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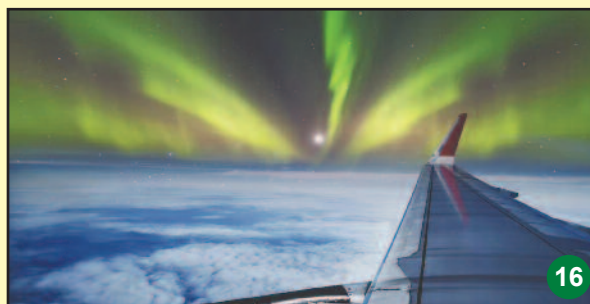
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Govt allows AirSial to expand flight operations to seven int'l destinations

The Federal Cabinet on Tuesday, 07 May accorded its approval to Air Sial, Pakistan's third private airline, to launch flight operations for seven more international destinations.

The approval was granted on the recommendation of the Ministry of Aviation under the National Aviation Policy 2023 and Air Services Agreement, according to a press release issued by the

Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Air Sial is allowed to start its flight operations for China, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkiye, the UK, and Kuwait.

The airline was inaugurated on 9 December 2020 and commenced its first domestic flight on December 25, 2020. It started flying internationally with King Abdulaziz International Airport, Jeddah as its first destination, on 29 March 2023.

CAA grants license to another airline to launch operations

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has officially granted a charter license for K2 Airways for commencing airline operations, CAA Spokesperson informed ProPakistani.



This decision comes after the airline fulfilled all the necessary conditions set by the authority. K2 Airways recently opted to withdraw its application for a Tourism Promotion & Regional Integration (TPRI) license, a move that could reflect a shift in the company's business strategy and priorities.

Despite this, K2 Airways remains actively engaged in expanding its operations, currently in the midst of acquiring an aircraft to support its services.



Fly Jinnah marks its first flight to Muscat

Fly Jinnah commenced its first non-stop flight from Islamabad to Muscat on Friday, 10 May.

Upon arrival at the Muscat International Airport, the flight was greeted with a traditional water cannon salute, said a press release issued here.

The low-cost carrier will operate two weekly flights on the newly added Islamabad-Muscat route.

Commenting on the inauguration of the airline's third international flight, a spokesperson for Fly Jinnah said: "Celebrating our continued growth and commitment to enhancing air travel opportunities, we are proud to have commenced non-stop flights between Islamabad and Muscat in Oman.

This expansion underscores our dedication to offering more affordable

and quality air travel solutions, both domestically and internationally".

With its fleet of five Airbus A320

aircraft, the airline serves five major cities in Pakistan - Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar and Quetta.



Fly Jinnah CEO Arman Yahya, Director Ali Muscatia, ASF Chief Security Officer Colonel Nadeem Asif and Airport Manager Aftab Geelani cutting the cake at the opening ceremony of Fly Jinnah's flight to Muscat.



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Governor opens Road to Makkah project at Karachi airport

The much-awaited Road to Makkah project for intending pilgrims going to perform Haj from Karachi was finally inaugurated at the Jinnah International Airport on Sunday, 12 May.

Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori, along with Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan Nawaf Bin Said Al Malki and Saudi Passport and Immigration chairman Lt General Sulaiman bin Abdulaziz, inaugurated the project at a ceremony.

Under the project, the intending pilgrims are exempted from the immigration process at Saudi airports as they are being cleared at the Karachi airport by Saudi immigration officials before boarding their flights. However, this facility is only for the pilgrims going to Saudi Arabia under the government-sponsored scheme.

On Sunday, 12 May the governor saw off the first batch of pilgrims that cleared Saudi immigration process here under the Road to Makkah project.

He felicitated the Haj pilgrims and presented bouquets to them.

The governor said that the Road to Makkah project was launched a couple of years ago at the Islamabad airport and this year it had also been started from Karachi.

He said that under this facility, the pilgrims will be able to receive their luggage at their hotel in Saudi Arabia after all the necessary clearances from Karachi airport.

He said this year government had ensured minimum expenses for providing facilities to the pilgrims. "The efforts of the government and the religious affairs and interfaith harmony ministry for this purpose are commendable," he added.

The governor said that all arrangements for Haj were digitised and the "Pak Hajj App" was launched to provide pilgrims with information and training material of all stages of Haj on their mobile phones.

He said that the pilgrims would be able to register their complaints through this app in case of facing any problem.

Over 16,000 Haj pilgrims to clear immigration at Karachi airport under Road to Makkah project

Saudi authorities will provide immigration facilities at Karachi airport to over 16,000 Haj pilgrims under the Road to Makkah project, it emerged on Friday, 03 May.

Under the project, the intending pilgrims would be exempted from the immigration process at Saudi airports.

project.

The meeting, chaired by Airport Manager Erfan Khan, was attended by airlines, ground handling agencies, border health services, the Airport Security Force, Federal Investigation Agency, Customs, and Anti-Narcotics Force.

The agencies at the Jinnah



A Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) spokesperson said that the Haj flights under the Road to Makkah project will commence on May 9 and conclude on June 8.

Saudi staff will have access to eight counters and equipment in the international departure satellite area.

According to the spokesperson, the Road to Makkah project at Karachi airport is specifically for government-sponsored Haj pilgrims, totalling over 16,000.

Haj flights to start on 9th; eight counters set up in airport departure area for Saudi staff, meeting told

He said that an additional 15,000 pilgrims going to perform Haj through private operators from Karachi airport would not be part of the Road to Makkah project.

The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will operate five Haj flights from Sukkur and 21 flights from Quetta, all transiting through Karachi airport.

The spokesperson said that a meeting was held at Jinnah International Airport to discuss the arrangements for the upcoming Haj, focusing on the Road to Makkah

International Airport reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to providing complete support to the pilgrims.

The meeting focused on the procedures involved in the different stages of the Haj pilgrims' stay at the airport, starting from their arrival at the terminal to their departure, following Saudi immigration formalities in the international departure satellite area.

The airport manager stressed the importance of providing a seamless experience for the pilgrims and urged all agencies to treat and welcome Haj pilgrims as honoured guests.

Deputy Airport Manager Saif-ur-Rehman requested airlines to submit their Haj flight schedules and aircraft types promptly for efficient parking bay planning.

Additionally, security personnel were encouraged to expedite luggage checks, the spokesperson said, adding that the collaborative efforts of the CAA and airport administration in managing the Road to Makkah project were commended by Director-Haj Karachi Imtiaz A. Shah.

The Road to Makkah Project begins at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport

A meeting took place at Jinnah International Airport in Karachi to discuss the arrangements for the upcoming Hajj pilgrimage, particularly focusing on the Road to Makkah Project. Various airport stakeholders, including airlines, ground handling agencies, Border Health Services, Airport Security Force, FIA, Customs, and Anti-Narcotics Force, attended the meeting led by Airport Manager Erfan Khan and Deputy Airport Manager Saif ur Rehman.

The meeting focused on the procedures involved in the different stages of the Hajj pilgrims stay at the airport, starting from their arrival at the terminal to their departure, following Saudi immigration formalities in the international departure satellite area. The Airport Manager stressed the importance of providing a seamless experience for the pilgrims and urged all agencies to treat and welcome Hajj pilgrims as honored guests.

The Deputy Airport Manager requested airlines to submit their Hajj flight schedules and aircraft types promptly for efficient parking bay planning. Border

Health Services were directed to be on standby to assist the Hajj pilgrims. Additionally, security personnel were encouraged to expedite luggage checks. The collaborative efforts of Civil Aviation and Karachi Airport administration in managing the Road to Makkah project were commended by Director Hajj Karachi Imtiaz A. Shah.

It was clarified that the Road to Makkah Project is specifically for government-sponsored Hajj pilgrims, totaling over sixteen thousand, while an additional fifteen thousand Hajj pilgrims will travel on commercial flights from Karachi Airport. PIA will operate five Hajj flights from Sukkur and twenty-one from Quetta, all transiting through Karachi Airport. Saudi staff will have access to eight counters and equipment in the international departure satellite area. The Hajj flights under the Road to Makkah Project will commence on 09 May and conclude on 08 June. The agencies at Jinnah International Airport reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to providing complete support to the pilgrims.

ICAO Team in Pakistan



The USAP-CMA Audit Team releases the report for ICAO USAP CMA Audit of Pakistan. The PCAA was successful to score 86.73% score in the Audit while the ICAO Goals Set For 80% for 2023. The current score is closer to ICAO goal for 2030 that is 90%.

The USAP-CMA Audit Team from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) had completed its assessment of Pakistan's aviation security systems during February 2024.

The success of this audit was a result of National Aviation Security Act 2023 and the continued efforts from airports, airlines, cargo agents, ground handlers and ASF working on the locations.

A group of 44 Saudi immigration official arrives at Karachi Airport

A group of 44 Saudi immigration officials has arrived in Karachi as part of the Road to Makkah Project. The immigration team will carry out Saudi immigration procedures for Hajj

pilgrims at Karachi Airport who are traveling under the Road to Makkah Project.

The team was warmly welcomed by the Acting Counsel General of KSA in

Karachi, the Director of Hajj (MORA), the Deputy APM Jinnah International Airport (JIAP), as well as representatives from ASF, Customs, ANF, BHS, and FIA.



Naqvi for increase in immigration counters at airport

Taking notice of lack of facilities, Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has ordered an increase in the number of immigration counters for the passengers going abroad at the Allama Iqbal International Airport.

During a visit to the airport here on Friday, 03 May along with Defence and Aviation Minister Khawaja Asif, Naqvi expressed dissatisfaction over existing facilities for passengers and said besides increasing immigration counters for the convenience of passengers going abroad, “the lengthy and three-tier search process will [also] be simplified.”

He also ordered immediate resolution of immigration issues, issued directives to

enhance facilities and expedite departure procedures for outbound passengers, seeking a plan to simplify the search process.

After observing the search process, he instructed the Airport Security Force (ASF), Anti Narcotics Force (ANF), and Customs to devise a comprehensive plan within the next 24 hours to simplify it.

During the visit, Naqvi also reviewed other facilities for passengers at the airport.

The federal minister also chaired a high-level meeting in the committee room of the airport.

The federal minister gave necessary instructions to the relevant authorities to enhance facilities for the passengers.

PIA starts Haj flights from eight cities

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has announced that Haj flights would be operated from eight cities from May 9 to June 10.

A spokesman for PIA said on Saturday, 04 May that PIA would operate direct flights this year to Jeddah and Madina from eight cities in Pakistan - Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Multan, Quetta, Sialkot, and Sukkur.

