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 Reporter Bazla Sardar  
 Photographer S. Shahid Ikram  
 Contributors Prof. Safdar Sandal  
 Chief Correspondent Prof. Karamat Rajput.

Address B-65 Ablagh-e-Aamma  
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Cover: Royal Caribbean's 'Icon of the Seas', billed as the world's largest cruise ship, heads out to sea for its second voyage from Port Miami, on Saturday 03 Feb. The 1,197-foot long ship cost \$1.79 billion to build, has 20 decks, and can hold a maximum of 7,600 people.

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# Aviation security audit by foreign experts completed, says CAA

A four-member team of auditors from the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has completed its assessment of Pakistan's aviation security systems, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) recently told the media.

The team of international auditors, led by Oscar Annabel Rubio, had arrived at Karachi on Feb 18 to conduct its 10-day full-scale audit. The audit, which aimed at enhancing the standards of aviation security through a process of regular evaluation and oversight mechanism, was completed on Feb 27.

In a briefing held at the CAA headquarters, the visiting team provided an overview of the full-scale audit and congratulated the authority's director general on the significant improvements made, particularly following the recent enactment of the CAA Act 2023.

'The team was pleased to see that CAA not only surpassed the new 2023 ICAO benchmark effortlessly, but also came close to achieving the ICAO goals set for 2030,' said a CAA press release.

During the assessment, the audit team primarily focused on evaluating the CAA Aviation Security Directorate for five days.

Subsequently, for the following four days, they examined the implementation of security protocols in various aviation security areas at Jinnah International Airport,

including the airport itself, the Airport Security Force (ASF), domestic and international airlines, cargo companies, ground handling companies, catering companies, etc.

Additionally, the team visited the Passport Office and received a briefing, and expressed their satisfaction with what they observed. They also interacted with the FIA immigration staff and reviewed their procedures.

This comprehensive assessment took place after 2019, which was not a full-scale

audit.

The ICAO USAP-CMA Audit Team expressed their deep appreciation for the warm and welcoming hospitality they experienced in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, an ASF press release said that its core responsibilities such as, access control mechanisms, screening processes, perimeter defence strategies, security training initiatives, and adherence to established rules, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and protocol questions (PQs) were some of the main areas assessed.



The chief security officer of the ASF provided an in-depth briefing to the audit team on aviation security measures, and the ASF's proficiency and preparedness in managing emergency scenarios at the airport.

'The auditors meticulously examined the adherence to ICAO's Security and Passenger Facilitation Standards and Recommended Practices, monitored ongoing security operations, inspected access control and passenger screening measures, visited the CCTV surveillance centres, and conducted interviews with the staff.

It said that the audit team commended ASF's aviation security framework during the concluding ceremony held on Feb 27. They affirmed that Pakistan has not merely met but exceeded the newly established ICAO benchmarks for 2023. Furthermore, the security strategies implemented by the ASF were considered as closely aligned with the ICAO's standards for 2030, heralding a significant accolade for Pakistan, it added.



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## PCAA regulations of pilot's license



According to the regulations outlined in the CAA Act 2023, the procedure for obtaining or renewing a pilot's license continues. The current regulations are strictly adhered to during the license issuance or renewal process. It is an exaggeration to claim that pilots are unable to fly or that the license issuance/renewal process has stopped. Local airlines have the authority to hire foreign pilots, as permitted by the CAA regulations. Once approved by the ministry, foreign pilots are granted a work visa and subsequently issued a validation certificate. The PCAA-ANO rules and regulations are diligently followed, ensuring that foreign pilots' licenses are validated and renewed upon the airline's application.

## Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority Staff shows honesty

The duty porter at Multan International Airport, Yasir, demonstrated exceptional honesty when he discovered a jewelry box at the International Briefing Area around 01:15 p.m. This incident occurred during the briefing for the Multan-Bahrain flight of Gulf Air GF 789. Without hesitation, Yasir promptly informed the Duty Terminal Manager (DTM) about the finding. Utilizing the airport's CCTV system, the DTM successfully located the rightful owner within approximately twenty-five minutes. The jewelry inside the box was valued at five lakh ten thousand rupees. After confirming the ownership at around 01:55 p.m., the DTM handed over the jewelry box to the passengers. The passengers expressed their gratitude and commended the airport officials, particularly Yasir, for their integrity.



A four member ICAO USAP-CMA team led by Mr. Oscar Rubio Annibal visits PCAA Headquarters and held meetings with the top leadership.





## Local pilots 'sidelined' in favour of foreign talent

The Aircraft Owners and Operators Association (AOOA) has criticised the hiring practices of local airlines, especially their preference for foreign pilots over hundreds of local and unemployed aviators.

In a statement issued on Sunday, 25 Feb, the AOOA said this trend not only sidelined hundreds of Pakistani pilots but also resulted in substantial financial implications, as international pilots were reportedly receiving salaries ranging between \$9,500 and \$15,000, payable in foreign currency.

This practice resulted in a significant outflow of dollars from the nation, the association pointed out, asking local airlines to employ domestic pilots.

It also alleged that these foreign pilots were benefiting from tax exemptions, a matter it suggested should warrant scrutiny from the Federal Board of Revenue and intervention by the government.

The AOOA also accused the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) of regulatory breaches, stating that the authority had allowed foreign pilots to operate within the country for periods extending beyond 12 months, contrary to the stipulated maximum time of three months.

It also claimed that foreign pilots were reportedly working without proper work visas, adding: 'We demand the FIA to investigate the permission of foreign pilots to fly without a visa.'

Highlighting the plight of over 800 local pilots currently without employment, the AOOA questioned the rationale behind spending valuable foreign exchange reserves on international pilots.

The association warned that such an 'illegal move' might attract objections from international regulatory bodies like the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the European Aviation Safety Agency.

## Hajj app launched to help facilitate travel: Minister

Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed on Saturday, 10 Feb. said that an app had been launched to facilitate Haj pilgrims travel.

Talking to journalists during his visit to New Haji Camp, he said that this app would guide pilgrims from Haj flight to their stay in Saudi Arabia and all other relevant details would be available on the app, including videos for training of pilgrims.

Mr. Ahmed added that all pilgrims would be provided with a free single-coloured QR coded suitcase so that they could easily identify their belongings.

He said that every pilgrim would be given a mobile SIM of a Saudi company for free which would have 180 minutes for international calls.

He further said that the caretaker government reduced the price of the official Haj package by Rs100,000.

Talking about building of the New

Haji Camp, the minister said that the building had been renovated and a vaccination centre also established for pilgrims.

He said that the 'Interfaith Harmony Conference' was organised under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Religious Affairs, in which the ambassadors from 30 countries had been invited.

Mr Ahmed said that Interfaith Harmony Dialogue was held in University of Karachi, NED University and Iqra University Karachi and Islamabad campuses.

The dialogue was also arranged in the St Patrick's Church in which Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Hindu, Parsi and Jain scholars participated. 'We conveyed the message of humanity to the world.'

He said that the project of establishing schools and clinics in mosques had been initiated by the Badshahi Mosque of Lahore and would be expanded across the country.



## Commercial Aviation set for steady growth in decade ahead

Commercial aviation is set for steady growth in the decade ahead with Asia Pacific and China key drivers of market expansion, according to an Aviation Week Intelligence Network forecast presented at the Aero Engines conference on Feb. 29.

Commercial aviation has rebounded since the darkest days of the pandemic in 2020 when GDP contracted sharply in every region of the world. Overall, economic growth fell by 4.1% in 2020, more than tripling the 1.3% contraction that oc-

Airbus has 52% of those orders and Boeing 36%.

Aviation Week's forecast shows Shanghai-based Comac delivering 3% of commercial aircraft over the next decade, edging out Embraer's 2% market share. Comac is projected to deliver 332 ARJ21 and 281 C919 narrow bodies. Since Comac's passenger jets are designed for regional flights of no longer than a few hours, the state-owned firm is eyeing sales opportunities in neighboring Southeast Asia in addition to its massive domestic market.



curred in 2009 during the global financial crisis.

Several metrics illustrate the state of the recovery. In 2023, six of the top 10 largest U.S. airline groups made a profit, while all but SkyWest Airlines recorded an increase in operating revenue. In every region of the world, available seat kilometers (ASK) increased in 2023, a trend that continued in the first quarter of 2024.

Both in 2023 and the first quarter of this year, Asia-Pacific and China have led the uptick in ASK. In 2023, Asia-Pacific's ASK rose 49% while China's increased 62%. The pace of growth has moderated this year but remains robust with Asia-Pacific growing 25% in the January-March period and China 33%.

Looking ahead, the global aircraft fleet is forecast to grow at a 3.3% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2024-2033. Unsurprisingly, the Airbus-Boeing duopoly is projected to remain dominant with the former accounting for 50% of deliveries and the latter 42%. As of January 2024, there were firm orders of 16,558 aircraft.

While North America is expected to be the largest single region for aircraft deliveries with a market share of 25% from 2024-2033, if China, India, and Asia-Pacific are combined, they account for 38% of projected aircraft demand globally and 39% of engine demand.

For its part, the MRO segment is predicted to grow stably in the next decade with a 3% CAGR. Engine maintenance will account for the largest share of that demand, followed by components and line maintenance. Modifications and airframe heavy will account for much a much smaller slice of demand respectively.

Meanwhile, the CFM International LEAP family is forecast to account for 54% of new generation engine deliveries in North America. Shop visits for new generation engines are predicted to start from a low baseline in 2024, but then begin to rise sharply from 2026, reaching about 1,000 by 2034. Because LEAP shop visits are expected to rise briskly, that engine will generate an estimated \$2.6 billion in MRO demand, more than any other aircraft engine.

## Riyadh Air puts focus on international collaboration

As it prepares to enter commercial service, Riyadh Air is putting its focus on expanding international collaboration with airlines as one way to scale up its network from the Saudi Arabia capital.



Riyadh Air COO Peter Bellew.

The new airline has applied for an air operator's certificate and test flights are expected to commence later this year.

"We want to be friends with everyone. It's better to be United Nations than to be oneworld," said COO Peter Bellew when asked if the airline has plans to join an alliance.

Riyadh Air has signed collaboration agreements with flag-carrier Saudia and Turkish Airlines in 2023.

Bellew said an advantage of being a startup is having the most modern digital systems, which can integrate with any airline's infrastructure without concerns about legacy issues.

Riyadh Air plans to announce its launch routes by the end of 2024, ahead of its entry into commercial service in mid-2025. Bellew said major regional and European capitals are likely candidates.

