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Issue Monthly
 Price Rs. 500/=

Annual Subscription Pakistan Rs.5000/=
 Other Countries US\$100/=

Published from New Flyer International
 B-65 Ablagh-e-Aamma
 (media) Cooperative
 Housing Society
 Block-8, Gulistan-e-Jauhar
 Karachi-75290

By Abdul Sattar Azad
 Phone 34615924
 Fax 34615924
 Printed by Sardar Sons

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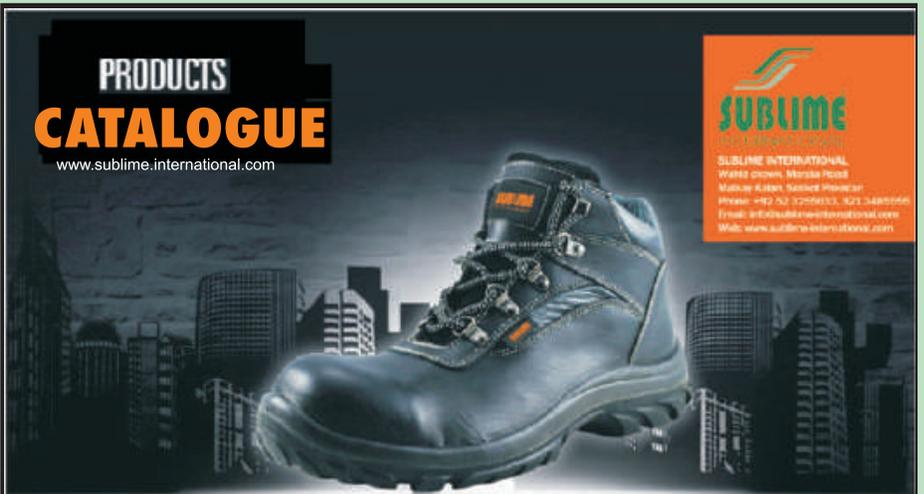
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FLYER

International

Monthly Magazine of Aviation and Tourism

Vol 29 SEPTEMBER 2023 No.11

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Bleeding continues even after many efforts to revive PIA

AFTER trying numerous 'revival plans' to turn around the lossmaking national carrier, Pakistani policymakers appear to have realised the folly of repeating the same mistake over and over again. They have eventually admitted that it is impossible to relive what many fondly remember as the 'lost glory' of PIA. Those happy days are long past; the airline is now moribund both as a business and brand. The company's liabilities and debt of Rs742bn far exceed its assets of Rs110bn.

Its flight operations are shrinking, and it cannot fly to many international destinations owing to serious safety concerns. Even on domestic routes, it is facing stiff competition from younger private airlines. Every plan to restructure the company has met with strong resistance from its employees, as well as elements responsible for squeezing blood from it. Following a decision by the Cabinet Committee of Privatisation and an amendment to the PIAC law by parliament, the PDM coalition had recently included PIA in the long list of active privatisation projects. The previous law passed by the PML-N set-up in 2016 had prohibited the government from selling its majority shareholding in the airline to private investors or outsourcing its management. PIA's privatisation plan was unveiled after Islamabad agreed to a strict fiscal discipline plan with the IMF last month to secure a short-term \$3bn bailout deal to avert sovereign default. But the question is: will the government find a buyer for a brand that has lost all its prestige and demand? Conversely, would an investor put money in a virtually dead concern plagued by political and financial problems? Recent reports suggest that the authorities do realise the potential difficulties in the way of PIA's sale, and, hence, have drawn up a fallback plan to first restructure it and then hand over its management to private investors. Under this plan, the authorities intend to transfer the airline's liabilities to a new holding company before outsourcing management. Indeed, with PIA's accumulated losses projected to rise to Rs850bn by the end of this year, it is imperative to divest it of its liabilities before reaching out to investors for its sale or partnership in management.

Meanwhile, like previous strategies formulated for the airline's revival, the new plan is expected to meet stiff resistance from employees as well as the forces of status quo who want to preserve their financial interests. While the government can allay the fears of the staff

by creating a pool of surplus employees or offering them generous compensation if they are to be laid off, it will require strong political will to overcome the resistance of vested official interests. Regrettably, concerns remain that the new strategy will also collapse like the previous plans since it is not very different from them.

Privatising

REPORTS that the lossmaking national flag carrier PIA has grounded 11 aircraft, or a third of its fleet, over the last two to three years is not surprising. The dearth of funds to procure spare parts to keep them operational is mainly responsible for this state of affairs. Last year, the airline was planning to purchase three wide-bodied planes to launch longhaul flights. To where? Now the PIA management is apparently trying to blame higher global oil prices and a weakening exchange rate for its financial crisis rather than admitting the real reason that has brought the company down. Spending on PIA is like burning cash. With its international flight operations curtailed significantly over safety concerns and new private airlines giving it a tough time on domestic routes, the airline, which is

burdened with massive debt and other financial liabilities, has no future at the moment. The government is also not in a position to inject liquidity into the company or give sovereign guarantees to lenders on its behalf due to its commitments to the IMF. Also, what is the point in investing in a company that the authorities have put on the privatisation list? As was widely anticipated, some employee pressure groups have already begun raising their voice against the planned privatisation of the airline to protect their interests. Some may be planning active protests soon. The authorities have capitulated more than once to such pressure that is hindering their revival and privatisation plans. The country no longer has the option to surrender to the opponents of privatisation this time around. Those who are against the new government plans concerning the national carrier must be made to see why their demands are not feasible. The worsening financial conditions of the bankrupt airline means the government must speed up the process of selling it or liquidating it if it doesn't find a buyer to avoid further losses to taxpayers.

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National Aviation Policy approved to woo investors

Aviation Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique on Wednesday 9 August announced that the federal government has approved the National Aviation Policy 2023 to revive the national carrier and promote public-private joint ventures.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday 9 August, the minister said under this new policy “all missing aspects will be covered and private investors will be encouraged” to invest in this sector.

He said privatisation or public-private investment was the only option to improve the aviation sector, as attracting international firms was not possible when the sector was working with limited resources. He said that the Islamabad airport was being outsourced through international competitive bidding for 15 years but no employee lost their job.

He said that the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) issued a tender for outsourcing the Islamabad airport and so far 25 applications have been received. The aviation minister said that more than 12 airlines have been allowed to operate in Pakistan.

National Aviation Policy

Earlier, the cabinet approved the aviation policy with proposed major amendments. The revised policy proposed major amendments in safety security and regulatory oversight, air traffic rights, guidelines on air service operators, aviation infrastructure development, guidelines for allied service providers, and the policy's implementation and revision.

As per the policy, the CAA shall encourage development of certified aircraft simulator infrastructure in Pakistan and inspect and certify simulators to cater to training and development needs of flight crews.

The CAA will provide land for the simulator setup at rationalised rates. It added 100 per cent foreign direct investment shall be permitted; however, JV with a local business entity would be preferred.

Under the amended aviation policy, a foreign registered private aircraft may be allowed to conduct air operations within Pakistan for non-commercial purposes as per CAA requirements.

Special attention will be given to safety oversight inspectors, air traffic controllers and flight crew training and personnel licencing, enhancement of language proficiency of pilots and controllers, aerodrome certification, dangerous goods regulations, containing airworthiness, threat & error management (TEM), and human factors.

It said a national safety plan has been developed in line with global practices while the Aircraft Accident Investigation Board (AAIB) shall carry out investigations pertaining to accidents involving civil aircraft in Pakistan. If a Pakistan-registered aircraft encounters any incident or accident outside Pakistan, it may also be investigated by AAIB after the authorisation of the Ministry of Aviation.

Instrument Landing System (ILS) facility shall be provided at all major aerodromes with its category corresponding to requirements and frequency of traffic. Certified Aircraft Maintenance Organisations and Maintenance Repair and Overhaul shall be incentivised to establish facilities in Pakistan.

Ground handling services providers are permitted to set up joint ventures with foreign companies or persons subject to the CAA's approval. Flight catering services to air service operators will only be provided by CAA-approved flight kitchens. The ASF working under the Ministry of Aviation shall provide security for all civil aviation installations in Pakistan and the CAA will be the aviation security regulator.

ML-1 accord in October

Speaking to reporters, Mr Rafique, who also holds the railways portfolio, said the ML-1 agreement between Pakistan and China would be signed in October and the project may start in January 2024. It is expected that President Arif Alvi or the caretaker prime minister would travel to Beijing for the ML-1 agreement, he added. The project covers a dual track with a

length of 1733kms from Peshawar to Karachi, having a capacity of 100 up and down trains between Peshawar and Karachi.

The minister said the project has now been pitched at \$6.8 billion against the original cost of \$6.6 billion after the evaluation carried out by the coalition government.

The project when completed will have increased market share from existing 4 per cent to 20 per cent besides providing employment opportunities to 20,000 technical experts, he explained.

About the introduction of bullet trains in Pakistan, the minister said, “The project would cost \$66 billion and would not be affordable for railway passengers in terms of fare.”

Saad Rafiq said if the railways system in Pakistan is to be sustained its land resources would have to be utilised.

Pakistan Railways and State Life Insurance Company concluded an agreement on Wednesday 9 August under which coverage of insurance of passengers has been increased.

PR's Chief Executive Officer Shahid Aziz said that in the event of any accident, the payment of insurance money for a deceased passenger has been increased from Rs1.5 million to Rs2.5m. In the case of disability, the insurance cover will be Rs300,000.

Railways Minister Saad Rafique instructed railway officials to visit the families of deceased passengers of Nawabshah train accident and get confirmation from the families for payment of insurance money at their doorsteps.



PIA aircraft is being refuelled at the Skardu International Airport, recently. The refuelling was carried out to test the equipment as the airport gets ready to welcome its first international flight. The Civil Aviation Authority has provided the refuelling facility while Pakistan State Oil has ensured the availability of jet fuel at the airport.

PIA gets permanent CEO after 15 months



Former air vice marshal Muhammad Amir Hayat has been appointed as the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) chief executive officer, the national carrier's spokesperson confirmed on Thursday 10 August.

Mr Hayat has been appointed for one year, according to Abdullah Hafeez Khan, however, the official notification in this regard is yet to be issued.

He had been serving as acting CEO since April 2022, after the retirement of the former CEO retired air marshal Arshad Malik.

According to the airline's website, Mr Hayat was commissioned in the engineering branch of the Pakistan Air Force in 1990.

He graduated as an aerospace engineer from PAF Academy, Risalpur and holds a Master's degree in Business Administration and National Security and War Studies.

He served in the PAF for over three decades and was subsequently deputed to PIA.

The outgoing aviation minister, Khawaja Saad Rafiq, had said Mr Hayat was "a very competent person" and has been working for the betterment of the airline.

Separately, the national flag carrier has announced discounted domestic fares on Independence Day.

Under the "Azadi Offer", passengers can avail 14 per cent discount on all domestic flights, according to the spokesperson.

The offer is only valid for travel on August 14 only. The airline has already started issuing discounted tickets.

PIA grounds 11 aircraft; three deemed beyond repair

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has grounded 11 aircraft, including three of its Boeing 777s, as the national flag carrier faces a serious financial crisis due to the uncontrolled flight of dollars and increase in prices of petroleum products.

According to sources, the airline, which operates around 30 aircraft, has been facing serious difficulties in procuring spare parts for the past three years due to scarcity of funds, which has resulted in the grounding of 11 planes.

Two of the three wide-body Boeing 777 aircraft were grounded in 2020 and one in 2021. Five A320 aircraft have also been grounded — two in 2021 and three in 2023. PIA also grounded three ATR aircraft — one each in 2020, 2022 and 2023.

A spokesman for PIA confirmed that 11 aircraft have been grounded due to a lack of funds to buy spare parts as the national flag carrier is facing serious financial challenges, including dependency on foreign currency.

A senior official of the airline said the PIA fleet consisted of 31 aircraft and three of the 11 grounded planes — Boeing 777, Airbus and ATR — are beyond repair for want of engines and other parts.

The official said PIA is currently operating with the remaining 20 aircraft and the flight operations are being carried out according to the available aircraft. He said the airline will be facing a shortage of aircraft if flights are increased, especially on international routes.

PIA's website shows its network spans across Asia, Europe and North America, covering 19 countries.

SSA office closed

Separately, the office of the Senior Staff Association (SSA) has been closed by the PIA management "to maintain law and order situation and smooth functioning of the corporation's activities".

Safdar Anjum, the secretary general of SSA, termed the closure of their office illegal and an attempt to sabotage peace of the organisation.