According to the initial plan, the spokesman said that PIA would transport around 34,000 Haj pilgrims to the Holy Hijaz through 170 flights from May 9 to June 10.

He also noted that 19,000 government Haj scheme pilgrims and 15,000 private pilgrims would travel through PIA for Haj this year.

Additionally, the spokesman said that the Road to Makkah plan would be available at Islamabad and Karachi airports this year.

Through the Road to Makkah project, Haj pilgrims would undergo their Saudi immigration process at Karachi and Islamabad International Airports, saving

them the hassle of long queues for immigration in Jeddah or Madina, said the spokesman.



The PIA has also issued a guidebook for Haj awareness, containing detailed instructions on the Nusuk application and other necessary guidelines.

The spokesman added that pilgrims should register their mobile numbers while booking their tickets to receive timely information about their flights.

All pilgrims are requested to pray for the security and development of Pakistan while performing the Haj rituals, according to the spokesman.

Following Islamabad International Airport, Karachi's Jinnah International Airport is ready to commence operations for

the Road to Makkah project.

A meeting to review arrangements for the upcoming Haj pilgrimage was held on Friday, chaired by Airport Manager Erfan Khan and Deputy Airport Manager Saifur Rehman.

The meeting was attended by airport stakeholders, including airlines, ground handling agencies, Border Health Services, Airport Security Force, FIA, Customs, and Anti-Narcotics Force.

PIA starts flights from Skardu to Dubai

Regular international flights between Skardu and Dubai commences on Monday, 29 April, with two weekly flights operating on Monday and Friday.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will operate these flights, with the first departure from Skardu to Dubai on April 29 and the first arrival on May 4.

The move to start regular weekly flights has come after the milestone of last year when a total of 11 flights were operated between Skardu and Dubai on different occasions.

The Skardu airport, declared ‘international’ by former prime minister Imran Khan in December 2021, is the only airport in northern Pakistan capable of accommodating larger airplanes.

Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Faisal Niaz Tirmizi confirmed to media that PIA has been requested to initiate regular flights between Skardu and Dubai.

The improved accessibility is expected to attract more visitors to Skardu and its surrounding areas, known for their stunning landscapes and natural beauty.

GB Minister for Planning and Development Raja Nasir Ali Khan met PIA's chief commercial officer Nausherwan Adil to discuss strategies for enhancing air connectivity and promoting tourism.

They agreed to increase flight frequencies from Dubai to Skardu and launch direct special flights from Skardu to Najaf and Damascus for pilgrims, the minister told media.

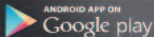
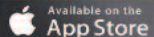
In the meeting, he said, they also discussed initiating direct Hajj and Umrah flights from Skardu airport, which would benefit local residents and promote international tourism, positively impacting the local economy.

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Global operators eye bid for Islamabad airport management

Renowned airport operators from around the world have expressed their interest in bidding for the management of the Islamabad International Airport.

The development came to light during an online meeting chaired by Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Saturday, 27 April. The meeting, which was attended by Pakistani envoys, reviewed market-sounding efforts for outsourcing airports through Pakistan's diplomatic missions.

According to a press release, Aviation Secretary Saif Anjum, who is also the director general of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), reported positive feedback from Pakistani missions in countries such as Turkiye, Malaysia, the UAE, Qatar, France, Spain, Germany, Kuwait, the UK, and Switzerland.

These efforts have led to a reinvigorated interest among top-tier airport operators, the press release said.

Operators of foreign airports, it said, "had shown positive interests in the bidding of the Islamabad International Airport".

The meeting was followed by the 9th steering committee session on airport outsourcing, which was attended by key government officials, including the secretary of law and justice, the additional secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and heads of various federal agencies.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) also presented a progress review report, noting a keen interest and expected healthy competition among foreign investors for the Islamabad airport project.

During the session, the forum reviewed key performance indicators and service delivery benchmarks established by international consultants to enhance the quality of services at airports across Pakistan.

The government agency heads committed to observing these benchmarks to ensure a seamless passenger experience.

Mr Dar stressed the importance of expediting the outsourcing processes for Lahore and Karachi airports within the stipulated time frames, underlining the government's commitment to enhancing economic diplomacy and strengthening trade and investment ties with other nations.

Privatisation of PIA clears more hurdles

Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Limited, doing business as PIA - Pakistan International Airlines (PK, Islamabad International), and PIA Holding Company Limited, it announced on May 6. The move provides for the legal separation of PIA's core aviation business from its "non-core" activities.

"The approval of the scheme paves the way for PIA Holding Company to own a 100% shareholding in PIA and simultaneously issue and allot shares to the qualifying shareholders of PIA," the accompanying statement reads. Two days earlier, the Competition Commission of Pakistan approved the same scheme of arrangement.

The approvals are part of a maze of red tape and bureaucratic approvals the Pakistani government and state-owned carrier must secure to sell a majority stake in PIA. Central to the process is the establishment of PIA Holding Company and the shifting of USD2.26 billion in non-core liabilities off PIA's balance sheet and over to the holding company. The government argues this will make the airline a more attractive proposition to potential buyers. The government wants to sell 51-100% of PIA's share capital and hand over management control of the loss-making airline.

Under the scheme of arrangement, shares in Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Limited will be swapped for shares in PIA Holding Company Limited. The latter entity will assume 100% ownership of Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Limited. In addition to the non-core liabilities, around USD89.3 million in non-core assets will also be transferred to the holding company, which will be 100% owned by the Pakistani government. PIA will retain approximately USD526 million in core assets and USD726 million in core liabilities.

Pakistan's finance minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb, told an investment conference in Saudi Arabia earlier this week that the government hopes to complete the privatisation by early July. The deadline for initial EOIs was recently extended until mid-May and reports are emerging of some interest in

PIA. The government is keen for a foreign investor with hard currency and aviation experience to step in and take over the carrier. However, early reports have said it is mostly local companies that are keen to take a stab at running it.

Outsourcing of airports

Foreign Minister, Mr. Ishaq Dar chaired an online meeting with Heads of the Missions to inter-alia review the progress made on market sounding efforts being made through Pakistan's Missions Abroad for outsourcing of Airports.

The Secretary Aviation / DGCAA presented the progress review and informed the Chair that concerted efforts by Heads of the Missions in Tukey, Malaysia, UAE, Qatar, Paris, Spain, Germany, Kuwait, UK and Switzerland have reinvigorated interests of well-known Airport operators, who have shown positive interests in bidding of Islamabad International Airport. The renewed interest of foreign Airport Operators testifies economic stability and confidence of investors in the political stability in Pakistan. The Chair emphasized on the need of enhancing economic diplomacy and efforts to bolster trade & investment ties with the foreign countries.

The session was followed by 9th Meeting of Steering Committee on Outsourcing of Airports, which was inter-alia attended by Secretary Aviation / DGCAA, Secretary Law & Justice, Additional Secretary MoFA ME, Additional Secretary BOI, DG ASF, DG ANF, Additional DGCAA, Additional DG FIA (Immigration), senior officer of Pakistan Customs and IFC Team.

The IFC presented progress review report and highlighted that foreign investors are showing keen interest in the bidding process of Islamabad International Airport and a healthy competition is expected. The fora also reviewed Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and service delivery benchmarks worked out by international consultants to improve quality of services at airports. It was assured by the heads of government agencies that all out efforts shall be made for observance and adherence to service delivery benchmarks to ensure seamless passenger experience at Airports.

The Chair stressed on IFC to expedite and complete the required tasks within stipulated time frame for outsourcing of Lahore and Karachi Airport.

Pakistan's lunar payload lifts off aboard Chinese mission

Pakistan's maiden lunar mission - iCube Qamar - embarked on its journey on Friday, 03 May as part of a Chinese probe, which aims to collect samples from the far side of the moon, a world first as Beijing pushes ahead with an ambitious programme that aims to send a crewed lunar mission by 2030.

The iCube-Q orbiter, which carries two optical cameras to image the lunar surface, is a 7kg cube satellite or cubesat. Cubesats are miniature satellites typically characterised by their small size and standardised cubic design.

These satellites are used by academic institutes for experimental and research purposes in Low Earth Orbits, generally with an altitude of less than 1,000km. However, they are now finding many applications in higher orbits and deep space missions.

China launched the uncrewed spacecraft on a nearly two-month mission. The Long March-5, China's largest rocket, blasted off at 5:27pm Beijing time (0927 GMT) from Wenchang Space Launch Centre on the southern island of Hainan with the more than 8 tonnes Chang'e-6 probe.

Chang'e-6 is tasked with landing in the South Pole-Aitken Basin - one of the largest known impact craters in the solar system - on the far side of the moon, which perpetually faces away from the earth, after which it will retrieve and return samples. The launch marks another milestone in China's lunar and space exploration programme.

The Chinese mission will employ lunar research payloads from multiple countries, including Pakistan's iCube Qamar, which was designed by the Islamabad-based Institute of Space Technology (IST) in collaboration with China's Shanghai University (SJTU) and Pakistan's national space agency Suparco.



A long march-5 rocket, carrying the Chang'e-6 mission lunar probe, lifts off as it rains at the Wenchang Space Launch Centre in southern China's Hainan province, on Friday, 03 May.

Pakistan to launch another satellite mission after iCube-Qamar

Following the successful launch of Pakistan's first lunar satellite, iCUBE, another satellite is scheduled for release into space on May 30. The upcoming satellite, MM1, is a collaborative effort between SUPARCO and the National Space Agency and will contribute to the establishment of a cutting-edge communication system.

Designed to address the increasing demands of the telecom sector, MM1 is poised to enhance 5G internet services in the country.

equipped with a 7kg one-megapixel camera specifically tailored for missions with stringent power constraints.



Notably, Pakistan's maiden lunar mission, ICUBE Qamar, achieved a significant milestone by successfully entering the moon's orbit just three days ago.

Operating under extreme conditions, with temperatures plummeting as low as minus 100 degrees Celsius, MM1 is

Its capacity to transmit images at a modest 1-kbps rate will facilitate surface-level analysis, providing crucial data on crater locations, water, and traces of ice on the moon's surface. These findings, obtained through various techniques, hold immense promise for global utilization.



An MH-6 Little Bird helicopter, piloted by members of the US Army's Special Operations Aviation Regiment, flies overhead during a demonstration at "special operations forces week" at a convention centre, recently. Army personnel from 10 nations will take part in a mock scenario defending the city of Tampa from "hostile invaders".



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Pakistan to provide 12 JF-17s to Iraq in landmark deal

Pakistan and Iraq have solidified their defense ties by signing a landmark agreement in Baghdad. The accord, aimed at

enhancing defense cooperation, involves Pakistan's provision of twelve MFI-Mushaq trainer aircraft and twelve JF-Thunder Block III fighter jets to the Iraqi Air Force.