He added there has been also huge interest in Asia, especially China, Indonesia and Singapore. Saudi Arabia and Singapore have signed an expansion of air services, allowing more flights and unrestricted fifth-freedom flights.

Riyadh Air has an order for 39 Boeing 787s and options for 72 more, and will make a decision on its narrowbody order in the next six months.

"There has been consistent commitment from [Boeing CEO] Dave Calhoun that the aircraft will arrive on time, and we will have to take Boeing's word for it," Bellew said.



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Indonesia	Denpasar	<b>DPS</b>
Indonesia	Surabaya	<b>SUB</b>

Country	City	Airport Code
Australia	Sydney	<b>SYD</b>
Australia	Melbourne	<b>MEL</b>

Country	City	Airport Code
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Japan	Haneda	<b>HND</b>

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## Pakistan Airlines cabin crew member goes missing in Canada, leaves note 'Thank You, PIA'

'Thank you, PIA', a cabin crew member of Pakistan International Airlines went missing after landing in Canada on PIA flight PK-782 from Islamabad. Maryam Raza was on duty and failed to report for her return flight PK-784 to Karachi from Toronto, media reported.

Authorities checked her hotel room and found her uniform with a note reading 'Thank you, PIA'.

She was assigned the flight from Islamabad to Toronto on Monday 26 February.

Maryam Raza joined the national flag carrier about 15 years ago. Notably, this is the second case this year. The airline's spokesman attributed the trend to the flexible Canadian law as it offers asylum after entering the country.

A similar incident took place last month when an air hostess failed to report for the return flight from Canada. At least seven PIA cabin crew members went missing in

Canada last year while on duty, as per media reports.

In January, an air hostess named Faiza Mukhtar arrived in Canada, but she did not show up for the return flight. The attendant was put on suspension a few years back due to allegations that she was involved in the smuggling of foreign currency and cell phones.

"On its scheduled return to the country, Ms. Mukhtar did not turn up in Toronto and the flight of the national flag carrier had to proceed without her," a PIA official said as quoted by media.

He also informed that a crew member who had absconded while on duty a few years ago has since relocated to Canada and is now advising other crew members to consider applying for asylum.

The PIA management has been coordinating with the Canadian authorities to avoid such incidents in future, he said.



A Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) cabin crew member went missing in Canada.

## Air France-KLM Group reports 5.7% increase in full year profit, fourth quarter swings to loss



Air France-KLM Group has reported a 5.7% increase in its operating result for the full year 2023, totalling €1.7bn (\$1.86bn). Its revenues were up 14% year-on-year to €30bn (\$32.5bn). The Group's 2023 full capacity was up 9%. Its cargo division Martinair reported a 6.2% capacity increase for the year though its revenues were down 29% to €2.49bn (\$2.13bn).

Its MRO division, Air France Industries-KLM Engineering & Maintenance, reported a 23.2% increase in revenues at €1.71bn (\$1.85bn). However, its operating result was down €13 million (\$14.1 million) to €150 million (\$162.6 million) in 2023.

## Airbus sets an example with sustainable Aviation fuel use

For its own test and demonstration flights, Airbus runs its aircraft on sustainable aviation fuel as far as possible.

Before the flight demonstration of its A350-1000 wide body airliner at the Singapore Airshow, the company demonstrated the refuelling process using a 35 percent blend of SAF made from used cooking oil and tallow that Shell supplied.

## Boeing missing key elements of safety culture: FAA report

The FAA blamed Boeing for a deficient safety culture in a 50-page report issued recently, following a public outcry over several safety lapses before the January 5 incident in which a door plug “blew out” from an Alaska Airlines 737 Max 9 in mid-flight.

In a review of the employment culture at the company, an expert panel found what it called gaps in Boeing’s safety journey and that a majority of employees did not show “skillful awareness” of the concepts of just culture and reporting culture.

The panel further reported that it could not find a “consistent and clear” safety reporting channel or process within the business unit. It also noted that employees do not understand how to use the different reporting systems and which reporting system to use and when. The panel expressed concern that the confusion might discourage employees from reporting what they see as safety problems.

The report concluded that, although Boeing previously provided a roadmap to implement an Organization Designation Authorization (ODA) and safety management systems (SMS), the airframer still hadn’t completed the changes de-

scribed in the roadmap.

The report recommended that Boeing develop an action plan that includes a “milestone-based” approach to address each recommendation and share the results with the FAA.



An FAA panel has strongly criticized safety practices at airliner manufacturer Boeing.

## Pakistan releases final report of PIA Airbus A320 crash in Karachi

A Pakistan International Airlines plane crash that killed 101 people near the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi in May 2020 was a result of “human error” by the two pilots, according to the investigation report on the incident.

The Aircraft Investigation Board (AIB) finally released its report on the reasons for the Airbus 320 failing to land safely at the Karachi airport and instead crashing into a residential neighbourhood near the airport.

The board has held the failure of proper judgement while landing by the two pilots as the main reason for the fatal crash in which 101 people, including 99 passengers, lost their lives while two passengers miraculously survived.

Several houses in the neighbourhood and parked vehicles were destroyed and damaged in the disaster.

The report said the air traffic controller had four times warned the pilots that they shouldn’t land as their altitude was not right.

According to the report, when the pilots first tried to land the aircraft, its engines hit the ground, which led to the system supplying lubricant to the engines shutting down.

The report said that “engine failure” eventually led to the crash.

The report also held the PIA and the Civil Aviation Authority responsible for not having clear procedures on whether pilots should fast during the month of Ramadan while on duty.

The AIB also noted that after the engine failure, the power supply went off in the aircraft and the last four minutes of the flight were not recorded on the data box. The pi-

lots have also been held responsible for not being in sync with each other when trying to land the plane.

Airworthiness documents show that the Airbus A320 had been previously used by China Eastern Airlines from 2004 to 2014, following which it was inducted into the PIA’s fleet.

There have been eight recorded incidents of the PIA aircraft crashes between 1965 and 2020.

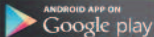
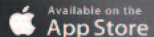


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## Ethiopian Airlines opens \$55 million Cargo Centre at Addis Ababa Airport

Ethiopian Airlines has opened a new e-commerce cargo centre at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport (ADD). The new facility, located inside the Ethiopian Cargo and Logistics premises, is dedicated to mail, couriers, and e-commerce goods. The new centre aims to connect various destinations and position Addis Ababa as the cross-border e-commerce logistics hub for Africa and other continents.

### A \$55 million dollar investment

Ethiopian Airlines, which runs one of Africa's largest cargo operations through its passenger aircraft and dedicated freighters, is looking to enhance how e-commerce goods are transported and delivered around the continent. The new facility sits on a 161,460 square-foot (15,000-square-meter) area, providing enough capacity to handle 330.7 million lb (150,000 tons) of cargo annually.

According to the carrier, this is a \$55 million investment, which sets Africa's e-commerce industry on a path to follow global trends. With the inauguration of the \$55 million center, the airline will pave the way for developing e-commerce services in Ethiopia and around the continent. Highlighting the importance of the new facility, Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO Ato Mesfin Tasew said,

"The inauguration of this cutting-edge e-commerce logistics facility is a significant breakthrough for Ethiopian Airlines Group and the entire African economy. We have implemented high-end technologies in the infrastructure that revolutionize the way goods are transported and delivered in the

e-commerce industry in Africa. Through this facility, Ethiopian Airlines paves the way for the development of e-commerce services in Ethiopia and the African continent."

The facility features state-of-the-art



*Africa's largest carrier: Ethiopian Airlines adds 2 new destinations, it plans to serve 78 passenger destinations across the continents.*

technology and industry-specific systems, allowing it to offer consolidation, deconsolidation, sortation, repacking, and labeling services. The airline currently has a modern warehouse facility at its hub with a cargo storage capacity of 2.53 billion lbs (1.15 million tons).

### Ethiopian Airlines' cargo fleet and operations

Ethiopian Airlines is already Africa's largest carrier by fleet size. Additionally, the airline launched a long-term strategy, aiming to nearly double its fleet by 2035. The company's cargo division has a fleet of 17 aircraft comprising ten Boeing 777-200LRs, three B767-300Fs, and four B737-800Fs. It has four more 777 freighters on order.

Last year, the carrier secured a \$450 million loan for five aircraft, which includes two 777Fs. The airline's cargo network covers over 135 international destinations with both belly-hold capacity and over 65 dedicated freighter services. In January, the air-

line added Casablanca (CMN) as its 35th cargo destination in Africa.

### Transporting mail from South Africa

The inauguration of the new cargo facility comes about two weeks after Ethiopian Airlines signed a new airmail agreement with the South African Post Office (SAPO). The partnership will allow SAPO to deliver and receive mail from China through Ethiopian Airlines' cargo network.

According to the Post Office, Ethiopian will deliver mail four times a week to Addis Ababa Airport for distribution around the continent. This includes African countries except for those sharing a border with South Africa, like Zimbabwe and Botswana, where mail will continue to be delivered by road.

With this agreement, SAPO aimed to clear its backlog for transportation to China and its African destinations for February 2024. Last year, the post office partnered with Swiss Air for mail service to Europe and Japan, while Qantas handled mail destined for Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands.

It also partners with Qantas to clear airmail to South East Asian countries, excluding China. "We are working to partner with an additional airline to handle the North American airmail demand. In the meantime, Ethiopian Airlines and Swiss Air will service this route, albeit with limited capacity," said the Post Office's business rescue practitioner, Anoosh Rooplal.



## Etihad considers going public with planned IPO listing

The UAE-based carrier Etihad is reportedly considering going public with the planned IPO listing as soon as this year. According to a report by Bloomberg, the considerations around the IPO listing are ongoing, and details such as the size and timing of any listing are still undecided.

ADQ, an Abu Dhabi state-controlled sovereign wealth fund, owns Etihad. ADQ is currently exploring the possibility of listing the carrier. According to Bloomberg sources fa-

move is the latest.

*Emirates was also under IPO consideration*

In recent years, Emirates, another UAE-based airline, was also under IPO listing considerations in order to boost activity on the local stock market. The news of the potential IPO listing first emerged in 2021. However, it never came to fruition.

In 2023, the airline's Chairman, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum, told Arabian Business that going public is the government's deci-



miliar with the matter, discussions have already taken place with banks regarding a potential deal.

Simple Flying reached out to Etihad, but the airline declined to comment on this matter.

***What happens when an airline goes public?***

An IPO, or initial public offering, happens when a privately held company decides to list its shares on a stock exchange, enabling the public to purchase them.