On the other hand, the protest by People's Unity against planned privatisation of the national flag carrier and demand for an increase in salaries of employees continued as the PIA office in

Rawalpindi remained closed for two hours.

In a press release, the People's Unity said the protest will continue till the acceptance of all their demands. In order to stop the privatisation process and make all daily-wage employees permanent, the two-hour long strike across the country will continue as well, it added.

Hidayatullah Khan, the central president of People's Unity, said the protest will continue until all demands are accepted and they will expand the scope of the protest to all offices throughout the country.

Terminal outsourced to ADP for 15 years

The Cabinet Committee on Inter-Governmental Commercial Transactions (CCoIGCT) late Wednesday 9 August night approved the outsourcing of the Bulk and General Terminal at Karachi Port, East Wharf, to Abu Dhabi Ports (ADP) for 15 years.

Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Ishaq Dar chaired the meeting, Maritime Affairs Minister Syed Faisal Ali Subzwari, Commerce Minister Syed Naveed Qamar, Power Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan, SAPM on Finance Tariq Bajwa, SAPM on Revenue Tariq Mehmood Pahsa, Secretary Maritime Affairs, Secretary Law & Justice, Chairman KPT and team and other senior officers attended the meeting.

The CCoIGCT reviewed the recommendations of the negotiation committee which held its deliberation in two sessions on Aug 8, for the development of the bulk and general cargo terminal.

The committee approved the recommendations of the negotiating committee subject to conditions that the concessioner will pay \$25 million non-refundable/non-adjustable upfront as goodwill.

The UAE government-owned firm will pay another \$25m upfront adjustable against revenue sharing in the next seven years with \$3m per annum for the first five years and \$5m in the next two years.

For modernising the terminal, the concessioner will start development work in September. It was also decided that all liabilities regarding the Karachi Dock Labour Board will be the responsibility of ADP.

The committee recommended the commercial agreement as amended to the federal cabinet for its approval.

UK's High Commissioner to Pakistan Jane Marriott inaugurates State-of-the-art Scanning Machine at Karachi's JIAP

Jinnah International Airport gets state-of-the-art hold baggage scanning machine as part of a growing cooperation in aviation security between Pakistan and Britain's civil aviation authorities. In a brief ceremony held at the Jinnah International, UK's High Commissioner to Pakistan Jane Marriott inaugurated the machine as she operated the machine and scanned a passenger's bag. The development is expected to save time as UK and other Western countries require hold baggage to be scanned a second time after the boarding card is issued. DGCAA Khaqan Murtaza, Director Security and Vigilance Shahid Qadir, senior officials of Karachi's JIAP Airport and ASF officials attended the ceremony. Talking to the media, the British High Commissioner (BHC) expressed optimism about the resumption of direct flights between Pakistan and the UK, stating that technical talks between the civil aviation authorities of both countries have been completed. She said the modern security machine will expedite the baggage scanning process for passengers traveling to the UK and other Western countries. DGCAA Khaqan Murtaza on this occasion hinted at positive outcomes from recently held talks with the European Commission in Brussels, indicating that good news regarding Pakistani airlines' flights to the UK and Europe may be expected soon. He added that a visit from the EASA team is expected in November this year, with promising results expected. Air Commodore (R) Shahid Qadir, the PCAA Director of Security and Vigilance, highlighted that the 20% extra security procedures previously applied to flights bound for the UK, EU, and other Western countries will no longer be necessary, saving time for everyone involved.





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Senate body on Aviation discusses about PIA



Senator Hidayatullah chaired a meeting of the Senate Committee on Aviation.

The Senate Committee on Aviation discussed the ongoing strike by Pakistan International Airlines employees in protest against privatisation plans at its session on Tuesday 29 August.

Senator Mian Raza Rabbani emphasised that workers had a right to engage in any type of action for their fundamental rights and called for withdrawal of an FIR registered against PIA employees.

Amir Hayat, the airline's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), said PIA was ready to negotiate with employees, but violation of law would not be tolerated.

The committee directed PIA to negotiate with the employees' representatives so that their grievances could be addressed.

The meeting, chaired by Senator Hidayatullah, was attended by senators Mian Raza Rabbani, Sherry Rehman, Syed Muhammad Sabir Shah, Umer Farooq and Saifullah Abro. Officials of the Aviation Division and other departments concerned were also present.

The committee later took up a public petition by a retired employee of the Civil Aviation Authority complaining the CAA had not raised pensions since 2014.

The CAA Employees Pay and Pension Regulations stipulate the pension of employees who retired in or before 2014, would be revised after every three years, according to the petitioner.

The upper house committee decided to form a sub-committee to investigate the matter and named Senator Saleem Mandviwalla as its convener.

Senator Saifullah Abro drew the body's attention to growing complaints about delays in luggage handling at Islamabad Airport.

The CAA officials put the blame for delays on factors like pre-customs scanning, heavy load of baggage and congestion at airports.

The Civil Aviation Authority closely monitors the ground handling agents

(GHAs) and takes punitive action against to avoid delays, the officials said.

The committee asked the CAA to provide details about GHAs, along with problems faced in luggage handling, at the next meeting.

While discussing the salaries, pensions and stay abroad of cabin crew, the PIA chief informed the body that salaries had not been raised over the past

seven years due to the company's financial woes.

The PIA, however, increased the salaries of cabin crews in Nov 2021 and made them eligible for pension. They are entitled to stay at five-star hotels during foreign trips.

Regarding implementation of recommendations by the committee on the fake degrees issue, the committee decided to file a 'breach of privilege' against the FIA chief for non-compliance with the standing committee's directives and sending officers not conversant with the case.

Sabre announces new agreement with CVFR travel group to grow its footprint in FIJI and the South Pacific Islands

Sabre Corporation (NASDAQ: SABR), a leading software and technology provider that powers the global travel industry, recently announced a new strategic alliance with Sydney-headquartered Airline Rep Services, part of CVFR Travel Group. Under the agreement, Airline Rep Services will promote Sabre's best-in-class solutions to travel agents in Fiji and the wider South Pacific islands.

This new alliance will bring local representation into Fiji, while growing Sabre's distribution presence across the South Pacific region. With the help of Airline Rep Services, travel agents will be better able to access Sabre's advanced technology, including Sabre Red 360. The intuitive interface unlocks a full spectrum of bookable content, including NDC offers, flights and lodging, and insightful information so agents can efficiently create, sell, and service tailored trip experiences.

"With strong travel demand in Fiji and the South Pacific islands and airline capacity returning, it is imperative that travel agents across the region have access to the right technological solutions to capture and create demand, streamline operations, grow revenue, and create optimal travel experiences," said Ram Chhabra, CEO, CVFR Travel Group. "Sabre is already incredibly well-known across Asia Pacific, and globally, for its

best-in-class technology, so we're thrilled that we have entered into this timely alliance to give agents the solutions they need to meet the sophisticated digital demands of today's traveller."

Established more than 30 years ago, CVFR Travel Group has rapidly grown into one of the largest travel operators in Australia. With offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Auckland, and Fiji, CVFR Group comprises four independent divisions addressing consolidation, airline representation, destination management, and Government Visa outsourcing services. Its office in the city of Nadi on Fiji's main island, will provide a focal point for its new alliance with Sabre, delivering a dedicated space to bring agents together for joint engagements and training.

"Sabre has a strong marketplace presence and expertise within the South Pacific region, and we're delighted to enhance this even further through our collaboration with CVFR," said Brett Thorstad, vice president of Sabre Travel Solutions, Agency Sales, Asia Pacific. "This new agreement brings together Sabre's leading-edge technology with Airline Rep Services' deep local market expertise. We're very excited that, through this agreement, Sabre's travel agency technology is set to play an even bigger part in the growth of the South Pacific travel industry."

Ethiopian Airlines to fly to London Gatwick in November



Ethiopian Airlines is adding new service from Addis Ababa to London (Gatwick).

The new route will operate three times per week from November 21, 2023.

It is Gatwick's first direct flight to the Ethiopian capital since 2006 and becomes the latest of several new long-haul services to start before the end of the year.



The airport now offers more than 80% of its pre-Covid long-haul routes.

Following Norse Atlantic launching five new US routes from London Gatwick earlier this year, the airline is due to start operating to Miami and Boston in September, before adding Kingston, Montego Bay and Bridgetown in October.

British Airways will start flying between London Gatwick and Accra, Ghana in October, following new flights to Las Vegas and Vancouver earlier this

year.

Air Mauritius is also due to take off in October, with daily flights to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International

Airport. London Gatwick's long-haul destinations now span the USA, Canada, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Farnborough International Airshow 2024 reports record demand from the global aerospace industry



In line with the positive outlook for the aerospace industry, which is expecting commercial revenues to grow 14% year-on-year, the forthcoming edition of the Farnborough International Airshow in 2024 is reporting record-breaking demand for exhibition space, sponsorship packages and marketing activations. The show is set to reach new heights as the preeminent marketplace for an industry on an upward trajectory.

Despite the ongoing supply chain challenges, the aerospace and space industries are set to soar during the next year. IATA has estimated that the global airline industry is expected to return to profitability in 2023, reaching \$5 billion in profit, and Accenture has reported that MRO recovery is expected to stay steady through 2023, with most executives anticipating MRO budgets will stay the same or increase in the next 24 months.

Heading above the atmosphere, the global space market has grown to approximately \$447 billion, up from \$280 billion in 2010, and is estimated to reach \$1 trillion by 2030, according to a report by McKinsey and World Economic Forum.

FARNBOROUGH 2022: Azerbaijan Airlines to expand its Boeing 787 Dreamliner fleet

The industry's reporting of high, pre-pandemic level results is reflected in the increased demand for exhibition opportunities and floor space at Farnborough International Airshow 2024. Over 90% of commercial exhibition spaces and chalets are reserved and sold across the show site, with only a handful of self-build stands remaining across the

show's four exhibition halls. To meet the exceptional demand, Farnborough International, organisers of the airshow, are constructing 17 new chalets with more than 50% of these already sold.

FARNBOROUGH 2022: Boeing and Qatar Airways finalise 737 MAX aircraft order

Discussing the appetite from the global aerospace industry, Gareth Rogers, CEO of Farnborough International, said: "As the first internationally renowned airshow to take place after the pandemic, Farnborough International Airshow 2022 signified the revival of the aerospace, defence, and space industries and proved the value and need for global airshows. Since then, we have seen the aerospace industry accelerate partnerships and sustainable strategies to take their operations to new heights.

"At Farnborough International, we are ready to support the industry within this period of growth and act as a catalyst for positive, future-focused change that will steer the trajectory of aerospace, space and defence for the next decade. We are working tirelessly with the global aerospace industry to provide opportunities at the 2024 airshow and will be implementing a waitlist for those who are still keen to engage with the event."

Returning 22-26 July 2024, the ground-breaking airshow will see global aerospace and aviation leaders return to Hampshire, United Kingdom, for five days of unrivalled opportunities to discover the latest pioneering technology and engineering, announce historic partnerships, build connections and work towards the cumulative sustainable aerospace vision as an industry.

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DHL Express relaunches international same day service



DHL Express, the world's leading international express delivery service provider, has relaunched its international Same Day Service for customers in the UK with emergency delivery needs, or with items that cannot be sent through the Express network.

Opting for the Same Day service ensures a shipment will be sent via the fastest available mode of transport, utilising DHL's trusted specialist service providers. The Same Day service gives customers access to a number of features to customise the delivery process based on their specific needs, including having an on-board courier who will hand carry items from pick-up to drop-off, using dedicated vehicles for shipments with a temperature control need, and specialist transport for dangerous goods.

Globalisation resilient even as US-China decoupling advances

Available to all customers, Same Day is aimed particularly at businesses that may have an emergency need to send time-critical documents, medical supplies, or spare parts for linefeed needed to prevent costly delays, such as those in the aviation, pharmaceutical, automotive and energy sectors.

Duncan Heron, VP at DHL Express said: "In the current environment with pressured supply chains and the increase in just-in-time manufacturing, as well as the need to safeguard brand reputation by delivering on promises, we recognise that an international same day service is more important than ever.

"Customers booking a Same Day service through us can take advantage of a wide range of trusted suppliers, that have all signed up to our rigorous SLAs – so they can rest assured they're getting the best possible service in their time of need."