Reliable sources within the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) revealed that the \$1.8 billion deal was reached during discussions between Pakistan's Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Babar and his Iraqi counterpart at the Ministry of Defense in Baghdad.

Secretary General of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, Lieutenant General Ahmed Dawood, and Lieutenant General ShahabJahid Ali represented Iraq in the talks. Both sides engaged in comprehensive discussions to finalize the terms of the agreement.

This marks the second instance of Pakistan supplying Mushaq Trainer aircraft to Iraq. Following the successful induction of twelve Mushaq aircraft into the Iraqi

forces in 2023, the Iraqi Defense Ministry expressed interest in acquiring more from the PAF.

In addition to the twelve Mushaq trainer aircraft, Pakistan will also provide twelve JF-Thunder Block III fighter jets to Iraq. These aircraft are currently undergoing technical evaluations to ensure compatibility with Iraqi requirements.

Iraq will join the ranks of Nigeria, Myanmar, and Azerbaijan as recipients of the JF-Thunder aircraft, highlighting Pakistan's growing stature in the global defense market.

During discussions in Baghdad, Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Babar provided Iraqi defense officials with detailed insights into the technical specifications and performance capabilities of the JF-Thunder aircraft. Iraqi officials are expected to visit Pakistan soon to personally inspect the manufacturing processes of these aircraft at the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) in Kamra.



PIA announces flight operations to UK and Europe

Great news awaits Pakistanis residing in the UK and across Europe as Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is set to resume its flights to Paris next month and to the UK on August 14, marking the end of a four-year hiatus, as reported by 24NewsHD TV.

According to Abdullah Hafeez, the spokesperson for PIA, the European Union



Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) is expected to grant permission to the airline in phases throughout the ongoing month.

Hafeez stated that upon receiving approval from the Agency, PIA will prioritize the resumption of flight operations in Paris. "The direct flight to London is scheduled to commence on August 14," he added. Furthermore, he mentioned that in anticipation of the flight resumption, the airline is expediting repairs on its 777 aircraft.

Presently, PIA operates seven 777 planes, with two additional aircraft set to become operational within the next two months, according to Hafeez.

Meanwhile, a PIA General Manager commented that with nine 777 planes in operation, the airline will significantly enhance its flight operations to Europe. Hafeez also highlighted that Pakistan currently holds air service agreements with 97 countries.

It's worth noting that direct flights from Pakistan to the UK were suspended in 2020.



Dazzling Display: Passengers capture breathtaking inflight photos of the Northern Lights

A powerful solar storm was responsible for displaying a dazzling light show that painted the night sky Friday, 10 May. With brilliant ombré accents of purple, green, yellow, and pink of the Northern Lights being seen worldwide, some people had a front-row seat to the display as they cruised several thousand feet in the air on commercial flights.

Although the natural light display, officially known as an aurora, is captured frequently and is predominantly viewed from regions of high latitude, strong solar energy caused this recent occurrence to be seen much farther south than normal. People in South Florida and even Hawaii

on social media.

Brian Yutko was traveling on a Delta Air Lines flight from Seattle–Tacoma International Airport (SEA) to Boston Logan International Airport (BOS) on Friday, 10 May. The passenger posted photos of his view, showing vibrant purple, pink, and green hues.

Another frequent flyer simply said, “Best. Flight. Ever,” posting their picture of the aurora above the clouds.

Allowing everyone to see

One Boeing 737 pilot was flying on an eastbound transcontinental flight on Saturday. To give all passengers a view of the light show, the pilot briefly reversed

feature a colorful livery depicting the aurora. The aircraft’s interior is also illuminated with mood lighting to recreate the light show in the cabin and enhance its ambiance. The airline unveiled the paint scheme in 2014, and has been flying it ever since.

This weekend’s solar storm is one of the strongest in history. According to the AP, the most powerful storm on record happened in 1859, prompting auroras as far south as Central America.

Emirates \$2 billion cabin refurb pays off with \$5.1 billion record profit in 2023

Emirates Group, comprised of Emirates, the airline, and the ground handling company dnata, announced record-breaking profit numbers that have increased 71% year-on-year (YoY). The group’s financial year, FY2023-24, ended on March 31, 2024.

Emirates’ major projects

Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, the chairman and chief executive officer



(CEO) of Emirates, highlighted that the group has once again raised the bar to deliver the latest record-breaking performance. The executive noted that the group saw high demand for air transport and travel-related services globally, and because of its flexibility, Emirates had managed to respond to customers’ needs, resulting in extraordinary results.



witnessed the stunning colors dancing in the night.

Garnering attention

According to the Associated Press (AP), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issued a rare severe geomagnetic storm warning after a solar outburst reached Earth on Friday, 10 May. The warning was issued sooner than officials expected and alerted operators of power plants, orbiting spacecraft, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to take precautionary measures. The intense storm posed a risk for high-voltage transmission lines for power grids and satellites, which could cause disruptions to navigation and communication services.

The solar energy, however, did not negatively affect aviation as several passengers documented their amazement

the aircraft’s course at 37,000 feet and asked the flight attendants to dim the cabin lights.

It is not the first time a pilot has circled a plane to treat passengers to a view of the northern lights. In February 2023, a passenger on an easyJet flight from Reykjavik, Iceland, to Manchester, England, witnessed spectacular views after the pilot performed a 360-degree turn, according to the BBC. The passenger, along with his fiancée, was seated on the right side of the plane and would not have been able to see the lights if the pilot had not circled the aircraft.

Hekla Aurora

Due to its geography, Iceland is one of the most popular destinations to view the northern lights. The country’s flag carrier, Icelandair, named one of its Boeing 757-200s “Hekla Aurora” and repainted it to

Iraqi Airways Boeing 737 lands on closed runway in Tehran

An Iraqi Airways Boeing 737-800 aircraft reportedly landed on a closed runway at Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKA) in Iran on May 1, 2024. The aircraft landed safely, and no injuries were reported.

The incident details

According to a report by The Aviation Herald, the pilots of an Iraqi Airways Boeing 737-800, registered as YI-ASI, operated an hour flight IA 113 from Al Najaf International Airport (NJF), Iraq, to

Landing on a closed runway is highly uncommon and typically only happens due to an error or an emergency situation. In the event of an emergency, a pilot might decide to land on a closed runway. However, in making this decision, the pilot must carefully assess the potential risks to themselves, their passengers, and individuals on the ground.

According to an Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) report, incidents of landing on closed runways highlight the



Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKA), Iran, on May 1, 2024.

The flight was cleared to land on runway 11R but mistakenly touched down on the closed runway 11L. The aircraft smoothly rolled out and briefly stopped without incident.

According to The Aviation Herald, the Iraqi Airways flight crew was accustomed to landing on runway 29R, which may have contributed to the error. Runway 11L/29R was closed for ongoing construction.

The aircraft in question is the 10-year-old Boeing 737-800 aircraft. According to ch-aviation data, the aircraft can accommodate a total of 162 passengers in a two-class cabin: 150 passengers in economy and 12 passengers in business class.

It is worth noting that Iraqi Airways has a total of 43 aircraft in its fleet at an average age of 11 years. The fleet comprises 21 Boeing 737s, six Bombardier CRJ900LRs, five Airbus A220s, three Airbus A320s, two Airbus A321s, two Boeing 747s, two Boeing 787 Dreamliners, one Airbus A330, and a single Boeing 777-200LR widebody.

importance of checking NOTAMS and airport unserviceability markings. The report cited an example of a business jet incident that occurred in 2021.

More about Iraqi Airways

Iraqi Airways is the national carrier of Iraq, headquartered at Baghdad International Airport (BGW) in the country's capital, Baghdad. Established in 1945, the flag carrier is one of the oldest in the Middle East and Central Asia regions.

The Iraqi airline boasts an extensive route network spanning 21 destinations across the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and its domestic network in Iraq. In Europe, it serves Berlin (BER), Duesseldorf (DUS), Frankfurt (FRA), Bratislava (BTS), and London (LGW). In Asia, the airline operates flights to Moscow (VKO), Beijing (PEK), Delhi (DEL), Karachi (KHI), and Tehran (IKA).

The Middle East and Africa destinations include Beirut (BEY), Cairo (CAI), Dubai (DXB), and Kuwait (KWT). Meanwhile, the airline's domestic network includes destinations such as Baghdad (BGW), Basra (BSR), Erbil (EBL), Kirkuk (KIK), Najaf (NJF), Nasiriyah (XNH), and Sulaymaniyah (ISU).

Aircraft operators want PCAA's old exam system

The Aircraft Owners and Operators Association (AOOA) of Pakistan has called the pilots' licence exam outsourcing a waste of foreign exchange and demanded that the contract with UK's CAAI be terminated and PCAA's old examination system be restored.

In a statement issued here on Monday, AOOA general secretary said that since the UK CAAI's contractual obligations have already ended, this contract may be terminated and the PCAA's old examination system be restored.

In a letter addressed to the secretary of aviation, the AOOA general secretary retired Wing Commander Nawaz Asim said: "Once again it is brought to your kind notice that International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has confirmed it to this association (AOOA) that PCAA audit and significant safety concerns (SSC) have been addressed and ICAO never told PCAA to outsource its own examination system to a private entity (UK CAAI). The copy of ICAO email is attached."

The AOOA said the country needed foreign exchange "but we are spending it on an examination system which is not better than our own examination system at PCAA. Before outsourcing the examination system, the stakeholders' input was never taken care of, which was conveyed to PCAA in Senate sub-committee (Aviation) meetings and through various communications".

The AOOA said it had highlighted the fact that it would drastically increase the pilots' training cost besides being an unnecessary drain of the precious foreign exchange.

"Outsourcing of exam was not a government's decision; rather the ministry was misled in the wake of the ban on PIA flights to European countries, after an irresponsible statement by the then federal minister on aviation Ghulam Sarwar Awan in one of the parliament's sessions that 262 pilots had fake licences.

Later, it was established by the court that there had been no fake licences.

The AOOA said that since the UK CAAI contractual obligations have already ended, this contract may be terminated immediately and PCAA examination system be restored.

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China announces visa free entry for 12 countries



As China expands its global outreach, it enthusiastically prolongs its visa-free entry policy for citizens from 12 countries until the conclusion of 2025.

As China expands its global outreach, it enthusiastically prolongs its visa-free entry policy for citizens from 12 countries, including Malaysia, until the conclusion of 2025. The announcement of this extension came from Chinese President Xi Jinping in France, during the closing ceremony of the Sixth Meeting of the China-France Business Council on May 6, 2024.

