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PIA to add eight more aircraft as Europe lifts ban

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will add eight aircraft to its fleet next year, its CEO has told a National Assembly committee.

The meeting of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Aviation, chaired by MNA Nawabzada Iftikhar Ahmed Khan Babar, was held on Monday, December 23 at the Islamabad International Airport, said a press release.

In his briefing, PIA CEO Khurram Mushtaq said the new wide-body Boeing 777 aircraft would be used on long routes.

He said the ban on PIA's flights to Europe had been lifted after four years. The airline's operation to the continent would resume with a flight to Paris on January 10. The national carrier would operate two flights a week on this route.

The CEO further said that PIA's agreement with Air France would facilitate passengers travelling to other European countries.

While responding to committee members' complaints about food served on PIA flights, the CEO said its quality has already been improved.

The CEO further revealed that daily flights from Karachi to Sukkur will start on Wednesday, December 25, adding that the construction of motorways has reduced the number of travellers on domestic flights. The Pakistan Airports Authority DG gave a briefing on the development of airports. He said the runways of Lahore and Quetta airports had been upgraded, while parking and transportation issues had also been solved at the Quetta airport. The committee was also briefed on the Aviation Division's strategic initiatives for airport development projects. The members expressed dissatisfaction with the ongoing projects and appointed a sub-committee to assess their progress and performance. The sub-committee, including MNAs Dr Mahreen Razaq Bhutto (convener), Abdul Aleem Khan, Rana Iradat Sharif Khan and Ramesh Lal, would evaluate these projects in detail.

The NA committee remains committed to addressing these critical issues to ensure transparency, accountability, and the continued development of aviation infrastructure, said a press release issued after the meeting. The committee expressed displeasure over the continued absence of the secretary/president of Multan Flying Club from the meetings

despite multiple invitations.

The club's official was called to attend the meetings to address unresolved matters



such as student fee refunds and employee concerns.

The committee has decided to issue a formal summon for him to attend the next meeting scheduled for January 9 in Multan.

The committee also expressed dissatisfaction with the initial findings of the inquiry into harassment allegations against a PIA official in Dubai.

PIA's regional sales manager was accused of harassment by a female employee of a Dubai-based handling agency, according to sources. An initial inquiry conducted by the airline cleared

as the alleged victim withdrew her complaint. A source close to the investigation revealed that the PIA employee and the woman were allegedly in a relationship.

They quarrelled over an issue after which, the woman lodged a police complaint against the PIA officer. A senior official of the airlines revealed that the investigation allegations against the accused couldn't be substantiated as the complainant, after initial inquiry, did not provide any tangible evidence to support her claims.

"There were indications of personal relationships between the two, but there has not been enough information to determine the nature of this relationship or how much it might have affected their [professional] work," the official said.

The committee has, however, directed the airline to submit a detailed fact-finding report to the next meeting for further review and action. The meeting was attended by MNAs, senators, officials and secretary of the Aviation Division and its attached departments.

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PIA resumes Europe flights from January 10

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will resume flights to Europe on January 10 after European Union authorities lifted a four-year ban on the carrier, the company said in a statement on Saturday.

The statement from PIA, which was at the centre of a pilot licence scandal, said a “PIA flight will depart from Islamabad to Paris on January 10.

“Initially, two flights will be operated weekly [on Friday and Sunday], which will gradually be increased.”

“We have got approval for the first flight’s schedule we had filed,” PIA spokesperson Abdullah Hafeez Khan had said a day earlier, adding that the airline would be opening bookings on December 9 for its planned Jan 10 flight of a Boeing 777 to Paris.

PIA officials also met with Director AGS Airports Glasgow Christopher Tibbett to discuss the resumption of flights to the United Kingdom according to a post shared by the national carrier on X.

PIA was suspended from flying to the EU in June 2020, a month after one of its aircraft crashed in Karachi, killing nearly 100 people. The disaster was attributed to human error by the pilots and air traffic control, and was followed by allegations that nearly a third of the licences for its pilots were fake or dubious.

The airline remains banned from operating in the United States. After Europe’s ban was lifted recently, a spokesman for the carrier said it would “strictly adhere to EASA’s regulations and guidelines”, referring to the European Union’s aviation authority.

PIA, which employs 7,000 people, has long been accused of being bloated and poorly run - hobbled by unpaid bills, a poor safety record and regulatory issues.

The government has said it is committed to privatising the debt-ridden airline and has been scrambling to find a buyer. Last month, a deal fell through after a potential buyer reportedly offered a fraction of the asking price. The sale was also part of International Monetary Fund demands in exchange for aid programmes, including the privatisation of public companies, establishing a broader tax base and ending subsidies for the 40 per cent



of Pakistanis who live below the poverty line.

In 2023, PIA had losses of \$270 million according to local media. Its liabilities were nearly \$3 billion, about five times the total worth of its assets.

Last year, dozens of flights were cancelled when it could not afford fuel for its planes. While speaking to reporters last

week, Aviation Minister Khawaja Asif called the restoration of flights to Europe a “major value addition” that would make the airline more attractive to potential buyers.

PIA came into being in 1955 when the government nationalised a loss-making commercial airline and it enjoyed rapid growth until the 1990s.

UK team reviews progress in aviation security

A delegation from the UK’s Department for Transport (DfT) visited the headquarters of Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

First Secretary Aviation of DfT Mohammad Gaffar, who was leading the delegation, acknowledged Pakistan’s efforts, noting a recent audit in which Pakistan achieved the highest score in the region.