Royal Selangor and DHL Express partner to reduce carbon emissions

By relaunching its international Same Day service, DHL is supporting its customers to meet increasingly high

expectations for expedited delivery options. With the Same Day market forecast to grow to \$26.4bn by 2027, utilising DHL's fast and reliable service will help businesses gain a competitive edge. DHL's international Same Day

American Airlines fined \$4.1M for tarmac delays

The Department of Transportation is fining American Airlines \$4.1 million for keeping passengers on delayed planes on the tarmac for longer than legally allowed.

DOT regulations require airlines to allow passengers to disembark the plane if they choose after three hours of ground delays for domestic flights or four hours for international flight, though some exceptions for safety and security are allowed under the policy.

A DOT investigation revealed that between 2018 and 2021, American excessively kept 5,821 passengers on 43 domestic flights, mostly departing from the airline's main hub at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

"DOT found that none of the exceptions to the tarmac delay rule, including the safety and security exceptions, applied to those flights. In addition, on one of the 43 flights, passengers were not provided with food and water as required," a statement from the DOT said.

The fines levied against American are the largest civil penalties ever assessed for violations of the tarmac delay rule.

"This is the latest action in our continued drive to enforce the rights of airline passengers," Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in a statement. "Whether the issue is extreme tarmac delays or problems getting refunds, DOT will continue to protect consumers and hold airlines accountable."

The airline said it will pay the fine.

"While these delays were the result of exceptional weather events, the flights represent a very small number of the 7.7 million flights during this time period. We have since apologized to the impacted customers and regret any inconvenience caused," a statement from the airline said.

Cruising Altitude: Is airplane coffee safe to drink? I'll try to put the rumors to rest.

service can be booked through the Support Services Group, a customer's usual DHL contact, or via the new portal for existing DHL customers.

Launched this month, DHL's new customer portal allows regular customers to benefit from a simplified booking process where they can easily access information on scheduled collections and live tracking for assurance that their consignments will be delivered on time and in full.

American also highlighted some of its recent operational investments meant to smooth the impact of severe weather, including its introduction of the Hub Efficiency Analytics Tool (HEAT) to shift arrivals and departures around severe weather, and new technology to facilitate gate assignments.

"These efforts are already providing significant benefits to our customers and team members, and we continue to look for innovative ways to further improve," the airline said in a statement.

Zach Wichter is a travel reporter for USA TODAY based in New York. You can reach him at zwichter@usatoday.com

Boeing makes design changes to its b777-8 variant



Boeing has increased the fuselage length of the 777-8 by 3.5 feet, boosting passenger capacity to 395 and the range to 8,745 nautical miles. This modification to the 777-8's design aims to close the order gap with the 777-9, but it remains to be seen if the increased capacity and range will attract more customers. The 777-8 and the B777-9 form a part of Boeing's 777X program. According to Boeing, the 777X has unique folding wingtips and 10 ft wide GE9X engines. However, the sales for B777-8 are not keeping up which might have led to Boeing to make changes.

Qatar Airways ramps up excitement for Expo 2023 Doha

As the global anticipation for Expo 2023 Doha rises, Qatar Airways, the national carrier of the State of Qatar, is proud to announce its role as the Official Strategic Partner for the landmark event. Set to be the first AI International Horticultural Exhibition in Qatar, the Middle East, and North Africa, the prestigious partnership underscores Qatar Airways' commitment to bringing global attention to Expo 2023 Doha and promoting Qatar as a premier travel destination.

Expo 2023 Doha, which is expected to attract an estimated 3 million visitors from around the globe, will take place in the picturesque Al Bidda Park, overlooking the azure waters of the Arabian Gulf. The six-month event will run from October 2023 to March 2024 and will offer visitors rich experiences, from beautiful gardens and thought-provoking talks, to arts and cuisine, as well as a focus on innovative solutions to mitigate desertification.

To celebrate the partnership, adorned with the Expo 2023 Doha emblem, an exclusive aircraft livery is set to be unveiled by Qatar Airways in the coming month.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, His Excellency Mr. Akbar Al Baker, said: "The upcoming months promise an array of cultural, environmental, and innovative experiences in Qatar for visitors from around the globe. As the Official Strategic Partner for Expo 2023 Doha, we look forward to welcoming international guests to Qatar, offering them our signature hospitality and connecting them to this monumental event."

Travellers onboard Qatar Airways will also be treated to an unforgettable experience that starts with a horticultural welcome video and continues throughout their inflight journey, providing them with celebratory artwork and exclusive healthy dining options, which will be rolled-out across both Premium and Economy Cabins on select routes.

Discover Qatar, the Destination Management Company of Qatar Airways, is offering complimentary entry vouchers to all international travellers for the duration of the Expo 2023 Doha. This includes stopover packages where options range from the Standard Stopover, showcasing 4-star hotel accommodations starting at USD 14 per night, to the Premium Stopover, presenting 5-star hotel selections from USD 23. For those

desiring the pinnacle of luxury, the Luxury Stopover offers lavish 5-star hotel stays,

inclusive of breakfast, with prices starting from USD 81.

For more information and to embark on this unique journey, travellers can visit: <https://www.qatarairways.com/stopover>. This offer is also available to over 4500 of Discover Qatar's global retail partners for all hotel bookings.

Saudi Arabia's new airline signs its first sports sponsorship deal with Spanish Football Club

Saudi Arabia's newly launched world-class airline, Riyadh Air and leading Spanish football club, Atlético de Madrid has signed a multi-year partnership naming the airline as the main and official airline partner of the Red and White football club. The partnership marks a significant milestone for both parties and is the first sports sponsorship that Riyadh Air has signed since its official launch on March 12, 2023.

As part of the historic milestone, the Saudi-based airline will be the main sponsor and official airline partner of the club as part of a multiyear agreement. In addition to having Riyadh Air's presence on the teams kits, the strategic partnership will bring together two entities that share a passion for excellence, innovation and will allow the airline and the club to reach millions of fans around the world.

The new airline, headquartered in Riyadh, the capital city of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, recently stunned the world by unveiling one of its unique liveries during the Paris Air Show in June 2023. It is scheduled to begin operations in 2025, connecting the Kingdom's capital to more than 100 destinations around the world by 2030. As a full service and digitally-native carrier, Riyadh Air will pioneer new technologies and innovations whilst

offering guests authentic and warm Saudi hospitality.

"We are delighted to welcome Riyadh Air as our new main sponsor of the club," said Miguel Ángel Gil, CEO of Atlético de Madrid. "This partnership signifies a great opportunity to offer better experiences to our fans around the world and I am confident that this alliance with Riyadh Air will elevate our club to new heights."

"It is an incredibly exciting day for Riyadh Air as we enter into a long-term partnership with Atlético de Madrid, one of Europe's greatest clubs, to become their main and official airline partner," said Tony Douglas, CEO of Riyadh Air. "We believe that this partnership is a perfect match, as both Riyadh Air and Atletico share a commitment to excellence and a passion for connecting people and cultures around the world. This airline created global waves when we recently launched our stunning livery and with this partnership, once again we are surprising the world as we move towards our maiden flight in 2025. We look forward to working closely with our friends at Atlético de Madrid to deliver innovative

Together, Riyadh Air and Atletico Madrid will redefine the future of sports partnerships, setting a new standard for collaboration and innovation in the world of football.



Iraqi Airways takes delivery of fifth and final Airbus A220



Iraqi Airways has taken delivery of its fifth and final Airbus A220-300 aircraft.

The narrow-body jet, registered as YI-ARH, arrived at Baghdad International Airport (BGW), Iraq, following a one-stop journey from Montreal Mirabel International Airport (YMX), Canada. The Airbus A220 stopped at Oslo Gardermoen Airport (OSL).

In total, the aircraft spent 12 hours and 11 minutes in the air while flying from the Airbus A220 Final Assembly Line (FAL) in Mirabel, Canada, to Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, where the latest Iraqi Airways jet landed on August 27, 2023.

According to ch-aviation.com data, the aircraft operated its first flight on August 4, 2023.

Iraqi Airways placed the order for the five Airbus A220-300 aircraft, then known as the Bombardier CSeries, in December 2013. A month prior, Bombardier and the airline signed a Letter of Intent (LoI), as Iraqi Airways sought to purchase a total of 16 aircraft of the type, including 11 options.

“The CS300 aircraft's range, fuel efficiency and comfortable, widebody-like cabin will permit us to respond to growing passenger demand and reach destinations across the Middle East, Northern Africa and Europe,” Saad Al-Khafaji, the Chief Executive Officer and Director General of Iraqi Airways, said at the time.

Airbus acquired 50.1% shares in the CSeries program in October 2017, renaming the CSeries aircraft to the Airbus A220 in July 2018, with the Canadian plane maker completely exiting the A220 program in February 2020.

The Mirabel FAL delivered the previous four Iraqi Airways A220s between November 2021 and January 2023, ch-aviation.com data shows. The

airline is the only air carrier that ordered and received this type in the Middle East, according to Airbus Orders & Deliveries filings for July 2023.

Previously, Iraqi Airways had to deal with the groundings of the type. The Iraq

Civil Aviation Authority (ICAA) issued an order to ground the Airbus A220 in May 2023. The ICAA's order came after the airline experienced issues with the Pratt & Whitney PW1500G engine, exclusively used to power the Airbus A220 aircraft.

Since, the airline has resumed flying two of its Airbus A220s, registered as YI-ARE and YI-ARF. The other two, registered as YI-ARG and YI-ARI, last flew in April and May 2023, respectively.

Mum told to stop breastfeeding baby on TUI flight due to 'uncomfortable' passengers

Chelsea Williams was left feeling discriminated against and humiliated when she was told by the crew that she couldn't breastfeed her five-week-old baby during take off. The 28-year-old was on a flight from to Spain on July 30 when a flight attendant left her embarrassed and close to tears.

The mum-of-two was travelling with her husband Tom, their baby and their two-year-old toddler on their first holiday together. However, during take-off she was approached by a TUI crew member who told her breastfeeding wasn't permitted during take off and landing for the 'comfort' of other passengers.

This left Chelsea and her two children distressed. Before the trip, Chelsea had researched the best ways to keep a baby calm on the flight, which included feeding the baby during take off and landing.

Chelsea said: “We purposely chose a short flight as it was our first time travelling with two children, we didn't want to go anywhere more than a couple of hours. We were trying to make the experience as least stressful as we could, we were really nervous before going.

To make things easier the family even selected to sit at the rear of the aircraft so they would be close to the baby change, and to avoid stares from other passengers if the baby was crying. Before take off the baby was buckled into the infant safety belt which was connected to Chelsea's and the baby started to fall asleep as she was feeding.

She said: “The night before we were due to fly home I was getting anxious to travel again in case we had a similar experience with feeding, so my husband messaged customer service at TUI to ask if

it was okay for me to feed during take-off and landing, just so we knew where we stood in case the problem did arise again.

“The response was that they would advise that we didn't feed in case we made other people feel uncomfortable, which was absolutely shocking, I didn't expect that response at all, I expected to hear a policy maybe, or a safety regulation.

Turkish Airlines and Thai sign strategic MoU to offer more destinations for passengers



Turkish Airlines and Thai Airways International Public Company Limited (THAI) have signed an MoU to paving way for a joint venture agreement between the two airlines. Under the MoU, THAI will introduce daily service to Istanbul from its Bangkok hub in December, where it will strengthen the position of THAI as the gateway carrier to Thailand, Asia Pacific region and Australia. The partnership will promote tourism between Türkiye and Thailand. “The collaboration will provide an unrivalled choice of destinations in Europe and Asia for passengers of Turkish Airlines and THAI,” the airlines said in a statement. Bilal Ekşi, chief executive,

Batik air



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Challenges highlighted to outsourcing of airports

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), a commercial arm of the World Bank, has alerted the Pakistan authorities about a series of key challenges that could hamper the successful outsourcing of the country's three major international airports.

The IFC is the transaction adviser on outsourcing of Pakistan's three international airports — Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi — and has been studying the transaction structure and preparing for outsourcing since April.

However, the previous coalition government recently asked the corporation to put on hold the outsourcing of Lahore and Karachi airports, and focus on Islamabad airport.

In its inception report to the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) — the owner and operator of public sector airports — the IFC highlighted several issues that “could hamper the smooth execution of the outsourcing initiative” if they remained unresolved before bidding and thus required immediate interventions and policy actions.

Uncertain economy, PIA's liabilities, airports' existing contracts can hamper outsourcing, says IFC

The key issues centred upon long-outstanding receivables and liabilities of Pakistan International Airlines, the uncertain macroeconomic conditions of the country, concession fee and tariff/user charges escalation/regulation mechanisms of the PCAA, the fate of its employees affected by outsourcing and existing contractual arrangements at the airports. PIA's losses surpassed Rs630 billion as of September last year.