Originally introduced for a limited selection of European countries and Malaysia in November 2023, the visa-free arrangement was initially set to expire in November 2024. However, due to its success and positive impact on tourism and the economy, an extension was deemed necessary.

Since the relaxation of pandemic

restrictions in 2023, China has witnessed a steady rise in international visitors. The National Immigration Administration reported that foreign nationals constituted 13 million of the total 141 million exits and entries in the first quarter of 2024.

While these figures still fall short of pre-pandemic levels, they signify a significant recovery from the travel downturn experienced during the pandemic. The extension of visa-free policies forms part of China's broader strategy to revitalize its economy through international tourism.

This strategy involves the relaxation of visa regulations and the introduction of similar visa-free entries for citizens of Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Switzerland from mid-March 2024 onwards. Additional pilot programs have also been initiated for other European and Asian countries.



Unfortunately, Pakistan has still not been able to make the list.

Data from 2023 further underscores the gradual recovery, with 35.5 million entries and exits by foreigners, representing approximately 36% of pre-pandemic figures. The final quarter of 2023 alone witnessed over half of these crossings, indicating a growing momentum that could persist in the coming years.

Founder of Skywise Airline joins PIA bidding process

Uprise Group has joined the bidding process for buying Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

The company is led by Tabassum Pardesi who herself first founded Skywise Airline in 2014. She has been instrumental



in shaping the Uprise Group, which includes Uprise Markets, Uprise Africa, and Uprise Aviation, reported media.

Pardesi's involvement with PIA dates back to 2017 when she served briefly as the Director of Customer Services.

More on PIA, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has approved the Scheme of Arrangement between the airline and PIA Holding Company Limited (HoldCo).

Earlier this year, the Federal Cabinet approved the segregation of PIA and the Scheme. Last month, the scheme received approval from PIA's shareholders and creditors. It entails the legal separation of PIA's core aviation business from non-core activities, transferring non-aviation-related business from PIA to HoldCo.

With the scheme's approval, HoldCo is set to acquire 100 percent shareholding in PIA, with shares also being issued to qualifying shareholders of PIA.



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THAI Airways Airbus A350s BOOST 1Q revenue from more international flights

In a week of airline failures, it is heartening news to hear that one of Asia's legacy carriers, Thai Airways, is moving closer to exiting its financial restructuring regime. After filing for bankruptcy protection in 2020, the airline turned its fortunes around and continued that in the first quarter of 2024, with revenues climbing by 10% year-on-year.

A financial rebirth in 2024

On Friday, 10 May Thai Airways said it expects to meet its obligations and complete the capital restructuring this year, according to the Plan amendment approved by the Central Bankruptcy Court in October 2022. The group added that it aims to restore positive equity in 2024 so that its securities can resume trading on the stock market, creating confidence among creditors, existing shareholders, and investors in the airline group.

For the three months ended March 31, 2024, Thai Airways International Public Company (Thai) and its subsidiaries increased total year-on-year (YoY) revenue by 11% to 45.95 billion baht (\$1.25b), while passenger revenues climbed by 10%. In announcing its first-quarter results (1Q24) on Friday, 10 May, the airline said the gain came from increased

passenger traffic and route expansion due to the arrival of three Airbus A350 widebody aircraft.

The additional Airbus A350s also brought increased operating efficiencies and allowed the airline to increase frequencies on popular routes to Hong Kong, Singapore, Taipei, Manila, Kathmandu, Tokyo Narita and Sydney. Thai also resumed services to the West Australian capital, Perth and to Colombo, Sri Lanka, from the end of March and introduced a new service from Bangkok to Istanbul, Turkey.

The airline also sold two Airbus A340-600s and one Boeing 747-400, reporting that its fleet numbered 74 aircraft at the end of 1Q24, compared to 86 at the same time last year. In line with its reorganization, Thai completed restructuring its aviation business group by receiving the final four Airbus A320-200 aircraft from Thai Smile in January 2024.

Thai also added domestic services to Chiang Rai, Khon Kaen, Ubon Ratchathani, Krabi, Hat Yai and Narathiwat, although the latter route was suspended on March 31, 2024. The group carried 3.88 million passengers and now serves 59 destinations in 24 countries, with eight domestic destinations.

More capacity with more aircraft coming

In 1Q, Thai increased both available seat kilometers (ASKs) and revenue passenger kilometers (RPKs) by 10.1%, producing a creditable load factor of 83.5%. Total operating expenses surged by 22.5% due to increased flying, aircraft maintenance, ground service fees and other non-fuel expenses, plus the depreciation of the Thai Baht.

Operating profit fell by 15% YoY to 11 billion baht (\$300.5m), and after finance and one-time expenses, a net profit of 2.42 billion baht (\$66.1m), a decrease of 81% compared to the first quarter of 2023. This was significantly affected by gains made last year from restructuring expenses and foreign exchange rates.

Looking ahead, Thai said it will take delivery of three Airbus A350-900s and one Boeing 787-9 in the second quarter, allowing it to resume flights to Milan and Oslo and start a new route to Kochi (India). Thai is also planning to retrofit the cabin seats of Airbus A320-200 aircraft with the new Royal Silk reclining seats this year and introduce a wireless inflight entertainment system. The airline also has a firm order with Boeing to acquire 45 Boeing 787 Dreamliners with an option for up to 80, with deliveries from 2027 to 2033.



Amadeus Pakistan Drives Digital Transformation at ATM 2024

Amadeus Pakistan marked a significant milestone in this year's Arabian Travel Market by signing on several renowned Pakistani travel agencies to the innovative Amadeus Online Suite.

This move underscores Amadeus' commitment to empowering travel companies with cutting-edge technology solutions, enabling them to seamlessly transition from traditional business models to a digital-first approach, encompassing B2C and B2B operations.

The Amadeus Online Suite is a complete tool that helps create an OTA. It is designed to streamline and optimize travel agency online bookings and operations. With its user-friendly platform, managing online bookings becomes effortless, and the mobile app adds to the convenience of using it on the go.

Amadeus empowers agencies with the technology they require to thrive in the digital age and has successfully created many success stories. This year's ATM showed a significant increase in interest from travel agencies based in Pakistan. This reflects the growing trend of online purchases in the country.

Consumers are now more inclined to use digital channels for booking their travels, prompting agencies to adapt their services accordingly. The leading travel agencies have adopted the Amadeus Online Suite, positioning themselves to capture a larger share of the online travel market.

"At Amadeus Pakistan, we are delighted to announce that we have added these esteemed Pakistani travel agency brands to the AOS community. The implementation of the Amadeus Online Suite is a demonstration of their dedication to digital transformation, enabling them to better serve the changing requirements of modern-day travel consumers.

This is a mutually beneficial arrangement for both travel agencies and their customers, who will benefit from a more streamlined and effective travel booking process.



Group photo taken on the occasion shows Mr. Mir Akbar (2nd L) with others



NEW FLYER INTERNATIONAL



Group photograph of participants taken on the occasion of ATM 2024 with Mr. Mir Akbar (centre)

Boeing's Starliner finally ready for first crewed mission

Launch day is finally here: Boeing's Starliner capsule blasts off on Monday, 06 May, to the International Space Station on its first crewed mission - several years after SpaceX first achieved the same milestone. The flight, a final test before Starliner takes

up regular service for Nasa, is critical for the US aerospace giant, whose reputation has suffered of late due to safety issues with some of its passenger jets.

Starliner, which was first ordered a decade ago by the US space agency, has

had a bumpy ride to the finish line, with surprise setbacks and multiple delays - a saga Boeing is eager to complete.

Astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams are set to leave Cape Canaveral at 10:34pm on Monday, 06 May aboard the capsule. Starliner will be propelled into orbit by an Atlas V rocket made by United Launch Alliance, a Boeing-Lockheed Martin joint venture. Wilmore and Williams, Navy-trained space programme veterans, have each been to the ISS twice, traveling once on a shuttle and then aboard a Russian Soyuz vessel.

"It's going to be like going back home," Williams said. As for the Boeing spacecraft, Wilmore said: "Everything is new. Everything's unique." "I don't think either one of us ever dreamed that we'd be associated with the first flight of a brand new spacecraft."

For Nasa, the stakes are also high: Having a second option for human space flight in addition to SpaceX's Dragon vehicles is "really important," said Dana Weigel, manager of the agency's International Space Station programme.



AN April 16 file photo shows a Boeing CST-100 Starliner spacecraft is being rolled out in the pre-dawn hours past the vehicle assembly building at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida.

China conducts first sea trials of new aircraft carrier

China's Fujian aircraft carrier took to the water for maiden sea trials on Wednesday, 1st May, state media said, a key next step in a vast naval build-up by Beijing as it carves out a more assertive role for itself in the Pacific and beyond.

The Fujian is China's third aircraft carrier after the Liaoning and the Shandong vessels and is the Chinese navy's largest-ever ship. It departed from eastern Shanghai's Jiangnan Shipyard at around 8am, state news agency Xinhua said.

The trials will "primarily test the reliability and stability of the aircraft carrier's propulsion and electrical systems", it added.

China has stepped up a massive expansion of its naval forces in recent years, as it seeks to expand its reach in the Pacific and challenge a US-led alliance system.

Tensions have notably flared in the disputed South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety, and near the

self-ruled island of Taiwan, where it has deployed the Shandong aircraft carrier.

A January report by the Congressional Research Service, citing the Pentagon,



described it as the largest navy in the world and said it projected it to grow to 435 ships by 2030.

The build-up is aimed at "addressing the situation with Taiwan militarily, if need be" as well as "achieving a greater degree of control or domination over China's near-seas region, particularly the South

China Sea", the report said.

China wants its navy to be able to deter "US intervention in a conflict in China's near-seas region over Taiwan or some other issue, or failing that, delay the arrival or reduce the effectiveness of intervening US forces," it added.

Analysts at Washington-based think tank CSIS have said the Fujian is expected to feature more advanced take-off systems, allowing the Chinese air force to deploy jets carrying larger payloads and more fuel.

"The vessel is slated to become the largest surface combatant in the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy and significantly upgrade China's naval capabilities," they wrote.

Meanwhile, Taiwan is on alert for China to carry out military exercises after the inauguration of President-elect Lai Ching-te this month, the island's top security official said on Wednesday, 1st May, adding China has already begun using unusual new tactics.



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Dubai begins work on 'Largest Airport Terminal'

Dubai announced on Sunday, 28 April that work had begun on a new terminal at Al Maktoum International Airport, which the Gulf emirate's ruler said will become "the world's largest" at a cost of almost \$35 billion.

