the issue of remittances from ticket sales not being allowed to remit foreign exchange, the committee was informed that foreign airlines are not obligated to share their financial statements with the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority, including outstanding remittances. The committee directed the PCAA to provide any details regarding payments/remittances available to them.



US bound Passenger's bag lost in Doha returned to her representative at Islamabad Airport.

Fifth Freedom Flights: What purpose do they serve for Airlines?

Flying between two countries on a completely foreign airline - how is this possible? We examine a South American case study involving Emirates.

The idea of being able to fly between Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, on a Middle Eastern carrier would seem rather strange. But on Emirates, this is entirely possible.

While such a flight seems strange from both the perspective of the airline and the two South American nations, these fifth-freedom flights (so named for the fifth-freedom of aviation outlined in the ICAO Treaty) still exist today.

But what purpose does such a flight play for Emirates from a business perspective? Surely Emirates cannot compete effectively against other carriers on one of South America's busiest routes?

A brief overview

In the past, aircraft had a significantly more limited range than they do today, requiring more technical stops for refueling. Thus, the fifth freedom permits airlines to pick up new, paying passengers between two foreign destinations.

It would be very possible for airlines to be granted the right to stop for refueling but not to transport revenue passengers between just the two foreign destinations. However, in today's modern world of alliances, diplomacy, and corporate partnerships, more and more airlines are granted the right to operate fifth freedom flights. Furthermore, these routes bring more passengers to foreign airports, improving revenue and benefiting the destinations despite the carrier not hailing from the nation.

The case of EK247/8

Emirates Flights 247 and 248 are great examples of modern fifth freedom flights. The airline's service, which is operated by a Boeing 777-200LR, departs Buenos Aires's Ministro Pistarini International Airport (EZE) at 10:20 PM and arrives at Rio de Janeiro's Antonio Carlos Jobim International Airport (GIG) at 1:01 AM. A little later in the night, the flight departs at 2:55 AM for Dubai International Airport (DXB) to arrive the following morning at 11:55 AM.

In the other direction, EK247 departs from Dubai at 8:05 AM and lands in Rio de Janeiro at 3:25 PM. After a 5:10 PM departure, the flight touches down in Buenos Aires at 8:35 PM.

Notably, this is a direct flight (albeit not a nonstop flight) as the service retains the same flight number throughout both

legs, and passengers are not required to change aircraft on the journey between Buenos Aires and Dubai. But why does Emirates fly passengers between Buenos Aires and Rio? The carrier's aircraft certainly has the range to provide nonstop service to the Argentine capital.

Partially, the story of this flight has to do with capacity. Emirates has noticed that there is not enough demand solely to Buenos Aires or Rio de Janeiro to completely fill their 777-200LR, which, despite its size, is actually the smallest jet in the airline's fleet.

Want answers to more key questions in aviation? Check out the rest of our guides here.

However, combined demand from both destinations will enable the carrier to provide a profitable service to the two cities. Thus, those passengers flying only between Rio and Dubai will leave empty seats for the second leg between GIG and EZE.

Therefore, the airline sells tickets (often at a hefty discount due to the inconvenient timing of the flight) between the two destinations in order to help fill more seats on this leg of the EZE-GIG-DXB journey.

Ultimately, fifth freedom flights rarely serve a business purpose for airlines. Emirates, however, due to their fleet consisting of only 777 and A380

aircraft, often finds use from such direct but stopping flights. However, with the carrier ordering smaller aircraft like the Boeing 787, these routes could soon become a relic of the past.

Jazeera Airways first flight arrives in Islamabad

Jazeera Airways' first flight arrived at Islamabad International Airport from Kuwait on Wednesday 12 July, commencing a new chapter in the airline's operations.

A spokesman for the Civil Aviation Authority said the Kuwaiti airline's flight J9-511 had 163 passengers onboard when it landed at IIAP around 4.30am.

Jazeera Airways will operate two weekly flights one on Wednesday and the other on Saturday.

The arrival of Jazeera Airways flight in Pakistan is expected to enhance travel options for passengers seeking affordable and efficient air travel between the two nations.

Jazeera Airways is a Kuwaiti low-cost airline with its head office on the grounds of Kuwait International Airport in Al Farwaniyah governorate. It operates scheduled services in the Middle East, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Europe. Its main base is Kuwait International.



Cake cutting ceremony held to celebrate first flight of Jazeera Airways.

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Iraq to reportedly acquire Pakistani JF-17 Thunder fighters



P.V.R.M / Shutterstock.com

An agreement between Pakistan and Iraq for the sale of 12 JF-17C Thunder Block III fighter jets, along with spare parts and ammunition, has reportedly been reached.

The agreement is said to have been reached during the recent visit of Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, the head of Pakistani diplomacy, to Baghdad.

Valued at a minimum of \$1.1 billion, this deal is poised to become the largest arms sale in the history of Pakistan, as highlighted by Pakistan Republic.

Such an agreement, however, would need approval from the Iraqi Parliament.

The JF-17 Thunder is a Pakistani-Chinese co-production, with 42% of parts reportedly being manufactured in China, and 58% of manufacturing performed in Pakistan. It is marketed as a cost-effective option for countries seeking to bolster their air defense capabilities. Powered by the Klimov RD-33 engine of Russian design, the aircraft can achieve a maximum speed of Mach 1.6 at an altitude of 17,000 meters.

The Block III variant of the JF-17 Thunder is expected to be equipped with advanced features, including an AESA radar (active electronically scanned array), improved avionics, anIRST (Infra-red search and track) system, and an in-flight refueling boom.

Iraqi authorities were also considering the French-made Dassault Rafale fighter. On May 23, 2023, Major General Rasool, the country's Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, hinted that France is one of the countries from which Iraq is considering purchasing "modern military equipment." It is unclear at this point whether a Rafale order is still being considered.

Etihad Cargo expands European road feeder services



Representatives from Etihad Cargo and Wallenborn Transports © Etihad Cargo

Etihad Cargo, the cargo and logistics arm of Etihad Airways, has appointed Wallenborn Transports as its road feeder service (RFS) partner for Europe to expand its scheduled and specialised services across 27 countries, facilitating the transportation of cargo between Etihad Cargo's main European gateways, including Amsterdam, Paris and Frankfurt and offline stations. Etihad Cargo's customers will benefit from the complete transparency provided by integrated telematics technology.

"Providing seamless connectivity between Etihad Cargo's European main freighter gateways and offline destinations is essential to meeting the carrier's delivery promises," said Etihad Cargo's Head of Cargo Operations and Delivery, Thomas Schürmann. "Strategic partnerships with leading RFS providers such as Wallenborn strengthen Etihad Cargo's value proposition and will enable the carrier to further expand operations in Europe, which is a key territory for the airline. Etihad Cargo remains committed to being the air cargo partner of choice and is achieving this through the provision of fast, efficient and reliable transportation of cargo from its arrival in-country to its final destination."

Frantz Wallenborn, Wallenborn Group President & CEO, commented: "We're proud to be selected as a strategic partner and look forward to enhancing Etihad Cargo's capabilities in Europe and introducing its premium products to new markets. Our values are closely aligned, and we both aspire to make air logistics smarter and more sustainable. This partnership will give Etihad Cargo's customers access to a comprehensive network connecting over 90 airports and a range of specialised logistics solutions, such as GDP-validated transport for temperature-sensitive healthcare products. Highlights of our partnership include dedicated capacity, 24/7 customer

support and handling services in 27 countries."

Etihad Cargo has entered into strategic partnerships with RFS providers around the world to bolster its operational footprint and ensure the efficient end-to-end journey of cargo. The new partnership with Wallenborn will enhance the carrier's capabilities in Europe and will enable Etihad Cargo's customers to benefit from specialised logistics solutions.

Wagner forces shoot down Russian aircraft: a summary



Vectorkel/Shutterstock.com

The brief insurrection of the Wagner mercenaries on June 24, 2023, and the ensuing stand-off with Russian regular forces sent to block their advance to Moscow, had also an aerial dimension.

In fact, it appears that, while Wagner forces met very little resistance on the ground as they advanced towards Moscow from the southern city of Rostov-on-Don, they were engaged by several aircraft of the Russian armed forces, mostly rotary-wing.

Telegram channels said to be closely affiliated with the Russian military claimed that at least 7 aircraft had been downed during these actions, with over a dozen Russian airmen losing their lives.

At least one Ka-52 attack helicopter (registration RF-13418) has been visually confirmed to have been downed, most likely by surface to air missiles.

The deadliest incident seems to have been the downing of an Ilyushin Il-22VZPU airborne command aircraft with the loss of its crew of eight. Video footage showed the aircraft spinning to the ground out of control after being hit by air defenses during the early stage of the insurrection.

Other aircraft said, according to Telegram channels said to be closely affiliated with the Russian military, to have been downed include 3 Mi-8MTPRs (the electronic warfare version of this ubiquitous helicopter model), a regular Mi-8 and a Mi-35M.

Wagner forces are reportedly equipped with several air defense systems, including Pantsir-S1 and Strela S-10 in addition to Iгла MANPADS.

These have been employed against Russian air assets deployed against the advancing Wagner column, as shown in videos circulating on social media, which show a Ka-52 attack helicopter narrowly evading a Strela S-10 ground to air missile, with the help of countermeasures.

Wagner forces started to withdraw back to their bases in the evening of June 24, 2023, after the group's chief, Evgeniy Prigozhin announced it had struck a deal with the Kremlin through the mediation of Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko.

In the morning of June 25, 2023, however, new reports emerged on social media channels, that Wagner forces were still in control of air bases in Rostov and Millerovo, near the Ukrainian border.

Airbus unveils new A320-family final assembly line



Official inauguration of Airbus' new A320-family FAL in Toulouse ©Airbus

Airbus has officially inaugurated its state-of-the-art A320-family final assembly line (FAL) in Toulouse.

The newly opened A321-capable final assembly line in Toulouse marks a significant milestone in the ongoing modernisation of Airbus' global industrial system. This FAL will contribute to the production rate ramp-up to 75 A320-family aircraft per month by 2026, while catering to the increased demand for A321s, which currently represent around 60% of the total A320-family backlog. Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury expressed his satisfaction with the new facility, which joins the company's worldwide network of final assembly sites, including four FALs in Hamburg, Germany; two in Toulouse, France; two in Mobile, United States and two in Tianjin, China, all

capable of assembling the A321.

The latest A320-family final assembly line incorporates various innovative features aimed at optimising product quality, efficiency and setting new standards for health, safety, and sustainability. Notable innovations include digital production control utilising tablets and smartphones to reduce paper consumption, automated logistics for efficient parts distribution and the use of lightweight robots for

assembly.

Located in the former A380 "Jean-Luc Lagardère" assembly building, the new FAL commenced initial operations at the end of 2022 with the delivery of the first fuselage sections. The rollout of the first fully assembled aircraft in this facility, an A321, is expected to occur by the end of this year. Over the next few years, the industrial site will progressively increase its operations, directly employing approximately 700 workers by 2025.

Hitit to drive data sharing between Cargo IQ members



Air cargo quality standards organization Cargo iQ has welcomed airline and travel IT solutions provider Hitit as a Strategic Associate member to help drive forward the organization's goal to enhance global quality standards in the air cargo industry through digitalization.

As a Strategic Associate, Hitit's combined team of tech experts and airline industry veterans will lend its sector insight and expertise in digital data management to Cargo iQ member discussions and projects.