Becoming publicly traded via an IPO can significantly boost a company's visibility. This increased exposure not only lends credibility and prestige but also strengthens their bargaining position with lenders, potentially resulting in better terms.

In addition, airlines can raise additional capital by selling shares to the public. The proceeds may be used to expand the business, fund research and development, or pay off debt.

Etihad's potential listing would be a notable event, as it would be the first time a major legacy airline in the Gulf region transitions to private ownership. While discussions about going public have occurred with various airlines over time, Etihad's reported

sion and that "the government will always make the decision for us."

It is worth noting that Emirates and Etihad are just some of the airlines that have considered going public in recent years. In 2023, Saudi Arabia's low-cost carrier flynas hired financial consultants for a possible IPO on the Saudi Exchange in Riyadh sometime in 2024, the budget airline told Bloomberg.

The news coincides with widespread government investments in the transportation sector, particularly aviation, across the Gulf region. These initiatives form part of a broader strategy to reduce reliance on oil revenues.

In Saudi Arabia, the aviation industry holds strategic importance, with an effort to nurture a tourism sector set to contribute significantly to the Kingdom's GDP, aiming for a 10% share. The country plans to inject \$100 million into its aviation infrastructure, aiming to establish top-tier hubs and draw millions of travelers to the country. As part of this plan, Saudi Arabia aims to have more than 250 destinations by 2030, optimizing airline operations and working toward their growth to support its larger vision.

## Another PIA steward goes missing in Canada

Another steward of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has reportedly gone missing from Canada, making it the second such incident in a week.

Jibran Baloch, 47, was part of the cabin crew on PK-783 from Karachi to Toronto.

He was scheduled to report for the return flight PK-782 to Islamabad on Thursday 29 Feb., according to a PIA spokesman.

When Mr. Baloch didn't report for the return flight, the staff opened his hotel room, but he was not there, the spokesman added.

Nothing else was discovered from his room which could help the authorities trace the missing steward's whereabouts. The authorities found no clue to trace the whereabouts of Ms. Baloch, who joined the national carrier in 2005.

Earlier on 26 February, an air hostess, Maryam Raza, also vanished from her hotel room in Toronto after arriving on flight PK-782 from Islamabad.

So far this year, three cabin crew members have gone missing after arriving in Canada.

Last year, at least seven PIA cabin crew members went missing in the country while performing flight duties.

Officials say this trend of disappearing in Canada is due to the flexible law which offers asylum after entering the country.

According to the national carrier's spokesman, one of the crew members who had slipped away while on duty some years ago has now settled in Canada and 'advises' other crew members mulling asylum.

He added that the PIA management has been coordinating with Canadian authorities to stop such incidents in future.



## China's first homegrown airliner makes international debut in Singapore

China's challenger to Airbus and Boeing's passenger jets, the narrow-body C919 manufactured by the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC), has made its first trip outside Chinese territory, staging a fly by at the Singapore Airshow on Sunday, 18 February.

China has invested heavily in its attempt to break the hold of the dominant two Western plane makers on the global passenger market. China has indicated a push this year to advance the C919 and COMAC's footprint domestically and internationally.

The plane is only certified within China and the first of now four C919s began flying with China Eastern Airlines last year.

With Airbus and Boeing struggling to ramp up production and meet demand for new planes, and Boeing struggling with a string of crises, the aviation industry is watching how COMAC positions itself as a viable alternative.

COMAC will invest tens of billions of yuan over the next 3-5 years to expand C919 production capacity, Chinese media reported a COMAC official saying in January. China's aviation authority said last month it would this year pursue European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) val-

idation for the C919, a process which began in 2018.

The C919 was one of two commercial plane makers flying their planes off Singapore's coast alongside Airbus at a Sunday, 18 February preview for Asia's biggest air show. Boeing will not display a commercial

aircraft this year.

COMAC has two passenger products: the ARJ21 regional jet and the larger C919 twin-engine narrow-body airliner with 158-192 seats, which competes with the established Airbus A320neo and Boeing 737 MAX 8 models.



China's Comac C919 plane (top) and six Pilatus PC-21 aircraft (down) from the Royal Australian Air Force aerobatic team perform during a preview of the Singapore Airshow, on Sunday, 18 February.

## Turkish Airlines increases Manchester to Istanbul

Turkish flag carrier Turkish Airlines has announced it is increasing the number of flights between iGA Istanbul Airport and Manchester (MAN/EGCC) from 19th May 2024.

A fourth flight will be added on the route bringing the total number of flights per week to 25.

The additional flight will operate on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

Manchester General Manager, SerhatGök, said: "Turkish Airlines' four additional weekly flights to Istanbul will meet the expected rise in demand from customers keen to visit Türkiye's top tourism destination during the summer.

"As a culturally rich city where east meets west, Istanbul is incredibly popular with British and European travellers.

"The city is renowned for its history and iconic landmarks – including the Blue Mosque, Topkapı Palace and Grand

Bazaar – as well as its breath-taking views and amazing nightlife.

"Adding further weekly flights will give customers more opportunities to visit one of Türkiye's most popular spots for travellers keen to immerse them-

selves in its rich history and culture."

Passengers from Manchester can also connect globally via iGA Istanbul Airport on Turkish Airlines network which flies to more countries than any other airline.



Turkish Airlines Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner photographed on August 23, 2019 from Wolfe Air Aviation Learket 25B.

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# Three new 787-9 Dreamliners join the Etihad Airways fleet as it flies towards ambitious growth

Abu Dhabi, UAE. Etihad Airways is celebrating the arrival of three new Boeing 787-9 aircraft this weekend. The national airline of the UAE welcomed the latest additions to its expanding fleet at Abu Dhabi Zayed International Airport.

dorf in quarter four of 2023, as well as Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram in the Kerala region of India on New Year's Day.

Etihad has also expanded across multiple markets with additional flight frequencies and improved connectivity

increased feeling of space for every guest.

The new 787 Dreamliner offers the latest in-flight entertainment technology from Safran with Rave Ultra 13.3" 4K touch-screen monitors and the option to pair personal phones and tablets to the screen to use as a remote.

The aircraft is fitted with a new connectivity solution from Viasat using Ka-band technology which offers high-speed Wi-Fi with streaming capabilities on board as well as Live TV, including news and sport channels.

Through Etihad's Wi-Fly, all Etihad Guest members can enjoy complimentary chat packages, while all guests can choose to purchase a full Surf package with unlimited data for the duration of the flight.

## Really cool airlines selects Lufthansa Systems for airline IT

New international airline from Thailand, Really Cool Airlines, has selected Lufthansa Systems for its operations and navigation solutions. The airline was founded by entrepreneur and former Nok Air CEO Patee



Sarasin. "We will be their one-stop solution for operational and navigation-related services and additionally strengthen our position in South East Asia," said Lufthansa Systems Asia Pacific CEO Tom Vandendael. The agreement will see the airline implement Lufthansa Systems' Lido Flight 4D, Lido mPilot and Lido FMS software solutions. "We need strong and experienced partners for all aspects of our operations. Lufthansa Systems is such a strong brand.



The new aircraft will begin operations this month, helping Etihad to expand in line with its ambitious roadmap which will see it fly to 125 destinations with more than 160 aircraft by 2030.

Antoaldo Neves, Chief Executive Officer, Etihad Airways, said: "We are thrilled to welcome these brand-new, state-of-the-art Boeing 787 Dreamliners to Abu Dhabi. Their arrival is key to our network expansion strategy and comes at the perfect time as we continue to add multiple new destinations and expand frequencies into key markets.

"These new aircraft support our commitment to Abu Dhabi, allowing us to bring more guests to experience the incredible capital of the UAE, either as their end destination or on a stopover when connecting across our expanding network."

The 787-9s will further bolster Etihad's fleet as it launches additional destinations over the coming months. Etihad will begin flying to Boston, its fourth US gateway, on 31 March, and will add Nairobi and Bali to the network as well as summer routes to Nice, Malaga, Mykonos and Santorini.

The arrival of the three new Dreamliners follows the new Boeing 787-10 received in October 2023, which added further capacity to support Etihad's network expansion. The airline added new routes to Osaka, Copenhagen and Dussel-

across the network.

Boeing's 787 Dreamliners are up to 25% more fuel efficient than many comparable aircraft of their size. In total, Etihad now operates 43 Dreamliners and a total fleet of 88 aircraft including the Airbus A380, A350, A320 family, and Boeing 777.

A remarkable flying experience Etihad's new 787 Dreamliner cabin interior offers a comfortable and spacious cabin environment in Etihad's award-winning signature style. The two-class aircraft features a brand-new cabin interior with 32 Business Suites and 271 seats in Economy.

The Business cabin features a unique and customised version of the Elements seat manufactured by Collins and Etihad is the first airline in the world to introduce this seat on the Boeing 787.

The Business Suites provide guests with generous levels of space, comfort and privacy. Each seat has direct aisle access and reclines to a fully lie-flat-bed 78" in length boasting a 17.3" 4K TV screen, Bluetooth headphone pairing, wireless charging, and multiple charging ports, as well as plenty of storage.

In Economy, the newest 787 offers lighter, and therefore more fuel-efficient, seats than the current fleet, with 217 standard seats and 54 Extra Legroom seats with four inches of additional legroom. As well as providing guests with exceptional comfort, the slimmer profile seats provide an



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# FAA tells Boeing to develop 'Comprehensive Action Plan' to address quality control

**B**oeing CEO Dave Calhoun met with FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker on Tuesday, 27 February.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has asked Boeing to develop a "comprehensive action plan" to address quality control in the plane manufacturer's assembly process. The call for an action plan was announced on Feb. 27th, one day after a report published to Congress found that the company's safety culture was inadequate.

In an update on the grounding of certain Boeing 737 MAX 9s following the infamous Alaska Airlines flight 1282 incident, where an improperly assembled door plug separated from the aircraft mid-flight, the FAA's leadership called for a comprehensive plan to address safety concerns within 90 days.

The announcement came after Boeing's Chief Executive and President Dave Calhoun and senior leadership in Boeing's safety team met with FAA leadership in Washington DC.

"Boeing must commit to real and profound improvements," FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker said in a statement following the meeting. "Making foundational change will require a sustained effort from Boeing's leadership, and we are going to hold them accountable every step of the way, with mutually understood milestones and expectations."

The comprehensive plan Boeing is tasked with developing will include steps to mature its Safety Management System (SMS) program, which it committed to in 2019, before the two fatal crashes of the 737 MAX 8 and subsequent grounding of that aircraft type.