"We approved the designs for the new passenger terminal at Al Maktoum International Airport, and (are) commencing construction of the building at a cost of AED128 billion (\$34.85 billion)," Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai and prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, said on X.

Once fully operational, the airport will "handle a passenger capacity of 260 million annually", the government declared in a statement. xSheikh Mohammed said it would have "the world's largest capacity" and be "five times the size of the current Dubai International Airport", which is one of the world's busiest air hubs. According to Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, president of the Dubai Civil Aviation

Authority and CEO of flag carrier Emirates, the first phase of the project will be ready within a period of 10 years, with a capacity to accommodate 150 million passengers annually.



Al Maktoum International Airport will be able to handle around 260m passengers annually and have five runways.

Built on the city's outskirts, Al Maktoum airport has received a relatively small share of the Gulf financial hub's air traffic since 2010. Authorities want it to replace Dubai International Airport, which has a capacity of up to 120m passengers annually and whose city-centre location prevents expansion.

IATA criticizes Germany over new aviation tax that will make flights more expensive

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has strongly criticized Germany's recent increase in aviation taxes, citing detrimental effects on both the economy and environmental sustainability efforts within the aviation industry.

Effective May 1, aviation taxes in Germany have surged by 19%, with passenger fees now ranging from EUR 15.53 to EUR 70.83 depending on the flight route. This tax hike is expected to negatively impact Germany's competitiveness in key sectors such as exports, tourism, and employment, while also impeding the recovery of air transport post-pandemic, which lags behind other EU countries.

Willie Walsh, IATA's Director General, stated, When Germany's economic performance is anemic at best, denting its competitiveness with more taxes on aviation is policy madness. The government should be prioritizing

measures to improve Germany's competitive position and encourage trade and travel. Instead, they have gone for a short-term cash grab which can only damage the economy's long-term growth.



Moreover, IATA warns that the tax increase will hinder the industry's efforts to decarbonize. Aviation aims to achieve net-zero CO2 emissions by 2050, and sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) are crucial to this goal. However, the German government's decision to divert aviation



tax revenues away from SAF production contradicts its previous commitment. This tax hike also makes it harder for airlines to invest in SAF, adopt fuel-efficient fleets, and implement other decarbonization measures.

Walsh further commented, The German government appears to have an unhealthy obsession with aviation taxes. On top of increasing the passenger tax, it is also in favor of a European jet fuel tax which will make it even more expensive to do business in Germany or for families to go on holiday. Our survey of air travelers in Germany shows deep skepticism about government claims for 'green taxes'. 75% agreed with the statement "Taxation is not the way to make aviation sustainable" and 72% agreed that "Green taxes are just government greenwashing". Time and again, we see taxation that was supposed to help the industry decarbonize be stolen and then lost in the general budget. And money taken out of the industry means that it has less money to invest in other decarbonization measures.

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PM wants wealthy to prioritise improving workers' conditions



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addresses labourers at a lunch hosted in their honour on Wednesday, 1st May.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday, 1st May said the government is fully cognisant of the value and role of the labourers and workers in the national economy and stressed upon the wealthy, businessmen, investors and industrialists to prioritise improving working conditions of their workers.

Speaking at a gathering of labourers and workers from different sectors at his residence in connection with the observance of the International Labour Day, the prime minister said the country's economic situation was challenging but the government was striving to turn it around, with collective efforts and sincerity.

He said the country would soon become powerful through the functioning of a fair system and on the basis of hard work by employers and the employees.

Referring to his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, Mr Sharif said Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and other Saudi leaders desired to see Pakistan moving on the path of progress.

He said the Saudi business and investors delegation would soon visit the country which would increase businesses and job opportunities in the country.

The prime minister said that in the upcoming fiscal budget, the government would try to provide further relief to the labour class.

The prime minister reiterated the government was striving to end corruption and promised that all organs of government and other state institutions, with their collective efforts, would carve a niche for the country among the comity of nations.

The prime minister said if workers were deprived of their due rights, a country

cannot make progress.

The prime minister admitted that due to price hike and inflation, the life for common man has become very difficult.

He said that prices of petroleum products had been reduced but it could not be a substitute to the daily price hike as the labour class had to meet requirements of education of their children, treatment of their parents, and other daily expenditures.

The prime minister said his father was also a worker who attained his earlier education in Amritsar and he later settled in Lahore, where he worked along with his brothers in a steel factory.

He said labour day started after the Chicago incident and later the movement became global. He welcomed the workers and labourers at his residence and said that he felt immense pleasure in hosting them at the residence

of the late Mian Muhammad Sharif.

Earlier, the Chairman of PM Youth Programme, Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan, highlighted the personal loan scheme for deserving children of workers and said that under the prime minister's tenure as the chief minister of Punjab, Danish schools and Educational Endowment Funds were established.

President's message

President Asif Ali Zardari in his message on the occasion of International Labour Day on Wednesday, 1st May reiterated the government's commitment to upholding the dignity of labourers and pay tribute to their historic struggle.

He said this day serves as a reminder for all of us to safeguard rights of labourers, and work for labourers' social protection, fair wages, and safe working conditions.

The president said labourers and the working class in the country are facing unprecedented challenges, such as inflation, rising cost of living, unemployment, and the adverse impacts of the climate change.

He said the state has a crucial role to play in protecting the rights of workers, implementing and enforcing policies to end labourers' exploitation, protect their rights, and provide social support.

The president called upon the employers to adopt fair wage practices, take steps for workers' safety and health and ensure the provision of necessary training and protective equipment to labourers working in hazardous environments.



People climb the Great Wall of China recently, the first day of a five-day national Labour Day holiday.

Pakistan, Uzbekistan vow early work on rail project

Pakistan and Uzbekistan on Wednesday, 8 May, underscored their commitment to the swift completion of the planned railway link that will traverse Afghanistan, connecting the two countries and promising to enhance regional connectivity and trade opportunities. Foreign Office, in a media statement after a meeting between visiting Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Bakhtiyor Saidov and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar said, “The two sides reaffirmed commitment to early implementation of the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Railways project, which would give boost to bilateral and regional trade and become a bridge between South and Central Asia.”

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in his meeting with FM Saidov also emphasised the importance of the railway project and Pakistan’s commitment to its early completion. Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan had in February 2021 agreed to build a railway line across Afghanistan to connect Central Asia with Pakistani ports at an estimated cost of \$4.8bn. In July last year, the three countries signed a protocol during their meeting in Pakistan that delineated the route of the project running from Termiz, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan’s Mazar-i-Sharif and Logar provinces, and culminating in Pakistan via the Kharlachi border crossing in the Kurram district.

The railway project, spanning 760kms, is scheduled for completion by the end of 2027, with the capability to transport up to 15 million tonnes of goods annually by 2030. This rail link will notably decrease cargo delivery time between Uzbekistan and Pakistan by around five days, while also slashing transportation costs by at least 40 per cent. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, according to PMO, expressed Pakistan’s commitment to working with Uzbekistan to speed up and complete all bilateral trade and connectivity projects. He reaffirmed Pakistan’s readiness to provide access to Uzbekistan to Pakistani ports. At the bilateral meeting, the two sides discussed at length bilateral economic cooperation, trade, investment and connectivity.

They noted that following operationalisation of Transit Trade Agreement, bilateral trade has increased 1.4 times during the previous year and has the potential to reach the targets set during the last Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) held in Tashkent in February 2023.

All state-owned enterprises to be privatised: PM

The government has decided to privatise all state-owned enterprises (SOEs), except strategic entities.

“The government would privatise all state-owned enterprises, excluding the strategic ones, regardless of their profitability or financial losses,” it was revealed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif while presiding over a high-level meeting.

The meeting reviewed matters related to the Ministry of Privatisation and Privatisation Commission.

According to the Prime Minister’s Office, PM Shehbaz directed all the federal ministries to carry out the necessary procedures and extend their cooperation with the Privatisation Commission for the purpose.

During the meeting, the privatisation ministry and the commission presented a roadmap for the Privatisation Programme 2024-29. “The government has nothing to do with running the businesses but was mandated to facilitate the investors,” an official press release quoted the PM as saying.

The prime minister viewed that the privatisation of SOEs would save the taxpayers’ money to help the government provide quality services to the people.

Reiterating the government’s commitment to a transparent process, he directed live telecast of the bidding and other procedures of the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and other entities. During the briefing on the progress in the SOEs’ privatisation, the participants were told that the pre-qualification process for PIA privatisation would be completed by the end of this month. The consultation for privatisation of PIA’s Roosevelt Hotel in the United States

was underway and the government-to-government transaction of First Women Bank was in process with the United Arab Emirates.

The meeting was told that power distribution companies had been included in the 2024-29 Privatisation Programme and the privatisation of loss-making SOEs would be prioritised. The participants were told that a pre-qualified panel of experts would be appointed at the Planning Commission for a swift and transparent privatisation process.

Federal ministers Khawaja Asif, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Jam Kamal Khan, Awais Ahmed Leghari, Abdul Aleem Khan, Dr Musaddik Malik and Ahad Khan Cheema, PM’s coordinator Rana Ehsan Afzal, and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.

Imports through Gwadar port

Presiding over a separate meeting, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif took a significant decision to make Gwadar port fully functional and effective, directing the authorities concerned to ensure routing a proportion of the country’s imports, particularly related to the government, through the port.

The prime minister gave stern instructions that he will not tolerate any delay and leniency in implementation of the second phase of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

“Pakistan-China economic relations are on their height these days all government ministries and officials must take advantage of it and get maximum benefit from it for both countries,” the PM said.

The meeting also stressed the need for improving security of Chinese nationals working in Pakistan.



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairs a review meeting on privatisation on Tuesday, May 14.

Karachi, Lahore passport offices start working 24/7

The Zonal passport offices in Karachi and Lahore have started to operate 24/7 in line with orders of Interior Minister Mohsin Raza Naqvi.

Passport offices at Awami Markat in Karachi and Garden Town in Lahore will now be open around the clock to facilitate the public.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday, 05 May, announced that at least one passport office in both Lahore and Karachi will stay open 24/7 to better serve the public and improve accessibility of the people to passport services.

In a post on X, Mr Naqvi said the move will make it easier for everyone to access passport services anytime.

“To give ease to the public and to facilitate them, at least one passport office will be open 24/7 in both Lahore and Karachi. This will make it easier for everyone to access passport services anytime,” he said.

The move is expected to significantly alleviate the burden on existing passport offices and reduce waiting times for applicants.

The development has come at a time when the number of people applying for passports appears to be growing.