In time, Hitit will help to drive data sharing between members by contributing to the development of the Cargo iQ Data Management Platform (CDMP).

"With Hitit planning to develop the CDMP functionalities in the short term, they will be best positioned to serve their airline partners by providing planning and measuring functionalities as per Cargo iQ specifications," said Lothar Moehle, Executive Director, Cargo iQ.

"We feel very positive about this new addition to our membership as it will enable more industry stakeholders to improve process quality for their operations."

Cargo iQ members use the CDMP to create shipment route maps and monitor shipment movement and status updates from airport to airport.

CDMP data reports are then analyzed and this information is used to drive

quality improvements by all members.

"For the past four years, Hitit has been committed to driving technological advancements within the air cargo industry, so it is of utmost importance for us to be actively engaged in an influential interest group like Cargo iQ, supporting the establishment and implementation of high-quality standards for air cargo," said Atilla Lise, Chief Transportation Solutions Officer, Hitit.

"As a new Strategic Associate Member, we want to continue to contribute to the digitalization of the industry."

Hitit was founded in 1994 by two female executives with previous experience working for Turkish Airlines.

It has grown over the past 29 years to become the third largest passenger system provider worldwide as of 2019, serving more than 60 airlines across six continents with business-critical software solutions, hosting infrastructure, and support services.

In 2018, Hitit added modular and scalable air cargo solutions to its portfolio to bring its partners a single point of integrated service and drive digital transformation in airfreight.

It is with this goal in mind that the company now joins as a member of Cargo iQ.

"Even very large companies in the sector continue to do business with old technologies and this habit of doing business spanning decades, coupled with the problem of transferring data that has reached very large dimensions, has turned digitalization into a much desired but somewhat delayed reality," said Lise.

"As part of Cargo iQ, we are eager to maintain our momentum in driving industry-wide digitization.

"Our focus remains on actively collaborating with industry stakeholders, as we strive to usher in a new era and build upon the success of our uninterrupted four-year air cargo initiatives."

First commercial flight since 2016 takes off from Sanaa for S. Arabia

The first commercial flight from Yemen's rebel-held capital to Saudi Arabia since 2016 took off carrying Haj pilgrims on Saturday 17 June, in the latest sign of easing tensions after years of war.

A Yemenia Airways plane carrying 277 travellers departed just after sunset, seven years after Sanaa's international airport was blockaded by the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

"Hopefully, the blockade will end and the airport will remain open. We are very happy and relieved, and I cannot describe the feeling," said Mohammad Askar, one of the travellers.

The flight is the first since Sanaa's airport was closed by the coalition blockade in August 2016, more than a year into the Saudi-led military campaign to dislodge the Houthis.

Air traffic was largely halted by the blockade, but there have been exemptions for aid flights that are a lifeline for the population.

Hundreds of thousands of people have died in the fighting in Yemen or from indirect causes such as lack of food or water, in what the United Nations calls one of the world's biggest humanitarian crises.

But despite coalition bombing raids and ground clashes, the Houthis, who seized control of Sanaa in 2014, ousting the internationally recognised government, rule over large swathes of the country.

Two more flights will depart on Monday and Tuesday, officials said. The Houthis' Works Minister Ghaleb Mutlaq said about 200 flights would be needed to accommodate the 24,000 people that he said wanted to travel.

"We consider what is happening today as a good gesture, so that airports, especially Sanaa airport, will be opened to Yemeni travellers," Najeeb Al Aji, the Houthis' minister of guidance, told journalists.

'Uptick in rhetoric'

Fighting in Yemen sharply declined after a UN-brokered truce came into effect in April last year, and full-scale hostilities did not resume even when the ceasefire lapsed in October.

Among the terms of the truce was a resumption in international flights from Sanaa. The first commercial flight in six years took off for Jordan's capital Amman in May last year.

Peace efforts have accelerated since March when Saudi Arabia, seeking to

calm the region as it tries to revamp its oil-reliant economy and attract investment, announced a surprise rapprochement with its powerful rival Iran, seven years after they broke off ties.

After Iran reopened its embassy in Riyadh earlier this month, on Saturday 17 June Saudi Arabia's foreign minister visited Tehran, where he held talks with his opposite number.

A Saudi delegation flew to Sanaa in April, the same week as a major prisoner swap that freed nearly 900 detainees in a confidence-building measure.

However, the Saudi and Houthi negotiators failed to agree on a new truce and later Saudi ambassador Mohammed Al Jaber, while stressing both sides were "serious" about the process, said the next steps were unclear.

"We are all aware that the road to peace is going to be long and difficult," UN special envoy Hans Grundberg said at a forum in The Hague this week, noting "an uptick in public rhetoric threatening large-scale escalation".

First Boeing 777X for Emirates



Emirates was supposed to take delivery of its first 777X as early as December 2019. Now, Boeing expects the first delivery of the aircraft in 2025. However, Emirates' Sir Tim Clark is concerned that the delivery will slip to 2026.

As the 777X program has been delayed several times, and Emirates has been vocal about its concerns about the program, the proving runs are a significant step forward for the 777X program. The proving runs will help to address these concerns and ensure that the 777X is nearing completion for commercial service.

Boeing hopes that the proving runs will help to demonstrate that the aircraft is meeting expectations, and it will help to build confidence among potential customers.

Skytrax World's best airlines award winners announced



Singapore Airlines has been voted the World's Best Airline at the 2023 World Airline Awards. This is the fifth time that the airline has scooped the Airline of the Year title in the 23-year history of the awards. Qatar Airways ranked 2nd and ANA All Nippon Airways in 3rd place, out of more than 325 airlines included in the survey results.

Best Airline: Singapore Airlines
 Best First Class: Singapore Airlines
 Best Business Class: Qatar Airways
 Best Premium Economy Class: EVA Air
 Best Economy Class: Japan Airlines
 Best Low-Cost Airline: AirAsia
 Most Improved Airline: Kuwait Airways
Cleanest Airline: ANA All Nippon Airways
 Best Cabin Crew: Garuda Indonesia
 Best Inflight Entertainment: Cathay Pacific
 Best Airline in North America: Delta Air Lines
 Best Airline in Europe: Turkish Airlines
 Best Airline in Africa: Ethiopian Airlines

Boeing to Send a 777X to Emirates for route proving runs in 2024

Boeing and General Electric have agreed to send a test 777-9 to Emirates for about two months of route-proving runs next year, as confirmed by Leeham News and Analysis (LNA) on the sidelines of a Boeing event in conjunction with the Paris Air Show.

The proving runs are a critical part of the aircraft certification process, and they will allow the Dubai-based carrier to evaluate the performance of the aircraft on its own routes. The aircraft will be flown on a variety of routes, including long-haul flights from Dubai to Los Angeles, New York, and Sydney. The proving runs will allow Emirates to assess the aircraft's performance in terms of fuel efficiency, range, and passenger comfort.



Shaheen Airport Service (SAPS) providing Ground Handling to a new Airline from Almaty, Kazakhstan to Lahore

SAPS A LARGEST AND REFINED GROUND HANDLING SERVICES IN THE AVIATION INDUSTRY SINCE 1982



SAPS welcomes Scat Airlines inaugural flight to Alama Iqbal International Airport, Lahore. Boeing 737 of Scat Airlines was given warm welcome and cake cutting ceremony along with refreshments held at the arrival lounge. Scat Airlines has started twice a week flight between Lahore and Almaty and will increase its frequency very soon.



Ethiopian to Enhance Passenger Experience with High-Speed Inflight Broadband Service

Revealed at Aircraft Interiors Expo (AIX) in Hamburg, Ethiopian Airlines, the fastest growing airline brand will offer advanced, high-speed inflight broadband to passengers onboard its upcoming Airbus A350-1000 aircraft, with GX Aviation provided by Inmarsat, recently acquired by Viasat, and selected through the Airbus Airspace Link HBCplus programme.

As one of the launching airlines for inflight connectivity (IFC) through Airbus' HBCplus programme, Ethiopian Airlines will benefit from a more streamlined, efficient order process that will ensure its latest aircraft meet the rapidly growing passenger demand to stay connected while flying. Inmarsat's latest Passenger Experience Survey found out that 97% of respondents use their personal devices on flights for entertainment, such as streaming movies and TV shows, keeping up with work, and to stay in touch with family and friends.

In addition, 82% of passengers are more likely to rebook with an airline that offers quality inflight WiFi. The first of Ethiopian Airlines' Airbus A350-1000 aircraft is set to be delivered in the Third Quarter (Q3) of 2024, with passengers able to benefit from GX Aviation's world-class connectivity technology. This supports the airline's Vision 2035 Strategy which focuses on expanding its fleets, enhancing its passenger experience and maintaining its leading position in the airline industry.

Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO Mr. Mesfin Tasew said, "As we endeavour to maintain our position as Africa's number one and among the leading airlines globally, we know one of the key success factors is giving our passengers the best possible onboard experience. Connectivity is a crucial part of our services and products; and bringing Inmarsat's best-in-class GX Aviation service to our passengers, as part of Airbus' HBCplus programme, is a major step forward. We want to give our passengers the possibility to stream, surf, and chat from thousands of feet in the air, no matter where their route or destination is. Inmarsat's seamless, truly global inflight connectivity will be vital to

deliver this. We look forward to a very successful partnership with Inmarsat and Airbus, now and in the years to come."

President, Inmarsat Aviation, Niels Steenstrup, said: "We were selected as the first managed services provider (MSP) for the Airbus HBCplus programme last year, with a scope that includes connectivity, digital portal services and ISP capability. The fact that we have already been selected by two leading airlines is a great achievement and we are excited about delivering our award winning GX Aviation inflight broadband to Ethiopian Airlines' passengers starting from next year. This will enable them to stream videos, browse the internet, shop online, enjoy social media and more, all from the comfort of their seats and using their personal devices."

Andre Schneider, Airbus VP Cabin and Cargo Programme said: "We are delighted that Ethiopian Airlines has selected our agnostic and flexible high-bandwidth connectivity solution – HBCplus. This is further endorsement from our valued airline customers of the confidence they place in Airbus to devise and integrate enhanced inflight capabilities for their passengers to experience. Airspace Link HBCplus provides satcom based off-board connectivity for the Airspace Link open ecosystem, available both in linefit and retrofit. Initially encompassing Ka-band services, it will enable the airline to connect to a choice of Managed Service Providers (MSPs), in this case with Inmarsat – via a new certified terminal and antenna built as part of the aircraft."

Powered by Inmarsat's Global Xpress satellite network, GX Aviation delivers world-class connectivity on every aircraft, on any route, and for every passenger. Airline customers will also benefit from seven more Inmarsat

satellite payloads entering service by 2025, increasing its Ka-band network fleet to 12. This includes two Inmarsat-6s, both of which have already launched, followed by two payloads in highly elliptical orbit, enabling the world's only commercial mobile broadband service for flights in higher latitudes and across the Arctic. This delivers uninterrupted connectivity on high-elevation routes. Three additional satellites will then launch in geostationary orbit, adding further speed, capacity, and resilience.

Ethiopian Airlines to recover \$100 million trapped in Nigeria via blocked funds swap deal

The Ethiopian and Nigerian central banks have agreed to swap funds trapped in their respective states, which will see Ethiopian Airlines (ET) recover up to \$100 million trapped in Nigeria, as per The Reporter. Both countries have blocked a significant amount of airline funds, with a low allocation of dollar to their aviation industries due to severe foreign currency shortages. The agreement between the central banks involves exchanging Ethiopian Airlines' funds in Nigeria for Dangote Cement's funds trapped in Ethiopia. Nigerian banks hold about \$180 million of Ethiopian's revenue. Ethiopia can access blocked funds in Nigeria through the swap agreement, including money.