The FAA additionally said that Boeing's SMS must be integrated with a quality management system to ensure subcontracted Boeing supplies like Spirit Aerosystems also get a "systemic shift" in quality control.

Recent report on safety culture

The meeting followed a report published by a panel of experts at the FAA that found that Boeing's senior management and its employees had a disconnect on the organization of safety culture, adding that employees questioned if the reporting of safety issues could be done without retaliation. The expert panel that made the report also found that there was a lack of awareness of safety-related metrics at all levels of Boeing.

This isn't the first time Boeing's Calhoun has visited Washington following the 737 MAX 9 door-plug failure. On January 23rd, the Boeing leader toured the Senate



to meet with individual members. The FAA had originally grounded 171 737 MAX 9 aircraft following the Alaska Airlines flight 1282 incident. Similar groundings occurred worldwide.

On February 12th, Administrator Whitaker toured the Boeing factory in

Renton, Washington, where 737 production takes place, to hear directly from Boeing engineers and mechanics. Administrator Whitaker went to Alaska Airlines headquarters in Seattle to discuss the fateful flight 1282 with members of the airline.

The FAA additionally halted the planned production expansion of the 737 MAX and was exploring the use of a third party to oversee an audit of Boeing's production and manufacturing. Beyond the investigation into the failure of the door on the Alaska Airlines 737 MAX 9, which the NTSB is leading, the FAA is also investigating Boeing for non-compliance with safety regulations.

Following inspections of aircraft fitted with the door plug, which fills a hole in the fuselage where certain high-capacity operators place a door, the 737 MAX 9 resumed service. Certain airlines have also announced that they would seek compensation from Boeing.

## Air Cargo demand up 18% in January

**A**ir cargo saw a strong start to the year with total demand, measured in cargo tonne-kilometres (CTKs), up 18.4% in January 2024 year-over-year (YoY). International operations were up 19.8%. According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), it is the highest annual growth in CTKs since the summer season of 2021.

Cargo capacity, measured in available cargo tonne-kilometres, was up 14.6% YoY (18.2% for international operations).

IATA said this was "largely related to the growth in belly capacity." International belly capacity rose 25.8% YoY. "This is a strong start to the year," said IATA director general Willie Walsh.



# News in Pictures



*Daewoo Express Annual Performance Awards-2023 held on 28th February, 2024 in Lahore. Picture shows Mr. Sajid Khan Batoor, Vice President, Daewoo Pakistan, present on the occasion.*





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## Rolls-Royce aims to double time-on-wing for A350-1000 engines operating in sandy conditions

Rolls-Royce is aiming to double the time-on-wing of its Trent XWB-97 engine for A350-1000s operating in harsh environments, through an improvement programme spanning the next two to three years.

The ability of the XWB-97 to cope with sandy conditions, typical of those in the Middle East, has been a concern to Dubai-based Emirates, which has resisted ordering the A350-1000.

At the Dubai air show last year Emirates Airline president Tim Clark cited durability issues, adding that he felt the XWB-97 needed to “stay on wing” for at least 2,000-2,500 cycles.

Speaking during a full-year briefing on 22 February, Rolls-Royce chief executive Tufan Erginbilgic said the XWB-97 was a good performer in “non-dusty, non-sandy environments”.

He insists the powerplant “sells really well”. There are 162 XWB-97s in the global installed fleet, the manufacturer states, and it delivered 31 last year.

“We aim to double the time-on-wing of the Trent XWB-97 in non-benign environments over the next two to three years, with our investment in [high-pressure turbine] blade coatings that are more resilient in areas with lots of sand and dust,” says Erginbilgic.

He adds that, in more benign settings, the manufacturer sees potential for a 50% increase in time-on-wing.

Erginbilgic says he met with Tim Clark

in the last few days, and claims: “He’s very happy with where this is going to go. He cannot wait for that to come to market.” FlightGlobal has sought comment from Emirates.

The A350-1000 with the improved XWB-97 will be “the highest-thrust, best aircraft, probably, four years [or] three years from now”, Erginbilgic adds.

Rolls-Royce is also hoping to advance the blade-durability programme for its Trent 1000-TEN powerplant for the Boeing 787.

Erginbilgic says the company is working with Boeing and the US FAA on the “final stages” to certify a new blade for the engine, which will double its time-on-wing.

“We expect it to be approved this year, taking us to a competitive level of durability by next year, while reliability remains very strong,” he states.

This is the same improvement certified for the similar Trent 7000 engine for the Airbus A330neo which, says Erginbilgic, has already been retrofitted to over 20% of the fleet.

He says the Trent 1000 fix was intended for certification last year. “Unfortunately, it didn’t, it got delayed,” he adds. “We want to work with [Boeing and the FAA] and accelerate, and certify this year.”

While the retrofit on 787s will “take some years”, he says it will mark a 30% improvement for the Trent 1000. “By the end of next year, it will be an absolutely fully-competitive engine on durability, as good as the competition.”

Rolls-Royce competes on the 787 with General Electric which offers the GENx powerplant.

Erginbilgic says Rolls-Royce is investing £1 billion (\$1.2 billion) in performance upgrades for its Trent engines

over the next few years. But he points out that the drive for greater efficiency and higher engine temperatures has resulted in lower cycle times.

Referring to the engine which powers earlier A330 variants, he says: “No engine we’ll produce – or the competition will produce – will have the Trent 700’s cycle time. But what we’re doing with our engines is taking them to a very competitive level.”

## MRO shops push quicker access to repairs

Engine manufacturers are leaning heavily on their approved overhaul shop networks to help meet unexpected demand on current generation engines, but restrictions on repairs and other licenses continue to create headwinds.

“There used to be no issues on sharing information,” Delta TechOps VP-commercial Basil Papayoti told AeroEngines Americas attendees Feb. 29. “Boy, has that evolved over the years.”



Papayoti underscored that Delta Tech Ops has strong relationships with GE Aerospace, Pratt & Whitney, and Rolls-Royce—all partners in different engine services ventures. But the nature of such agreements is changing.

“The [intellectual property] piece is huge, especially on the new-generation engines. That makes it really difficult for the independent” shops, he said. “It’s gotten to the point where it’s really restrictive,” he added, noting that Delta benefits from its status as one of the largest aircraft and engine purchasers.

Both CFM International and Pratt & Whitney tout a faster pace of repair development on the Leap and PW1000G



A350-1000s are exclusively powered by the Trent XWB-97 engine





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geared turbofan (GTF) families, respectively, compared to their predecessors. This is due in part to the engines' more complex materials and operating conditions.

But entry-into-service (EIS) durability and production issues have affected both families, reducing expected time on wing and forcing unscheduled engine removals. The GTF fleet has been more affected, overwhelming its still growing overhaul network. The Leap fleet has been less affected, but retrofits of a reverse bleed system to address fuel nozzle coking and improved high-pressure turbine blades will add to scheduled work beginning to ramp.

More work often leads to demand for more parts or repairs. Getting approved fixes into the field as quickly as possible will help minimize disruptions for operators. The need extends to legacy engine platforms such as the CFM56-5B/7B and the International Aero Engines V2500, which need more maintenance work to keep them on-wing to backfill gaps created by the new-engine issues.

"You can control as much as you want in terms of proprietary repairs, but that's causing gridlock for a lot of this work," said MTU Aero Engines North America VP Sales and Marketing Les Cronin. "The knock-on effect is that the new-generation entry-into-service issues are causing the legacy engines to go to the shops as well, because people didn't build in sufficient green time."

One challenge both the Leap and GTF faced is the rapid escalation of their in-service fleets. Both saw in-service numbers ramp up more quickly than the CFM56 or V2500, even with pandemic and supply chain-related delivery delays. But the expansion of repair manuals, which leans heavily on lessons learned from early shop visits, has not been similarly accelerated. Mix in the added complexity incorporated into the newest engines—and related higher parts costs—and both manufacturers and MRO providers have an opportunity.

"It takes all of us to come up with ideas on how to fix parts, especially high-cost items," said Lufthansa Technik Head of Sales-Engine Services, Americas Sebastian Torhost. "Get creative with all the engineering and all the experience from the previous engine types to come up with repairs. Maybe you can do this touch-up repair, maybe you can drill a hole a bit differently in order to stay within the limits."

# Which are the UK's most family friendly airports?

Travelling on holiday with young children in tow can make navigating the airport a stressful experience so getting the holiday off to the right start at a family friendly airport can make a big dif-

ference. London's primary leisure airport is perhaps no surprise offering fast track security for infants under 2, play areas and one of the lowest costs for children's access to lounges.

Birmingham Airport ranked top for the



ference.

That's why travel insurance experts at PayingTooMuch analysed 30 of the UK's most popular airports to find out which ones are the most friendly and easy for families to use to minimise the airport "sighs" and the "woes".

Metrics used by PayingTooMuch included things such as kids play areas, breastfeeding facilities and even child access to lounges.

London Gatwick came out on top as the UK's most family friendly which as Lon-

don's primary leisure airport is perhaps no surprise offering fast track security with an upper age limit of 5 rather than the average 2, Manchester, Heathrow and Stansted don't offer it all without additional costs.

The cheapest lounge access for kids was at Belfast International where it costs just £15.00 on average compared to around £20-£25 at other UK airports.

The data can help parents make decisions on where they fly from, particularly in the south east where there are multiple options, enabling them to get their holiday off to the best start.

## The Top 10 Family Friendly Airports in the UK

Rank	UK Airport	Breastfeeding facilities advertised (yes/no)	'Kid zones' or play areas advertised (yes/no)	At what age (and under) do infants get free fasttrack?	Av. airport lounge cost (1 Child, £)
1	Gatwick	Yes	Yes	2	20.53
2	Luton	Yes	Yes	2	21.49
3	Liverpool (John Lennon)	Yes	Yes	1	21.49
4	Manchester	Yes	Yes	0	20.32
5	Belfast International	No	Yes	2	15.00
6	Glasgow	Yes	No	3	20.00
7	Birmingham	No	Yes	5	26.25
8	Leeds Bradford	No	Yes	2	22.00
9	Heathrow	Yes	Yes	0	29.68
10	Stansted	Yes	No	0	18.99

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# Assessing a decade of CPEC

It was in 2013 that Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled two highly ambitious international development programmes, the 'Silk Road Economic Belt', which he announced during his visit to Kazakhstan in September, and the '21st Century Maritime Silk Road Development Strategy', announced a month later in Indonesia. Jointly, they were termed as 'One Belt-One Road' (OBOR), and later as the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI).