The IFC also recommended permission for the concessionaire and the PCAA to maintain a foreign currency account with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to ensure that the government could fulfil its obligations to “ensure availability, convertibility and transferability of foreign currency and mitigate against the potential loss of revenue for the concessionaire due to foreign exchange volatility”.

The transaction adviser also pointed out that improving service quality at the airports largely depended on the performance of government agencies working at the airports.

For this, it proposed a service-level agreement between all these entities

performing “reserve functions” and the PCAA so that the aviation authority might not be held responsible for any breach of the agreed performance indicators. In fact, the PCAA shall oversee the performance of these reserve functions and report any breach, the adviser suggested.

Any financial liability accruing from a breach of any performance indicator by an entity performing a 'reserve function' shall be undertaken by the government of Pakistan under a state support agreement (SSA).

Moreover, the IFC also recommended that the government would backstop PCAA's payment obligations in the case of termination payments under all scenarios through the SSA.

Moreover, the concessionaire would be allowed to set off any non-payment by PIA against PCAA revenue share under the concession agreement to be signed before the transfer of an airport.

However, under the state support agreement, the federal government would compensate the PCAA for revenue loss on account of PIA under a separate agreement to be entered into later. Given the urgency of the matter and since advertisements for inviting bids had already been issued, the previous coalition government already got approved a draft SSA from the federal cabinet during the last leg of its tenure recently.

The remaining challenges would have to be addressed by the caretaker government as the transaction process progressed. The PCAA also assured the former cabinet that the SSA, in principle, addressed the objections of various stakeholders while some of the concerns which were of an operational nature shall also be addressed before formally signing the SSA.

The government of Pakistan has been examining various options for more than a decade to improve airport services, including outsourcing the operation of major airports in Pakistan to improve passenger services and optimise the revenue potential of airports.

Accordingly, the PCAA after a bidding process signed a transaction advisory services agreement with the IFC in April with the approval of the relevant forums, including the federal cabinet. Under the agreement, the IFC was given the task of outsourcing three major airports, namely Islamabad International Airport; Jinnah International Airport, Karachi; and Allama Iqbal International

Airport, Lahore.

To push through the outsourcing at a fast pace without any hindrance and raise foreign exchange inflows, the outgoing prime minister also formed a steering committee headed by the finance minister to oversee the outsourcing of airports.

Following a series of meetings with the IFC and other stakeholders, the steering committee then decided that in the first instance, only Islamabad airport should be considered for outsourcing, whereas the two remaining airports could be outsourced considering the experiences and insights gained from that outsourcing. About a dozen internationally renowned firms, including the one operating London's Heathrow Airport, had reported to have shown interest in airport service contracts, although they are yet to come up with formal requests for proposals.

Demo against outsourcing of airports

Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) employees on Friday 11 August held a demonstration on the Allama Iqbal International Airport premises against bifurcation of their department and outsourcing of major airports of the country.

The protest was held under the banner of the People's Unity.

Holding banners and placards, the employees said they would not allow privatisation of the CAA and demanded increase in salaries.

The National Assembly just before completing its term passed the Pakistan Airports Authority Bill 2022, and the Pakistan Civil Aviation Bill 2022, to bifurcate the role of the CAA — one for regulating civil aviation activities in the country and the other for providing civil aviation services and developing aviation infrastructure.

The government has decided to begin the 25-year outsourcing of operations and land assets at Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi airports. It says the operations of these hubs will be run in a public-private partnership to 'boost foreign exchange'.

The CAA employees said their economic murder would not be allowed by this 'anti-state decision'. They said the protest across the country would continue till the government withdrew its decision.

News in pictures



Chairman HOAP Sindh Mr. Furqan Abdul Qadir along with other executive members of HOAP Sindh Zone Presenting shield to Honourable Minister of Religious Affairs & Interfaith harmony, Mr Aneeq Ahmed on his visit to Karachi Hajji Camp recently.



Mr. Jamil Ahmed CEO Vision Logistics presenting a bouquet to Mr. Jafar Hussain, Cargo Manager Turkish Airlines who facilitate students of PIFFA - FIATA Diploma in Freight to visit cargo complex at Airport Lahore.



Group Photo taken on the occasion of Dangerous Goods Regulations cours held at ACAAP office Sialkot



Photo shows Mr. Shakil Ahmed Regional Director Karachi UIC being honoured by PIFFA Lahore.



An Educational visit of Cargo Basic Students to SIAL being briefed conducted by ACAAP .



ACAAP Regional Office Sialkot arranged an educational visit for Cargo Basic Students to Sialkot International Airport to see Physical Instruments facilities.

AirSial launches flights from Pakistan to Jeddah

AirSial has launched 2 weekly flights from Sialkot to Jeddah and Sialkot on August 19th. The inaugural ceremony held at Sialkot International Airport and graced by the Honorable Consul General of 'UAE' Mr. Bakheet Al Romaithi.

Mr. Fazal Jilani Chairman AirSial said that this markable ceremony held in the presence of Members of Executive Council, Core Committee of AirSial

Limited, Mr. Muhammad Umar Mir Vice Chairman, Mr. Ameen Ahsan CEO of the airlines and distinguished guests from Sialkot International Airport and Sialkot Chamber of Commerce.

AirSial also launched 5 weekly flights from Multan to Jeddah and Multan. The cake cutting ceremony held at the airport to mark the inauguration of the flight. Mr. Tariq Amin COO AirSial

alongwith the other officials of AirSial inaugurated the flight in the presence of distinguished guests and crew.

The Airlines also started the flights from Karachi to Jeddah and Karachi five time a week. The ceremony held at Jinnah International Airport and the Sr. Staff of AirSial with crew inaugurated the flight. The cake cutting ceremony also held to mark the inaugural flight.



Chairman AirSial Mr. Fazal Jilani along with other guests cutting the cake to inaugurate the flight at SIAL.



The guests on the occasion of inaugural flight of AirSial from Sialkot to jeddah at SIAL.



Group photo taken with the Consul General of UAE on the occasion at SIAL.



Mr. Tariq Amin COO AirSial along with the crew cutting the cake to mark the inaugural flight from Multan to Jeddah.



The cake cutting ceremony held at Jinnah International Airport Karachi on the occasion of inaugural flight of AirSial from Karachi to Jeddah.





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Turkish Airlines Profiting from Increased International Travel

As the world moves past the COVID-19 pandemic, airlines are back to making money again. Passengers are returning to the skies across the world eager to make up for lost time.

One such airline that has benefited from this pent-up demand is Turkish Airlines. The airline finished the second quarter of 2023 and has reported strong financials.

Growth in 2023

The airline saw total revenue reaching \$5.1 billion, up 13.5 percent from the same time last year. Turkish Airlines also increased capacity to account for this increased demand and was flying with 28 percent higher capacity than in 2019 by growing the fleet by 10 percent. Overall, the airline surpassed its 2019 international capacity by 29 percent. Turkish Airlines currently operates a fleet of over 424 aircraft.

Loads appear healthy as well with a 81.5 percent domestic load factor and 81.8% international load factor in the second quarter. Looking at January to July, the total load factor was 82.3 percent, an increase of nearly 5% from the same period last year. This was further broken up with an international load factor of 82.2 percent and a domestic load factor of 83.2 percent.

From January to July of this year the airline carried 47.3 million passengers, a massive 22 percent jump from the same A Turkish Airlines Boeing 777-300. (Photo: AirlineGeeks | William Derrickson)

Notable given that global airline capacity in the second quarter of this year is still 12 percent below what it was in 2019. Not all airlines have benefited equally from the return of passengers to the skies.

Cargo revenues did decrease significantly, 44 percent decrease year over year to \$600 million. The airline attributes this to a slowing in global trade overall and the deadly earthquake earlier this year across Turkey and Syria. It is estimated that nearly 60,000 people perished and over 121,000 were injured. The earthquake caused massive damage to an area that accounts for over 9 percent of Türkiye's global exports.

From January to July of this year cargo decreased nearly 8 percent to 890.3 thousand tons from 965.2 thousand tons the year prior.

Yields were acceptable as well with Turkish Airlines ending the quarter with a

net profit of \$635 million.

Turkish Airlines while doing well domestically is primarily seeing growth from the international side of operations. This makes sense given that the airline has

the largest flight network of any airline in the world. The airline flies to hundreds of destinations in over one hundred different countries. Year to date the airline has seen a whopping 36 percent increase in international to international passengers, shuttling 16.7 million passengers across the world on its aircraft.

The airline will continue to grow as it seeks to expand further into markets and develop close partnerships with other airlines such as IndiGo.

UK air traffic glitch causes flight delays across Europe

Britain's National Air Traffic Service (NATS) was hit by a technical problem for several hours on Monday 28 August, causing widespread disruption to flights using UK airspace that airlines and airports said would continue for some time despite the issue being fixed.

NATS had earlier had to restrict the flow of aircraft after the issue affected its system's ability to automatically process flight plans, with airlines and airports warning of delays and cancellations.

"We have identified and remedied the technical issue affecting our flight planning system this morning. We are now working closely with airlines and airports to manage the flights affected as efficiently as possible," NATS said in a statement.

"Our engineers will be carefully monitoring the system's performance as we return to normal operations." British transport minister Mark Harper said he was working with NATS to help them manage affected flights and support passengers.

Earlier Irish air traffic control provider AirNav Ireland said the issue, which struck during a public holiday in parts of Britain, was resulting in "significant delays for flights across Europe that are travelling to, from or

through UK airspace".

A spokesperson for London Heathrow, the busiest hub in western Europe, said schedules would remain significantly disrupted for the rest of the day.

"We ask passengers to only travel to the airport if their flight is confirmed as still operating. Teams across Heathrow are working as hard as they can to minimise the knock-on impacts and assist those whose journeys have been affected," the spokesperson said.

Manchester Airport, London Stansted and London Gatwick were among the many UK airports who warned of delays and cancellations, while Dublin Airport said the issue had resulted in delays and cancellations to some flights into and out of the Irish capital.

Many passengers took to social media to say they were stuck on planes on the tarmac waiting to take off, or being held in airport buildings in Spain, Portugal, Greece, Israel and elsewhere on what is a traditionally busy travel day as the school holidays draw to a close.

One witness who was held on the tarmac at Budapest for two hours before being taken off the plane said their pilot told passengers that they could face an 8-to-12-hour delay.



Travellers wait for their flights at London's Heathrow Airport after air traffic was restricted by Britain's National Air Traffic Service due to the technical glitch, on Monday 28 August

CAA hosts a seminar against harassment of women at work place

CAA hosts a seminar against harassment of women at workplace. The PCAA Human Resource Directorate, in collaboration with the Federal Ombudsman Secretariat for Protection against Harassment at Workplace (FOSPAH), organized a seminar at JIAP Karachi. The session began with an opening note from Air Commodore (R) Shahid Qadir, the Director of Security, who welcomed the Chief Guest Ms. Fauzia Waqar, the Federal Ombudsman. Air Vice Marshal Taimur Iqbal, Additional Director General of the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority, Air Cdr Shahid Iqbal, Director of Security, Lt. (R) Abid Ali, Director HR, Syed Asif Raza Gillani, Director P&D, and Airport Manager Muhammad Erfan were also present the seminar. During her speech, Ms. Fauzia Waqar shared her experiences on the protection of women at the workplace. The Chief Guest enlightened the audience about the Federal Government's aim of creating a safe working environment for all females. The FOSPAH team delivered a presentation on the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, which has been amended in 2021. Ms. Fauzia Waqar also answered questions from the audience and highlighted the significance of the 2010 act. She presented the contributions and achievements of the Federal Ombudsman Secretariat. A large number of PCAA employees attended the session with great interest. On behalf of the Director General PCAA, Additional Director General Air Vice Marshal Taimur Iqbal presented a Crest to the Honorable Chief Guest Ms. Fauzia Waqar. Additional Director General Taimur Iqbal in his speech reiterated CAA's commitment to implement the 2010 Act. FOSPAH Team also showed gratitude to PCAA HR Team for arranging a successful seminar.



Oman's SalamAir grows in Pakistan



SalamAir is set to expand its South Asia network over the coming weeks by bolstering direct connectivity between Oman and Pakistan.

The airline has confirmed the launch of a new route from Muscat International Airport to Peshawar's Bacha Khan International Airport from Oct. 2, operating two flights per week on Mondays and Thursdays. Reservations have now opened for the 1,073-mi. (932-nm) service, which will utilize Airbus A320neo aircraft.