Scat Airlines starts flight operations from Almaty, Kazakhstan to Lahore

SCAT Airlines has started its flight operations from Almaty, Kazakhstan, to Lahore, Pakistan, starting from July 8, 2023. The announcement was made by the embassy of Kazakhstan in Pakistan, revealing that the new direct flights will operate twice a week on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Passengers will travel aboard a Boeing 737 aircraft. The inaugural flight was welcomed at Alama Iqbal International Airport Lahore by the officials of Kazakhstan embassy Islamabad, SAPS, the management of GSA for the airlines in Pakistan.

Scat Airlines has appointed M/S Nexus Global Enterprises as its GSA in Pakistan. The airlines initially has started to operate two flights a week, it has plan to increase frequency for Lahore and also to operate flights to Karachi very soon. This was told by Mr. Rizwan Qaiser CEO, GSA of the airlines in Pakistan. The airlines has awarded Ground Handling contract to Shaheen Airport services (SAPS).

Excitement surrounds the launch of this new route, as it opens up opportunities for enhanced connectivity between Almaty and Lahore. Scat Airlines connecting both countries as well as major cities of Europe, Central Asia, Russia and China.

The embassy of Kazakhstan highlighted the cultural significance of Lahore, emphasizing its architectural marvels such as the Lahore Fort, known for its impressive palace complexes and beautiful gardens. Other notable attractions mentioned include the Badshahi Mosque, Chauburji Gardens, and the renowned Aitchison College. Tourists are encouraged to explore these remarkable landmarks and immerse themselves in the city's rich heritage.



The inaugural flight of Scat Airlines landed at Lahore Airport on July 8, 2023.

The new flight route is expected to facilitate greater tourism and strengthen the bonds between Almaty and Lahore, fostering closer connections between the

people of Kazakhstan and Pakistan. Kazakhstan has a business potential as well as other many attractions for Pakistani people.



Group Photo taken on the occasion shows (L-R) Air Commodore Gohar Majeed (Retd) GM, SAPS, Lahore, Air Commodore Wasim A Khan (Retd) Executive Director SAPS, Mr. Allauddin Shaikh operations Manager, Mr. Rizwan Qaiser, CEO GSA of the airlines for Pakistan, Mr. Manzoor-ul Haq former chairman FPCCI, Mr. Vikeor Koroekov Director Revenue and Rates, Scat Airlines and other guests.



Photo taken on the occasion of the cake cutting ceremony at inaugural flight.



Air Com. Gohar Majeed (Retd) GM SAPS Lahore and Air Com. Wasim Khan (Retd) ED. SAPS with the crew of Scat Airlines.



The crew of Scat Airlines being welcomed at Alama Iqbal International Airport Lahore.



Mr. Rizwan Qaiser (2nd L) Photographed with Mr. Alouddin Sheikh, Mr. Manzoorul Haq and Mr. Vikeor Koroekov of Scat Airlines.



Mr. Rizwan Qaiser welcomes the passengers.





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Turkish Airlines named 'Most Sustainable Flag Carrier Airline' in World Finance Awards



The climate crisis presents great challenges for the aviation industry, and as the global face of Türkiye, Turkish Airlines continues to take great steps in combating climate change.

Turkish Airlines, which was crowned as the 'Most Sustainable Flag Carrier Airline' in World Finance's Sustainability Awards 2023, won the same award last year as well.

In the magazine's summer issue, the company outlined the sustainable travel experience it offers, including voluntary carbon offset platform CO2mission, usage of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), in-flight sustainable products and waste management along with digitalisation projects.

Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board and Executive Committee Prof. Dr. Ahmet Bolat said within the exclusive World Finance article, "Turkish Airlines has set a goal to be one of the top three airlines in the world in terms of digitisation within three years as part of its strategic plan. Our company, in line with our commitment to be a 'Carbon Neutral Airline in 2050,' have expanded the use of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), which we started to use as of 2022, by adding additional lines in 2023 as part of our plans to combat climate change."

Since 2008, the company has taken on more than 100 operational optimisation projects to reduce its carbon footprint. In 2022 alone, Turkish Airlines saved 57,581 tonnes of fuel, equivalent to

a reduction of 181,379 tonnes of greenhouse gases.

The flag carrier airline has announced its goal of becoming carbon-neutral airline by 2050. To find out more about Turkish Airlines' sustainable operations, pick up the Summer 2023 edition of World Finance magazine, available in print, on tablet and online.

Airport worker dies after plane engine 'ingests'

US regulators said on Sunday 25 June they are investigating an incident in which a Texas airport worker was killed after being sucked into a passenger plane engine.

A Delta flight had arrived in San Antonio, Texas from Los Angeles on Friday 23 July night and was taxiing to the gate with one engine on 'when a worker was ingested into that engine,' the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said in a statement.

'The NT SB is continuing to gather information about the event,' it said. The worker was employed by Unifi Aviation, a company the airline giant contracts with for ground crew operations, according to local media.

Delta told San Antonio broadcaster KENS 5 that the company was 'deeply saddened' by Friday night's events and that it is 'cooperating with authorities as they begin their investigation.' Unifi Aviation told the broadcaster the incident was 'a tragic accident.'

From our initial investigation, this incident was unrelated to Unifi's operational processes, safety procedures and policies,' the company said.

Regional carrier Piedmont Airlines was fined \$15,625 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), another regulatory body, for the death of a ground crew worker last year in a similar incident. 'Proper training and enforcement of safety procedures could have prevented this tragedy, an OSHA official said. Piedmont is a subsidiary of carrier American Airlines.

IATA revises Hong Kong Aviation recovery to year end 2024



The International Air Transport Association (IATA) welcomed the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government's efforts to ease the city's labor crunch in the aviation sector. This comes as IATA upgraded passenger traffic projections for Hong Kong that now see a recovery to pre-crisis levels by the end of 2024. This revision brings Hong Kong's recovery in line with expectations for a faster recovery in the Asia-Pacific region.

"The situation is looking bright for Hong Kong. China's earlier than expected reopening is providing a much-needed boost to the passenger recovery. By the end of 2024, we expect to see Hong Kong's traffic return to pre-crisis levels. And it is encouraging to see the Hong Kong government preparing for this with measures to ensure that the workers needed to support the recovery are available," said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director General.

The Hong Kong government introduced a labor importation scheme to ramp-up the airport workforce by 6,300 workers from the Mainland of China. While demand for air travel has been strong, airlines in Hong Kong have been struggling with supply chain issues and a labor shortage.

"The last three years have been devastating for the aviation sector. As we look ahead to the recovery and prepare for future growth, it is important that the entire Hong Kong aviation community, including airlines, airport, regulator, and government, work together to address the challenges and are well prepared to tap on future opportunities. I look forward to being in Hong Kong in August to meet with various partners and engage in fruitful discussions," said Walsh.

IATA and the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) are partnering to organize the Hong Kong Aviation Day from 2-3 August 2023.

Emirates celebrates World Chocolate Day



Celebrating World Chocolate Day on 7 July, Emirates is sharing that more than 40 million pieces of gourmet chocolate are served onboard each year, to passengers in all classes. Sweetening the travel experience with the world's most beloved confectionery, Emirates selects and serves a delectable selection of artisan chocolate as part of the signature meal service in all classes, to 140 destinations around the world. Throughout the last 12 months, 35 million chocolate treats have been served in Economy Class, more than 160,000 chocolates in Premium Economy Class since its launch in June 2022, with an additional 4 million chocolate pairs offered in Business and First Class. Emirates also introduced large gourmet chocolate boxes to First Class in December 2022, offering premium passengers the chance to indulge in a sample onboard and even takeaway some of their favourite flavours, with chocolate fans relishing more than 36,000 boxes in the last 6 months.

Emirates collaborates closely with connoisseur chocolatiers from around the globe, including Bateel, Coco Jalila and Forrey & Galland from the UAE, Godiva and Neuhaus from Belgium, Valrhona from France, Butlers from Ireland, Canonica from Switzerland, Pacari from Ecuador and Hotel Chocolat from the UK. The chocolate brands are selected for a multitude of reasons including content – for example dark, milk or white chocolate, bonbons, pralines or truffles, with fillings of creamy ganache or tangy fruit, the all-important taste and texture component, alongside brand recognition, current trends, its 'instagrammability' and whether its sustainably sourced. Each handpicked chocolate brand is on board for a minimum of 3 months before a new selection is introduced to delight frequent flyers.

Across all classes, customers craving a chocolate fix can enjoy chocolate desserts and hot chocolate from the menu. The most popular chocolate desserts onboard Emirates historically are the decadent Molten Chocolate Cake in First Class and the silky-smooth Milk Chocolate Mousse for children. On longer routes, chocolate candy bars are served in a snack tray and chocolate lollipops are

offered to children during festive celebrations. At Emirates' A380 Onboard lounge, customers can also help themselves to vegan and non-vegan sweet treats of M&Ms, chocolate cake and chocolate mini treats.

In Emirates Lounges, chocolate is a staple feature, with customers enjoying homemade Emirates chocolate ice-cream from the old-fashioned ice cream cart, signature creamy hot chocolate from Costa Coffee, and a myriad of creative chocolate desserts from Emirates Master Chefs including white chocolate raspberry delight with white chocolate mousse and

luscious raspberry jelly, decadent chocolate truffles, a fruity white chocolate passionfruit cheesecake and indulgent dark chocolate salted caramel tarts amongst many others.

A special chocolate-focused dessert is a new feature in Emirates First Class Lounges in Dubai, using Valrhona Grand Cru Blends from around the globe to make exquisite desserts like chocolate and pecan gateaux, 85% Abinao chocolate creux, pecan praline, Sacher sponge and spiced milk ice cream, as well as Dulcey Chocolate – a blond and biscuity flavoured chocolate. In July, the special First-Class lounge dessert will be a rich chocolate extravaganza of 64% Manjari dark chocolate entremets, cocoa crumble, dark chocolate sponge, vanilla ice cream.

Hong Kong airport celebrates 25th anniversary giving away 80,000

It is 25 years since Hong Kong's International Airport moved out of town and there were plenty of celebrations to mark the occasion.

It is now twenty-five years since Hong Kong International Airport moved home from downtown Kai Tak to its current location in Chek Lap Lok island. This momentous slice of history was never going to pass unnoticed, and Thursday, July 6th, was marked with a series of celebrations, starting in the arrivals hall of Terminal 1.

Surprised passengers would have enjoyed performances by a drum group, a jazz band, and dance performances by airport staff from home-based airlines, airport companies and businesses, and the airport authority. The festivities also included another airport cake-cutting ceremony.

There are 80,000 tickets up for grabs

While that all looks like a lot of fun, perhaps more exciting to the public was that 80,000 free air tickets will be given away to Hong Kong residents. That was announced last night by Jack So, Chairman of the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK), at a reception to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the move to the new site.

To support the airline industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, AAHK purchased 500,000 tickets from home-based airlines in 2020. In March this year, the authority launched the "World of Winners" campaign, giving some of those tickets away to travelers in major global markets to boost the recovery of Hong Kong's airline industry.