The initiative envisaged the development of a vast network of infrastructural connections across the continents, both overland and maritime, connecting China more closely with Asian, European and African markets. In BRI, the 'Belt' comprised six overland economic corridors, while the maritime 'Road' connected Chinese ports with ports in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Middle East and Africa. It is also sometimes called the 'String of Pearls'.

Among the six economic corridors, one is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which connects the city of Kashgar, at the foot of the Pamir Mountains in western China, to the Gwadar port on the Indian Ocean in southern Pakistan, traversing a distance of about 2,700 kilometres. Gwadar, being a part of both the maritime and overland components of BRI, prompted President Xi to term Pakistan as a country where both 'the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road meet'.

In view of its importance, the CPEC was designated as the 'flagship' programme of the BRI and is the largest strategic and economic initiative undertaken by China outside its borders.

**INITIAL ROADBLOCKS** In Pakistan, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) had formed the government at the centre, with Nawaz Sharif as the prime minister. One of the main opposition parties, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan, refused to accept the 2013 elections results, alleging that they were rigged in favour of the PML-N.

Things came to a head in August 2014, when the PTI and the Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) staged a dharna or sit-in in front of the Parliament House in Islamabad, where tens of thousands of their supporters assembled.

Incidentally, this was just a few weeks before the Chinese president's scheduled visit to Islamabad in September 2014, where he was expected to formally launch the CPEC project. The Chinese expressed

their reservations regarding the president's visit while the dharna was taking place.

Upon this, the government requested the PTI and the PAT to end the protest, but they refused. Instead, they proposed that the protesters welcome President Xi by holding Chinese flags. This did not fly with the Chinese, resulting in a cancellation of the visit.

The dharna ended in December, paving the way for President Xi's visit to Islamabad a few months later, in April 2015. During his visit, he addressed the joint session of the Pakistani parliament, in which he termed the CPEC as the 'focal point' between the two countries. On that occasion, the two countries signed 51 agreements and memorandums of understanding, to the tune of \$46 billion, which was a much larger figure than the \$28 billion contemplated at the time of his postponed visit in September 2014.

**SCOPE OF THE PROJECT** President Xi broadly elaborated the extent and scope of the CPEC in his officially released article 'China-Pak Dosti Zindabad', coinciding with his Pakistan visit. He wrote that the project would 'form a '1+4' cooperation structure with the Economic Corridor at the centre, with the Gwadar Port, energy, infrastructure and industrial cooperation being the four key areas.' The President also hinted on expansion of the scope in future, stating that the 'planning and layout of the Economic Corridor should cover other parts of Pakistan as well'.

Among the four priority sectors spelled out by the Chinese president, the topmost was the development of Gwadar as a deep sea port of international standards. The projects envisaged included dredging, the development of the port and the free trade zone, the construction of breakwaters, the construction of an international airport, the development of facilities and infrastructure for the provision of fresh water, including installation of desalination plants, etc.

Next on the priority list was power generation, utilising a variety of resources, ranging from coal to hydel to wind to solar. In view of the prevalence of prolonged periods of power outages, the goal was to add several thousand megawatts to the national grid. In addition to power generation, the project also had a component relating to the construction of power transmission lines.

Further down the line was a set of 'connectivity' projects, envisaging the

construction of motorways, highways and railway networks. It also had a project relating to digital connectivity, by laying fibre-optic cables between the two countries, with future prospects of connecting Pakistan to the Chinese space satellite system.

Then came the set of projects relating to the establishment of 'special economic zones' (SEZs), where a liberal package of concessions and incentives was to be granted to promote industrialisation in the country. Several sites were identified from which, initially, nine were selected.

The entire programme was divided into three five-year phases, from 2015 to 2030.

The first phase (2015-2020) was divided into two subphases: the 'early harvest' projects, which were to be completed before the 2018 elections, followed by the 'short-term' projects to be completed till 2020. The second phase (2020-2025) envisaged the establishment of SEZs, while the last phase (2025-2030) had a much wider canvas for cooperation, in areas from agriculture to tourism.

While ambiguity remains about the financial size of the CPEC project, it was initially said to be around \$46 billion.

But with the ongoing addition of projects, the figure being quoted soon reached \$62 billion, while some experts even cited \$100 billion. The mode of funding comprised three streams: direct grants, government-to-government loans, and corporate financing.

Amid a total blackout of financial information in the public domain, international sources indicate that direct grants account for about 10 percent of the original package, mostly meant for the development of Gwadar. The government to-government loans comprise about 20 percent of the programme funding, which are primarily meant for developing transport infrastructure. Most of the remaining 70 percent comes from China in the form of corporate financing on commercial interest rates, mostly meant for energy infrastructure.

It warrants mention that the programme serves Chinese interests equally and is not just an act of benevolence on part of China for Pakistan, as many in Pakistan tend to believe. The project serves multiple Chinese interests. Firstly, it connects China with the Indian Ocean, which provides it an easy access to the Middle East markets and beyond. Then, it further opens Pakistan's 250-million strong mar-

ket for Chinese goods and services, as well as business opportunities for Chinese companies to undertake most of the CPEC contracts. Additionally, it also increases the prospects of exploration and utilisation of Pakistan's virgin mineral and land resources.

Last but not the least, China's presence through the CPEC at Gwadar, located just 600 kilometres from the Strait of Hormuz, at the gates of the Gulf of Oman, has the strategic potential of serving as its 'back-door' for trade and energy, in case tensions in the South China Sea escalate.

**FEARS AND CONCERNS** While the project has been largely portrayed as a panacea for all the ills and evils plaguing Pakistan, there have been fears and doubts as well in various sections of society. The first and foremost concern has been about the almost complete opacity of the CPEC. Weary of what had happened to the Hambantota port in neighbouring Sri Lanka in 2015, people want to know the extent and the terms and conditions of Pak-China financial agreements.

Voicing concerns about the lack of transparency, the then governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, Ashraf Mahmood Wathra, had lamented in 2015 that, 'I don't know, out of the \$46 billion, how much is debt, how much is equity, and how much is in-kind.' If the governor of the State Bank does not have information, what can be said about the rest of the country's citizens? Another major concern, primarily born out of opacity, is regarding the selection of projects under the CPEC umbrella.

For instance, very serious concerns and questions were raised regarding the establishment of the 1,320-megawatt (MW) coal-fired power plant in Sahiwal in central Punjab.

This power plant was designed to operate on imported coal, which was to be imported from Indonesia and South Africa to Karachi's Port Qasim by ships, and then had to be carried inland through trains to the lush green agriculture-intensive areas of Sahiwal, about 1,000 kilometres away. This creates a set of ecological, environmental, economic and operational issues.

Yet another cause of concern is that the execution of almost all the projects went to Chinese contractors, who brought in most of their executive and technical manpower from China, except low-tier staff that was recruited locally. The question raised is that, when Pakistanis have to foot the bill of these projects, why are they being denied business and employment opportunities.

A significant segment of the business community has concerns regarding the SEZs. An important segment of traders believes that 2006's free trade agreement

with China had resulted in an explosion of Chinese exports at the cost of locally manufactured products. They also fear that Chinese companies would be offered preferential terms, which would leave them at a disadvantageous position.

**THE OUTCOME** The CPEC projects went ahead at full steam for the first two years, till 2017.

However, things changed with the removal of the greatest proponent of CPEC, Nawaz Sharif, from the office of the prime minister.

The following year saw the PTI in government, with Imran Khan as the prime minister. While the PTI was not against the project, it had reservations over the manner in which it had been implemented 'too Punjab-centric, not enough benefit for Pakistani businesses, not green enough, poorly negotiated, and probably corrupt, wrote Andrew Small while quoting PTI leaders in his book *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics*.

In his victory speech, while Imran Khan spoke about China and the CPEC, his emphasis was on learning from China and 'how they brought 700 million people out of poverty.' He also wanted to learn from them about the measures they had taken to eliminate corruption, and particularly 'how they had arrested more than 400 ministers [on corruption charges] there.

He did not speak about the mega projects under the CPEC, which was interpreted as his reservations on the manner in which the project had been implemented.

Shortly afterwards, the adviser to the prime minister on commerce, Abdul Razak Dawood, in an interview with the *Financial Times*, stated that Pakistan needed to review and renegotiate the CPEC project. He even suggested freezing the programme for a year or so to re-evaluate it in its entirety.

These developments considerably

slowed down the implementation and expansion of the programme, with efforts to speed it up resuming only after the ouster of the PTI government in 2022.

Still, the last decade of CPEC has added about 510 kilometres of motorways and highways, in addition to the generation of about 6,000 megawatts of electricity, and foreign direct investment of about \$25.4 billion, according to a report titled 'Ten Years of CPEC', published by the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI).

**THE ROAD AHEAD** Recently, there has been talk of CPEC 2.0.

It is necessary that we should draw lessons from our earlier experiences. Firstly, there is a need to bring transparency to the entire programme, from the conceptualisation of the projects till their operation. Secondly, stakeholder involvement is essential for sustainability of any development project, which has been badly neglected so far in the CPEC.

Thirdly, Pakistan should understand very well that any programme that brings in excessive dependency on any other nation is not good for the country. The best course of action is to limit the programme to a modest size, and to carry it out at its natural pace, without much fanfare, to avoid political bickering.

Fourthly, it would be well advised for Pakistan to give due consideration to environmental concerns during the selection of the projects, particularly considering the threats posed by climate change.

Finally, the country would be very well served if a consensus is built beforehand regarding the various projects of the programme, instead of adopting a 'top down' approach, which always results in adverse situations.

In conclusion, the CPEC project still has great potential for the development of Pakistan, provided its weaknesses are removed.



## Cargo ship damaged by Houthi strike sinks

**A** cargo ship loaded with fertiliser has sunk in the Gulf of Aden less than two weeks after it was damaged by missiles from Yemen's Houthi rebels, recently Yemen's government said.

The Houthis claimed the Feb 19 attack against the Rubymar, a cargo ship flying a Belizean flag and operated by a Lebanese firm, which transported combustible fertilisers.

The crew abandoned the ship and evacuated to safety after it was hit by two missiles. The vessel had departed the United Arab Emirates and was bound for the Bulgarian port of Varna.

'The MV Rubymar sank last night, coinciding with weather factors and strong winds at sea,' said a crisis cell of Yemen's internationally recognised government in charge of the case.

Roy Khoury, chief executive of the ship's operator Blue Fleet, said he was unaware of the sinking. 'We have nobody on board to check if it's true or not,' he said.