Peshawar is the sixth-largest city in Pakistan, with a population of more than 2.3 million. It is situated in the northwest of the country and currently has one nonstop link to Oman through Pakistan International Airlines' 2X-weekly service to Muscat.

According to data from OAG Schedules Analyser, SalamAir is also planning to further bolster its Pakistan network in October by launching four other new routes and offering frequency enhancements on three more. However, reservations for these additional services have yet to open.

The latest schedules suggest the LCC plans to inaugurate flights connecting Muscat with Islamabad from Oct. 1, operating five times per week. Flights to Lahore and southwestern Pakistan's Quetta are scheduled to commence two days later, followed by service to Faisalabad from Oct. 5. SalamAir's plans include three roundtrips per week to Lahore and 2X-weekly services to Quetta and Faisalabad.

Additionally, frequencies on SalamAir's three existing routes to Karachi, Multan and Sialkot are also set to rise. Each operate 3X-weekly at present, but Karachi and Sialkot are scheduled to increase to 5X-weekly and Multan to 4X-weekly.

SalamAir began flying to Pakistan in December 2017 with service to Karachi and Sialkot and added Multan two months later. A small number of repatriation flights to Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar were also provided during the pandemic.

If the airline operates its October schedule as planned, its Oman-Pakistan capacity will rise from 3,640 two-way weekly seats at present to more than 10,500. This will give the LCC a 43% seat capacity share between the two countries, up from 20% now.

The proposed expansion comes fewer than three months after aviation officials from Oman and Pakistan met to discuss plans to increase travel between the two countries. The talks included proposals to start flights from Muscat to Karachi and southwestern port city Gwadar.

Oman is home to a large Pakistani community, estimated to be more than 200,000 people. SalamAir's new services will therefore likely attract flows of VFR traffic and migrant labor.

On Aug. 8, it was reported that Oman's flag-carrier Oman Air is to undergo a restructuring process that will see it integrated with SalamAir, which is also state owned. SalamAir CEO Mohamed Ahmed told Aviation Week that he had no further information on the proposals, but said that discussions had taken place earlier this year on greater cooperation between the two carriers.

He added that he hoped meetings scheduled for later this week would clarify matters.

Abu Dhabi Airport to open massive new terminal in November

An airliner at Abu Dhabi International Airport in front of the iconic air traffic control tower.

Abu Dhabi International Airport (AUH) has set early November for the opening of its new 8-million-ft.2 passenger terminal.

AUH says the new facility, to be called Terminal A, will have the capacity to handle 45 million annual passengers—more than twice the number of passengers AUH is expected to process this year. The terminal was originally targeted to open in 2017, but a number of hurdles, including the COVID-19 pandemic, pushed back completion of the facility to 2023.

“Equipped with the latest technologies, Terminal A boasts a range of interconnected biometric systems that will invite passengers to enjoy the speed and comfort of a seamless, digitized journey from pre-travel to boarding gate, facilitated by self-service kiosks, streamlined security checkpoints and state-of-the-art baggage handling systems,” AUH says in a statement.

The terminal will feature 163 food and beverage outlets, as well as “relaxation zones” and spas, according to AUH, which adds: “Terminal A will appeal to both leisure and business travelers.”

AUH Chairman Mohammed bin



Hamad bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan says: “The opening of the facility ... turns over a new page in Abu Dhabi's 55-year aviation history. A beacon of modernity and sophistication, it will be a pivotal driver for our emirate's growth by spurring tourism and trade.”

The airport's Managing Director and Interim CEO Elena Sorlini adds: “Through leveraging the latest technologies, Abu Dhabi's reimagined airport experience will offer a seamless passenger journey, fostering connectivity, interactions, business, trade and tourism, all of which are essential elements in strengthening Abu Dhabi's position on the world stage.”

AUH handled 10.3 million passengers in the first half of 2023, up 67% year-over-year. The airport connects to 114 destinations served by 27 airlines. The top AUH destination markets in the first half of 2023 were Mumbai, India; London, New Delhi and Kochi, India; and Doha, Qatar.

Wagner chief was aboard plane that crashed with no survivors

Russian mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin was listed as a passenger on a private jet which crashed on Wednesday 23 August evening north of Moscow with no survivors, the Russian authorities said.

There was no confirmation that Prigozhin was physically on board and Reuters could not immediately confirm that he was on the aircraft.

However, Russia's aviation agency Rosaviatsia said the founder of Wagner group Prigozhin was on board the plane.

"According to the airline, the following passengers were on board the Embraer — 135 (EBM-135BJ) aircraft:... Prigozhin, Yevgeny," said Rosaviatsia, which also listed Dmitry Utkin, a shadowy figure who managed Wagner's operations.

Russia's emergency situations ministry said in a statement that the aircraft travelling from Moscow to St. Petersburg had crashed near the village of Kuzhenkino in the Tver Region.

It said that 10 people had been on board, including three crew members. According to preliminary information, everyone on board had been killed, it said.

Prigozhin, 62, spearheaded a mutiny against Russia's top army brass on June 23-24 which President Vladimir Putin said could have tipped Russia into civil war.

The mutiny was ended by negotiations and an apparent Kremlin deal which saw Prigozhin agree to relocate to neighbouring Belarus. But he had appeared to move freely inside Russia after the deal nonetheless.

Prigozhin, who had sought to topple Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Valery Gerasimov, chief of the general staff, recently posted a video address which he suggested was taken in Africa.

Unconfirmed Russian media reports said that Dmitry Utkin, Prigozhin's right-hand man, was also on board and that Prigozhin and his associates had attended a meeting with officials from the Russian Defence Ministry.

Reuters could not confirm that and there was no immediate comment from the defence ministry or the Kremlin.

Soon after the plane dropped out of the sky, a second private jet linked to Prigozhin which also appeared to be

heading to St Petersburg, Prigozhin's home base, turned back to Moscow, flight tracking data showed, and later landed.

The flight radar 24 online tracker showed that the Embraer Legacy 600 (plane number RA-02795) had dropped off the radar at 6:11pm time. An unverified video clip posted to social media showed a plane resembling a private jet falling out of the sky towards the earth.

Russia denies foreign investigation for crash that killed Wagner chief



Foreign investigators will take no part in the investigation surrounding the crash of the Embraer Legacy 600 jet that killed Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of the infamous Russian private military company Wagner Group.

On August 23, 2023, the business jet registered as RA-02795 crashed in a field near Kuzhenkino, Tver Region, approximately 300 kilometers (about 185 miles) northwest of Moscow, Russia. All 10 individuals on board were killed.

The circumstances of the crash have raised concerns that foul play might have been involved in the elimination of Prigozhin and his associates. Factors such as the sudden descent of the aircraft and the scattering of parts over several kilometers suggest that a catastrophic mid-air event, such as an explosion, may have taken place.

Due to the potential criminal nature of the incident, the Kremlin has ruled out international participation in the investigation. As a result, the Brazilian Aeronautical Accidents Investigation and Prevention Center (CENIPA) will not be involved, despite being the country where the crashed aircraft was designed and manufactured.

In the event of an aviation accident, the Convention on International Civil

Aviation, also known as the Chicago Convention, specifies that "the State of Registry, the State of the Operator, the State of Design, and the State of Manufacture shall each be entitled to appoint an accredited representative to participate in the investigation".

On August 28, 2023, a CNN reporter who visited the crash location reported that it had already been "flattened and cleaned".

Rules notified for cargo clearance under PSW

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has notified draft rules for all government agencies that apply trade controls on imports, exports and transit goods through the Pakistan Single Window (PSW) system.

The rules were notified through SRO1077 of 2023. These rules are named Pakistan Single Window Integrated Risk Management System Rules 2023.

Moreover, cargo clearance will be done through scanning or other forms of non-intrusive inspection technology, physical inspections, withdrawal of samples, detailed examinations or documentary controls in the form of licences, permits, certificates and other documents under the regulatory requirements of the government agencies.

Moreover, there will be an Integrated Risk Management System (IRMS) implemented through the PSW system to apply trade controls, management procedures and risk mitigation measures on imports, exports and transit goods.

IRMS will apply to all cross-border trade consignments being cleared through the PSW system. All goods will be assigned to risk channels by the IRMS based on risk criteria defined by the government agencies in the system.

Each government agency will be required to constitute an operational Risk Management Committee within the agency. The committee will comprise officials responsible for cross-border trade-related procedures of the agency and will be headed by an officer, not below BPS 19 or equivalent.

The committee will be responsible for risk assessment, analysis, development, maintenance and review of the risk rules about the licences, permits, certificates and other documents processed and issued by the government agency.



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15 cable cars sealed over safety concerns



A District administration official seals a chairlift in Abbottabad.

At least 15 cable cars were sealed by the district administration in Havelian and Galiyat due to their poor conditions and lack of safety measures.

Tehsildar Havelian Muhammad Ejaz along with technical team, tehsil municipal administration (TMA), Communication and Works Department (C&W) and revenue staff, took action against the cable cars for violation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) during inspections. The cable cars were sealed at Puna, Harlan and Satora in Havelian tehsil, while two others were sealed in Kokal Bursain tehsil.

Assistant commissioners are currently conducting site visits alongside technical teams in their respective areas, ensuring strict action against any cable cars found in violation of SOPs. Assistant Commissioner Lubna Iqbal led a team comprising TMA, C&W, and revenue staff to inspect cable cars in various parts of Tehsil Havelian.

She evaluated the fitness of these cable cars and instructed relevant individuals to fully adhere to SOPs, guaranteeing the safety of citizens' lives and property, while also ensuring the cable cars' fitness.

The Abbottabad district administration is strictly enforcing the law to safeguard the lives and property of citizens and prevent potential untoward incidents in the future.

However, these measures have caused problems for a large number of people in these areas. This is particularly evident as cable cars serve as the solitary mode of communication for residents inhabiting remote hilly regions. A multitude of individuals, including students, daily commuters, and the general public, heavily relied upon these cable cars for their transportation needs. The people have also shown concern over closure of the cable cars which is the only means of communication to hundreds of villages.

Sardar Gohar Zaman, Chairman of

Tehreek-i-Hazara, urged the administration to reopen the Havelian Puna cable car, which serves as a connection for around two dozen villages and is extensively utilised by both students and the general public. He called upon the administration to establish alternative transportation arrangements for the affected people.

K2 porters tread the line between tradition and modernity



A porter hikes past K2, carrying gas stoves, live chickens and even lawn furniture for adventurers seeking an audience with the world's second-highest peak.

Under mountains that dagger the sky, a misfit caravan of Pakistani porters trudge towards K2 toting live chickens and lawn furniture for adventurers seeking an audience with the world's second-highest peak.

It's a dozen-day round trip, some 270,000 burdened steps in lopsided plastic loafers, tie-dye headbands and leopard-print pyjamas, climbing to a glacial perch under one of the most awing sights on Earth — the apex of the Karakorams 8,611 metres (28,251 feet) above.

Pakistan's dragging economy spurs them into this risk, even as it drains the rewards. The wilderness is shrinking with the creeping advance of roads, promising safer routes but less work. The mountains romance their souls, even as the peaks and troughs punish their bodies.

Seven decades after K2's first summit, the hardscrabble lives of the men shouldering expeditions up to such great heights are at a crossroads.

"I love the mountains," says 28-year-old Yasin Malick, tasked with ferrying a

crate of 180 eggs for a tour group joined by AFP journalists.

"My paternal grandfather, maternal uncle, father were all in this line of work," he explains. "Now it's my turn." Yet in the same breath, he pledges the tradition won't pass to younger generations: "I will carry loads till the day I die but I will not let them carry it."

Different worlds

Tour operators typically quote between \$2,000 and \$7,000 for the trip starting in Askole — a village in the Gilgit-Baltistan region where jeeps end their muddling journeys and spill trekkers sporting neck pillows and parasols, as well as more hardbred mountain-climbers.

Porters — doing the dogsbody work carting luggage, dining tents and pantries of provisions — make something like Rs30,000 to Rs40,000 (\$105 to \$140) each trip in the four-month summer season, less than the price of high-end hiking trousers one firm recommends clients wear.

Over the past year, the purchasing power of that meagre wage has ebbed, with inflation standing at 28 per cent in July, as Pakistan came to the cusp of default before an IMF intervention offered some paltry relief.

"Now with this job, I'm finding it difficult to pay for household necessities," said 42-year-old Sakhawat Ali. "I don't have a choice but to come here and work hard." But his tone lifts irresistibly as he describes the mountains.