Now that goodwill is spreading to local residents as, starting from 6th July, the AAHK will be giving away 80,000 tickets through a variety of channels from

the home-based airlines. The round-trip air tickets will be for travel from Hong Kong to multiple destinations in Asia.

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A big change from 1998

No doubt much will be written about the development of the new airport and the behind the scenes political machinations at a time when the United Kingdom was negotiating the handover of Hong Kong to China. For anyone interested in that topic, a good place to start is the book written by the Governor of Hong Kong between 1992 and 1997, Sir Chris Patten, entitled *East and West: the Last Governor of Hong Kong*.

What's not in dispute is the wisdom of the move, which has seen Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) grow from 28 million passengers in 1998 to 75 million before the pandemic grounded global aviation. So said that while the last three years have been difficult for the airport, it has persisted in developing for the future growth of Hong Kong.

"We persisted in building the three-runway system for future expansion [and] the new runway has been operational since November last year. Looking to the future, when all the ancillary facilities are fully open, the capacity of HKIA will be increased by 50% to cater for 120 million passengers and 10 million tonnes of cargo, sufficient to meet the demand for the next 30 years."

As part of the overall development of HKIA, the SKYCITY mega project is underway, which is the airport's vision to build an airport city serving the local region. SKYCITY will comprise aviation, tourism, trade, retail, and entertainment and is designed to be a landmark for the Greater Bay Area surrounding Hong Kong.

Hotel meal vouchers now available in the united app if things go wrong with your flight



United Airlines is giving travelers more self-service options than ever if something with their travel goes awry. By further streamlining its mobile application, the airline is providing customers a feature to view and claim vouchers for things like hotels, meals and rideshares when applicable.

“What we’ve learned through all the different things we’ve done in the app is there’s a huge amount of our customers that actually prefer to do things self-service,” Linda Jojo, United’s chief customer officer told USA TODAY. “This is an ability to give that option to the customers who want it.”

The app updates have been in testing for a few months and are expected to be rolled out more widely with the airline’s announcement recently.

“We love using technology to create a better experience,” Jojo said. “It’s really to help get through the day of travel from the time you check in to the time you pick up your bags at baggage claim.”

In addition to the new ability to view vouchers, Jojo said the update will consolidate a lot of the self-service features to make the app easier to navigate.

According to United, the updates and things that are being moved include:

Seeing and receiving hotel, meal and rideshare vouchers during eligible delays and cancellations.

Notifications about flight delays.

Rebooking options for eligible flights.

Bag tracking.

Connecting with a virtual customer service agent.

Although about half of United customers now use self-service options when disruptions occur, Jojo said in-person service will remain available for those who prefer to speak to a customer service agent.

“There’s a perception that airlines don’t care about customers when things go wrong, and that’s the opposite of what’s the case,” Jojo said. “We want to get our customers the best way to get on to their original destination the smoothest way possible despite all of those other things we can’t control.”

Cruising Altitude: Airlines make bank from bag fees even if you hate them. What you’re owed if your flight is delayed or canceled

If your flight is canceled and you choose not to travel on alternate flights you’re offered, you’re entitled to a full cash refund even if you purchased nonrefundable tickets. Policies around delays are more complicated and are essentially at the discretion of each carrier, but the Department of Transportation has a dashboard that outlines individual airlines’ promises in the event of a significant holdup.

Aeroflot resumes direct Moscow-Cuba flights, bypassing restricted airspace



Aeroflot has resumed direct flights between Moscow and Cuba. The inaugural flight departed from Sheremetyevo Airport (SVO) in Moscow, Russia, on July 1, 2023, and arrived in the popular Cuban tourist destination of Varadero (VRA) thirteen hours later.

To bypass the airspace of Western countries that had imposed restrictions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine in

February 2022, the flight followed an alternative path.

Operated by Rossiya Airlines, the flight utilized a wide-body Boeing 777-300 ER aircraft registered as RA-73277. This specific aircraft, which is 16 years old and was previously leased from AerCap, underwent re-registration in April 2022.

Cuba holds strategic importance as a key partner for Russia in the Central American region. It is also an affordable and visa-free vacation destination for Russian citizens, according to the airline.

The renewed flight schedule will consist of two weekly operations, with flights departing on Thursdays and Saturdays.

It is worth noting that Aeroflot’s first regular flight to Havana dates back to 1962, utilizing the Tu-114 aircraft.

On February 28, 2022, Russian airlines suspended flights to Cuba, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, four days after the commencement of the invasion of Ukraine.

Aviation insurance quarterly update



Gallagher, the UK insurance broker, has provided an update on the aviation insurance market in its latest Plane Talking newsletter. Some key themes from the team on the market conditions include foremost that core pricing is stable “surprisingly” says Gallagher given the ongoing challenges and outstanding claims mainly due to excess market capacity keeping all risks insurance rates stable and most airlines are generally experiencing improved results. However, hull, war and liability war markets continue to harden. In the absence of any new developments or major losses, Gallagher expects that in the short-term these market trends.

Transport Logistic Southeast Asia to bring the global industry together

Messe München is set to host the first multimodal logistics trade fair in Singapore, the transport logistic and air cargo Southeast Asia.

Running from 1st-3rd November 2023, the event will be an influential meeting place for logistics, mobility, IT, and supply chain management in Southeast Asia.

Singapore, which took the top spot among the 179 countries in the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (LPI), is leading the way, but the ASEAN countries as a whole are also gaining importance as strategic logistics hubs both now and in the future. This places transport logistic in a hotspot of the industry.

The LPI ranking gave Singapore the best scores in the quality of logistics services, competence and infrastructure categories.

With its favorable geographical and geopolitical location on the Strait of Malacca, the city-state is home to one of the world's most important transshipment hubs with its port.

Handling a good 37 million TEU, Shanghai was the only port that was more successful last year. The Tuas Port, which was opened last year, is currently creating 65 million TEU of additional capacity.

The Asia-Pacific region is one of the most important markets for air freight, as well. Overall, ASEAN countries are catching up with China, the largest consumer market and production location. These countries are also considered reliable partners from a strategic geopolitical perspective.

"Singapore has become an important asset in Messe München's strategic positioning, which for us extends far beyond Southeast Asia," Messe München's co-CEOs Stefan Rummel and Dr. Reinhard Pfeiffer explained at a press event prior to transport logistic and air cargo Europe in Munich.

"The fact is: Germany still belongs to the world's top group in logistics. This is precisely why the world's leading logistics trade fair, transport logistic, is



held here in Munich for many years – with multiple spin-offs in China, Turkey, South Africa and now Southeast Asia, for example. Singapore is the logistics world champion. Where else, if not here, should the latest addition to the transport logistic cluster be launched?"

Jost Lammers CEO of Munich Airport: "I congratulate Messe München on its decision to establish an offshoot of the transport logistic trade fair in Singapore. Against the background of the agreement on the liberalization of traffic rights between the EU and the ASEAN countries in 2022, the launch comes at exactly the right time and will further boost relations between the two strong economic regions. The Munich Premium Hub is already well connected to Southeast Asia with two daily flights to Singapore and Bangkok, and we are optimistic that more destinations are to come." Lammers also emphasizes, "One-third of all German airfreight volume to and from Southeast Asia is generated in the 'powerhouse of southern Germany' – this offers further growth potential for the Munich hub."

Asok Kumar, EVP Global Air Freight at DB Schenker, also sees enormous potential: "Southeast Asia is a playing field for new business opportunities in logistics. We are confident that both export growth and consumer demand will bounce back there, also because of the overall upturn of the intra-Asia consumer market. As a logistics player with presence in all Southeast Asian countries, we are prepared to support our customers' needs for end-to-end supply chain solutions in these complex yet promising markets."

Peter Dressler, Vice President Logistics, Infineon Technologies AG, confirms the great importance of

Southeast Asia for Infineon: "We have sites in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. Many production partners are in the Southeast Asian region. Singapore is an important hub for us in logistics, not only because of its location, but also because the focus there is on highly automated and digitized logistics processes. This fits in with our own business as a semiconductor manufacturer, but above all it enables the speed and reliability that our customers and we need."

Ms Jaisey Yip, Vice President Cargo Business Division, Changi Airport Group, adds: "Despite economic headwinds, Southeast Asia's air trades with the rest of the world continued to expand over the past four years. Given the expectation of strong long-term progress with urbanisation and industrialisation, Southeast Asia is primed for growth in manufacturing, trades and logistics. The Changi air cargo hub, being in the heart of Southeast Asia, will have a critical role to play in global supply chains, facilitating the flow of international goods with its well-developed connectivity, cargo infrastructure and capabilities."

Prof. Dr. Christopher Stoller, President of the aircargo club deutschland, who moderated the discussion, also sees positives in the further strengthening of Singapore: "We see Singapore as another important link in the international supply chains that serve Germany as a business location."

"Singapore is the gateway to the greater Southeast Asia region and the most dynamic and exciting hotspot for transport and logistics right now. Many global companies are already active here, and many more want to come to reap the rewards of the attractive conditions. By offering transport logistic and air cargo Southeast Asia, we are creating a platform for shippers and transport and logistics service providers to develop and expand their business in the region. We are experiencing great interest in our new trade fair across all modes of transport," remarks Michael Wilton, Managing Director of MMI Asia, Messe München's regional subsidiary.



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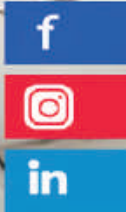


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Importance of Travelling (Part -2)

Varying approaches of man in history

Professor Safdar Sandal

“Nothing great is created suddenly, any more than a bunch of grapes or a fig. If you tell me that you desire a fig, I answer you that there must be time. Let it first blossom, then bear fruit, then ripen”. – Epictetus

Two Botanists and an archeologist found remains of figs in a prehistoric village near Jericho, presently in Palestine-West Bank) and their claim to be the earliest cultivated fruit crop by man. This served as the first piece of evidence of domestic production of food and the human interest in agriculture. Those very figs were dated back to 11,400 years ago. They described the discovery and stated that the fig trees were cultivated 10,000 years before other staples like wheat, barley and chick peas. They symbolize the first step towards systematic agriculture.

Prehistoric remains of figs found



from a village near Jericho. Jericho = (Hill of Sultan), located in the modern-day West Bank.

The village does not exist since long ago. Known as the “oldest city in the world”.

A myth goes that some plants and the full moon charm each other. In the photo taken by me from my lawn of the full moon, shows that both of them, the plants

and the moon seem, about to caress each other and it happened on the day Monday when I took this photo, quite unmindfully. It is also said that a full moon that falls on Monday is extra lucky, as it is the “moon day”. So keep a lookout for that in future. The two closest planets, the earth and the moon, share and cooperate with each other on many other counts, good for the beauty of life on earth. Scientifically speaking the moon has a proven effect on plants, as has been known since ancient times. During full moon period, for example, sap flows more strongly and slows down as the moon wanes.

In today's world the said specie of fig is re-grown by the scribe in his house situated in Sialkot-Cantt; the pictures of the fig trees, the yield and the moon, as shown above are due to the activity and zeal are only a part of my fondness and



Prehistoric remains of figs found from a village near Jericho. (The village does not exist since long ago).



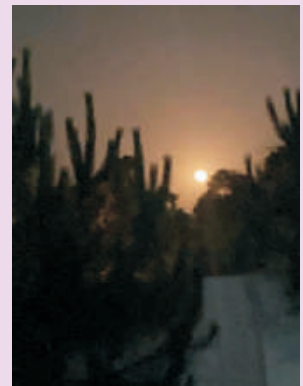
Jericho (Hill of Sultan), located in the modern-day Palestine, (Known as the oldest city in the world).