Fuel oil appeared to be leaking from the vessel in satellite images shared by Maxar Technologies. The Tanker Trackers website said the sinking would 'cause an environmental catastrophe in the (Yemeni) territorial waters and in the Red Sea'.

'A spill of ammonium nitrate fertiliser in the sea could have several significant impacts on marine ecosystems,' said Julien Jreissati, programme director for Greenpeace in the Middle East and North Africa.

The maritime security agency UKMTO, run by the British navy, said the Rubymar had been 35 nautical miles (65 kilometres) from the Yemeni port of Mokha when its crew was forced to abandon it.

The Rubymar was identified as British-registered by the US military and

security firm Ambrey, but Khoury has denied that information.

Since November, the Houthis have been carrying out attacks on ships linked to Israel in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, saying they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Surface-to-air missile destroyed US forces struck and destroyed a Houthi surface-to-air missile in Yemen after deciding it posed an 'imminent threat' to American aircraft, the US Central Command in the Middle East announced.

The Iran-backed Houthis, who control much of war-torn Yemen, have been attacking shipping in the Red Sea since November in a campaign they say is in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza amid the Israeli aggression.

The United States is spearheading a naval coalition to protect vessels in the vital waterway, and has also conducted air strikes in Houthi territory, both on its own and alongside Britain.

Recently, US 'forces conducted a self-defence strike against one Iranian-backed Houthi surface-to air missile that was prepared to launch,' Centcom said in a statement, adding it had 'determined (the missile) presented an imminent threat to US aircraft in the region.'

It went on to say that the Houthis launched an anti-ship missile into the Red Sea, but 'There was no impact or damage to any vessels.'

US and British forces carried out strikes against 18 Houthi targets across eight locations in Yemen, including weapons storage facilities, attack drones, air defence systems, radars and a helicopter, according to a joint statement.

One person was killed and eight wounded in the attacks, the Houthis' official news agency said.

## Exporters reap Rs8 premium per dollar

**F**ear is high for the appreciation of the dollar as the premium for two months of forward selling has reached Rs8 per dollar, and exchange companies in the open market have halted dollar sales, except for travel purposes.

'This is strange; the exchange rate has been stable for more than a couple of months, but forward selling by exporters is attracting a premium of up to Rs8 per dollar for two months,' said Atif Ahmed, a currency dealer in the inter-bank market.

The perception that the current exchange rate is being managed is growing stronger with the increasing premium on forward selling.

Mr Atif noted that exchange companies are not providing dollars for students, health, and other requirements, even though thousands of students studying abroad require dollars from Pakistan. While exchange companies are allowed to provide dollars for such purposes, they are not bound to arrange dollars for students or health needs.

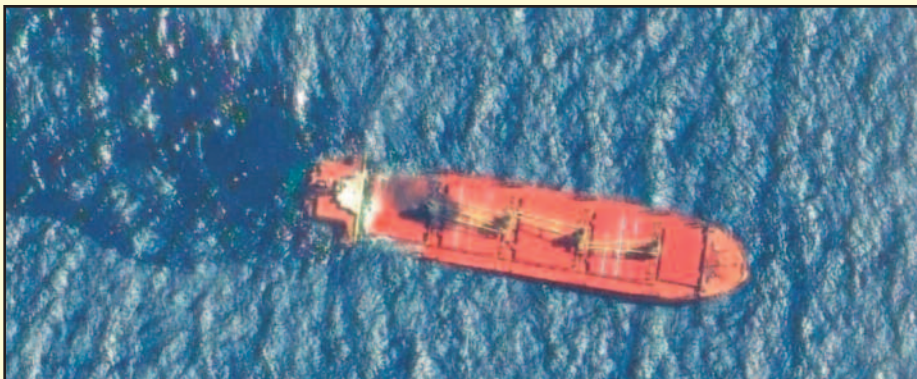
Banks are not allowed to provide dollars for travel, student, or health purposes. However, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has been encouraging banks to open their own exchange companies, potentially tightening the availability of dollars for the general public. The SBP has already closed B and C categories of exchange companies and suspended licences of several exchange companies across the country.

'Selling the dollar at premium clearly indicates the fear among dollar holders about devaluation of the local currency in coming months,' said Mr Atif.

However, some experts believe that the expected inflows of \$1.2 billion from the IMF by the end of this month or beginning of April could improve Pakistan's weak balance of payment situation and support the exchange rate.

'I have noted a few complaints about the shortage of dollars in the open market, or exchange companies not selling dollars except for travelling, but there is no shortage of liquidity,' said Zafar Paracha, General Secretary of the Exchange Companies Association of Pakistan.

However, he said that the additional



A satellite image shows cargo ship Rubymar before it sank in the Red Sea.



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charges by banks on the withdrawal of dollars could be a reason why exchange companies are not willing to pay. He explained that banks are charging Rs1.30 per dollar at the time of both deposit and withdrawal.

'I withdrew \$100,000 from my own accounts two days back, and my bank charged a \$330 fee without justifying the action, he said. Banks do not impose charges when they are in need of dollars.

There was fear among currency dealers that the shortage of dollars for customers, such as students, would compel needy people to turn to the black market for Hundi and remit the amount they need for the students. The same thing may happen for health issues.

This is an old trend, and the demand for dollars helped the black market emerge as an alternative supplier in 2023, destroying the exchange rate and

devaluing the PKR to Rs340 in the open market and Rs307 in the inter-bank market.

The crackdown by the government at that time helped control the situation, closing illegal currency businesses and curbing smuggling of dollars.

Currency experts suggest that this is the time to gain control over the artificial shortage, which could again fuel the black market to become a monster.

## Red Sea container shipping down 30pc after attacks

Container shipping through the Red Sea has dropped by nearly one-third this year as attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels continue, the International Monetary Fund said on Wednesday, 31 January.

'Container shipping... has declined by almost 30 per cent, said Jihad Azour, director of the IMF's Middle East and Central Asia department, adding that 'the drop in trade accelerated in the beginning of this year'.

The Iran-backed Houthis have launched more than 30 attacks on commercial shipping and naval vessels since November 19, the Pentagon said on Tuesday, 30 January.

The IMF's Port Watch platform indicates that the total transit volume through the Suez Canal was down 37 percent this year through January 16 compared with the same period a year

earlier. The canal connects the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.

Houthi attacks have prompted some shipping companies to detour around southern Africa to avoid the Red Sea, a vital route that normally carries about 12pc of global trade, according to the International Chamber of Shipping.

'The level of uncertainty is extremely high and the developments will determine the extent of change and shift in trade patterns in terms of volume but also in terms of sustainability,' Azour told reporters in an on-line briefing.

'Are we on the verge of major change in trade routes or is it temporary because of the increase in costs and the deterioration of the security costs?' Revised regional outlook The United States heads a coalition to pro-

tect Red Sea shipping, and is seeking to apply diplomatic and financial pressure by redesignating the Houthi as a 'terrorist' group. The Red Sea is particularly vital for European trade.

Recently, the European Union's trade commissioner said maritime traffic through the Red Sea shipping route had fallen by 22pc in a month because of the rebel attacks.

The European Union is pushing to launch its own naval mission in the Red Sea to help protect international shipping.

EU countries have given initial backing to the plan and are aiming to finalise it by a meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers on February 19.

The United States and Britain have launched repeated strikes against Houthi capabilities in Yemen, but the Iran-backed movement is still able to hit vessels.

Wednesday's IMF briefing came as the Washington-based fund released a revised economic outlook for countries in the Middle East and North Africa due to the Israel Hamas war. The economic downturn in the occupied West Bank and the war-ravaged Gaza Strip and was 'immense', said Azour.

In 2023, real GDP growth in Gaza and the West Bank was estimated to have dropped to about minus six per cent, the IMF said, adding it reflected a nine percentage points downgrade from its October outlook.

'We project that the economy will keep on contracting in 2024 if there is no fast and quick cessation of hostilities and reconstruction, Azour said.

For emerging market and middle income economies in the region, total funding requirements over 2024 were projected to \$186 billion, the IMF said, up from \$156 billion in 2023.



Destroyed buildings in the Gaza Strip are pictured from a position along the border with southern Israel, on Wednesday, 31 January.



## Exports of textiles rise 10pc in January

**T**extile and clothing exports grew for the second consecutive month in January, according to data issued by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) on Friday, 16 February.

The sector's exports rose 10.10 per cent to \$1.45 billion in January from \$1.32bn in the same month last year. Month-on-month the exports increased by 3.33pc.

However, in the first seven months of FY24, textile and clothing exports shrank 2.99pc to \$9.73bn from \$10.03bn in the corresponding months last year. The decline was attributed to escalating production costs due to higher energy costs and a liquidity crunch.

However, it remains uncertain whether this upward trend in growth observed in the past two consecutive months will persist in the upcoming months.

A few months ago, the Ministry of Commerce announced that the government would soon offer regionally competitive energy prices to textile exporters and resolve their cash flow issues by releasing pending sales tax refunds. However, the decision has yet to be implemented.

The textile and clothing exports contracted by 14.63pc to \$16.50bn in FY23. However, the total merchandise exports dipped 12.71pc to \$27.54bn from \$31.78bn in the preceding year.

The PBS data showed the exports of readymade garments rose 13.85pc in value in January and 28.06pc in quantity, while knitwear grew 8.39pc in value and 69.84pc in quantity. Bedwear posted a growth of 19.26pc in value and 25.63pc in quantity.

Towel exports increased by 5.41pc in value and 11.45pc in quantity, whereas those of cotton cloth by 0.46pc in value and 49.26pc in quantity.

However, raw cotton and yarn exports increased by over 126.45pc and 19.78pc in January from a year ago.

The exports of made-up articles, excluding towels, increased by 9.81pc, and tents, canvas and tarpaulin went down by 24.15pc in January from a year ago.

The import of textile machinery declined by 34.81pc in January, a sign that expansion or modernisation projects were not a priority.

At the same time, the import of synthetic fibre increased by 16.92pc, synthetic and artificial silk yarn by 13.20pc and other textile items by 33.45pc.

The import of raw cotton declined by

91.11pc during the month under review. However, the import of worn clothes posted a negative growth of 5.52pc during the month under review.

In the first seven months of FY24, the total exports slightly increased by 7.87pc to \$17.77bn from \$16.48bn over the last year.

Oil imports Oil imports dipped by 12.06pc in the first seven months of FY24 to \$9.33bn from \$10.61bn a year ago, PBS data showed.

According to the PBS data, imports of petroleum products declined by 25.94pc in value during July January and 18.87pc in quantity. Imports of crude oil increased by 7.74pc in quantity while the value decreased by 3.96pc.