The visit aimed to reinforce mutual cooperation on aviation security and regulatory practices between the two countries, said the CAA in a statement.

The UK team met CAA Director General Nadar Shafi Dar and reviewed Pakistan’s progress in implementing aviation security measures. The Directorate of Aviation Security, under the leadership of Director retired Air Commodore Shahid Qadir, briefed the delegation on current security protocols.

The team was presented with the CAA’s regulatory documentation along with operational records of entities such as Airport Security Force, Pakistan Airport Authority, airlines and regulated agents involved in catering and cargo.

The two-day visit is expected to strengthen coordination between the

regulatory bodies of Pakistan and the UK, focusing on the alignment of security documentation and procedures with international standards.

The director general CAA expressed gratitude for UK’s longstanding support in aviation security.

He highlighted the UK’s contributions, including specialised training programmes and provision of advanced screening technology at no cost to Pakistan’s airports. He said these efforts had significantly bolstered the country’s aviation security infrastructure, and expressed optimism about expanding this collaboration in the future.

The first secretary aviation of DfT acknowledged Pakistan’s efforts, noting the success of the recent audit where Pakistan achieved the highest score in the region. He reaffirmed the DfT’s commitment to supporting CAA’s mission, aiming to deepen the partnership between both countries’ aviation sectors.

The visit underscores the growing relationship between Pakistan and the UK in aviation security with both countries dedicated to enhancing regional and international air travel security, said the statement.



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Govt eyes speedy outsourcing of major airports



Pakistan Airports Authority is evaluating bids for Islamabad airport.

The government is seeking expedited outsourcing of Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi airports and implementation of other G2G-based projects worth Rs29 billion with friendly countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Azerbaijan to show the tangible output of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).

To speed up implementation, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal presided over a review meeting of the Public-Private Partnership Authority (P3A) to evaluate progress on 13 directives issued by the prime minister for the completion of key public interest projects being processed through SIFC, a civil-military forum created for the effectiveness of government functioning, particularly towards the promotion of foreign investment from friendly countries.

The minister directed the SIFC secretary to prepare a focused agenda to review the timelines of Rs29bn worth of projects signed with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Azerbaijan. Another meeting will be called early to remove irritants and facilitate speedy project implementation.

To streamline inter-ministerial coordination and ensure timely implementation of projects, the minister directed the formation of a dedicated committee tasked with developing actionable timelines for the pipeline projects under P3A.

“Foreign investment can be efficiently harnessed by developing bankable commercial propositions targeted at export expansion, which will significantly benefit Pakistan. The strategic mission of SIFC must be achieved in its true spirit,” the

minister was quoted as saying.

Representatives from various ministries presented updates on the status of each project. The Ministry of Aviation was directed to expedite the outsourcing process for Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi airports. A senior officer of the aviation ministry reported that the Technical Evaluation Committee of the Pakistan Airports Authority was currently evaluating bids for Islamabad airport, while due diligence reports for Lahore and Karachi airports have been submitted to P3A. Following the prime minister’s directive, the meeting was also told that the CAA had halted expansion work at Lahore airport and was in discussions with a UAE-based company, with a meeting scheduled soon for its outsourcing.

PIA resumes Turbat flights

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has resumed operations from Karachi to Turbat as part of its efforts to restore its network.

The move is expected to boost the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects, which are vital for the country’s economy.



According to a PIA spokesperson, the flights from Karachi to Turbat began on December 10, with two weekly flights on Mondays and Wednesdays. He said the national flag carrier is focusing on strengthening its operations for both Turbat and Gwadar.

Earlier, following the EASA’s lifting of restrictions on Pakistani flights operating to Europe, PIA announced its first flight from Islamabad to Paris on January 10, 2025.

Initially, two weekly flights on Fridays and Sundays will operate, with plans to gradually increase the frequency over time.



An armoured war machine and other military vehicles were on display at Expo Centre in connection with the International Defence Exhibition and Seminar, Ideas 2024, held in November.



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IATA: Air cargo demand robust in October but outlook less positive

Air cargo volumes remained robust in October as traffic was up year on year for the fifteenth consecutive month but the coming 12 months should be viewed with caution, according to IATA.

The latest statistics from IATA show that in October demand in cargo tonne km (CTK) terms increased by 9.8% compared with last year, while capacity in available CTAs was up 5.9% and the cargo load factor increased by 1.7 percentage points to 47.3%.

The increased capacity was largely driven by the addition of international belly hold space, which was up 8.5%, while dedicated freighter capacity increased by 5.6% as levels neared 2021 peak levels, IATA said.

IATA director general Willie Walsh said that air cargo yields in October were up 10.6% on 2023 and 49% on 2019 but added the demand outlook for next year was less positive.

“Global air cargo yields (including surcharges) continue to rise, up 10.6% on 2023 and 49% on 2019 levels. While 2024 is shaping up to be a banner year for air cargo, we must look to 2025 with some caution.

“The incoming Trump Administration’s announced intention to impose significant tariffs on its top trading partners-Canada, China and Mexico-has the potential to upend global supply chains and undermine consumer confidence.

“The air cargo industry’s proven adaptability to rapidly evolving geopolitical and economic situations is likely to be tested as the Trump agenda unfolds.”

Looking at market indicators, IATA highlighted several metrics; industrial production rose 1.6% in September while the global goods trade increased 2.4% for a sixth consecutive month of growth.

“The increase in trade is partly due to businesses stockpiling inventory ahead of potential disruptions, like the US port strike,” IATA explained.