Fig trees planted & grown in my house



Fresh yield of figs



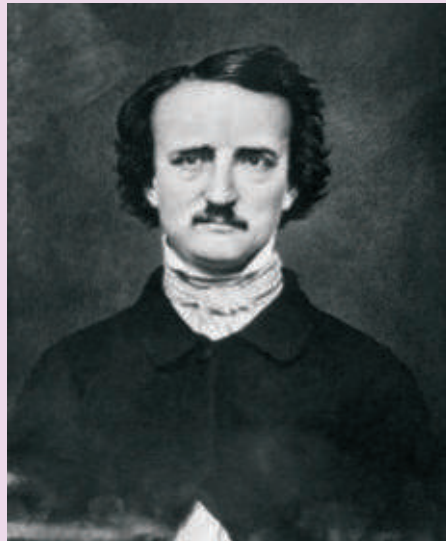
Full moon on a Monday night

love for nature. Interesting point is that I had brought two saplings from Beirut - Lebanon, some years ago (and I regularly do so when my travelling schedule offers me an opportunity); the area of origin of my broughtup sapling's was or is, convincingly belonging to the same geographical belt as 'Jericho' climatically. The effort on my part has just been a hobby, added with my love of the universe. Otherwise, I am neither a Botanist, Agriculturalist nor a commercial dealer, but simply a manufacturer and exporter of footballs and other Sports Goods for which my city Sialkot is known the world over, and I feel proud about it. My visits abroad have only been for selling my products (definitely not importing figs, grapes, olives, avocados, mandarins or pomegranates, trees of which I have grown in my house over the years; saplings of which I usually bring with me from Mediterranean countries, because they have a compromising soil and a congenial climate like my own beloved homeland. I do this, at the close of my business trips, when my sample-bags are emptied due to nearing the close of my journey. These are unpredictable moments and benefits of my journeys which I enjoy only inside me.

"We loved with a love that was more than love"—(Edgar Allan Poe)

Many things are un-common and melancholy which happen together in this world.

Edgar Allan Poe; a prominent name in English poetry, was born in 1809 in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. By the age of three only, both of his parents died and he was left under the care of his Godfather, John Allan who was a wealthy tobacco merchant. John Allan was kind to send Edgar to school in England from where he was forced to leave due to excessive gambling, leading him to serve in the army for over two years. There was another falling out that led him to be dismissed from service and by that in time, he had already published three works of poetry, although neither got any attention. It was only years later in 1844 when his poem 'The Raven' saw spectacular success in New York City, after which he became one of the world's



most renowned poets.

Edgar was naturally an American writer, poet and a literary critic, who is best known for his poetry and short stories particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre. He is widely regarded as a central figure of Romanticism. A hopeless alcoholic, Poe died at age of 40, drunk in a gutter in Baltimore, a victim of his debauched lifestyle and complications of extreme alcoholism.

"It is better to open and see than to wait and see"—(Sidney Cuthbert Wallace)

The practice of surgery did not begin until the time 1800s and even then, the rate

of infection was high and the outcomes were generally poor. Early techniques were considered to be barbaric, since they were still in the early stages of development. For instance, I saw in a Hollywood film depicting old times, that when so called doctors wanted to make a man unconscious for any surgery; they would hit him hard by a wooden hammer on his upside-neck and the patient would become unconscious for the balance required treatment. It seems a joke now. But it happened. It was particularly excruciating for the patients who may expire during this treatment. Naturally, it was before anesthesia was not invented and practiced until the late 1800s.

Back in 6500 BCE, skulls were found in France that showed the first traces of a rudimentary procedure called 'trepanation' which involved drilling a hole into the skull. By 1550 BCE ancient Egyptian medical treatise were created which included information on how to surgically treat crocodile bites and burns. 600 BCE saw the rise of Sushruta, considered to be the founding father of surgery. In 950, Abulcasis, an Arab physician, rose to fame for being one of the most learned surgeons, there ever was.

"Man is essentially ignorant, and becomes learned through acquiring knowledge"—(Ibn-e- Khaldun)



Invention of surgery: "It is better to open and see than to wait and see". Sidney Cuthbert Wallace

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Planned Iran-Saudi naval alliance to include Pakistan, India

Iran's navy commander said his country and Saudi Arabia, as well as three other Gulf states, plan to form a naval alliance that will also include India and Pakistan, Iranian media reported on Saturday 3 June.

"The countries of the region have realised that only cooperation with each other brings security to the area," Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani was quoted as saying.

He did not elaborate on the shape of the alliance that he said would be formed soon.

Iran has recently been trying to mend its strained ties with several Gulf Arab states. In March, Saudi Arabia and Iran ended seven years of hostility under a

China-mediated deal, stressing the need for regional stability and economic cooperation.

Rear Admiral Irani said the states that will take part in the alliance also include the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Qatar, Iraq, Pakistan, and India.

Saudi Arabia's rapprochement with Iran has frustrated Israel's efforts to isolate Iran diplomatically.

The UAE, which was the first Gulf Arab country to sign a normalisation agreement with Israel in 2020, resumed formal relations with Iran last year.

In comments at a televised show on Friday night, the Iranian Navy commander said nearly all littoral countries located in the northern areas of the Indian Ocean have come to the

conclusion that they need to work in collective cooperation to ensure security, Tasnim News reported.

Pointing to the formation of new regional and extra-regional coalitions, Rear Admiral Irani said the trilateral naval coalition of Iran, Russia and China, which holds annual exercises, is developing. The region will soon be free from any "illegitimate force" and the regional people will ensure security with their own soldiers, he stated.

He noted that while Iran and Oman have held several joint naval drills in the past, other countries are now eager for collective naval cooperation, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq, Pakistan and India. He confirmed that the UAE has withdrawn from a US-led naval coalition in the Persian Gulf, saying, "Today, the regional countries have realised that establishment of security in the region requires synergy and cooperation."

PM sees potential to increase food exports to Gulf states

Pakistan could attract an investment of \$40 billion to \$50bn in the years ahead and could grow its food exports to Gulf states within two years, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Monday 10 July.

Addressing a seminar on agriculture and food security, he termed agriculture the backbone of the country, saying that farmers worked hard to provide food to millions of people.

He said that the Green Pakistan Initiative would eventually bring a second agricultural revolution, creating four million jobs in the country.

"It is the demand of our national security that the country's food security and economic security should be strengthened," he said.

Premier concerned over adulterated drugs given to farmers, warns of strict action

He said the farmers had a right to avail incentives for the agriculture sector and it was the responsibility of the government to provide them all possible assistance for overall development and progress.

The prime minister said growth in the agriculture sector would bring Pakistan at a par with developed countries.

He said hard work was imperative to ensure the country's progress, adding that the Green Revolution in the 1960s was due to the introduction of new varieties of



Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi examine a tractor during their visit to various stalls at the inaugural ceremony of the Green Pakistan Initiative, on Monday 10 July.

seeds, the building of dams and canals, and modern agriculture practices.

He said farmers should get more profits than the cost of production of their crops, including wheat. The government did increase the support price of wheat which led to record production of the commodity, he added.

He was hopeful that due to the incentives given by the government, cotton production would also rise, adding that it was the responsibility of the government to provide standard seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides to farmers and equip them with the latest technology.

Mr Sharif appreciated the new agriculture initiative for giving real-time

information about any pest attacks.

He expressed concern over adulterated drugs given to farmers and warned of strict action against the culprits.

He lauded the vision of Army Chief Syed Asim Munir for development of the agriculture sector in the country.

"We have to implement the vision for agriculture through collaboration among federal and provincial governments, agriculture departments, and research institutes," he said.

He said the government was ready to fund agriculture research centres, adding that there had been no worthwhile work due to a culture of favouritism.

Mr Sharif said state-owned enterprises were losing Rs600bn annually. Pakistan imported palm oil worth \$4.5bn which was a burden on the economy, he noted.

There was a time when Pakistan was producing more cotton than its neighbouring country, but then it lost track and the production of staple crops declined, he said.

Pakistan could not afford more foreign loans, but was forced to save its economy from default by getting loans from friendly countries, he added.

The PM said Gulf countries were ready to invest in the agriculture sector and bring modern machinery to boost crop production in the country.

Pakistan needed political stability to attract investment as in an unstable environment, investors shied away, he added.

Pakistan misses mango export target



Mango hot water treatment plants have asked the government to relax the NOC 'condition' for making exports.

Amid a 20 per cent drop in production, mango exporters have said achieving the export target of 125,000 tonnes has become a distant possibility due to the poor strategy of the Department of Plant Protection (DPP).

All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) on Thursday 6 July said the DPP on June 12 issued a new SOP [standard operating procedure] requiring hot water treatment (HWT) of mangoes mandatory from the approved plants only.

“Due to this discriminatory policy and favouritism of the DPP, 90 per cent of the 35 plants have been shut down, resulting in a loss of \$44 million due to the closure of HWT plants which were not issued no-objection certificates (NOCs) by the DPP.

Around 2,500 labour (skilled and unskilled) employed in these plants have become jobless due to the closure of these plants while 6,000 labour working with growers have been badly affected as well.

The association has informed the Ministry of National Food Security about the discriminatory policy and favouritism of the DPP in which blue-eyed treatment plants are being allowed under the guise of new SOPs while modern HWT plants are facing shutdowns.

The DPP is refusing to issue NOC to the plants due to minor objections which have nothing to do with the basic functions of the plants, the association deplored, adding that the non-approved HWT plants have been processing mangoes for export to Europe, Iran, Australia, China, Kenya and Iraq for many years and have never received any complaints from their buyers.

As 90pc of the hot water treatment plants have been shut down, the existing plants are under pressure and they are treating mangoes beyond their capacity, raising fears that the treatment of

mangoes exported from Pakistan will be affected, the PFVA observed.

The association informed the ministry that certain elements were being benefited by non-approval of hot water treatment plants, which should be taken note of and action should be taken against the officials who are harming the national trade.

PFVA chairman Muhammad Shehzad Sheikh said exporters had confirmed orders of mangoes from various countries and due to the non-operational status of HWT plants by the DPP, India would take advantage of the situation and avail the confirmed orders and would capture these international markets for future as well.

Before the start of mango exports from the third week of May, PFVA Patron-in-Chief Waheed Ahmed had warned of a drop in production to 1.44m tonnes from 1.8m tonnes last year.

Punjab produces 70pc of mango while Sindh holds 29pc share and 1pc by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. About 50pc of mangoes are exported from Pakistan by sea, 35pc by land and 15pc by air.

Pakistan steps up efforts for renewal of GSP+ status



AN assessment report prepared by an EU monitoring team, which recently visited Pakistan, is expected to be made public this month or the next.

As the European Union's 10-year preferential trade arrangement approaches its expiration this year, Pakistan has intensified its efforts to enhance compliance with key international conventions that encompass a wide spectrum of human rights, labour standards, and environmental protections.

The EU monitoring team had already visited Pakistan and compiled the last assessment report on the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) for 2014-2023, which was expected to be made public in the current month or in July.

The report will elaborate on Pakistan's performance in terms of human rights, labour standards, press freedom and environmental protection, which are linked with the availing of GSP+

preferences. The report will also become a basis for the renewal of GSP+ status for Pakistan.