Informed sources said the passports and immigration currently had a capacity to print 20 to 25 thousand passports per day while it was receiving around 40 thousand applications each day, leading to a backlog of passports which stands at around 0.8 million.

They said the interior minister has also taken notice of the huge backlog and under his directions steps were under way to enhance the printing capacity. They said that tenders had already been invited for printing of e-passport and machine

readable passport machines.

The sources said the delay in release of funds for procurement of lamination paper and other essential materials was one of the reasons for the delay in issuance of passports.

They said a law will soon be brought to the parliament to give passports and immigration department the status of Authority, so that the organisation earning billions of rupees each year is not handicapped by delays in the release of funds.



Exports to Europe fall despite GSP+

Pakistan's exports to European countries declined 6.27 per cent in the first nine months of the current fiscal year.

Exports to the European Union states have begun to dip in the current fiscal year despite a GSP+ status that allows most Pakistani goods a duty-free entrance into European markets.

In October 2023, the European Parliament unanimously voted to extend the GSP+ status for another four years until 2027 for developing countries, including Pakistan, to enjoy duty-free or minimum duty on exports to Europe.

In absolute terms, Pakistan's exports to the EU dipped to \$6.105bn in 9MFY24 from \$6.27bn in the corresponding months of last year. According to figures compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan, the decline was mainly due to reduced demand for Pakistani goods in western, southern, and northern Europe.

In FY23, exports to the EU dropped 4.41pc to \$8.188bn from \$8.566bn in the

preceding fiscal year. Western Europe, which includes countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy and Belgium, accounts for the largest portion of Pakistan's exports to the EU.

However, exports to this region have significantly decreased by 12pc. The export value stood at \$2.947bn in the first nine months of FY24, down from \$3.353bn during the same period last year.

While exports to western, southern, and northern Europe have declined, there is a silver lining in the form of an uptick in exports to Eastern Europe. The exports saw an increase of 8.38pc to \$466.19m in 9MFY24, up from \$430.14m in the corresponding months last year.

Exports to southern Europe declined 1.24pc to \$2.216bn in 9MFY24 from \$2.244bn in the corresponding period last year.

In this region, exports to Spain grew 3.73pc to \$1.084 in 9MFY24 from \$1.045bn last year.

Exports to Italy declined 3.22pc to \$825.44m in 9MFY24, compared to \$852.93 m in the same period last year.

However, exports to northern Europe witnessed a 2.31pc dip. The export value to this region stood at \$475.92m, down from \$487.19m in the corresponding period last year.

Before Brexit, Pakistan's major export destination was the United Kingdom. In the post-Brexit period, Pakistan's exports to the UK slightly went up to \$1.529bn in 9MFY24 from \$1.494bn over the corresponding period of last year, indicating an increase of 2.34pc.

In FY23, Pakistan's exports dipped by 10.63pc to \$1.966bn to the UK from \$2.20bn in the same period of the preceding year.

The British government, however, has assured Islamabad that there will be no change in the post-Brexit scenario, as evident from Pakistan's inclusion in its preferential market access scheme.



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The 're-rise' of the retail travel agent – what's behind the sudden influx of new high street agents?

Late last year the Daily Telegraph, one of the UK's largest newspapers, reported that the high street travel agent is making a comeback. Although the paper questioned whether the trend will last, it comes following the opening of new branches by several major high-street travel agencies in the UK, including Hays Travel and Flight Centre.

So, what is driving these openings – and is the Telegraph right to call people's current use of high street agents "a trend"? Did they ever really 'go away'? And is this something happening in the UK only, or all major source markets around the world?

To the extent to which high street agents are 'back' though – at least in the UK – one reason could be that travellers are becoming overwhelmed by the amount of information (and misinformation) on the internet, and therefore want an expert to help guide them. Eugene Ko, marketing director at Phocuswright, says: "Booking travel has become increasingly complex. This is not even so much to do with the 'pandemic effect' anymore – there's a colossal amount of information and inspiration available online, through countless different sources. Although most people do enjoy an element of research and choice when booking travel, using a travel agent can eliminate the need for extensive online trawling, as the agent can handle all the details and bookings on behalf of the customer. This convenience saves time and effort, especially for complex itineraries or group travel."

It could also be a result of better technology that's now available to agents. Gareth Matthews, Chief Marketing Officer at global travel distribution provider Didatravel says: "Gone are the days when travel agents booked flights and hotels via a green screen. Distribution companies and intermediaries have long since evolved to offer far more advanced retailing technology, giving agents the ability to find highly personalised deals for their customers. Travellers are starting to learn this all over again, returning to the experience and advantages of booking travel in a physical store. Artificial intelligence and automation, while often heralded as a threat to travel agents, also offers huge potential, ensuring agents have better information at their fingertips which in turn will free up more of their time to offer a more personalised service."

Travellers may also think that a travel agent has access to special deals and prices.

Evren Oktay, Founder & COO from pax2night – an accommodation bedbank that is part of Yuppi Travel – explains that "travel agents often have access to exclusive deals and offers that may not be available online, and this isn't likely to change any time soon. They have established relationships with travel suppliers and can negotiate better prices or perks for their clients. Suppliers should take note that while direct bookings can return a higher profit per booking, the relationships agents have with their travellers – and the reach high street stores have – is likely to mean more sales."

Certainly there seems to be a consensus that the quality on offer from retail travel agents has increased in recent years and one reason is that they can now offer ancillary extras for the in-destination experience, points out Craig Everett, Founder and CEO from Holibob, the experiences tech provider to airlines and OTAs. "Agents have upped their game a lot overall to remain competitive and one very successful strategy has been to start cross-selling or including in packages all the little in-destination extras such as activities, tours and theme-park tickets. But not only do you need to offer this, you need to have an intuitive and integrated booking flow that agents can easily use along with automated post-sale technology in place."

Sami Doyle from TMU Management, a data-driven insurance intermediary specializing in travel, says that it's also about trust. "The near two years of chaos that COVID unleashed on travel plans for people was a bit of a wake-up call for anyone who'd booked direct or even through an online travel agency – suddenly discovering that customer service was non-existent, cancellations and refunds were hard if not impossible, and in some cases bankruptcies were leading to people not getting what they'd paid for. By contrast, the trust factor with high-street retailers or anyone where you're dealing with an individual, even if remotely, is so much higher. That's also in part because of the perception of security, that you'd have someone to complain to or ask for a refund. Nonetheless, if you're one of those agents or agency chains you'd better make sure that you really do have in place the right travel trade insurance and packaging protections – as if you don't and word gets around, even just a few isolated cases of problems could undermine your best asset, your reputation."

When it comes to the operational side of things, Koert Grasveld at global B2B travel payments company Terrapay points out that there's better payments tech and back office services now available to smaller agencies and even sole traders. "Not only does the agency have to take payments from the consumer but then they have to settle with suppliers, perhaps many of them just for one booking, via a B2B payment too. Technology that used to be available to just the biggest players, for example virtual credit cards, is now available to even independent, self-employed agents working from home. This levels the playing field a lot, making a retail agent as price competitive as an online one in that sense at least."

Looking beyond the UK shores, Juan Socas from PriceTravel, one of Latin America's biggest B2B and B2C sellers of travel, points out that in Latin America certainly the travel agent never went out of fashion, with estimates of up to 75% of travel sold face-to-face or by telephone still. "Don't make the mistake of thinking that Latin America doesn't have a sizeable middle class and that all the travel sold is cheap, local trips – that's far from true. There's huge demand for international travel to the US and even Europe and such travellers often want the reassurance of a personal travel agent handling everything," says PriceTravel's Juan. "Based on our experience there's lots of other examples of such demand around the world, certainly outside of your typical top 10 biggest economies – so if you're a hotel or other type of travel supplier don't overlook the potential here."

As a final thought Janis Dzenis from price comparison travel website WayAway points out that whilst there's always a market for retail travel agencies, lots of people still want their online version and sometimes the best value can be found for the more adventurous types searching for cheap trips, discounts or to purchase with loyalty points. "It doesn't have to be all about the big three OTAs or the high-street retailer, there is something in-between and there are lots of online sellers set up specifically for certain niches and focusing on a particular demographic or geography. Indeed many of those are now a hybrid of online and offline, meaning you can browse online and go into the shop to book or vice versa. The line is blurred nowadays to some extent between online and offline."

Veteran mountaineers train Swat girls in using compass, maps

Francesca Colesanti, a seasoned compass expert and Italian mountaineering instructor, brought to light on Sunday 05 May, the remarkable stories of pioneering women whose courage and determination shattered the gender stereotypes of their time.

She stated this while training girls from Swat using compasses and maps alongside other Italian and Spanish female mountaineering trainers.

Veteran mountaineer Prof Carlo Alberto Penelli led them.

“Within the towering peaks and rugged landscapes of the world’s great mountains, where adventure intersects with adversity, a legacy of courageous women has left its mark in the annals of mountaineering history,” she said.

Colesanti’s narrative unfolds with Henriette d’Angeville, a French trailblazer who etched her name into the slopes of Mont Blanc in 1838, becoming the second woman to conquer its summit unaided.

With each tale, Colesanti illuminates the lives of women like Nina Boarelli, Lucy Walker, Mary Varale, and Loulou Boulaz, whose feats of courage and resilience

echoed across the Alps, challenging the notion that mountaineering was a pursuit reserved solely for men.

However, Colesanti’s focus transcends mere historical retelling, and she aims to inspire a new generation by highlighting contemporary heroes, who continue to redefine the boundaries of mountaineering.

“Among them stands Wanda Rutkiewicz, the Polish mountaineer, who scaled the formidable heights of K2, and Alison Hargreaves, the British alpinist, who dared to ascend Mount Everest solo while six months pregnant in 1995,” she said.

Colesanti spotlights Lynn Hill, the American rock climber, whose audacious free ascent of The Nose on El Capitan captured the world’s attention, and Catherine Destivelle, the French pioneer, who blazed new trails in extreme alpine climbing. During the 1990s, their stories resonate as testaments to the indomitable spirit of women in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Nives Meroi’s saga epitomises the triumph of the human spirit, as she and her husband conquered all 14 eight-thousanders without supplemental oxygen in 2017,

exemplifying resilience and determination in pursuing their dreams.

Yet, amidst these tales of triumph, Colesanti reminds them of the sacrifices made by those who dared to dream. Chiaretta Ramorino’s multifaceted life reflects the pursuit of freedom and self-expression, a testament to the power of individual agency in shaping one’s destiny.