Meanwhile, the Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) for global manufacturing output was above the 50-mark, indicating growth.

However, the PMI for new export orders, remained below the 50-mark, suggesting ongoing uncertainty and weakness in global trade.



The airline association added that US headline inflation, based on the annual Consumer Price Index (CPI), rose by 0.17 percentage points to 2.6% in October, ending a six-month decline.

“In the same month, the inflation rate in the EU increased by 0.24 percentage points to 2.3%,” IATA said. “China’s consumer inflation fell to 0.3% in October, sparking concerns of an economic slowdown.”

Looking at regional performance, Asia Pacific airlines registered a 13.4% year-on-year demand growth for air cargo in October and capacity increased by 9.3%.

Cargo demand at North American

carriers was up 9.5% compared with last year and capacity increased by 5.8%.

European carriers registered 7.6% demand growth for the month and capacity increased 3.9%.

Middle Eastern carriers saw cargo traffic improve 4.5% and capacity was up 0.8%.

Latin American carriers noted an 18.5% year-on-year improvement for the month, the strongest growth among the regions, and capacity increased 5.8%.

Finally, African airlines saw 1.6% year-on-year demand growth for air cargo in October, the slowest among regions, and capacity increased by 7.7%.

Air cargo market in detail - October 2024

October 2024 (% year-on-year)	World share ¹	CTK	ACTK	CLF (%-pt)	CLF (level)
Total Market	100%	9.8%	5.9%	1.7%	47.3%
Africa	2.0%	1.6%	7.7%	-2.4%	40.1%
Asia Pacific	33.3%	13.4%	9.3%	1.8%	49.3%
Europe	21.4%	7.6%	3.9%	1.9%	55.5%
Latin America	2.8%	18.5%	5.8%	4.4%	41.1%
Middle East	13.5%	4.5%	0.8%	1.7%	48.0%
North America	26.9%	9.5%	5.8%	1.4%	41.1%

¹% of industry CTAs in 2023

PIA to increase flights from Quetta to Jeddah

The general manager of PIA, Balochistan, Lodhi Muhammad Sadiq, said on Monday, December 16 that the national carrier will launch more direct flights between Quetta and Jeddah and plans are in the pipeline to connect Balochistan with other big cities.

Mr Sadiq said this during a meeting with business leaders and office-bearers of Quetta Chamber of Commerce here on Monday, December 16.

“Efforts are under way to link Balochistan with other big cities by launching more flights,” the PIA general manager said, adding that from January next year there will be three weekly direct flights between Quetta and Jeddah.

The PIA general manager said that flights from Islamabad to Paris will commence from January 10 next year.

He said the Memorandum of Understanding between PIA and the Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry for travel-related services will also be renewed soon.

The business leaders requested Mr Sadiq to resume PIA flights from Quetta to Peshawar, Gwadar, and Zahedan.

He said that additional Quetta-Jeddah flights starting from January 2025 would also include cargo services to enable local exporters to ship perishable items from Balochistan to Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, he said, exporters could benefit from Islamabad-Paris flights which will start from Jan 10 next year, for using them for cargo shipments.

Mr Sadiq also suggested that traders exporting goods to Australia could utilise PIA flights from Islamabad to Kuala Lumpur, from where cargo could be sent to Australia. He said that plans are also under way to soon launch direct flights to US and UK.

Referring to flights to Gwadar, he said that flights to Gwadar have been suspended due to a lack of demand, as there was only 10 per cent occupancy rate over a year. Similarly, he said, the Quetta-Peshawar flights were discontinued due to a shortage of aircraft, but these operations would be resumed after new planes are added to the fleet.

Iranian unmanned fighter jet undergoing flight tests

The pilotless version of Iran’s homegrown stealth fighter jet “Qaher (Conqueror)” has shown promising performance in flight tests, an official said.

The managing director of the Iran



Aviation Industries Organization (IAIO), a subsidiary of the Defense Ministry, updated reporters on Iran’s advances in the aviation industry on the sidelines of the 12th edition of the Iran International Aerospace Exhibition (Iran Airshow 2024), held on the Persian Gulf island of Kish.

General Afshin Khajefard said the homegrown Qaher fighter jet has emerged as a pilotless aircraft in a project carried out by the local experts.

He noted that the pilotless version of Qaher warplane is currently undergoing flight tests and has produced “promising results”.

The Iranian fighter jet Qaher-313 was unveiled in February 2013. The single-seat stealth fighter jet can take off and land on short runways. The general also unveiled plans for the development of various jet trainers in Iran with the purpose of achieving self-sufficiency in this sector. A main priority of the Defense Ministry is to complete the training fleet of the Armed Forces, he added. General Khajefard then pointed to a project to manufacture a new combat helicopter for the naval forces.

He said the combat chopper has been designed by the local experts and will be unveiled in the near future. Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

ADB to help build aviation fuel facility

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a technical assistance project worth \$86.2 million to develop a Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) facility. This project is expected to significantly impact Pakistan by converting local waste resources into a high-value export product.

According to an ADB report, the proposed fuel plant is expected to bring substantial economic benefits, enabling the production of a new, environmentally friendly fuel product that can be traded globally.

The plant will convert waste resources into high-value SAF, aligning with climate initiatives by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, the project will create skilled jobs for Pakistani engineers through technology transfer and training, and it will help formalise and economically improve the existing illegal gutter oil market, positioning Pakistan as a key player in the global SAF industry. According to the International Air Transport Association, sustainable aviation fuel will contribute significantly, accounting for over 65 per cent of the industry’s reduction target. It has been projected that the SAF market will expand to 407 million tonnes by 2050.