"They each have different colours which allows me to witness different worlds," he says.

Porters — all male, spread from young adulthood to pensionable age — report carrying up to 35 kilograms on the 2,000-metre ascent, much crammed in blue chemical storage drums lashed to metal backpack frames.

On the odyssey to Basecamp, hikers take a sauntering pace, pausing for picnics, as porters power ahead at sunrise on spartan diets of chai and chapati after a night under plastic sheet shelters.

Mules also carry a large share of the cargo and their desiccated corpses litter the half-formed trails.

"Sometimes it's cold, sometimes it's raining, sometimes the weather is harsh," said porter Khadim Hussain.

"Young age has no match," the 65-year-old says. "I wasn't afraid of anyone, anything — there was no fear."

"My age is not the same now: my age has passed."

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CPEC to SIFC

A WEARY nation is being sold a new acronym-based dream about huge progress. It was Seato and Cento in the 1960s, OIC in the 1970s,; CPEC in the 2010s and the Strategic Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) now. Similar dreams in the past only resulted in short-term, inequitable and distorted progress.

The common thread across all was the attempt of our rulers to attract politicised lumpy investment via political ties with autocratic patron states like the US, China and those in the Gulf, rather than from a wide range of local and foreign investors, as India and Bangladesh did by becoming economically attractive by implementing reforms. Autocratic states make us dependent on the political agenda of autocratic states, whose shifting moods can stall progress. Local foreign investors would give no single entity control over our destiny and allow us policy freedom.

While CPEC is not dead, it has stalled and is not living up to its dizzying marketing. It is unclear what impetus the new agreement signed on its 10th anniversary gives. But it is telling that China sent only a vice premier for the partying of supposedly the crown jewel of its huge global Belt and Road Initiative. In 10 years, China pumped in \$25 billion but we are much worse off economically now than in 2013, with the PML-N responsible for one and the PTI for two economic crises. The power plants are expensive and technically dubious; the freeways have made travel easier but not added economic value to pay off the foreign loans. The economic zones and the Gwadar port are inactive. Why have things stalled? Has China concluded that Pakistan is not the right place to do business in, given our political instability, bureaucracy and elite-dominated economy?

With apparently less Chinese interest, we are now beseeching the Gulf sheikhs for patronage. Can the SIFC result in sustainable and equitable progress? The immediate prognosis looks dim. Firstly, it is a huge demotion to go from China to them. There is the difference in economic size. China's GDP is \$20 trillion; that of the six Gulf states around \$2tr.

The type of projects being championed the most raise concerns.

More critically, China is a highly productive and dynamic state that has grown through creativity and hard work and possesses amazing managerial and technological prowess to share, though its autocratic ways are a concern. The Gulf

states are living off natural resources, with no economic dynamism to share beyond investing huge oil money abroad. They will come to us only if they can make much more money than in the competitive West, as we give them all sorts of advantages not available to other actors in our economy. So, instead of being a haven for the fittest, we will be a pillage ground for the fittest.

To predict the fate of the SIFC, one only has to view the intellectual prowess and economic dynamism of the three driving forces — Gulf sheikhs, the establishment and Raiwind. Economic dynamism, productivity, creativity and vision are the last things that come to mind about them (the PTI and PPP are no better). With the three joining forces, we do not get much.

With major economic reform to fix unproductivity on hold (let alone restructuring to create a fair economy), this is just another attempt by rulers to postpone reforms and restructuring, maintain an exclusionary, elitist economy that benefits them but still relaxes our binding current account deficit constraint. That constraint periodically forces them into attempting to undertake patchy, dubious reforms under IMF diktat as the economic unproductivity and large money supply increases and fiscal deficits produced by our elitist, rapacious economy frequently deplete our foreign reserves.

The type of projects being championed the most — corporate farming and mining — raise concerns further as globally these sectors are known for economic inequity and environmental destruction. The lack of transparency and involvement of civil society in a democratic way and the powers and role being given to the establishment raise hackles further. This economic strategy is going hand in hand with political autocracy as all players look to increase their political control, silence all opposition and media and crush freedoms.

Thus, Pakistan is entering a new and dangerous phase of economic inequity and political repression, apparently led by the establishment with the help of a new set of political lackeys to replace the PTI. As always in our history, the promised rosy dream may soon turn into a traumatic nightmare and a lived tragic reality soon for a hapless nation. Sadly, one sees little chance of major change in the foreseeable future.

Minister pledges to accelerate CPEC pace

Caretaker Minister for Planning and Development Muhammad Sami Saeed on Tuesday 22 August promised to maintain the pace of ongoing development projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

“The minister expressed a fervent commitment to sustain the momentum of ongoing CPEC projects,” said an official statement after a briefing session apparently to assure the Chinese government and investors that a political transition would not affect the progress on a multi-billion dollar bilateral initiative.

The statement said the minister led a comprehensive meeting to review the progress on development projects under the CPEC portfolio. The meeting was attended by senior officials from the CPEC secretariat and related wings of the Ministry of Planning including Secretary Planning Zafar Ali Shah.

The minister said the caretaker government will maintain the pace of pivotal development projects. Underlining the transformative potential of CPEC, the minister reaffirmed that the caretaker Government was “mandated to sustain the acceleration of all development initiatives, with CPEC being accorded the utmost precedence”.

He directed all the departments concerned and ministries to work with close coordination and cooperation to maintain the current pace of development so that the development process should continue without any hindrance during the transition period. He opined that CPEC will significantly enhance the development in the region and Pakistan, the statement said.

He also called for an effective oversight mechanism that should be embedded within the implementation process in CPEC projects to harness its full potential and optimal utilisation of resources, it added.

China bans Japanese seafood after Fukushima water release



South Korean environmental activists hold a protest against the Japanese government's plan to release wastewater from the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean, in Seoul on Thursday 24 August.

Japan started releasing treated radioactive water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday 24 August, a polarising move that prompted China to announce an immediate blanket ban on all aquatic products from Japan.

China is 'highly concerned about the risk of radioactive contamination brought by... Japan's food and agricultural products,' the customs bureau said in a statement.

The Japanese government signed off on the plan two years ago and it was given a green light by the UN nuclear watchdog last month.

The discharge is a key step in decommissioning the Fukushima Daiichi plant after it was destroyed by a tsunami in 2011.

Plant operator Tokyo Electric Power (Tepco) said the release began at 1:03pm local time and it had not identified any abnormalities. However, China reiterated its firm opposition to the plan and said the Japanese government had not proved that the water discharged would be safe.

Tokyo has in turn criticised China for spreading 'scientifically unfounded claims.' It maintains the water release is safe, noting that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has also concluded that the impact it would have on people and the environment was 'negligible.'

Japan has requested that China immediately lift its import ban on aquatic products and seeks a discussion on the impact of the water release based on science, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters.

Japan exported about \$600 million

worth of aquatic products to China in 2022, making it the biggest market for Japanese exports, with Hong Kong second. Sales to China and Hong Kong accounted for 42 per cent of all Japanese aquatic exports in 2022, according to government data.

China customs did not give details on the specific aquatic products impacted by the ban and did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Decades long process The Fukushima Daiichi plant was destroyed in March 2011 after a massive 9.0 magnitude earthquake generated powerful tsunami waves causing meltdowns in three reactors.

The first discharge totalling 7,800 cubic metres the equivalent of about three Olympic swimming pools of water will take place over about 17 days.

According to Tepco test results released on Thursday, that water contained about up to 63 becquerels of tritium per litre, below the World Health Organization drinking water limit of 10,000 becquerels per litre.

A becquerel is a unit of radioactivity.

The IAEA also released a statement saying its independent on-site analysis had confirmed the tritium concentration was below the limit.

There are not going to be any health effects There is no scientific reason to ban imports of Japanese food whatsoever,' said Geraldine Thomas, former professor of molecular pathology at London's Imperial College.

Separately from China, Hong Kong and Macau have announced their own ban starting Thursday, which covers Japanese seafood imports from 10 regions.

South Korean Prime Minister Han

Duck-soo said import bans on Fukushima fisheries and food products will stay in place until public concerns were eased.

Japan will conduct monitoring around the water release area and publish results weekly, Japan's environment minister said. The release is estimated to take about 30 years.

Protests In Hong Kong, Jacay Shum, a 73-year-old activist, held up a picture portraying IAEA head Rafael Grossi as the devil.

Japan's actions in discharging contaminated water are very irresponsible, illegal, and immoral,' said Shum, who was among a group of about 100 marchers.]

South Korean police arrested at least 16 protesters who entered the Japanese embassy in Seoul, although South Korea's government has said its own assessment found no problems with the scientific and technical aspects of the release.

Pakistan needs to implement GSP+ conventions: envoy

Ambassador of Belgium to Pakistan Charles DeLogne has said that implementation of GSP+ conventions especially related to labour and human rights and environmental protection would help Islamabad to further improve its trade with EU countries.

During his visit to the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Mr DeLogne said that Pakistan should ensure the implementation of the IMF agreement, to save its economy from more problems.

He lauded the skilled human resource of Pakistan and said that the educated and skilled workers can directly apply to Belgian companies from here and the embassy will facilitate them in signing employment contracts in case of their selection.

The envoy highlighted that Belgium is the fifth largest trading partner of Pakistan in the EU and it was interested to further enhance cooperation with Pakistan in various sectors including trade, scientific research and education sectors.

He said that PIA is in negotiations with the EU to reopen its flights and the start of PIA flights would facilitate Pakistan's trade promotion with EU countries.

Abid Hussain, Trade Commissioner of the Belgium Embassy also present at the meeting.

While ICCI President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that Pakistan and Belgium enjoy cordial relations, their bilateral trade of just over \$1 billion was not matching the actual potential.

Relief in Battagram after daring mid-air rescue bears fruit



(CLOCKWISE) Pakistan Army commandos take part in the rescue operation after a cable car became stranded in mid-air in the Allai tehsil of Battagram on Tuesday 22 August morning; locals look on from a mountainside as a military helicopter hovers above the trapped chairlift; and, a screengrab shows local rescuers bringing two of the trapped students to safety amid late-night efforts after the aerial operation was halted.

The nation remained glued to TV and mobile phone screens, looking on as locals, rescue workers and military personnel attempted to rescue eight people stuck in a chairlift suspended in mid-air after its cables snapped.

The 14-hour rescue operation, launched to save the people — mostly students — who were crossing a river in Allai tehsil of Battagram on Tuesday 22 August morning, concluded late at night when all eight on board the suspended chairlift were brought to safety.

An eyewitness told media that one of the kids, who had a pre-existing medical condition, was moved to the hospital for examination. The rest of those recovered were given initial first-aid at a camp set up nearby by Rescue 1122 personnel, however all of those rescued were said to be in good health and spirits.

Locals hailed as heroes those who put their lives on the line for “no reward or recognition”.

PM Anwaarul Haq also confirmed the development. “Relieved to know that Alhamdulillah all the kids have been successfully and safely rescued. Great teamwork by the military, rescue departments, district administration as well as the local people,” he said in a tweet.

The chairlift, or cable car, had started

dangling on the zipline after two of its three ropes snapped in the early morning, leaving the small trolley used for river crossing suspended in mid-air.

Initially, at least four helicopters were used by the army to try and reach the precariously positioned cable car. By the time the aerial operation was called off in the evening, two people had been rescued — one by the army and the other by locals.

After darkness fell, it was decided to continue efforts via alternative means and locals launched a rescue attempt from the ground — quite a risky proposition as it involved rescuers sliding along the remaining cables to approach the chairlift. Once within reach of the cable car, each of its occupants was secured by harnesses to a rescuer, who then rappelled them back to safety.

During the day, assistant commissioner Jawad Hussain told Dawn that the cable car was privately run by locals for transportation across the river in the absence of roads or bridges in the area.

The AC said that the first child was rescued with the help of a rope that was hooked onto a belt provided by rescuers to everyone in the cable car. Speaking about the aerial operation, the AC said helicopters struggled to hover over the suspended chairlift due to strong winds and inclement weather conditions.

He added that Rescue 1122 teams had also spread nets under the cable car, where it dangled over the raging river.

Gulfaraz, one of those who were stuck in the cable car, said that one of the stranded students kept slipping in and out of unconsciousness during the ordeal. The 20-year-old said the trapped students were between the ages of 10 and 15 years.

Iqbal, a school teacher, explained that at least 150 students made the hazardous journey to school by cable car due to a lack of roads in the area.