As Colesanti’s narrative unfolds, she directs our gaze to the present, where a new generation of female mountaineers emerges to carry the torch of their predecessors. Samina Baig and Naila Kiani, Pakistani women of unparalleled grit and determination, have ascended to new heights, conquering some of the world’s most formidable peaks with unwavering resolve. Baig’s ascent of Mount Everest in 2013 and subsequent conquests of the Seven Summits, K2, and Nanga Parbat exemplified her unwavering commitment to breaking barriers and inspiring others to follow in her footsteps.

Kiani’s remarkable feat of climbing 10 of the 14 eight-thousanders in just two years showcases her unparalleled determination and resilience in the face of adversity.



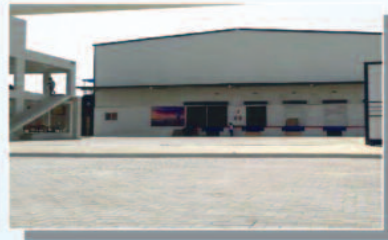
Francesca Colesanti and other Italian mountaineers train a girl from Swat in rock climbing.



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Naila becomes first Pakistani woman to summit 11 peaks of over 8,000 metres

Mountaineer Naila Kiani on Sunday 05 May, became the first Pakistani woman to summit 11 peaks having a height of over 8,000m in the world, her expedition team has announced.

Ms Kiani made the record following her successful summit of Nepal's Makalu Peak, world's fifth-highest mountain with a height of 8,485m.

According to her expedition organiser 'Imagine Nepal', Ms Kiani was part of the team consisting of four international climbers and as many Sherpas, which made it to the top at around 9:35am local time.

Makalu Peak, in the northeast region of Nepal, is known for its steep slopes and precarious ridges. "[It] provided a formidable challenge to the expedition," added the statement posted on Facebook.

Ms Kiani also told the organisers that the team had started the descent and was at camp 3.

The expedition organisers informed media that weather conditions on the mountain were adverse, but the team was safe in tents. Alpine Club of Pakistan (ACP) Secretary Karrar Haidri has also confirmed the mountaineer's record.

"She now holds the record of being the fastest Pakistani — both male and female — to have summited 11 8,000-metre peaks," he said, adding that Ms Kiani accomplished the feat in less than three years.

In a statement posted on Facebook, Mr Haidri called her achievement "remarkable" and said the mountaineer has also become the first Pakistani woman to have summited Makalu Peak.

"Naila is grateful for all the prayers and wishes, and she gives special thanks to everyone. She also thanks Sherpa Gelgen Dai from Imagine Nepal, who has supported Naila every step of the way, making this achievement possible."

"While celebrating this remarkable

achievement, we ask for your prayers for her safe descent to basecamp and then to her family," the ACO statement concluded.

In a video message before the summit, the mountaineer said she was sharing her achievements "to show that no matter who you are ... you can accomplish your dreams".

Ms Kiani started her summit push on May 3 after acclimatisation. Ms Kiani, a Dubai-based Pakistani banker, an amateur boxer, and a mother of two daughters, is one of the most accomplished mountaineers of Pakistan. In April last year, she became the first Pakistani woman to climb Nepal's

Annapurna peak, world's 10th-highest peak standing 8,091m tall. The following month, she completed the summit of world's highest peak, Mount Everest and became the second Pakistani woman to do so.

In July, she became the first Pakistani woman to climb the world's ninth- and 12th-highest peaks, Nanga Parbat and Broad Peak, respectively.

Months later, Ms Kiani and Sirbaz Khan became the first Pakistani duo to summit the 8,201m-tall Cho Oyu, world's sixth-highest peak in China's Tibet region.

She also has the summits of Gasherbrum-I, Gasherbrum-II and K2 under her belt.

Uber ceases ride-hailing app in Pakistan

Uber said on Tuesday, 30 April that it had decided to cease operating its ride-hailing app in Pakistan.

"We've decided to cease operating the Uber app in Pakistan," a spokesperson told media.

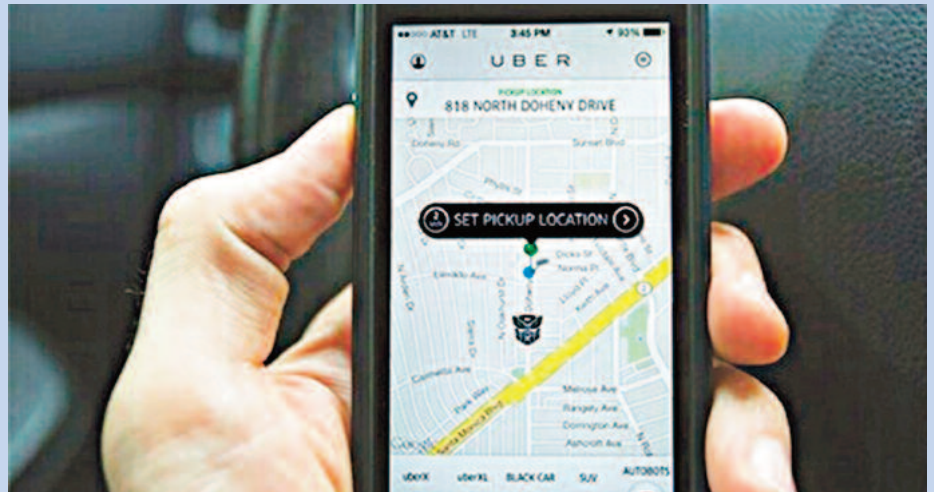
"Our subsidiary brand Careem will continue to operate, with the Careem app offering ride-hailing services across Pakistan and earning opportunities for drivers," the spokesperson added.

In 2019, Uber had acquired its rival Careem for \$3.1 billion. The two companies had said they would continue to operate their respective regional services

In an email sent to users in Lahore on Tuesday, 30 April Uber said it had made the "difficult decision to no longer offer the Uber app services in Lahore as of April 30".

"Ride-hailing services will continue to be offered through our subsidiary brand Careem and you will have the option to sign up and request a trip to Careem for a seamless experience," the email read.

"In light of this, Careem Rides may contact you to check in and sign up. Please fill out the form provided by May 3, if you do not want your details to be shared with Careem.



The global ride-hailing firm also announced that its services will continue to be offered through Careem, its subsidiary.

and independent brands.

In October 2022, Uber ceased operations in Karachi, Multan, Faisalabad, Peshawar and Islamabad. It had decided to operate in the five cities through Careem and through the Uber app in Lahore.

"If you currently hold Uber Cash balance in your Uber Wallet, we will be communicating with you in due course on the process for reclaiming your Uber Cash balance," it said, offering users a 50pc discount on five rides with Careem.

Digitisation of artifacts' data facilitates Swat Museum visitors

International visitors and students on Sunday, 12 May expressed appreciation for the newly-implemented QR code system, which allowed them to access detailed information about artifacts kept in the Swat Museum.

They said this addition had proven to be beneficial, aiding visitors and learners through both practical and digital means.

According to them, the newly-installed QR code systems in front of displayed artifacts are a step ahead, enabling visitors to scan the QR code to immediately access complete information in Urdu, English and Chinese languages, along with photos of the artifacts and their origin sites.

Students, who visited Swat Museum, mentioned that there was brief information about each artefact displayed in front of them.

"We wanted to understand in detail about some artifacts, so the curator told us to scan the QR codes fixed in front of the artifacts. As we followed his instructions, we obtained detailed information about the artifact with just a click, and it was amazing," said students Mohammad Saad and Sanaullah, who were observing Buddhist artifacts in Swat Museum.

Swat Museum is considered one of the largest archaeological museums of the Gandharan civilisation, attracting a large number of national and international tourists seeking firsthand information about the pre and post-history of Gandhara culture and civilisation.

"I have found very few museums in Pakistan with digital facilities, and I am happy that Swat Museum has a digital information system through QR code access. Personally, I cannot read the small scripts in the museum, so I prefer to scan the object information and then magnify them on my cell phone to read clearly," said Chris, a visitor from Poland, adding that he found Swat Museum very interesting and useful.

Museum curator Nawazuddin mentioned that the QR code system was freely sponsored and installed by a group of Chinese individuals working for the protection of Gandhara civilisation. "The Chinese group, under 'Guardians of Gandhara,' installed the QR code system for which proper traditional wooden display boards have been made," he told media, adding that visitors easily accessed detailed information through the QR code system.

GB trophy hunting season revenue boosts to Rs309m

As the Gilgit-Baltistan Trophy hunting season 2023-24 ended in April, official sources disclosed that more than Rs309 million revenue was generated during the season to protect and balance wildlife conservation with sustainable economic development.



A foreigner poses with a Blue Sheep in Shimshal Valley. He secured the hunting permit after paying \$33,000.

The figure shows a growth of over Rs89 million in the annual revenue, as during the last trophy season, Rs220m revenue had been generated.

The trophy hunting season spans from November till the start of April every year.

In October 2023, the GB Forest, Parks, and Wildlife Department auctioned four licences for the hunting of the prized Astore markhor, one of which fetched a record \$186,000. The licences included four for Astore markhors, 14 for blue sheep, and 88 for Himalayan ibex in various community conservation areas across Gilgit-Baltistan.

The second highest permit for the Astore markhor was sold for \$181,000, the third for \$177,000, and the fourth for \$171,000.

The base rate fees for blue sheep and Himalayan ibex permits were \$9,000 and \$5,500, respectively. Out of these, 51 Himalayan ibex, six blue sheep, and four Astore markhors were hunted by the end of the season.

While the GB Forest and Wildlife Department received Rs309.5 million, 80 per cent of this revenue goes to the respective community-controlled hunting areas, which distributes cheques among



An official briefs students about the QR code system in Swat Museum.

respective communities at special ceremonies, while the remaining 20pc goes to the national exchequer.

The trophy hunting programme in Gilgit-Baltistan, which began in the Nagar Valley in 1990, has since expanded to other areas within the region. Despite global controversies surrounding trophy hunting, proponents argue that such programmes help prevent poaching, empower local communities, and contribute to wildlife conservation.

According to a GB - based conservationist Rashid Minhas, from 1990 till 2023, around \$5 million was generated through trophy hunting of markhor alone, of which US\$ 4.3m has been invested in social, economic and environmental development of local communities.

GB Forests and Wildlife Department officials are exploring more areas within the Gilgit-Baltistan region to declare as protected areas with public participation, which protects precious and rare wildlife from illegal hunting.

Currently, 60pc of the area in Gilgit-Baltistan has been declared a protected area. GB is rich in flora and fauna due to its varied climatic conditions and ecosystem. The region is home to many rare species, such as the Marco Polo sheep, ibex, markhor, urial, blue sheep, lynx, snow leopard, leopard cat, brown and black bears, wolf, fox, marmot, chakor, and ram chakor, and golden eagle. However, some of these rare species are facing the threat of extinction due to illegal hunting, negligence by the wildlife department, and climate change-related issues.