The facility will be developed by Bio Tech Energy (BTE), which owns and operates an existing bio-diesel refinery in Sheikhpura that started commercial operation in 2016 and is a second-generation multi-feedstock refinery with a production capacity of 45 kiloton per annum (KTPA) producing biodiesel, with all output sold in EU markets. The biodiesel refinery plant utilises a waste-based feedstock that includes used cooking oil, poultry feather acid oil, and soap stock acid oil. BTE is the leading bio-diesel supplier in Pakistan and the only large-scale producer in the region.

The project will be developed on a brownfield site adjacent to the existing biodiesel operations and will share some key infrastructure at the current site. As part of its expansion plan, BTE is developing a SAF production facility with a capacity of 200 KTPA, with 85pc of the output being SAF and the remaining 15pc of bio-naphtha. The feedstock for the SAF production will be similar to the existing biodiesel refinery.



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Cabinet approves relaxation of aviation policy; allowing Serene Air and Airblue to fly international

In a significant move to support Pakistan's aviation sector, the federal cabinet has approved the relaxation of the National Aviation Policy (NAP) 2019, allowing Serene Air to commence international operations and enabling Airblue to continue its overseas flights. The decision was taken in light of the severe financial challenges faced by airlines globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the existing policy, Article 4.5(a)(iv) requires domestic carriers to operate at least 5% of their capacity-measured as available seat kilometers-on primary and socio-economic routes. However, both Airblue and Serene Air have struggled to meet this requirement for over a year, as the pandemic disrupted the aviation industry worldwide.

Airblue, which currently operates flights to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, had been at risk of losing its international designation. Meanwhile, Serene Air has sought permission to expand its services to destinations including the UK, China, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

Acknowledging these constraints, the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) forwarded a request to relax the policy, emphasizing the importance of allowing airlines to maintain or expand international operations to sustain their business viability. Serene Air has committed to meeting NAP 2019 requirements on primary and socio-economic routes once the pandemic's impact subsides.

The federal cabinet approved the proposal, granting Airblue and Serene Air designation for international operations with countries where Pakistan has Air Services Agreements (ASAs), including provisions for multiple airline designations. Pakistan has ASAs with 98 countries, which facilitate such arrangements.

This relaxation aligns with the vision of NAP 2019 to enhance the country's aviation industry while adapting to unprecedented challenges. The cabinet's decision underscores the government's commitment to supporting local carriers in navigating the post-pandemic landscape and fostering growth in the aviation sector.



Pakistani travellers to UAE need police verification

A Senate panel was informed recently that all Pakistani travellers to the United Arab Emirates would need to be vetted and verified by the police.

The development comes amid growing discontent among Middle Eastern states over the increased numbers of Pakistanis involved in begging that has spurred authorities into action as they have started vigilant screening of passengers travelling to those destinations.

The UAE authorities also started actively declining visas to Pakistanis who did not have enough money in their accounts to prove them as "genuine visitors", according to travel agents.

During a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development today regarding the UAE's unofficial visa restrictions, especially for employment visas, Bureau of Emigration of Overseas Employment Director General Muhammad Tayyab informed the panel: "No case of travelling to the UAE will now be allowed without police verification."

He added that travel agents were also instructed in this regard.

A post on the Senate's Facebook page said Committee Chairman Senator Zeeshan Khanzada emphasised the need for more action as people were

questioning when visa-related issues would be resolved.

He also noted that agents claimed to meet all requirements when applying for visas, yet visas were still not being issued. Seeking clarity on the underlying problem, the committee chairman pointed out that while people were increasingly seeking opportunities in other countries, the UAE remained a key labour market.

Khanzada said there was still significant pressure and many challenges for those affected and suggested the provision of updates on compliance and a timeline for resolving the issues so the public could be better informed.

The statement said that other committee members also expressed reservations regarding the update on visa restrictions.

Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OPHRD) Secretary Arshad Mahmood clarified that restrictions did not imply a complete denial. He explained that, as far as Dubai was concerned, there were no restrictions, and each country had its own objectives.

The secretary emphasised that there were no restrictions on skilled labour, although there had been a recent decline in the demand for unskilled labour.

He noted the need to focus on sending more skilled workers abroad, adding that approximately 700,000 workers had already gone abroad this year.

SIAL – A Leading Hub for Air Travel and Logistics in the Region



Flyer International interviewed Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti, Chairman of Sialkot International Airport Limited (SIAL). SIAL has completed 17 years of its operations this year. This interview sheds light on SIAL's impressive growth trajectory and its strategic vision to become a leading hub for air travel and logistics in the region.

SIAL has ambitious plans to expand its terminal facilities, tripling its capacity to handle 12 flights simultaneously. Additionally, land has been acquired to expand the runway, enabling further growth. Over the years SIAL has demonstrated consistent improvements in operational efficiency. Passenger and cargo traffic has increased since the airport began operations, according to Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti, Chairman, of SIAL.

The Chairman highlighted several development initiatives aimed at updating SIAL's infrastructure to meet International Standards and attract more airlines to operate their flights from SIAL. Apart from the expansion of the terminal and runway, it has a plan to start MRO facilities to provide maintenance services for aircraft, it also plans for the construction of a second runway which is in progress, 100 acres of land already acquired and more being arranged. The 5-star Hotel Ramada Plaza building has been erected and hopefully, some rooms will be operational next year, SIAL also has a plan to establish flying Club facilities to train new Pilots.