The current scheme, launched in 2014 for 13 countries including Pakistan, will expire in 2023. The EU Council and parliament will also finalise new GSP terms, which will spell out details for compliance and implementation.

For making Pakistan's case for the next GSP, the Parliamentarian's Commission for Human Rights (PCHR) and Justice Project Pakistan would hold a consultation session in Islamabad from June 5-8 to assess recent developments, highlight progress, and frame strategic recommendations for continued reform.

These high-level consultations will foster discussion on human rights priorities defined in the last GSP+ report while shedding light on problematic areas where concrete reform is needed.

Key stakeholders from the federal and provincial governments, parliamentarians, senior members of the judiciary, diplomatic missions, and prominent members of civil society will be part of the consultations. These discussions will be live-streamed for the European Parliament, representatives from the European Council of member states and the European Commission's GSP+ team in Brussels.

The GSP+ status allows Pakistan to export more than 78pc of its products to the EU, which is the second most important trading partner accounting for 14.3pc of the total exports in 2020 and 28pc in 2021.

Since acceding to the GSP+ scheme, the trade between the EU and Pakistan increased from €6.9 billion in 2013 to €12.2bn in 2021.

However, the recipient countries of the preferential scheme commit to three key measures: the ratification and implementation of 27 international conventions covering a broad range of human rights, labour standards and environmental protections, fulfilment of UN Treaty Body reporting obligations, and cooperation with the European Commission's monitoring framework.

The 2018-2019, GSP+ Assessment Report submitted to the European Parliament and Council notes Pakistan's commitment towards meeting its obligations but identifies certain challenges to the implementation of the UN Treaty Body Obligations such as devolved provincial powers, limited institutional coordination, lack of institutional capacity, scarce human and financial resources, and overriding security concerns.

Consequently, the report states that “Pakistan must demonstrate that it will concretely increase its efforts and take more proactive and sustained actions to implement legislation and to address problematic areas,” according to the assessment report.

Minister defends port deal with UAE firm

Maritime Affairs Minister Faisal Subzwari has rejected the baseless impression created by former PTI minister and analysts that the Karachi Port has been sold out to the UAE government for \$50 million.

Addressing a press conference at Karachi Port Trust (KPT) on Friday 23 June, the minister said the port had not been handed over or sold to any country. "This is totally wrong. We will not give the port to any country."

He said all the container terminals at twin ports have been constructed by the foreign companies. "Concession Agreements do not mean the transfer of property or selling off berths," he stressed.

Various foreign government departments and companies are taking a keen interest in investing in Karachi Port which would further raise more revenues through rising business.

Hammad Azhar of PTI had tweeted that Karachi Port, the most profitable entity, leased out for \$50m and profits would now be repatriated out of the country.

Muzzamil Aslam commented that handing over the port for \$50m does not make sense at all. The government can impose royalty by itself. There will be more profit outflows than this meagre \$50m.

Mr Sabzwari said Mr Hammad does not know that this is not the first time that a concession agreement has been signed.

He said the agreement between the Abu Dhabi Ports Group and KPT will generate about \$5-7 million in revenue for the KPT and pave the way for the fresh investment of around \$2bn in the maritime sector.

Mr Sabzwari was of the view that the presence of an international player suggests its confidence in Pakistan's economy and that the arrival of ADP would improve the financial health of KPT through revenue generation.

Exports to Middle East fall

Pakistan's exports to the Middle East dipped 12.28 per cent year-on-year to \$2.127 billion in the first 11 months of FY23, mainly driven by a substantial decline in exports to the United Arab Emirates.

The exports to Saudi Arabia increased while other countries of the region dipped, according to data compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan.

Nearly 62pc of total exports to the region go to the UAE market alone. However, it suffered a decline of 20.46pc to \$1.341bn in 11MFY23 from \$2.425bn over the corresponding months last year (FY22).

Out of seven UAE states, the bulk of export was destined for Dubai amounting to \$1.209bn during 11MFY23 against \$1.272bn in the corresponding months last year, showing a decline of 4.95pc.

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

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

Pakistan's second biggest market in the region in terms of value is Saudi Arabia. However, the exports jumped 21.41pc to \$457.113m in 11MFY23 from \$376.485m in the preceding fiscal year.

Exports to Saudi Arabia have stagnated at around \$500m in the last decade due to no expansion in market access as compared to the UAE.

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

Pakistan's exports to Qatar dipped 13.77pc to \$152.880m in 11MFY23 from \$177.296m during 11MFY22, which include rice, bovine carcasses, potatoes, onions, guavas, mangoes, etc. However, one of the most exported goods to Qatar during 11MFY23 remained footballs as Pakistan was the official football supplier to the FIFA World Cup 2022 held in November in Doha, Qatar.

Pakistan exports to Kuwait fell by 7.92pc to \$117.353m during the July-May FY23 from \$122.356m over the corresponding months of last year. Top exports to Kuwait include bovine

carcasses, seafood, tents, rice, etc. The top sectoral exports to Kuwait include meat and edible meat offal, followed by other made-up textiles. And Pakistan exports to Bahrain dipped 6.06pc to \$59.275m in 11MFY23 against \$63.103m over the corresponding year.

EU considers extending Pakistan's GSP+ status

The European Commission has proposed extending Pakistan's GSP+ status — which is set to expire at the end of this year — for another four years as a contingency measure.

The EU has decided to introduce fresh legislation to continue the scheme for another 10 years, but there seems to be a deadlock between the EU Council, which wants to link the GSP+ scheme with migration, and the EU Parliament, which is not ready to do so.

"The EU Parliament strongly believes that trade shouldn't be linked with the migration issue," MEP Heidi Hautala said during an interaction with visiting Pakistani journalists.

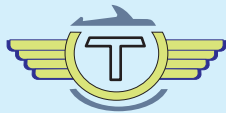
As a temporary measure, it has been proposed that the current scheme should be extended for four years. The proposal will now be put to vote in the EU Parliament. According to a European official, the scheme will definitely be extended, but its time period will be decided by the legislature.

However, one EU official said that over the next decade, the GSP+ scheme would be very stringent and some countries may not even qualify for it, under the new legislation. It was repeatedly mentioned that conditions will be the same for all those countries trying to avail the GSP+ status and there will be no 'pick and choose'.

Under the new regime, countries will have to submit a plan of action to implement over 30 conventions to qualify and remain eligible for duty-free access of goods to EU markets.

In a statement, EU Ambassador to Pakistan Dr Riina Kionka said they were keeping a close eye on Pakistan. A European official also commented that upcoming conditions may prove challenging for Pakistan.

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Banks asked to arrange dollars for opening LCs

Banks have been asked to allow about 25 per cent higher imports but they will have to arrange dollars before opening letters of credit (Lcs), sources in the banking industry told media on Thursday 6 July.

A shift has taken place regarding the arrangement of dollars. Bankers said they have been asked by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to arrange dollars before opening LCs which will limit imports due to the non-availability of dollars.

Earlier, importers were given the responsibility to arrange dollars for opening LCs to import raw materials which relatively eased the situation for industries but at the same time, it strengthened the black marketing of dollars.

Importers started purchasing greenbacks at higher prices, up to Rs20-25 per dollar, from the grey market which widened the rate gap between the interbank and open markets resultantly remittances started declining while export proceeds were sold in the grey market or were held back for higher rates.

Despite a 31pc decline year-on-year, the imports totalled \$55.29 billion with a trade deficit of \$27.55bn in FY23.

Sources in the financial sector said that banks would be unable to improve their dollar reserves which means the imports would remain restricted. The central bank's reserves may improve once the IMF board approves the \$3bn Stand-By Arrangement mid of this month.

The banking sources said the SBP has relaxed import restrictions by abolishing criteria for essential and nonessential imports. It will help particularly the industries that largely depend on imported

raw materials like the pharmaceutical industry.

SBP reserves rise The foreign exchange reserves of the SBP rose in the week ending on June 30. In the preceding week, its reserves recorded an increase of half a billion dollars.

During the week ended on June 30, the SBP reserves increased by \$393m to \$4.462bn mainly due to receipt of official GoP inflows, announced the central bank.

The total liquid foreign reserves held by the country stood at \$9.745bn including \$5.282bn of the commercial banks.

Meanwhile, the US dollar slightly depreciated by 37 paise against the rupee to close at Rs277.04 compared to Rs277.41 the previous day.

In the open market, the greenback lost Re1 to settle at Rs280.

Import curbs lifted despite low reserves

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Friday 23 June relaxed the import restrictions imposed in December last year despite dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

Earlier, the banks had been advised to prioritise certain types of imports under different categories in the wake of poor foreign exchange reserves and a large trade deficit.

However, the latest decision that opens options for imports on a large scale was also taken when the country is struggling to avoid a default-like situation.

"Given the representations received from various stakeholders, it has been decided to withdraw the above instructions (issued on Dec 27, 2022) with immediate effect," said the SBP circular.

A highly placed government official said the country is not in a position to allow imports of goods which already crossed \$49bn in 11MFY23. He believes that this decision was also taken under IMF's

pressure.

"The importers will continue to arrange dollars from the grey markets since the banks are out of foreign currencies," said a source not willing to be identified.

The previous circular advised the banks to prioritise imports related to essential sectors such as food (wheat, edible oil, etc), pharmaceutical, energy (oil, gas and coal), raw materials and spare parts, and agri inputs (seed, fertilisers and pesticides).

The priority list included the imports on a deferred payment basis, preferably from parents or sister concerns of the importers, beyond 365 days, from the shipment date.

Imports funded by foreign exchange available with the importers raised through equity or project loan or import loan from abroad, under the applicable Foreign Exchange Regulations, the list of priorities noted.

In the last, the import for export-oriented projects near completion was included in the list of priorities. Import of plant and machinery for the export-oriented projects near completion where at least 75 per cent of the project's plant and machinery has already been imported, included.

"The decision will ease the imports of required raw materials that will help the industry to improve its performance," said Amir Aziz, a manufacturer and exporter of textile finished products. Despite a long history the entire textile industry still depends on imported plants, parts and at least 35 per cent other imported constituents to make their products exportable.

Earlier, the central bank allowed importers to arrange dollars on their own as a result the cost of imports has gone higher due to buying costly dollars from the grey market but it helped many to continue their business.

After an inflow of \$300 million received as commercial loans, the SBP's total foreign exchange reserves stood at \$3.8bn not enough to cover three-week imports.

Haj 2023, a dream come true for millions of women



A WOMAN pilgrim prays in front of Mount Arafat during the climax of the Haj pilgrimage. According to Riyadh, the 1.8 million pilgrims who came for Haj this year also include over 875,000 women.

Haram?" the 40-year-old orphan from India, wondered. "Why do I have to pay the price for a decision that's not mine?" she asked, fighting back tears.

Then in the Haj 2020, during the height of the Covid pandemic, she made a fervent plea as the sight of an almost empty Kaaba pierced through her heart — "Oh Allah, call me once."

The prayer was answered.

In October 2022, she and countless other women were granted permission to travel for Haj and Umrah without male guardianship.

"It's not about money or status or anything else. Once Allah has decided to call you, He will make ways," Sakina told me during an Umrah earlier this year. She was finally in the holy city of Makkah, seeing the Kaaba with her own eyes. The dream had come true.

This year, thousands of women from across 160 countries participated in the Haj pilgrimage, the biggest since the start of the pandemic.