“There are no other arrangements,” he lamented, adding that no such incident had occurred previously. The teacher further said that it had been around eight years since the cable car was installed and it was inspected on a monthly basis.

PM honours Battagram chairlift rescuers



Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar greets Rizwan Ullah, a survivor of the cable car accident, on Thursday 24 August.

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq has said every individual who was part of the operation to rescue eight people stranded in a chairlift at a height of 600ft in Battagram “exhibited remarkable prowess during a daring mission”.

In a ceremony at the PM Office on Thursday 24 August to honour locals and armed forces personnel who carried out the rescue operation, Mr Kakar said the entire nation was concerned about the safety of the trapped children, who were stranded for hours.

The successful rescue endeavour was “a collaborative achievement,” the PM said, adding that those who prayed at homes also deserved recognition.

Kakar meets AJK, GB leaders

“Being a father, I could feel the pain of stranded children's parents but the teamwork based on prudent and efficient planning ensured their safety.”

“Hats off to all of you who did an immaculate job,” the PM added.

The rescued children, who also attended the event, were given souvenirs.

He said a safety audit of all cable cars in the region has been ordered and the report would be presented to the premier. He also emphasised the need for capacity building of local rescue departments to deal with such emergencies.

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Hanging by a thread and living to tell the tale



In this still from drone footage obtained by BBC News, the occupants of the chairlift are seen suspended hundreds of feet above the valley in Battagram's Allai tehsil.

It was a routine morning for students who were en route to school on a chairlift. But as fate would have it, they soon found themselves suspended in mid-air, thousands of feet above the ground after two of the three wires holding the chairlift snapped.

“As a result of the sudden jerk which came with a big bang, we piled on each other in the lopsided trolley, which was swaying due to strong gusts of wind,” the survivors told media a day after they were rescued in a 14-hour-long operation. The passengers — including six students — held on to the rickety trolley's hooks and supporting pipes — their lives dangling by a solitary steel wire.

As if the gusts were not enough to terrify them, the wind pressure on the trolley scared them to death. “All hope was lost; with every passing moment,” one of the survivors told Dawn. However, they got their hopes up again after an army chopper started hovering over the chairlift in an attempt to rescue them.

Before the aerial operation was called off at night, 13-year-old Irfan was the only one rescued by a helicopter. Irfan said he did not see any other option but death before he was rescued. As he was being pulled out of the gondola, his parents and the rest of the family gathered at the site anxiously awaited his return.

Another student, Niaz Mohammad, said army officials threw down a rope after rescuing Irfan. “I tied the rope around myself, but when I was pulled up, the rope got stuck with another rope on top of the cable car and they had to abort the attempt,” he said.

“After several attempts, when the

helicopter flew back, I thought it was impossible to rescue us,” Attaullah, 16, told Dawn.

Gulfranz, 20, who was earlier mistakenly identified as a teacher, said that at nightfall, their hopes also faded. “When the helicopters left and darkness fell in front of our eyes, we started losing hope; if we could not be rescued in daylight then night was surely going to make things worse,” the survivor told Dawn.

Heroic operation

Enter Sahib Khan and his Koka and Engineering Company. They were called in to rescue the stranded passengers after the aerial operation did not get the job done.

The two private rescuers and their team from Bisham Seror, along with zipline operators from Naran, rescued the passengers in a daring operation, widely hailed by locals. Sahib Khan told media at his residence that he was asking the local authorities to spearhead the efforts to save the students, but his requests were ignored at first.

Mr Khan claimed that the army had succeeded in rescuing one student, but after that it became impossible for them to overcome the situation, due to poor visibility.

After nightfall, he and his team were allowed to initiate the operation with ground support provided by the army, Rescue 1122, police and locals. He claimed that locals and the administration started to back him after he rescued the first person. Soon, other rescues followed, and eventually everyone was safely by midnight.

Niaz Mohammad was rescued at

about 11pm. His teary-eyed family and mother hugged him and thanked God for the rescue. His father, Umer Zaib, said they had lost all hope of their son's safe recovery, but rescue efforts thankfully bore fruit, ending their hours-long ordeal.

Voice of reason

As these teenagers were facing death, Sher Nawaz, who was on his way to Abbottabad, became a voice of reason. He said the chairlift was already ferrying students when he reached there and he got on board on the third trip.

“After the rope snapped, the students got scared and were screaming... I calmed them down and told them to be patient and have some hope... whatever fate has held in store for them will come to them,” he said as he related the scenes inside the trolley.

“Some of the children were so frustrated, they were considering jumping down, but the elder passengers gave us confidence,” 15-year-old Rizwan Ullah told AFP.

Gulfaraz said they were prepared to die after the ropes snapped. “I don't have words to explain what we faced inside the hanging cable car,” he said.

On the ground, the families' terror was palpable.

13-year-old Irfan's father said that shortly after his son left for school, he received word about the accident. “I reached there with a heavy heart, unaware of my son's presence in the cable car... soon someone told me that my son is also stranded.”

“My wife and other kids rushed to the scene and their eyes remained glue to the cable car till the rescue operation came to an end in the night,” he said.

“Death is less painful than looking at your teenage son dangling thousands of feet above the ground, in a broken trolley,” Umraiz told media.

Two arrested

Meanwhile, Allai police arrested cable car owner Malik Gulzarin and operator Ejaz after a lodging a case over the incident.

The FIR said that a substandard rope had been used, with no alternatives available, which endangered the lives of the passengers. The report also mentioned that the chairlift operators had been instructed beforehand to provide a fitness certificate for the cable to a nearby police station, but they neglected to do so.

Separately, AC Allai Muhammad Jawad told media that he formed an inspection committee to inspect such chairlifts.

Rampant corruption, favouritism, nepotism plague Gorakh Hills Development Authority: report



AZIGZAG road leading to the top of a hill at the Gorakh Hills Station Dadu district in Sindh..

Rampant financial irregularities, favoritism and nepotism plague the Gorakh Hills Development Authority, which had been established purportedly to transform this cool and picturesque hill station into a thriving tourist hub on the pattern of Murree, causing the authority to fail to achieve its core objectives.

A damning special audit report submitted by the Auditor General of Pakistan to the National Accountability Bureau exposed the authority's substantial blunders, which included, among others, the authority's inability to seek approval for its master plan, a crucial step in the development of the tourist site, said sources.

Additionally, the authority failed to acquire the proposed 284,597 acres land, which was crucial for the site's expansion, indulged in substantial financial irregularities with Rs23 billion allegedly misused in the procurement of equipment without adhering to proper tender procedures and did not deduct income tax, said the report.

The site had also been visited upon by tragedies with numerous fatalities resulting from accidents on the substandard road leading to the hill station from Dadu district's underprivileged Wahi Pandhi town, it said.

Situated at a height of 5688 feet above sea level, the once-promising Murree of Sindh has suffered greatly due to government's negligence. The authority

was established with ambitious goals in 2008 after its unanimous approval from the Sindh Assembly.

Its objectives included the construction of an international standard road spanning 54 km, approval of a comprehensive master plan, land acquisition, infrastructural enhancement and revenue generation through tourism.

However, the AGP report reveals stark reality of unfulfilled promises. Even after an amendment to the authority's Act in 2013, nothing has been done so far to convert the site into a fully-fledged tourist place at par with Murree and other famous spots.

The amendment only paved the way for PPP MNA Rafique Ahmed Jamali to become chairman of the authority and the tourism minister its vice chairman but its performance remained questionable.

Despite having a budget of billions of rupees at its disposal, the PPP lawmaker has failed to achieve the required objectives of the authority and the dream of a beautiful tourist spot remain elusive till this day.

The AGP report disclosed that the authority's affairs had been heavily influenced by personal interests rather than guided by its designated objectives. The revelation that the master plan remained unapproved and land ownership unresolved, despite billions of rupees invested over 15 years, underscored a significant failure on the authority's part, commented the report.

The authority's continued inability to receive green light for the master plan had cast a shadow over its endeavors and the absence of a formal framework and approved roadmap had contributed to a lack of direction in the hill resort's development, it said.

Even prior to the authority's inception, transparency and accountability were seemingly absent. Vehicles procured prior to its establishment lacked documented records, while several officials including former DG of the authority Naseer Ahmed Jamali, former secretary of tourism Nazir Ahmed Chakrani, Mohammad Saeed Awan and former account officer Alamuddin had reportedly failed to return the allocated vehicles, said the report.

In response to the AGP report and recent media reports about large-scale corruption at the authority, the GHDA rejected what it termed as allegations of embezzlement of billion of rupees over a nine-year period and said they were designed to malign its reputation.

In an official statement, the authority clarified that the allegations of financial misconduct totaling Rs23 billion were baseless and tantamount to blackmail as the authority had only received Rs3 billion over the past none years, which had been judiciously utilized on several projects aimed at enhancing facilities at the hill station.

About mismanagement of vehicles, the authority clarified that all vehicles had been accounted for and safely under its custody. It also dispelled allegations of illegal recruitment.

"The GHDA believes the recent viral news on social and electronic media is part of a malicious campaign aimed at tarnishing the authority's reputation," said the statement and added that the allegations were leveled without merit, which were nothing but a concerted effort to besmirch the authority's image.



A rare spotless giraffe born at Bright's Zoo, in the US state of Tennessee, captured in this still image taken from a handout video.



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Pakistan football captain Maria Khan signs for Saudi club

The announcement wasn't as elaborate or spectacular as the ones Saudi Arabian football clubs have recently made for the arrival of star names like Sadio Mane, but it was still high in its significance.

Dammam-based Eastern Flames on Friday 11 August night announced the signing of Pakistan women's football team captain Maria Khan for the upcoming season of the Saudi Women's Premier League, a development that came after a string of strong performances by Ms Khan for Pakistan in the Four-Nations Cup last year in the kingdom.

The club announced the move on microblogging site X, formerly Twitter, saying Maria Khan was their first foreign acquisition for the upcoming season.

Saudi Arabia has significantly increased its investment in football in the last year. And since Al-Nassr Football Club signed Cristiano Ronaldo in December and the country's Public Investment Fund acquired four top clubs, there has been a flurry of big-name arrivals during the current transfer window.

Investments have also been made to develop women's football, with Saudi Arabia not having hidden its ambition in emulating Qatar and hosting the World Cup in the coming years.

"I had the opportunity to go to Saudi before the influx of investment into the women's game," Ms Khan, 31, who was playing her club football in the United Arab Emirates, told media on Saturday 12 August.

"However, my circumstances at the time didn't allow me to make the move. Now, however, I'm at a point in my life where I am able to take this opportunity and really look forward to it.

"Being in the Gulf for over 10 years, I've watched the growth of women's football in the region. More than anything, I'm looking forward to being given the opportunity to try my best not only to represent but also try to bring awareness to fellow Pakistani athletes," she said.

The Saudi Women's Premier League replaced the Saudi Women's National League as the country's top-tier women's competition last year. The revamp also saw a significant influx of foreign players, including Morocco's Ibtissam Jraïdi, who scored at the ongoing Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

Women's football has taken

significant strides in Pakistan in the last year, and although a league structure has been non-existent, the national team has put in good performances.

And Maria is hoping her transfer

creates a pathway for other players to secure moves to foreign clubs. "I hope this starts to create opportunities for Pakistani athletes and the talent that a lot of times goes unnoticed," she said.

Officials stop Russian tourist from crossing over to Afghanistan

The immigration staff at Torkham border turned back two tourists hailing from Russia and Kazakhstan on Saturday 27 August amid social media allegations about Khyber police misbehaviour with them.

Immigration officials told media that 31-year-old Lizunov Viacheslav from the Russian Federation and his female companion Grishkova Violetta, 29, who were desirable to cross over to Afghanistan, were stopped from crossing the border as the visa duration of both had expired.

They said that Grishkova Violetta had overstayed for only one day while Lizunov Viacheslav had overstayed illegally in Pakistan for 17 days.

"We can grant permission for a 'leave' to a foreigner, who has his or her visa expired for less than two weeks. We allowed Grishkova Violetta to cross over to Afghanistan but she was not willing to leave her partner alone and thus they both went back," they said.

Meanwhile, social media users in Jamrud took the local police to task for their alleged misbehaviour with the foreign tourists in Jamrud prior to their departure for Torkham on Saturday 27 Aug.

They alleged that police used foul language while conversing with the tourists in Jamrud bazaar where the two foreigners briefly stayed to stitch their shoes while a crowd of locals gathered around them.

In a strong-worded response to social media accusations, a statement issued from the office of DPO Salim Abbas Kulachi said that police instead helped and assisted the two foreigners to proceed to Torkham after they were spotted in Jamrud while providing them full security

and also arranging a taxi for them.