Similarly, liquefied natural gas imports

increased by 4.82pc during 7MFY24 on a year-on-year basis.

Machinery imports increased by 16.61pc to \$4.35bn in July-January from \$3.73bn in 7MFY23, mainly due to an increase in imports of telecom equipment, including mobile phones, electrical machinery, and office machinery. All other categories of machinery recorded a negative growth.

Mobile phone imports surged by 138.08pc to \$987.53 million from \$414.80m. This represents the single largest share of overall machinery import value in the first seven months of FY24.

The transport sector's imports tumbled by 25.15pc to \$976.004m in the July-January period against \$1.30bn in the same months last year.

## Exports to 9 regional countries jump 18pc

**E**xports to nine regional countries grew 17.71 per cent during the first half of the current fiscal year mainly driven by an increase in shipments to China.

The country's exports to Afghanistan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives rose to \$2.233 billion in July December FY24 from \$1.897bn in the corresponding period last year, showed data compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan.

In FY23, exports to regional countries dipped year-on-year by 21.1pc to \$3.331bn.

Pakistan's bulk of the regional exports, which accounts for 60pc, go to China while the rest to the remaining eight countries.

Exports to China increased 39.91pc to \$1.481bn in July-December FY24 from \$1.058bn over the corresponding months of last year. In FY23, the exports to China declined 27.3pc to \$2.02 from \$2.78bn in FY22. It was the first decrease in the post Covid period.

The imports from China declined by 1.14pc to \$5.782bn in 6MFY24 from \$5.849bn over the corresponding months of last year.

Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan grew 3.63pc to \$260.72m in 6MFY24

from \$251.58m in the same period last year.

Till a few years ago, Afghanistan was the second-largest export destination for Pakistan after the United States. The export figures did not include proceeds materialised through the land routes. However, Pakistan has allowed Afghanistan to encourage exports.

A very negligible export was made to Iran on the official channel in the first six months of the current fiscal year. Most of the trade with Tehran is carried out through informal channels in border areas of Balochistan.

The country's exports to India remained negligible at \$0.004m in the first six months of the current fiscal year. It has been reported that Pakistan imports Indian goods via Dubai and Singapore which has also multiplied the cost for Pakistani products.

Exports to Bangladesh decreased 27.41pc to \$305.44m from \$420.83m in July-Dec2022. Exports to Sri Lanka surged by 11.91pc to \$180.03m in 6MFY24 from \$160.87m in the same period last year.

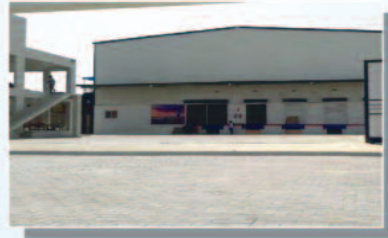
Shipments to Nepal rose year-on-year by 2.59pc to \$1.54m in 6MFY24. Shipments to the Maldives increased 9.6pc to \$4.44m from \$4.05m. No export to Bhutan was recorded in 6MFY24.



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## Pakistan, US sign agreement on cultural property protection

Pakistan and the United States (US) have signed an agreement on cultural property protection, which establishes import restrictions on certain types of archaeological and ethnological materials originating from Pakistan and entering the US.

The US Ambassador to Pakistan, Donald Blome, and Secretary National Heritage and Culture, Hu-

looting and trafficking of objects, promote a clean market for Pakistani art and antiquities in the US, and increase opportunities for US museums and the American public to learn about and experience Pakistan's history and culture.

'This agreement protects unique and historically significant artefacts for future generations. It also demonstrates US support for the



Tourists visit the tomb of Bibi Jawindi in this Punjab town. The monument, dating back to the 15th century, is included in the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

maira Ahmed, signed an agreement at a ceremony in Islamabad on Tuesday, 30 Jan. The new bilateral cultural agreement highlights the diversity of the Pakistani nation and sets the stage for further bilateral cooperation.

The agreement facilitates the return of these cultural objects to the people of Pakistan. The cultural property agreement demonstrates the strong US and Pakistani commitment to disrupt the theft and trafficking of cultural objects and our shared goal of protecting Pakistan's rich and diverse cultural heritage.

This agreement commits both parties to work together to counter

principles of tolerance and respect for diversity principles by which the people of this region have lived for centuries,' said Mr. Blome.

Today's signing underscores the US global commitment to cultural heritage protection and preservation. The US has been unwavering in its commitment to protect and preserve cultural heritage around the world and to restrict trafficking in cultural property, which may be used to fund terrorist and criminal networks.

To date, the US has returned over 175 cultural objects to Pakistan, and this agreement simplifies the process.

## American hunts markhor in Chitral for \$125,000

An American hunted a nine-year-old Kashmir Markhor with 38-inch horn in Gahiret-Golen community - managed game reserve area here on Sunday, 18 Feb.

He had obtained a hunting permit from the wildlife department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at a cost of 125,000 US dollars.

Divisional forest officer of Chitral wildlife division Farooq Nabi told media that Robert Myles Hall spent a number of days to tag a markhor of the trophy size near Gahiret village with the help of the local community.

'He successfully hunted the trophy with his automatic rifle from a close range.'

He said that it was the third trophy hunting of markhor during the current season in Chitral, as previously another American national had hunted a markhor in Toshi-Shasha conservancy in December, and a Russian hunter in the first week of February in the same conservancy.

Mr Nabi said that 80 per cent of the fee of the hunting permit went to the local community to be spent on their collective well-being through the village conservation committee, and in lieu of it they played role in conservation of species.



## PC Hotel, Bhurban Attains ISO-22000 & HACCP Food Safety Management Recertifications

Pearl-Continental Hotel, Bhurban has been recertified by ISO-22000:2018 and HACCP, an esteemed international standard for food safety management, with 100% compliance two years in a row.

ISO-22000 is an internationally accepted standard for food safety management systems, providing a comprehensive framework to ensure the safety of food products throughout the supply chain. It covers processes from primary production to consumption, emphasizing a holistic approach to food safety.

Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) is a systematic approach to food safety that identifies, evaluates, and controls potential hazards throughout food production. Developed in the 1960s by NASA in collaboration with the Pillsbury Company to ensure the safety of space food, HACCP has since become a global standard in the food industry.

The recertification audit, conducted

by the globally renowned TUV Austria, encompassed on-site evaluations and a meticulous examination of documentation, policies, and procedures. No major or minor non-conformity was identified during the comprehensive assessment, showcasing the team's unwavering commitment to maintaining the highest standards in food safety.

Addressing the positive audit results, Chief Operating Officer, Hospitality and Education Division, Hashoo Group, Haseeb A. Gardezi remarked, "We have a longstanding reputation for exceptional service standards and commitment to excellence in all hospitality avenues. Our pledge will only grow stronger with such humbling accolades, spurring our motivation for the future."

General Manager, Pearl-Continental Hotel, Bhurban, Nadeem Chaudhary shared his thoughts on the achievement, "We strive to provide the best-in-class services for our valued guests and continue evolving our processes and proce-

dures to maintain quality at par with global standards. Thank you for your continued trust; we are grateful to receive these recertifications and will continue enhancing our services to stay at the top of our game."

The auditors commended the team for their dedication and also lauded the sustainability initiatives spearheaded by senior management. The Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) project at Pearl-Continental Bhurban, which utilizes live bacteria to treat and recycle wastewater while converting it into organic fertilizer, was also praised.

Hashoo Group is Pakistan's premium conglomerate with a diversified business portfolio spanning national and international markets. The Group owns and operates the Pearl-Continental Hotels & Resorts, PC Legacy, and Hotel One brands in Pakistan and has business interests encompassing the information technology, investment, travel & tourism, and real-estate sectors.

## Seibu Prince Hotels Worldwide chooses Sabre's advanced hospitality technology

Sabre Corporation, a leading software and technology provider that powers the global travel industry, recently announced a new agreement with Seibu Prince Hotels Worldwide. The hotel chain will deploy the Sabre SynXis Central Reservation System (CRS) to reach the broadest points of distribution in the industry as they forge ahead with ambitions to double the size of their property portfolio.

Under the agreement, Seibu Prince Hotels Worldwide will be using the SynXis platform to expand its reach across global distribution channels. The chain is also deploying SynXis Booking Engine to drive direct bookings and SynXis Channel Connect to connect to hundreds of OTA channels globally. The addition of Seibu hotels to Sabre's SynXis platform means its properties are available to book through Sabre's own global GDS as well as others, corporates, travel management companies, and almost 900,000 travel agents and tour operators globally, significantly in-

creasing distribution channels and revenue opportunities.

"We have aggressive plans to double our hotel numbers to 250, so it's essential that we are working with the right technology partner with the advanced, scalable solutions, and the future-focused mindset we need to support those ambitions," said Eiichi Akamatsu, Director, Executive Managing Officer, Seibu Prince Hotels Worldwide. "Given our rapidly expanding scale, Sabre SynXis will enable us to consolidate operations into one intuitive ecosystem so we can improve the guest experience while increasing our geographic footprint and driving efficiencies for our international growth."

With more than a century of hospitality experience, Seibu Prince Hotels Worldwide is focused on asset-light hotel operations, with an aim to expand its scale two-fold. Seibu Prince brands include The Prince, Grand Prince Hotel, Prince Hotel, Prince Smart Inn, The Prince Akatoki, Policy, Park Regis by

Prince, Park Regis Park Proxi, and Leisure Inn overseas. These include hotels in major Japanese cities and resort areas such as Tokyo and Kyoto, as well as popular destinations in Asia, the Middle East, Oceania, the US, and Europe. It will continue to develop its business to achieve its goal of expanding its network to 250 hotels in Japan and abroad.

"We're thrilled to welcome Seibu Prince Hotels Worldwide to our Sabre SynXis family," said Frank Trampert, senior vice president, global managing director of community sales for Sabre Hospitality Solutions. "Seibu Prince Hotels Worldwide will now be able to gain an intuitive chain-wide performance overview and valuable insights to enable improved distribution, increased bookings, and optimized offerings for guests at its existing, and future, hotels. We're looking forward to many more Seibu properties connecting to the SynXis platform as Prince drive forward their exciting expansion plans."

# 17 PTDC motels to be leased out to army-owned company

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker government is set to lease out 17 motels of the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation to a military entity for a period of 30 years claiming 40 per cent share in their profits.

The lease proposal was approved by the provincial cabinet in its meeting on Feb 6 to 'outsource these properties [motels] to a government-owned company,' according to a government statement.