Vast crowds of robed worshippers hurled pebbles to stone the devil as the biggest Haj pilgrimage since the start of the pandemic draws to a close in intense Saudi Arabian heat.

More than 1.8 million people — including over 875,000 women, or 47pc of the total — are taking part in the first unrestricted Haj since Covid, before which about 2.5 million joined the pilgrimage in 2019.

In the 2020 Haj, which came after the pandemic struck, only 1,000 Saudis performed the annual Islamic ritual. The figure rose to 60,000 Saudi pilgrims in 2021, and then to around 900,000 — including some 780,000 foreigners — in 2022.

The Saudi decision to remove the requirement for women to be accompanied by a male guardian heralds a historic shift. Countless Muslim women worldwide are fulfilling their spiritual yearning to visit the holy mosques of Masjid Al-Haram and Masjid Al-Nabawi, independently.

Among them was Hibu from Somalia, who never had the opportunity to perform Haj or Umrah due to the absence of a male guardian.

"I don't have a brother, nor have I got married. My father passed away long ago... but thanks to Allah that now I came here and saw His house," she told me during the Umrah in April.

"We are an all-women group. Most of us either didn't have a mehram or enough money that we could travel along with them. They then sent us for the pilgrimage," she said.

Fatima Bibi, from Lahore and in her 70s, also had a tale to share. The family's limited financial resources led her husband to make the difficult decision to send her alone for the Umrah.

"He (her husband) saved all his life for two things only, to do Umrah with me and gold earrings for me... Unfortunately, we couldn't make this wish [Umrah together] come true. But I am grateful to him that he finally forced me to come here and perform Umrah," she said. "We can do it together again someday if we stay alive."

Pakistan's Council of Islamic Ideology also endorsed this change, allowing women earlier this year to travel for Haj without a male guardian, acknowledging provisions for it in Maliki, Shafi'i and Jafria schools of thought.

The council's spokesperson noted that a woman who enjoyed the company of reliable women and did not feel insecure while travelling or during the pilgrimage could perform Haj without a mehram, provided her parents or husband allowed her to do so.

Just next door in India, more than 4,300 Indian women registered to perform Haj on their own. An all-women Air India flight took off from Kozhikode, a southern state of Kerala, to Saudi Arabia, carrying 145 pilgrims — the crew and the passengers, all women.

As Wednesday's 28 June sun sets and

the Haj 2023 draws to a close, it also signals a new dawn for Muslim women. Amid the echoing prayers and the hum of a million footsteps, one thing is clear: a new chapter has begun.

And it's a chapter written by the hands — and feet — of millions of Muslim women.

PAC seeks forensic audit of Haj expenses under

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on Monday 10 July recommended forensic audit of Haj expenses incurred under the government scheme during this year's Haj.

Presiding over a meeting of the committee, PAC Chairman Noor Alam Khan said that despite completion of Haj proceedings, several officials including the additional secretary to the ministry of religious affairs and interfaith harmony, Mr Atta-ur-Rehman, DG of Haj and other staff were still in Saudi Arabia and they had not returned to the country.

The committee discussed reports of problems faced by Pakistani Haj pilgrims this year.

It was noted that the matter had already been forwarded to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for probe into the complaints and suggest measures so that Haj pilgrims in future did not experience such problems.

Mr Khan directed the authorities concerned of the ministry of religious affairs and interfaith harmony to provide a detailed response as to why Pakistani pilgrims experienced problems during the Haj.

The religious affairs secretary said that the ministry was responsible for the needs of Haj pilgrims and other arrangements in Madina and Makkah, whereas most of the complaints had been received from places where arrangements had been made by the Saudi government.

The members of the committee demanded that overhead expenditures incurred by the ministry should be reduced to make Haj cheaper under the government scheme.



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Minister unveils secure, reliable passport system

Ullah on Saturday 10 June unveiled a robust and reliable passport system, complying with international standards.

Speaking at the launch of passport processing counters, inland online passport renewal facility and e-passport facility for residents of Islamabad, the minister said he said the step would significantly reduce the risks of passport fraud and identity theft, which would strengthen confidence in passport system.

He said digital transformation would not only save valuable time of the people, but it would also make the process of issuance of e-passport easy.

Director General Immigration and Passport Yawar Hussain and Nadra chairman Tariq Malik were also present on the occasion. He said efforts were being made to strengthen partnerships and cooperation with other countries to enhance facilitation, he added.

The interior minister highlighted the significance of this milestone in Pakistan's technological advancement and public service delivery. He said the initiative included the establishment of 30 passport processing counters at Nadra offices located in those areas where dedicated passport offices were unavailable, besides the online renewal of passports within the country and the launch of the e-passport facility in Islamabad.

Mr Sanaullah said the accomplishment was the result of a collaborative effort between the Nadra and DGI&P and commended Mr Hussain and Mr Malik as well as their dedicated teams for their hard work. The minister said the measures would not only enhance passport security but also provide convenience to citizens. "The e-passport facility incorporates state-of-the-art security features, such as biometric data and digital signatures, effectively reducing the risks of passport fraud and identity theft. This, in turn, will instill greater confidence in our passport system," he explained.

He announced that while the e-passport facility was previously available only for official and diplomatic passports, it would be extended to Islamabad residents and gradually to people across the country.

Monks, scholars come to Islamabad to attend Gandhara symposium



A monk from Vietnam looks at Buddhist relics displayed at the Islamabad Museum on Monday 10 July

Monks and scholars from various Buddhist majority countries have started arriving in the federal capital for the Gandhara symposium.

The three-day symposium is scheduled to start on Tuesday 11 July and will be participated by scholars, historians and senior monks from Nepal, Vietnam and other Buddhist countries.

Prof Dr Haridaya Ratna, former vice chancellor of Lumbini Buddhist University, Nepal, was overjoyed upon arriving in Islamabad to attend the symposium.

"The Mahayan Buddhism that we practice in Nepal came from Gandhara to our country and I am deeply touched to be here; this is a legacy and heritage that we share between Kathmandu and Pakistan," Dr Ratna said.

Like other guests he was welcomed by the minister for state and PM's Task Force on Gandhara Tourism Chairman Dr Ramesh Vankwani.

The scholar from Nepal said: "People went from Gandhara to Nepal via Tibet and now we pay homage to Taxila and other areas by visiting these places. This is the place from where the light of Buddhism spread all over the world."

Buddhist Monk from Malaysia Jue Chenk said Buddhists from all over the world should come to Pakistan.

"I feel very touched, I cannot explain it. I am impressed with the hospitality of Pakistanis; this is a beautiful country," monk Jue Chenk said.

He said this place had a history of more than 2,000 years, adding that, "Pakistan has a precious history".

Dr Vankwani highlighted that the rich history of Pakistan had to be presented to the world.

"The objective of the symposium was to raise global awareness about the historical and cultural significance of the Gandhara civilisation and Buddhist heritage in Pakistan," he said, adding that

Pakistan had successfully defeated the menace of terrorism and the country was safe for foreign travelers including those coming to the country for religious tourism.

Later a group of young artists working on Gandhara civilisation called on Dr Vankwani, at Sir Syed Memorial Museum.

Dr Vankwani said these artists were our assets and we must create opportunities for them to polish their talent and attract young generation to the field of visual art.

The PM Task Force chairman said works contributed by these budding and established artists would be displayed during the two-day Gandhara symposium.

"After this grand event, we will hold a national level Gandhara art competition to involve students and artists in the promotion of Gandhara tourism at home and abroad," Dr Vankwani said.

Chitral lift Shandur polo trophy with 7-5 win over Gilgit



Chitral lift Shandur polo trophy with 7-5 win over Gilgit. Players fight for the ball during the final match of Shandur Polo Festival in Upper Chitral on Sunday 9 July.

Two timely goals by promising young player Ilyas and a goal scored by star player Meraj guided Chitral to a comfortable 7-5 victory in the final of Shandur Polo Festival-2023 that concluded at the world's highest polo ground in Upper Chitral on Sunday 9 July.

Peshawar Corps Commander Lt Gen Hassan Azhar Hayat was the special guest

of the final match. Before the start of the matches, the teams of both Chitral and Gilgit were introduced to him. A large number of local and foreign tourists participated in the festival.

The closing ceremony included a tableau presented by school students while paragliders and paratroopers also displayed their skills.

The festival was jointly organised by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority, Pakistan Army and the district administration.

During the festival, local artists of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) performed at a musical concert on the previous day. Artistic works of talented people of Chitral and GB were also displayed at the event.

Stalls had also been set up for promoting the local culture. A large number of local and foreign tourists attended and enjoyed various events during the festival.

The final game started at high speed as players of both the teams tried hard to outclass each other in the first half amid cheering by a large number of spectators. In the first half, Chitral was leading 3-1 and went on to extend their advantage to 4-1 in the second half.

The players of Chitral including captain Israr Wali, Shahzad Ahmad, Amir Hama, Izhar Ali Khan Mohammad Ilyas, and Mirajuddin played well and did not give much time to the GB team to strike back.

However, the GB team made an impressive comeback with two quick goals to make the match interesting. The team came close to levelling the match on numerous occasions but Chitral players held their nerves to win the match 7-5.

The three-day Shandur Polo festival took place from July 7-9. Besides polo, the participants enjoyed traditional food and cultural dances besides rock climbing, trekking and paragliding.

Shandur polo ground is considered to be the highest in the world at 3,700 meters where the historic game has been played since 1930.

The polo ground is adjacent to Shandur Lake. The festival provides an amazing cultural experience to visitors in the Hindukush mountain range.

Later, the Shandur polo trophy 2023 was handed over to the winning team Captain amid celebrations by the players and their supporters. Chitral won the festival record 13th time continuously.

Indian wrestler accuses govt of silence over sexual harassment probe



Wrestler Vinesh Phogat weeps during an interview at her residence in Sonapat, Haryana

An Olympic wrestler on Saturday 10 June criticised the pace of a police inquiry into sexual harassment accusations against the chief of India's national wrestling body.

Vinesh Phogat, a two-time Olympian who has accused Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of sexually abusing her, said she has also been hurt by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence on the issue. Phogat is one of seven female athletes to have lodged a police case against Singh accusing him of sexually harassing them.

Singh, who is also a federal lawmaker from Modi's ruling party, has denied allegations of making sexual advances, groping and threatening female athletes if they refused to meet him alone.

"I have only felt a deep sense of humiliation since I mustered the courage to protest," Phogat said in her first interview since she and fellow wrestlers were forced out of a protest site by the police last month. Delhi Police have filed two cases against Singh, including one under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. Phogat, 28, who is the first Indian female wrestler to win both the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games gold, claims that during training camps and tournaments Singh would use "every possible way to single out young athletes and grope them repeatedly".

"It was the same disgusting pattern over and over again and I am among the victims," she said at her residence in northern Haryana state.

In her police complaint Phogat said she contemplated suicide after the "mental trauma" but felt reinvigorated after a 2021 meeting with Modi, who promised to look into the complaints by the female wrestlers.

Keenjhar Lake to have world-class tourist resort, says minister



Two government departments had also collected water samples for examination to check the reported contamination, but their results were pending.

Provincial government on Saturday 3 June decided to build a world-class tourist resort at Keenjhar Lake.

The decision to this effect was taken at a meeting of the steering committee on tourism chaired by Energy Minister Imtiaz Ahmed Shaikh.

Mr Shaikh said the provincial government intended to develop Keenjhar Lake as an attractive tourist site on the direction of Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah.