SIAL started operations on 30th November 2007, with

PIA passenger flights from Karachi to Sialkot, presently 8 international airlines operate flights from SIAL to 10 international destinations with about 64 frequencies per week. Following the suspension of Gulf Air flights on October 28, SIAL's leadership including the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and CEO visited Bahrain to meet Gulf Air's management. Assurance was given that flights would resume soon. Additionally, new carriers such as Turkish Airlines, Jazeera Airways, and Flyadeal Airlines are expected to launch services from SIAL. Recently Slam Air has increased its flights from 3 to daily and, AirSial also plans to increase frequency of its flights. Currently, about one million passengers travel through SIAL annually, with numbers steadily increasing.

Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti was elected chairman of SIAL in July this year for the 2024-2025 term. He has been associated with SIAL as a director since its inception.

He graduated from Murray College Sialkot (1988) and holds an MA in economics from Lahore. He started his career in 1990 with Zulifqar Brother (ZB) Group, his Family's import-export business specializing in leather garments. Established in 1987, ZB Group has built a reputation and reliable name in the leather and textile garment industry. With over 60 years of experience in leather production and 30 years in garments Manufacturing, ZB Group supplies quality products to customers worldwide.

FBR withdraws restrictions on bringing multiple mobile phones

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has reinstated the policy allowing passengers to bring two mobile phones from abroad into Pakistan.

This reverses an earlier amendment to the Customs Baggage Rules, which limited passengers to one mobile phone.

The FBR has also decided to withdraw its proposed amendment to the Baggage Rules 2006, which sought to classify goods exceeding \$1,200 in value as commercial items. The proposed rules required passengers to pay duties, taxes, and penalties for goods over the threshold, barring their release without payment.

Stakeholders were given seven days to



provide feedback on the proposed amendments. If no substantial revisions are made, the new regulations will be enacted via a gazette notification after the consultation period.

The withdrawn notification also included plans to limit passengers to one mobile phone, with additional devices subject to confiscation. The FBR has

confirmed it will revisit these proposals and resubmit them after further review.

The initiative is part of the FBR's efforts to strengthen border controls, regulate the import of commercial quantities, and ensure compliance with Pakistan's trade laws. Further developments are expected following consultations with stakeholders.

PIA inducts A320 into its fleet after renovation

Pakistan International Airlines has inducted eleventh Airbus A320 into its fleet of operational aircraft with new engines and cabin decoration.

The aircraft had been grounded for ten months. With the induction of Airbus AP-BOM with new engines and decorated cabin into its fleet of 34 aircraft, the number of its operational aircraft has become 18. Six Boeing 777s, one ATR, and eleven Airbus A320s.

A spokesman for PIA said that PIA's operational fleet continues to grow rapidly as its 11th Airbus 320 AP-BOM has been inducted into the operational fleet with new engines. The Airbus A320s plane was rolled out of the hangar with new paint and cabin decoration, said the spokesman.

He added that long-grounded Boeing 777 and ATR aircraft will also be added to PIA's operational fleet in the next few days. Fleet rehabilitation will greatly improve PIA's network expansion and product quality. Earlier this week, PIA also introduced an in-flight internet system on domestic flights, which is gaining popularity among passengers.

Strict adherence to flight schedules, providing passengers with safe and high-quality products is a top priority, said the spokesman. PIA's flight schedule has 90pc regularity, besides operational fleet expansion and product improvement measures are part of our commitment, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) PIA Khurram Mushtaq said.

China's C919 jet faces crunch test as its network rapidly expands

China's first home-grown passenger jet, the C919, is now serving 10 major cities across the country as domestic airlines move swiftly to deploy the new aircraft.

The aircraft, seen as a symbol of China's achievements in tech and advanced manufacturing, also hit a new milestone on Thursday, December 19, carrying a total of

1 million passengers since its maiden commercial flight in May 2023.

The rapid roll-out will be a key test for the C919 as it strives to prove itself a reliable alternative to Boeing and Airbus' single-aisle models, with more frequent flights posing challenges from deployment to maintenance.



Uzbekistan Airways starts flight from Tashkent to Lahore

First direct flight from Tashkent to Lahore was launched on Friday, November 29 and it was welcomed by Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Alisher Tukhtayev along with Mr. Naeem Ahmed CEO - Holiday Planner GSA for the airlines in Pakistan and local industrialists and business community at Allama Iqbal International Airport Lahore.

The Uzbekistan Airways flight landed at 9 am which was warmly welcomed with a Water Cannon Salute at the airport. Uzbekistan Airways flights operations to Lahore was suspended in 2020 due to Corona-19. It has plan to increase frequency of flights to 3 to Lahore and start to Islamabad and Karachi, the airline uses B-737-400 neu aircraft on this route.

Speaking to the media on this occasion, Uzbek Ambassador Alisher Tukhtayev said that this important step is creating, new opportunities to strengthen economic, cultural and tourism ties between two countries.

He said that the flight was possible due to the vision of President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the joint efforts



of the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Pakistan and the Ministry of Transport.

The Uzbek ambassador said that the flight was fully booked that shows the importance of this route. Alisher said that the flight is not just a common air trip, but a symbol of friendship and cooperation that is taking our relations to a new level. He said that the start of this flight between Uzbekistan and Pakistan will further strengthen the economic, trade, cultural and people-to-people ties between the two countries.