Environmentalists also oppose trophy hunting, citing that it causes a decline in the population of wildlife species and encourages poaching.

Floating hut adds to Keenjhar Lake's beauty

Keenjhar Lake – a scenic freshwater body frequented by thousands of picnickers every weekend — recently gained another attraction when a floating hut was added to its motley fleet of boats.

The lake, surrounded by many historical sites in Thatta and Makli, is recognised mainly due to its attribution to the legendary characters of Noor and Jam Tamachi.

Masood Lohar, a former head of the UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme, has introduced the floating hut to start translating his ideas to promote Sindh's culture and tourism in this part of the province. He has named his innovation after Noori, the folklore character fondly discussed by people of all age groups, right from young schoolchildren to elderly ones.

Discussing his ideas on “revolutionising” the tourism industry in Sindh, Masud Lohar, who is also founder of the ‘Clifton Urban Forest’, told media that there was great tourism potential in Sindh, especially Thatta district, which must be tapped.

“While regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan have gained due recognition of their natural beauty and tourist attractions, Sindh's potential remains largely untapped, though it boasts about its scenic lakes, islands and numerous historical sites,” he said.

“Keenjhar Lake stands out as a

serene oasis, attracting tourists from across the country as well as other countries. From the ancient civilisation of Mohenjo Daro to the vibrant culture of Tharparkar, Sindh offers a rich tapestry of experiences for explorers and researchers.”

Lohar believes that more tourist attractions like his ‘Noori Floating Hut’ would definitely revolutionise Sindh's tourism industry. Eco-lodges and adventure camps with modern facilities would enhance and satisfy tourists' urge for knowledge, exciting experiences and exploration who enjoy Sindh's unique offerings, he said.

According to him, all such additions would not only please tourists through memorable experiences, but would also contribute to the local economy, create jobs and promote sustainable development. “Such things and initiatives help spotlight Sindh's diverse landscapes and rich cultural heritage globally, attracting investment and enhancing tourism infrastructure.”

Lohar said Pakistan could generate billions of dollars in revenues by just focusing on multifaceted tourism. Historical sites, Hindu and Sikh temples and Sufis' shrines, besides food and cultural tourism, do attract foreign tourists.

“Tourism alleviates poverty by creating micro-economy and checking unemployment in both rural and urban areas,” he said.



The ‘Noori’ floating hut waits in lake water to receive guests.



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Snakes take centre stage in Italian mountain saint procession

Snakes are the highlight of an ancient religious procession held every May 1 that attracts thousands of visitors to a mountainous village in central Italy.

Every year, villagers wrap a statue of Abbot Saint Dominic in snakes in the weeks leading up to the procession, before carrying it from the church and down Cocullo's narrow streets. Abbot Dominic (951-1031), also known as Dominic of Sora, is the patron saint of snake bites, rabid dogs, and toothaches and lived in the region around the year 1000.



A woman holds her snake during the procession of St Dominic in Cocullo, central Italy.

Thousands of visitors flock from all over the peninsula and even abroad, to join the procession alongside a few hundred locals. The procession marks a rare peaceful interaction between snakes and humans, who often hunt and kill the reptiles despite being a protected and declining species.

In the weeks leading up to the procession, so-called Serpari, men and women trained from generation to generation, search the mountains for snakes and keep them in their homes until the big day. The snakes are released in the same place where they were found at the end of the patron saint's day.

This time-honoured tradition is also a way of monitoring the population and health of snakes in the region.

According to a recent study by the University of Bari in southern Italy, studying snake behaviour could help scientists predict earthquakes.



Hindu pilgrims attend their annual religious festival at Hinglaj Mata Mandir near Hub on Saturday, 27 April. The three-day Hinglaj Mela concluded on Sunday 28 April.



Foreign tourists visit the 100-year-old suspension bridge in Danyor. The wooden bridge, built over the Hunza River, connects Danyor to Gilgit. It was declared unsafe and closed for vehicles in 2013, and an alternate two-way concrete bridge was constructed. Now, the wooden bridge and a nearby tunnel have been converted into tourist points.



A bus crosses the half-a-century-old Neeli Bridge, one of the only access points to the Leepa Valley in Azad Kashmir.



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Greece hands Olympic flame to Paris

Greece on Friday, 26 April, handed over the Olympic flame of the 2024 Games to Paris organisers in a ceremony at the Athens marble stadium where the competition was revived nearly 130 years ago.

Hellenic Olympic Committee chairman Spyros Capralos handed the torch to Paris Olympics chief organiser Tony Estanguet at the Panathenaic Stadium, where the first modern Olympics were held in 1896.

Estanguet in a speech said the goal for Paris was to organise “spectacular but also more responsible Games, which will contribute towards a more inclusive society.”

Organisers want to ensure “that the biggest event in the world plays an accelerating role in addressing the crucial questions of our time,” said Estanguet, a member of France’s Athens 2004 Olympics team who won gold in the slalom canoe event. A duo of French champions, Beijing 2022 ice dance gold medallist Gabriella Papadakis and former swimmer Beatrice Hess, one of the most successful Paralympians in history, carried the flame during the final relay leg into the Panathenaic Stadium.

Nana Mouskouri, the 89-year-old Greek singer with a worldwide following, performed the anthems of France and Greece at the ceremony. After spending the night at the French embassy in Athens, the flame on Saturday, 27 April, will begin its journey to France on board the 19th-century three-masted barque Belem.

On Sunday, 28 April, the ship will pass from the Corinth Canal - a feat of 19th century engineering constructed with the contribution of French banks and engineers.

The Belem is set to reach Marseille - a city founded by ancient Greek colonists around 600 BCE - on May 8. Over 1,000 vessels will accompany its approach to the harbour, local officials have said.

French swimmer Florent Manaudou will be the first torch bearer in Marseille. His sister Laure was the second torch bearer in ancient Olympia, where the flame was lit on April 16. Ten thousand torchbearers will then carry the flame across 64 French territories.

It will travel through more than 450 towns and cities, and dozens of tourist attractions during its 12,000-kilometre



Water polo athlete Ioannis Fountoulis lights the cauldron during the Olympic flame handover ceremony for Paris 2024 at the Panathenaic Stadium on Friday, 26 April.

(7,500-mile) journey through mainland France and overseas French territories in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific. On July 26, it will form the centrepiece of the Paris Olympics opening ceremony.

A French historical monument launched just weeks after the Athens 1896 Games were held, the Belem carried out trade journeys to Brazil, Guyana and the Caribbean for nearly two decades. Hours before the handover ceremony, the flame

passed from Marathon, the town where the classic 42-kilometre endurance race, a key Olympic event, sets off annually. The torch harks back to the ancient Olympics when a sacred flame burned throughout the Games. The tradition was revived in 1936 for the Berlin Games. During the 11-day relay on Greek soil, some 600 torchbearers carried the flame over a distance of over 5,000 kilometres (3,100 miles) through over 50 towns and cities.



Against the backdrop of the hilly terrain, people take a boat ride in the Safari Park Lake - Karachi.

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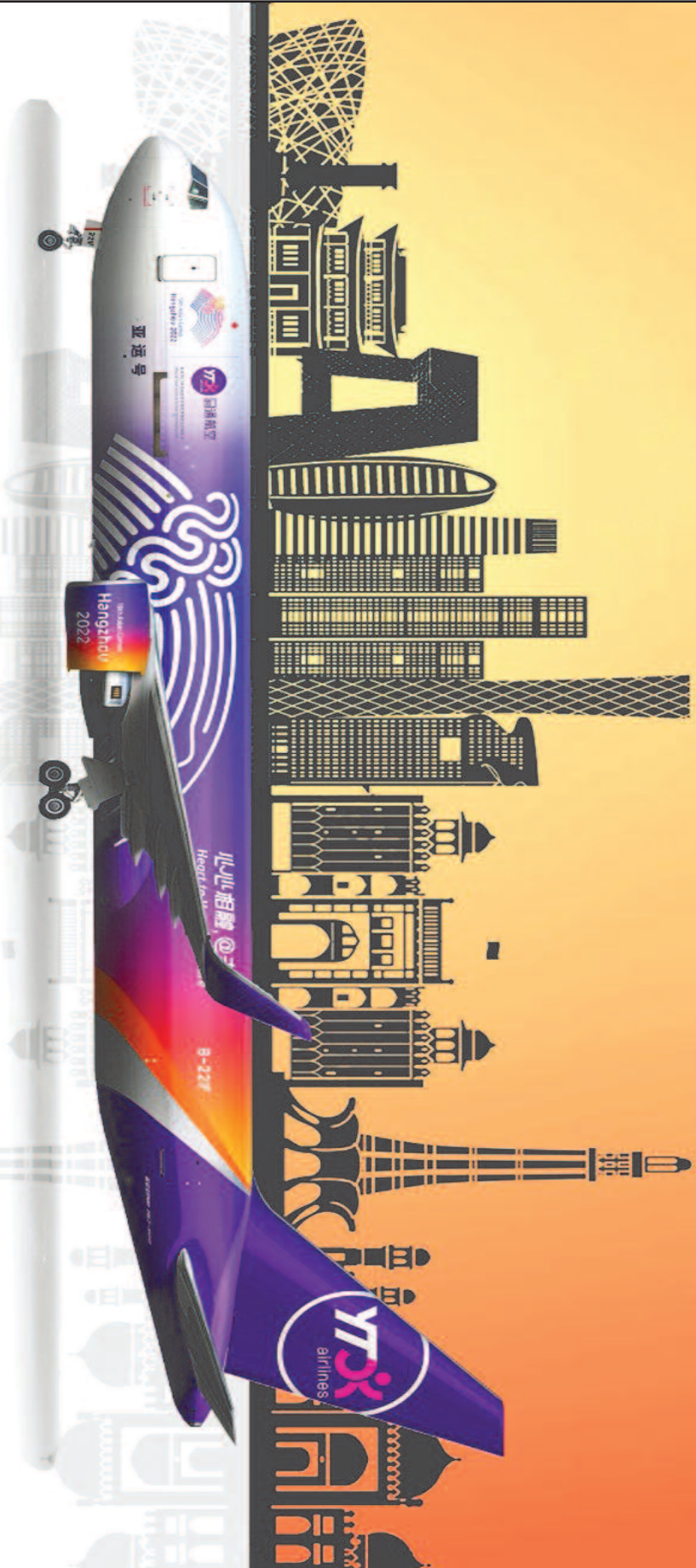


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