The federal government had handed over 17 motels and two tracts of lands meant for setting up such motels to the KP government in March 2022 in line with the devolution under the 18th Constitutional Amendment.

The provincial government earlier said the outsourcing of those properties would be made under the guidance of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).

Minutes of the provincial cabinet's meeting available with media reveal that the secretary of the culture, tourism and archaeology department informed the cabinet that the provincial government had received a request from the Green Tourism, a company registered under the Companies Act, 2017, and a 100pc government-owned entity, for leasing 17 PTDC properties.

Regarding the terms and conditions under which these properties will be handed over to the entity, the minutes said the provincial government's share was set at 40pc of their net profit.

They added that the profit share in question was 32pc in Punjab and 35pc in Gilgit-Baltistan.

'Moreover, the provincial government shall not bear any loss incurred by the company, the minutes read.

They also said the grace period of four years as proposed in the agreements shared with other provincial governments was reduced from three to four years depending on the nature and status of the property.

To oversee the operations of these properties, a joint management board comprising five members from each side will be formed with co-opted members.

Besides, all structural interventions will also be carried out in due compliance with local bylaws and other applicable laws to preserve the environment and heritage of the properties.

The minutes said the law department

opined that Rule 3(2)C permitted direct sourcing to public sector organisation, which may either be totally owned and controlled by the government or may be semiautonomous and autonomous agencies under the administrative control of federal or provincial governments.

'Since Green Tourism remains under the federal government, there exists no legal impediment in the way of grant of lease to the same on government to government basis,' the minutes read.

The minutes said that the advocate general while endorsing the opinion of the law department insisted that legal analysis of the law department was inconsonance with the juridical precedents, provisions of the KP Public Procurement of Goods, Works and Services Rules, 2014.

It said that the cabinet approved the direct leasing/outsourcing of 17 PTDC properties under Rule 3(2)c of KP Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Procurement Rules, 2014, Green Tourism for a 30 years period on the terms and conditions proposed by the administration department.

Documents show that 17 motels and two plots of land value more than 10.112 billion and are located in Naran, Balakot, Chattar Plain, Ayubia, Booni, Bumburet, Garam Chashma, Mastuj, Chitral, Birmogh Lasht, Saidu Sharif, Besham, Miandam, Baran Kallay, Kalam, Chak-

darra, Panakot and Torkham.

The documents show that the PTDC motel in Naran has 60 huts and spread over an area of 160 kanals while the motel in Besham area of Swat had 47 rooms and spread over 16 kanals of land.

When contacted, culture and tourism minister Barrister Feroze Shah Jamal Kakakhel confirmed the development and said the government was going to sign the motels lease agreement with the Green Tourism.

He said the Green Tourism was owned by the army and would function under the SIFC.

The minister said that the majority of those motels were currently closed and didn't generate any revenue.

'I found the PTDC motel in Naran to be shut during my visit to the area and made it functional,' he said.

Mr Kakakhel said handing the motels over to a government-owned company would save those motels from mismanagement as they required proper management.

To a question as to why the caretaker government is making such decisions of lasting impact, he said, 'one needs not worry while doing things in good faith.

A search on the Securities and Exchange Commission's official website shows that the Green Tourism was registered at the Company Registration Office in Islamabad on Jan 26, 2024.



Students perform a classical dance at Alhambra during the Faiz Mela.



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## KPCTA arranges safari train trip to Takht Bhai relics



An attendant serves refreshments to passengers on their way to the world site in Takht Bhai, Mardan, on a safari train that stated its journey from Peshawar.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) arranged the first-ever safari train trip to Takht Bhai relics, recently.

The excursion was aimed at informing people about the rich history of Buddha-era heritage sites declared by Unesco as World Heritage Site.

A large number of people enjoyed the train safari, which commenced from Saddar Railway Station here. The visitors were warmly welcomed at the station with traditional pipe band.

A total of 140 passengers visited the site through the train safari, during which they were briefed about the historic places of KP, its culture, traditions and the history of Takht Bahi relics.

The train safari departed from Saddar Cantt Railway Station at 9am and reached Takht Bahi Railway Station after sightseeing stops at City Railway Station, Nasirpur, Pabbi, and Mardan.

Upon arrival, manager events Hassina Shaukat welcomed the visitors, distributed traditional items and adorned them with

garlands.

She said KPCTA was keen to promote rail tourism. 'Tour of such kind would be arranged in future as well for promotion of heritage and archaeological tourism'.

She said these tours would give insight to people about rich history of KP, attract foreigners to enjoy diverse culture and traditions of the province.

Upon reaching Takht Bhai, visitors were taken to the TakhtBahi relics' monastery, where they were briefed by the curator directorate of archaeology. The curator highlighted the grandeur of the Buddha-era and the historic significance of the UNESCO World Heritage site.

Visitors were informed about the traditions, culture of Buddha-era and the religious importance of these relics to followers of Buddhism, who often visit here for prayer and meditation. They were also informed about KPCTA efforts to promote the rich history, culture and traditions of the people living in this area for centuries.

## 100,000-year-old human footprints found in Morocco

Archaeologists in Morocco have unearthed more than 80 human footprints dating back around 100,000 years and believed to be the oldest in North Africa.

The footprints, probably left by five homo sapiens, including children, were discovered on the coast of Larache, a city 90 kilometres south of Tangier, by archaeologists from Morocco, Spain, France, and Germany. 'This group (of homo sapiens) was crossing the beach towards the sea, probably in search of food and shellfish,' Anass Sedrati, curator at the archaeological site of Lixus Larache, said.



'They were probably fishermen or gatherers.' The researchers, whose study was published in scientific journal Nature in January, said the footprints were some of the world's best-preserved human traces and the oldest in North Africa and the southern Mediterranean.

'This discovery was made during a field mission in July 2022, as part of a scientific research project on the origins and dynamics of the boulders strewn along the coastline,' said the researchers led by France's Université Bretagne Sud.

In 2017, some homo sapiens remains dating back 300,000 years were unearthed in northwest Morocco, a breakthrough that pushed back the estimated origin of the human species by 100,000 years.



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## Faisal Mosque to be renovated after decades

After almost 35 years of its construction, the Saudi government is expected to provide funds for the renovation of Faisal Mosque in the federal capital, which has not seen any major repair work over the past three decades.

This was revealed as caretaker Interior Minister Gohar Ijaz visited the mosque along with Saudi envoy Nawaf Saeed Al-Maliki, Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chairman Anwarul Haq and others on Monday, 12 February.

In 1966, King Faisal Abdul Aziz visited Islamabad, and an international competition was held for the selection of the mosque's design, which was won by a Turkish architect, Vedat Dalokay. In 1976, its foundation stone was laid and the building was completed in 1988. Now, after more than 35 years, the mosque, frequented by worshippers and tourists alike, requires renovation.

Sources said that the Saudi government through its embassy wanted to get the repair work started as soon as possible, adding that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) would likely be signed between the interior ministry, the CDA, and Saudi Arabia soon.

According to sources, the mosque was not renovated after it was built in 1988 and currently, its parking lot as well as toilets are in bad condition.

There is also a need to improve its air-conditioning system as well as electrical works.

According to Gohar Ijaz, he had decided to approach the Saudi envoy after he offered his Friday prayers at the mosque and found out the mosque direly needed a facelift and there was a need to make it more beautiful.

Mosque's caretakers The CDA is in charge of the mosque affairs while the Islamic International University Islamabad, another project of Saudis in Islamabad, is in charge of the management and relevant affairs.

The CDA has been doing small-scale repair works at the mosque, however, The CDA officials said that the civic agency had been doing 'necessary maintenance through its funds and the funds provided by the federal government, which were meagre for its proper maintenance'.

According to the CDA officials, the



mosque was constructed with funding from the Saudi government, and at least \$45 million was spent on this project.

The Saudi government had provided over \$28m for the construction. 'Once again, Saudi Arabia has shown interest in this mosque, which is indeed a great gesture,' said an official of CDA.

Besides helping repair and renovation work of said mosque, the Saudi government is also planning to construct a grand mosque in the IUI for \$32 million, which will also serve as a 'hub for research'.

## Ganweriwala to be converted into tourism centre

The site of Ganweriwala, the ancient city of the Indus Civilisation in Cholistan desert, would be converted into a tourism centre. The excavation at the site, over 100km from Bahawalpur city, started, recently.

The announcement regarding the tourism centre at Ganweriwala was made by Bahawalpur Commissioner Dr. Ehtasham Anwar Mahaar in the opening ceremony of the excavation.

He was flanked by Punjab Archaeology Director General Shozeb Saeed, Dr. Rafique Mughal, Professor of Emeritus at the Boston University, and heritage expert Sajida Vandal.

After launching the excavation, the commissioner said the 7,000 years old Ganweriwala was buried across the area of over eighty hectares and it was the second largest city after Mohenjodaro. He described the day of excavation as historic and hoped that excavation would lead to the discoveries regarding the world's oldest civilization of Hakra river.

He thanked Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman for providing funds for the excavation. Dr. Mahaar lauded Dr Mughal whose research led to discovery of Ganweriwala. He said that measures would be taken to include Ganweriwala in the UN's permanent heritage list as the historical Derawar Fort has already been included in the UN's temporary heritage list.

The commissioner announced that museums would be established in the Cholistan desert after preservation and restoration of 19 forts and over 500 historical sites and

monuments.

Veteran archaeologist Dr. Rafiq Mughal said Ganweriwala was a small city compared to Mohenjodaro but bigger than Harappa. He said the cities like Harappa and Mohenjodaro were generally settled at the heights and a central dune and Ganweriwala was also settled over a mound.

Sajida Vandal, the CEO of Thaap, said the sand dunes of Ganweriwala were traced in 1975 by Dr. Rafiq Mughal and the city was located 60km southwest of Derawar Fort. She added Ganweriwala was located in the middle of Mohenjodaro and Harappa and its distance from Mohenjodario was 340km while from Harappa it was 260km. She lamented that despite the discovery of the remains in 1975 by Dr Mughal, its excavation could not be taken. She disclosed that the experts had observed the existence of the walls of mud bricks, which were also found at various places in the Sindh valley. She said clay pottery and artifacts like a tongawala, a sculpture, a bronze seal and a Goali of mud had been found at Ganweriwala.

Shozeb Saeed said that the archaeology department realised the significance of the Ganweriwala excavation project and assured that it would continue work on the project in the coming days. He stressed the need to unearth the hidden treasures of Cholistan's Hakra civilization and its possible connection with Mohenjodaro as it seemed that the Hakra civilisation was the oldest in the world.

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