Meanwhile, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), business organizations and various chambers of commerce of the country have described this flight important for

the promotion of economic relations between the two countries.

The FPCCI and other business bodies have hailed the commencement of the direct air link between Pakistan and Uzbekistan as it would help to enhance bilateral economic cooperation.

This direct flight would prove to be useful in forging bilateral business and economic integration with the Central state of the Central Asian region, Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states, President, FPCCI Atif Ikram Sheikh, said while talking to the media.

He said the Uzbekistan Embassy in Islamabad deserved appreciation for playing a significant role in launching of direct air link between the two

countries. President of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mian Abuzar Shad said Uzbekistan is an important country in the Central Asian region and the direct flights between Tashkent and Lahore would strengthen business relations between the two countries and all the credit in that regard goes to Islamabad and Tashkent embassies.

President of the Gujranwala Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), Rana Muhammad Siddique Khan hailed the direct flight and said that the role of the business community of Gujranwala is significant in increasing bilateral trade between Uzbekistan and Pakistan.

He said GCCCI, traders and the business community are already doing business in Uzbekistan in different sectors, and the direct flight operation will benefit the business community of Gujranwala.

President of the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Rehan Naseem Bharara said besides trade relations, the direct flight link would also help in enhancing tourism and cultural ties between the two countries.



DG PAA visits Lahore's AllAP construction projects and new Walton Muridke Aerodrome

Director General Pakistan Airports Authority (DG PAA), Air Vice Marshal Zeeshan Saeed, conducted a comprehensive visit to Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport (AllAP) and the New Walton Muridke Aerodrome for General Aviation.

During his visit to AllAP, DG PAA reviewed the progress of various ongoing projects, including the Domestic Terminal, Extended Apron, and the remodelling of entry and exit points. Expressing concerns over the slow pace of work, he directed the contractor and consultants to expedite progress by deploying additional resources. He emphasized the strategic importance of timely completion and urged all stakeholders to collaborate effectively. The visit included inspections of the terminal building, Apron Extension area, and Access Road works.

At the New Walton Muridke Aerodrome, DG PAA received a detailed briefing from the Project Director regarding the completion of Phase-1 and the initiation of Phase-2. He stressed the

need for improved facilities for general aviators, enhanced workmanship, and the inclusion of advanced systems such as the Instrument Landing System (ILS) and the Airfield Lighting System (AFLS). DG PAA also highlighted the importance of data integration at PAA Headquarters to

ensure the swift operational readiness of the aerodrome.

The DG PAA reiterated the Pakistan Airports Authority's commitment to enhancing infrastructure and facilities to meet international standards and serve stakeholders effectively.





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Cainiao and Qatar Cargo deepen partnership covering e-commerce

Qatar Airways Cargo and Cainiao have announced the formation of a new partnership that aims to capitalise on the growth of e-commerce.

Details on exactly what the partnership will involve were lacking, with the two companies stating that they will “leverage their complementary strengths through this partnership to enhance global e-commerce logistics and stimulate economic growth at both regional and global levels”.

It is likely that the two companies plan to utilise Qatar Cargo’s hub in Doha for onward shipping. The two announced a similar partnership back in 2021 and later launched a two year deal on flights between Hong Kong and São Paulo / Guarulhos International, via Doha.

Qatar Airways Cargo chief officer cargo, Mark Drusch, provided more details: “Since the inception of our collaboration with Cainiao in 2021, the partnership has seen strong growth, driven by ongoing flying agreements and a shared vision to support the burgeoning e-commerce industry.”

He continued: “We are now further deepening our ties with Cainiao to work even closer together. By utilising the Qatar Airways Cargo hub at Hamad International Airport in Doha, we aim to expedite shipments to customers in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, reinforcing our commitment to Cainiao.”

Cainiao chief executive Wan Lin added: “At Cainiao, we’re committed to building a smart, future-proof logistics network for e-commerce. We are pleased to strengthen our partnership with quality players like Qatar Airways Cargo to build a more robust global express network and better support our global customers with faster deliveries and enhanced supply chain efficiency.”

The two companies said that “e-commerce remains the largest driver of air cargo capacity demand worldwide”.

“Through this collaboration, both companies continue to enhance connectivity and reliability for businesses and consumers across the globe,” the airline added in a press release.

“Qatar Airways Cargo looks forward to further developing this strategic relationship, reinforcing its position as a leader in the air cargo industry.”

Cainiao has a long-term target of

achieving nationwide delivery within 24 hours and worldwide delivery within 72 hours. Meanwhile, Qatar Cargo has access to a fleet of 28 Boeing 777 freighters and

230 passenger planes.

Cainiao has also formed partnerships with other airlines, most notably Saudia Cargo and Atlas Air.



Garuda Indonesia selects three advanced fares management solutions from Sabre

A leading software and technology provider that powers the global travel industry, recently, announced a new agreement with Garuda Indonesia. The airline will use fare management solutions from Sabre to enhance its pricing management capabilities, streamline operations, and reinforce its competitive positioning. By adopting Sabre’s advanced solutions, Garuda Indonesia aims to support its broader transformation strategy and address critical challenges in fare management.

“We’re thrilled to welcome Garuda Indonesia to the growing list of airlines that trust Sabre’s proven fare management solutions,” said Rakesh Narayanan, Vice President, Regional General Manager, Asia Pacific, Travel Solutions Airline Sales. “The addition of Garuda Indonesia to our airline partner portfolio, alongside other recent signings, is a clear indication of the market’s confidence in our advanced fares optimization technology. Sabre’s Fares Manager, Contract Manager, and Fares Optimizer will play a pivotal role in helping Garuda Indonesia navigate market complexities and achieve its revenue goals.”