He said that a location suitable for the modern resort at Keenjhar Lake was being determined. "Establishment of the resort will open the doors of employment and business opportunities and this will become a source of foreign exchange for the country," he added.

The energy minister said local and foreign tourists would be provided with all modern facilities at the site.

He said that there were many sites of tourists' interest in the province and it was necessary to make modern facilities available there, too, so that not only local but also foreign tourists were attracted to them.

Mr Shaikh said that a spot for the resort would be determined very soon and got approved by the cabinet accordingly.

CM's Special Assistant Qasim Naveed Qamar, investment department secretary, irrigation secretary and director general of the public-private partnership unit of the finance department also attended the meeting.

PIA's Roosevelt Hotel leased out to NYC for three years against \$220m



PC gets go-ahead for Services Hotel, HBFC divestment

The Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP) on Monday 10 July allowed the Privatization Commission to proceed to complete privatisation of Services International Hotel and House Building Finance Corporation (HBFC).

A meeting of the CCoP, chaired by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, deferred a summary presented by the Privatisation Commission on the privatisation of PIA-owned Roosevelt Hotel in New York and asked the commission to submit an update on the status after consultation with the aviation ministry.

Aviation Minister Khwaja Saad Rafique had disclosed a few weeks ago that a contract has been signed with the New York city government to operate Roosevelt Hotel for three years. The agreement is expected to fetch \$220 million, he said.

As per a cabinet decision, the commission in consultation with the aviation ministry has developed terms of reference for a consortium to advise the government on the leasing of Roosevelt site for prospective mixed-use development through the best suited mode of privatisation.

The Privatization Commission submitted a summary regarding privatisation of Services International Hotel (SIH) and updated the CCoP on its privatisation process. The committee after detailed discussion allowed the Privatisation Commission to proceed towards successful conclusion of SIH transaction with completion of transfer process in the name of the purchaser.

The commission also presented a summary on privatisation of HBFC with one single (pre-qualified) bidder. After detailed deliberations, the CCoP decided to allow the Privatization Commission to proceed with single source/negotiated transaction for privatisation of HBFC with sole pre-qualified investor, namely Pakistan Mortgage Refinance Company Ltd (PMRCL).

The government has finally leased out its precious asset in the United States —Roosevelt Hotel, a property of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) — to the New York City Administration for a period of three years against USD 220m.

A contract has also been signed between the government and the NYC administration/government, according to Federal Minister for Railways and Aviation Khawaja Saad Rafique.

“After various exhaustive exercises, we finally succeeded in finding a way out to overcome the challenges to the country's most precious asset/heritage in New York (USA). So we have signed a contract with the NYC administration that will operate the hotel for a period of three years. Under this contract, we will receive US \$220m that will enable us to clear the hotel's various liabilities besides earning handsome revenue for our country's treasury,” the minister said while talking to journalists at a press conference here on Sunday 4 June.

“Since our property was already facing a threat of being landmarked, this contract has also saved it from such a big threat. Had the hotel fallen into the landmarks category, we would have been restricted to use it for the hotel purpose with the current 19-storey building alone that, after coming out of this danger, can now be used for a high-rise up to 40-storey with change of business,” he maintained.

Sharing further details of the contract, he said, the three-year term included a guaranteed-income for a period of one-and-a-half year. In the last few days, the possession of 600 of the total 1,025 rooms

had been handed over to the NYC government, he said and added that the possession of the remaining 425 rooms would also be handed over to the authorities in the NYC within the next 30 days. Under the contract, according to him, the room charges for the first year would be USD202, followed by USD205 in second year and USD210 in third year. Moreover, the hotel, which is about 100 years old, would be handed over to the government of Pakistan (PIA/Civil Aviation Authority) after three years in the same condition as of today.

Talking about the background to the property, the minister said, the hotel was closed in 2020 (Covid time) and its expenditures (during its closure) were US \$25m per annum. A liability of US \$20m already existed on part of the hotel. Moreover, the hotel union, considered very powerful in NYC, was also demanding US \$66m. The danger of being put into the category of landmarks was also looming over the property.

“Keeping in view all this, our predecessors (the PTI government) decided to run the hotel under the public-private-partnership (PPP), which was the right decision. But it couldn't do so, so the PDM government inherited this issue and finally resolved it,” Mr Rafique said.

He said the contract also saved the government from the liabilities of 479 employees as now, under this agreement, only 77 employees would work and the remaining 402 would be laid off.

“It is really a wonderful contract that has benefitted our government,” he claimed.

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Pakistan, Iraq ink MoU on visa-free travel



Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein sign MoUs aimed at expanding bilateral cooperation in various fields, on Monday 5 June.

Pakistan and Iraq on Monday 5 June agreed to cement bilateral ties and promote cooperation in diverse fields and signed two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) — one on visa waiver for diplomatic and official passport holders and the other to promote cultural cooperation.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein made this announcement during a joint press conference on Monday 5 June.

Mr Bhutto-Zardari is on a three-day official visit to Baghdad.

The two FM's earlier during delegation-level talks agreed to further strengthen bilateral relations in various fields.

FM Bhutto-Zardari told the presser his visit to Baghdad "aims to strengthen relations", noting that "Iraq and Pakistan have contributed to supporting peace in the region".

"We look forward to opening a centre for visitors in the holy city of Karbala," he added.

'A true friend'

Terming Iraq 'a true friend' of Pakistan, he reiterated the hope to reinvent fraternal ties and transform them into mutually beneficial economic relations.

He acknowledged that similar to Pakistan, Iraqi nation had shown exemplary resilience, steadfastness, and resoluteness in combating terrorism and defeating this scourge. "Our two nations have made great sacrifices in achieving this victory, fruits of which are being enjoyed by the region and beyond," he remarked.

He said both countries had always stood by each other at the multilateral forums. "We have good flourishing defence cooperation, contributing towards our shared objectives for peace, stability and security. It is time to rebuild,

come out stronger than ever and transform our countries into progressive nation states," he said.

Mr Bhutto-Zardari said his visit would pave the way for enhancing people-to-people contact especially between the private sector, media, academia and researchers.

Speaking at the press conference, Iraqi FM Hussein said relations with Pakistan were strong and the two sides also discussed defence cooperation at the meeting.

He indicated the signing of an MoU in near future on facilitating Pakistani visitors to the holy places in Iraq.

Later, Mr Bhutto-Zardari in tweet said both sides signed important MoUs and resolved to unlock "huge potential in dynamic bilateral cooperation". He also expressed gratitude to the government of Iraq for its support in opening of Pakistan consulate in Najaf.

Meeting with president

Later, the foreign minister in a meeting with Iraqi President Dr Abdul Latif Rashid discussed the existing bilateral relations and agreed to expand mutually beneficial cooperation.

Also in a tweet, Mr Bhutto-Zardari wrote he resolved in the meeting to take relations between Pakistan and Iraq "to new heights and expand cooperation in diverse areas, including sharing expertise on water, agriculture and reinforcing defense cooperation and bilateral trade".

Extremism

Iraqi President Abdullatif Jamal Rashid expressed the desire to consolidate relations with Pakistan, and the need to benefit from experiences in the field of combating extremism and terrorism, "referring to "Iraq's role in fighting the terrorist ISIS gangs that invaded many countries, including Iraq, and destroyed many urban and cultural landmarks and infrastructure. "The unity of Iraqis and the valour of security forces in all its formations contributed to defeating these gangs and fragmenting their remnants," he said.

He also discussed "the stability of the security situation in Iraqi cities and governorates, and the move towards the government's implementation of its ambitious programme that is in the service of the people, as more efforts are being made to approve the budget and start implementing building and reconstruction projects and addressing drought, desertification and water scarcity."

Also, Mr Bhutto-Zardari called on Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani and "discussed a broad range of issues, including enhancing bilateral trade, convening of joint ministerial commission, rebuilding Iraqi infrastructure, connectivity, pilgrims and enhancing people-to-people and business contacts".

Nadra offices to have passport counters in 30 far-flung areas

The Directorate General of Immigration and Passport has decided to establish one window passport counters in National Database and Registration Authority offices in 30 densely-populated localities across the country. The initiative is being taken to facilitate the residents of tehsils where passport offices are yet to be established and streamline the passport application process, an official told media.

The one-window passport counters at Nadra will be operated by the Passport and Immigration Department. Nadra will charge Rs1,000 per passport in addition to government fees. The tehsils where one window counters are being established include Malir, Deepalpur, Daska, Pasrur, Nurewala, Chuniyam, Shanghla Hills, Sharqpur, Faisalabad, Pindi Gheb, Sambrial, Kamoake, Tandliawala, Samundari, Safdarabad, Khanpur, Khan Garh (Muzaffar Garh), Khawaza Khela, Sher Garh, Chak Dara, Shringal, Umar Kot, Jampur, Pattan (Lower Kohistan), Pattoki, Kabirwala, Mailsi, Nowshera Virkan, Malikwal and Faizpur Khurd (Faizwal).

The official said that passport offices will also be established in the tehsils when the economic conditions of the country improve. By establishing passport offices in these districts, the government will ensure that citizens can easily access passport-related services without having to travel long distances.

In November last year, the DGIP launched an online passport-fee app enabling millions of citizens to pay their fees without having to stand in bank queues. The service, launched under the 'Passport Fee Asaan' initiative, was one of the several other facilities to be launched by the government in the upcoming months.

The online payment facility was previously available for Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Lahore, and was later scheduled to be launched in Karachi.

However, the ministry activated the facility across Pakistan prior to its proposed launch in the financial capital. The official also made it clear that the directorate general of immigration and passports will continue to be the passport issuing authority, rejecting as baseless the rumours that Nadra is set to issue passports from June 10.



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ACAAP hosts 6th Cricket Gala 2023 Sialkot

On the successful completion of the 6th ACAAP Cricket Gala 2023 held at Faraz Sports Daska Road Sialkot on 8th & 9th May 2023. All worthy institutions like Sialkot International Airport, Sialkot Chamber of Commerce & Industry, and all IATA and Non-IATA members have participated in this Cricket Festival.

The ceremony was inaugurated by

Riazuddin Sheikh (Chairman Etihad Founders Group Sialkot), Mr Fazal Jilani Chairman AirSial, Mr. Irfan Younas Senior Vice Chairman ACAAP, Mr. Abdul Ghafoor Malik President SCCI, Mr. Wahab Jahangir Senior Vice President SCCI, Mr. Amir Majeed Shiekh Vice President SCCI, Member EC ACAAP and Executive members of ACAAP and SCCI.

The Blue Line Cargo Pvt. Ltd has won the ACAAP Cricket Trophy 2023 and Speedy Worldwide Logistics has got the Runner trophy. The winner and runner-up teams were awarded with Trophies, shields, and other appreciation souvenirs.

During the matches, the guests from SCCI, WWG, SIAL, AirSial, and ACAAP were served delicious edibles.



Mr. Riazuddin Sheikh (Chairman Etihad Founders Group Sialkot) flanked by Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman AirSial and a guest addressing the inaugural ceremony.



Chairman ACAAP Mohsin A Dharsi, Mr. Azam Sulehri and others presenting cup to the winner team.



Photo shows Mr. Irfan Younus, Mr. Amjad Fakhri, a guest Mr. Kalbe Abbas Naqvi Secretary ACAAP Sialkot, and a guest.



(R-L) Mr. Wajhat Kazmi, a guest, Mr. Faraz Akram Awan, Mr. Irfan younas and others.



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