"The couple was travelling in a private taxi and when they disembarked from the vehicle in Jamrud bazaar, a group of locals gathered around them. Police on duty immediately approached them for any help," it said.

The statement said that the tourists were not well-versed in English and had difficulty in explaining their point of view to local police. "Both got infuriated when police asked for checking their travel documents. They used some indecent words against police," a police official in Jamrud requesting anonymity told Dawn. He added that even then police arranged another taxi to take them to Torkham.

The DPO in his statement insisted that any negative propaganda against his force regarding treatment of the two foreigners was totally baseless and without any substance. He said that the tourists stayed in Peshawar after they were sent back by immigration staff at Torkham on Saturday 27 August.

The officials of Federal Investigation Agency said that they could not detain such foreign passengers and instead they were directed to get their travel documents prior to their departure to their next destination. "It is then up to the foreigners to where they go and from where they stamp a fresh visa or an extension in their stay," they added.



Visitors enjoy a boat ride as a large number of people throng Sardaryab picnic spot near Peshawar recently.

Lion prowling streets leaves onlookers in awe

A lion being illegally transported in a vehicle managed to escape from its owner's custody near Aisha Bawani College on Sharea Faisal on Tuesday 29 August evening, creating a lot of scare among commuters and pedestrians who saw the big cat prowling on the pavements and forcing the police and the wildlife staff to capture the wild animal.

The young lion was later caught with the help of its keepers and handed over to the wildlife department.

Speaking to media, Sindh Wildlife Conservator Javed Ahmed Maher said that the staff was conducting an investigation into the incident.

“It’s a pet. The incident was unusual for everyone including our staff, which is not trained in managing lions on the loose, as well as the animal that’s not used to be in the public,” he said, sharing a fact that big cats do pose a threat despite being raised in captivity.

“Fortunately, no one was hurt. But, the poor animal, too, panicked, and could hurt anyone.”

According to him, there is a complete ban on keeping big cats in residential areas as well as their transport under provincial laws and the concerned individuals would be taken to task under the law.

“A case will be registered under the Sindh wildlife protection act,” he said,

adding that the lion would be shifted to the Karachi Zoological Garden.

Earlier South Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Sheraz Nazir stated that the lion’s owner was taken into custody.

“Owner Shams is a resident of the Garden area and told police he was taking the lion to a veterinarian because the animal was sick and not eating anything for the last three days.”

It might be recalled that six lions had been spotted earlier in a compound in a Gulshan-i-Hadeed area in 2020.

The matter taken up by the wildlife department was still pending in court.

Meanwhile, Interim Sindh Chief Minister retired Justice Maqbool Baqar has taken a notice of the incident and sought a report from the wildlife department on lions being kept as a pet in urban areas.

“Under which law and by whose permission was the lion kept in a residential area,” a statement issued by his office quoted him as saying.

Earlier this year, a similar incident was reported in Islamabad’s Defence Housing Authority when a leopard ran amok in the area. It was captured by the Islamabad Wildlife Management Board and Capital Development Authority after more than five hours. Three people were hurt during the episode.

Reports have earlier suggested that

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

According to officials, Sindh is the first province in the country to enact a new wildlife law three years ago — called the Sindh Wildlife Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management Act 2020 — to protect 326 species of birds, 107 species of crawling animals and 82 species of other animals.

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

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

Besides, under the 2020 law, no new application for importing big cats will be entertained. The permit also bars citizens from keeping big cats in residential areas, and an applicant must acquire a no-objection certificate from the relevant union council, town committee and cantonment board.



Screen grabs from videos widely shared on social media show the lion walking down the road, while a man (right) tries to approach the big cat on Tuesday 29 August.

Karachi Zoo lone 'beneficiary' of dramatic lion rescue



The pet lion at a zoo enclosure.

The law started to take its course in the lion's case on Wednesday 30 August that saw five suspects being granted bail by a court, experts raised concern over the well-being of the big cat that was rescued, along with a tortoise a day earlier, from Sharea Faisal and moved to the Karachi Zoological Garden late Tuesday 29 August night.

Sources said the big male cat was around one year old and had been raised as a pet, though illegally.

"It seems to be highly tamed as he didn't inflict serious injuries to anyone during the operation. This is why it's important that he is handled with due care and attention. Unfortunately, the zoo lacks trained staff and this may affect his health," a zoo official said, wishing not to be named.

According to him, the zoo is the lone beneficiary from the dramatic operation carried out on the city's busiest road.

"The zoo has gotten a young lion without spending a single penny. If looked after well, the newcomer may help the facility increase the number of its big cats," he said, adding that the zoo was left with two lionesses (of *Panthera Leo* species) after losing the lone male member last year.

Concerns raised over welfare of 'pet' big cat spending rest of its life in zoo

Sources said the first day was tough for the visibly depressed lion as he remained confined to a corner of its cage almost the whole day despite getting a lot of media attention.

"He hardly moved and apparently ate very little today. The people responsible for his fate are out on bail while the poor animal is likely to spend rest of his life at a facility that doesn't offer good care to its inmates, resulting in frequent disease

outbreaks and mortalities," another zoo official shared.

According to sources, the zoo has been hosting traumatised rescued animals for decades since the wildlife department doesn't have a dedicated facility for such animals.

"There is a long list of animals that were brought here (by the wildlife department) and passed away in few years. Often such animals were kept in poor conditions and there are mortalities during operations," an expert said, emphasising the need for inducting more staff at the zoo and providing them with the much-needed training in animal care.

He also expressed the possibility of animal abuse at the hands of lion's handlers and said that there should be a complete physical examination of the lion that's possible only after sedating him.

"Big cats are instinctively ferocious. Often, these animals are declawed and made fangless by their handlers raising them in illegal captivity. This cruel practice makes them vulnerable to infections and they are stated to have shorter lifespan than their counterparts in the wild."

Zoo director Iqbal Nawaz wasn't available for a comment despite repeated attempts made by this reporter to contact him.

Speaking to media Sindh Wildlife Conservator Javed Ahmed Maher agreed with concerns regarding welfare of rescued animals and said that the province needed a rehab facility for rescued animals.

"We are gradually moving towards that direction. The first step was to have an updated law that provides protection to all species and covers related sensitivities and that we have achieved. Now, it's in the

enforcement phase," he said.

Efforts, he said, were underway to identify people illegally keeping big cats and other animals in captivity and that, too, in residential areas.

According to officials, Sindh is the first province in the country to enact a new wildlife law three years ago — called the Sindh Wildlife Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management Act 2020 — to protect 326 species of birds, 107 species of crawling animals and 82 species of other animals.

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

Besides, under the 2020 law, no new application for importing big cats will be entertained. The permit also bars citizens from keeping big cats in residential areas, and an applicant must acquire a no-objection certificate from the relevant union council, town committee and cantonment board.

A sessions court on Wednesday 30 August granted bail to the owner of a young lion and his four employees against a surety bond of Rs200,000 each.

They were booked in a case registered by the Sindh wildlife protection police over violations of Sections 21 (protection of wildlife), 32 (seizure of property being wildlife species), 49 (certificate of lawful possession) and 50 (lawful possession of wildlife species) of the Act. — Additional reporting by Naeem Sahoutara and Imtiaz Ali



A view of Tarbela dam, which attained its maximum conservation level at 1,550 feet on Thursday 17 August. Pakistan's two other major water reservoirs — Mangla and Chashma — also reached their capacities on the same day.

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Rakhi Festival celebrated



Clockwise from top left) Hindu and Muslim women select rakhis at a stall; married Hindu women celebrate the full moon with prayers by offering flowers to the sea just before sunset; and, a girl ties a rakhi on her brother's wrist to strengthen the love between Siblings.

Hindu families in Pakistan celebrated the sweet bond between brothers and sisters on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan or the Rakhi Festival on Wednesday 30 August.

Stalls set up near Hindu temples or mandirs all over the city had the prettiest of rakhis or bracelets with colourful threads and stones or beads in the middle of that thread for women and girls to choose from and purchase for their brothers.

Traditionally, the sacred thread is tied around a brother's right wrist by his sister or sisters after pooja when the full moon appears in the sky during the Hindu month of Shravana. They can also tie the rakhi the following morning.

The ritual is carried out annually to honour brothers for protecting and being there for their sisters. The thread is also said to strengthen the love between the siblings.

The big ground behind the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Karachi had many stalls selling rakhi. Those made in India were said to be the most expensive and durable, while the one's made here in Pakistan, mostly in Mirpurkhas, were rather delicate. Understandably, the Indian rakhis were priced at Rs100 to Rs300 while the local, Pakistani ones cost less than Rs50. The least expensive of the local variety cost Rs5. "One is for five rupees and a dozen are for 50 rupees if you buy in bulk," one stall owner told Dawn.

And there was a lot of bulk buying going around as ladies were also coming out to shop for rakhis for so many men and boys in the household. Four paternal aunts Gayatri, Diwali, Bhavna and Rajna were there with nieces Neha and Nisha to select the bracelets for their brother, the girls' father, while the two girls were there

selecting for their four brothers Pardeep, Suresh, Sumeet and Nidev.

Vijay Kumar, a young father, was looking for pretty rakhis for his daughter Smirta to tie around her brothers, Dheeraj and Chirag's wrists.

Three-year-old Komal was also getting some help from her father and paternal aunt Poonam to buy a rakhi for her six-year-old brother Sundar while the aunt herself looked for one to tie around her brother and the children's father Mohan Kumar's wrist.

At another stall, one ran into 13-year-old Himani busy tying the thread around younger brother, 11-year-old Satyansh's wrist. For her there was a special rakhi packet, with the bracelet, a tiny box of kumkum for marking a tilak mark on the forehead and also an eclair for sweetening the mouth. Normally, a sister also prepares a pooja thali with some rice, kumkum, a burning clay lamp, some sweetmeat along with the rakhi for arti and prayers before Lord Ganesha before marking their brothers' foreheads with the tilak followed by the tying of the thread and offering the sweetmeat. The packet with the kumkum and eclair was a new shortcut to that ritual.

Those females, who did not have brothers, said that they were buying rakhis for cousins. Meanwhile, the festival was bittersweet for Sarika, who said that she used to buy two rakhis every year until eight years ago, when one of her brothers passed away. "He was only 20 then," she said sadly.

Some Muslim women were also found to be buying rakhis at the stalls. They said that they enjoyed brotherly relations with several Hindu men here and tied them rakhis every year on Raksha Bandhan because they were always there for them just like protective brothers.

British Museum's director resigns over stolen items

British Museum director Hartwig Fischer resigned on Friday 25 August, admitting the museum did not act "as it should have" on warnings that items had gone missing.

The museum in central London is best known for housing collections that include the Rosetta Stone and the Parthenon Marbles.

It said recently it had dismissed a staff member and alerted the police after artefacts from its collection were found to be "missing, stolen or damaged".

The items included gold jewellery and gems of semi-precious stones and glass dating from 15th century BC to the 19th century, it said in a statement.

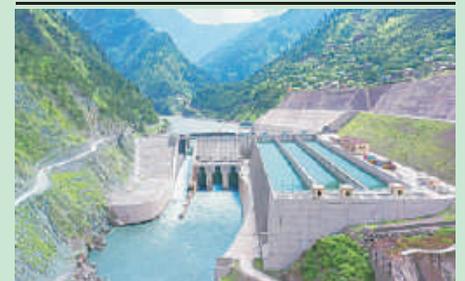
London's Met police said on Thursday 24 August a man had been interviewed by investigating officers, although no arrests had been made.

Fischer, a German art historian, said he would step down with immediate effect because of lapses in procedures that allowed the items to be taken.

"The responsibility for that failure must ultimately rest with the director," he said. "It is evident that the British Museum did not respond as comprehensively as it should have in response to the warnings in 2021, and to the problem that has now fully emerged," he added.

Emails leaked to the BBC claimed the museum was alerted by an antiquities dealer to items being sold on eBay in 2021 and ignored the report.

Most of the items affected were described by the museum as "small pieces kept in a storeroom belonging to one of the museum's collections".



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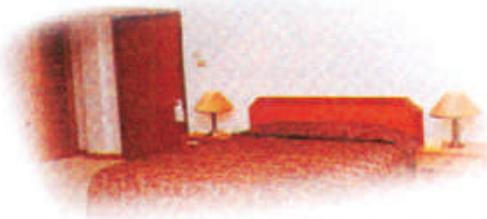
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