Taken in combination, Sabre Fares Manager, Contract Manager, and Fares Optimizer are designed to tackle industry challenges head-on, enabling airlines to:

- Reduce revenue leakage by

automating fare management process and ensuring revenue opportunities are captured;

- Implement optimal pricing strategies through the use of advanced analytics and real-time insights, enabling airlines to develop and execute strategies that respond dynamically to market changes, demand fluctuations and competitive pressures;

- Enhance agility in a dynamic market, ensuring airlines can remain competitive and aligned with customer demand;

- Have integrated end-to-end automation and advanced intelligence to proactively adjust fares in real time

“This agreement with Sabre represents a significant step forward in our ongoing efforts to optimize our operations and enhance our competitive edge,” said Muhamad Yusuf, Product Development Group Head, Garuda Indonesia. “We are confident that Sabre’s innovative fare management solutions will provide us with the tools we need to drive revenue growth, improve pricing accuracy, and support our overall business strategy.”

Garuda Indonesia flies an extensive domestic, regional, and international schedule, including to Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere in Asia Pacific. With this agreement, Garuda Indonesia joins over 30 airlines globally that have entrusted Sabre with their fare management needs.

Sialkot International Airport concludes 2024 with milestone achievements

Sialkot International Airport Limited (SIAL) proudly announces a remarkable year of achievements in 2024, reinforcing its commitment to excellence and innovation in aviation services. From passenger milestones to operational advancements, SIAL's dedication to enhancing the travel experience has set new benchmarks in the aviation sector. In 2024, more than 1 million passengers chose Sialkot International Airport as their gateway to the world, showcasing its growing reputation as a premier travel hub.

This milestone underscores the confidence of travelers/Airlines in SIAL's exceptional services and facilities. SIAL achieved a significant feat by operating over 11,000 tons of air cargo during the year, solidifying its position as a vital player in global trade and logistics. The airport's robust cargo handling capabilities continue to facilitate economic growth in the region. During the year 2024 the SIAL medical team exemplified dedication and professionalism by treating over 550 patients, including passengers and staff, throughout the year. This commitment to health and safety underscores SIAL's holistic approach to passenger care. Safety remained a top priority at SIAL in 2024.

The airport successfully maintained a zero-accident rate in handling international flights, reflecting its stringent adherence to global safety standards and protocols. In a significant move to enhance accessibility, SIAL inaugurated a new and wide-laned airport gate, streamlining traffic flow and improving the overall passenger experience. Additionally, the airport rehabilitated its runway in record time, ensuring uninterrupted operations and meeting international aviation standards. With number of International Airlines operating from SIAL that includes PIA, Emirates, Air Sial, Qatar Airways, Fly Dubai, Air Arabia, and Salam Air, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) emerged as the leading carrier at SIAL, operating an impressive 697 flights during 2024. This collaboration highlights SIAL's pivotal role in supporting national and international aviation.

As part of its passenger-centric initiatives, SIAL carried out an impressive passenger awareness campaign throughout the year. This initiative aimed to educate and engage travelers on key aspects of air



SIAL hosts a Board of Directors meeting, the photo shows Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti, Chairman flanked by Mr. Faraz Akram Awan, Vice Chairman, Air Vice Marshal (R) Tanveer Ashraf Bhatti, CEO, Mr. M. Jhangir Khan, Company Secretary and Mr. Bashir Ahmed, CFO on dais.

travel, enhancing their overall journey experience. During the year 2024 SIAL successfully facilitated Hajj operations, ensuring a seamless experience for Hajj pilgrims. The airport's meticulous planning and execution during this critical period earned widespread appreciation.

In collaboration with its partner airlines, SIAL marked various national and international days with zeal and zest. These celebrations highlighted the airport's commitment to fostering a sense of community and shared pride. As 2024 concludes, Sialkot International Airport remains steadfast in its mission to provide world-class services, prioritize safety, and contribute to the regional and national economy. SIAL looks forward to welcoming even greater achievements in the coming year. Chairman & Vice Chairman SIAL stated that Reflecting on the achievements of 2024, we are filled

with immense pride and gratitude for the remarkable journey we have undertaken together. This year has been a witness to our resilience, dedication, and unwavering commitment to excellence. From surpassing passenger milestones to achieving a zero accident rate, our accomplishments are a collective effort of our exceptional team, partners, and valued passengers.

CEO SIAL Air Vice Marshall Tanveer Ashraf Bhatti (R) stated that as we welcome the dawn of a new year, I extend my heartfelt wishes to all passengers, partners, airlines, and team members of Sialkot International Airport. This year, we aim to elevate our commitment to excellence, fostering connections that inspire progress and unity. Together, let's soar to new horizons and create an experience that reflects the spirit of Sialkot - resilient, ambitious, and ever-reaching for the skies.



Meet 'Blackbird': A flying taxi that spins and moves in any direction thanks to new propulsion system



A new type of flying car could soon be ferrying passengers through the skies using a novel propulsion technology, engineers say.

On Nov. 5, CycloTech, an Austrian company that builds flying car components, unveiled blueprints for its new "BlackBird" demonstrator aircraft - a flying car that uses a custom-made alternative to propellers.

Dubbed the "CycloRotor," this all-electric propulsion system is based on the principle of the Voith Schneider propeller (VSP) - which is frequently used on tug boats and ferries, CycloTech chief technology officer Tahsin Kart said in a promotional video. It's a circular rotor with small propeller blades inside, which spin around and can be used for both propulsion and steering.

By moving the center around which the propeller blades spin, the aircraft can change its airspeed and direction, CycloTech representatives said in a statement. Each propeller blade can also be angled to produce directional thrust, like the wing of an aircraft, and can be precisely aligned to send the aircraft in specific directions or rotate mid-air.

The CycloRotors will greatly enhance the BlackBird demonstrator's maneuverability, enabling it to move or spin in any direction while airborne and also perform sharp corrections to its trajectory with added precision, CycloTech representatives said in the statement. This can also improve the comfort and safety of passengers on any flight in windy or other inclement weather conditions, they added.

This technology sets BlackBird apart

from electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, such as those being tested by DARPA, as well as prototype air taxis - all of which use more traditional propeller designs.

The Blackbird demonstrator is still in development, but CycloTech

released several promotional videos showing the CycloRotor technology being used to levitate and propel scale models.

At present, the model can support a maximum of 750 pounds (340 kilograms) and can fly at around 73 mph (118 km/h). This is almost half that of a Skyhawk Cessna, one of the most popular private light aircraft options on the market, which can max out at 142 mph (229 km/h).

The team behind the BlackBird demonstrator aims to fly a full-size version of the aircraft in early 2025.

PIA to facilitate 35,000 Haj pilgrims next year

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will transport 35,000 Haj pilgrims to the holy land under a government scheme in 2025.

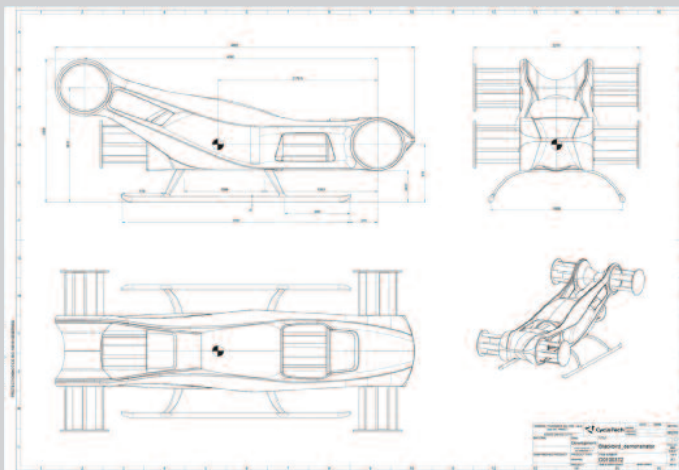
A spokesman for PIA said the Ministry of Religious Affairs and PIA have signed an agreement, under which the national flag carrier will operate special flights from six cities - Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Multan and Sukkur - to transport 35,000 Haj pilgrims to the holy land in 2025.

The agreement was signed by PIA CEO Air Vice Marshal Aamir Hayat and additional religious affairs secretary Dr Syed Ata-ur-Rehman.

The PIA CEO reaffirmed his organisation's commitment to provide best possible services to the Haj pilgrims.

The federal cabinet recently approved the Haj Policy for 2025, setting the cost for pilgrimage between Rs1,075,000 and Rs1,175,000. The sacrifice amount of Rs55,000 will be in addition to Haj expenses. This year's Haj quota for Pakistan is 179,210, divided equally between government and private sector. Children under the age of 12 will not be allowed to travel for Haj.

The "Road to Makkah" facility will be available at Islamabad and Karachi airports. Haj group organisers will sign service provider agreements with the ministry of religious affairs, and these organisers will be closely monitored for provision of services.



Putin apologises to Azerbaijan over 'tragic' plane crash

President Vladimir Putin on Saturday, December 28, apologised to Azerbaijan's leader for what the Kremlin called a "tragic incident" over Russia in which an Azerbaijan Airlines plane crashed after Russian air defences were fired against Ukrainian drones.

The extremely rare publicised apology from Putin was the closest Moscow had come to accepting some blame for Wednesday's December 25, disaster, although the Kremlin statement did not say Russia had shot down the plane, only noting that a criminal case had been opened.

Flight J2-8243, en route from Baku to the Chechen capital Grozny, crash-landed on Wednesday near Aktau in Kazakhstan after diverting from southern Russia, where Ukrainian drones were reported to be attacking several cities. At least 38 people were killed.

Four sources with knowledge of the preliminary findings of Azerbaijan's investigation told Reuters on Thursday, December 26, that Russian air defences had mistakenly shot the airliner down. Passengers said they heard a loud bang outside the plane.

Putin called President Ilham Aliyev and "apologised for the tragic incident that occurred in Russian airspace and once again expressed his deep and sincere condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to the injured," the Kremlin said.

"At that time, Grozny, Mozdok and Vladikavkaz were being attacked by Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicles, and Russian air defence systems repelled these attacks."

The Kremlin said "civilian and military specialists" were being questioned.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also said he had called Aliyev to offer condolences, and in his statement on the X platform demanded that Russia provide "clear explanations".

Azerbaijan for its part said Aliyev had noted to Putin that the plane had been "subjected to external physical and technical interference in Russian airspace, resulting in a complete loss of control and redirection to the Kazakh city of Aktau".

Until Saturday, Russia's last working day before a long New Year holiday, the Kremlin had said it was improper to comment on the incident before official investigations were concluded.

Meanwhile, the European Union's top diplomat on Saturday called for a "swift,

independent" probe into the Azerbaijan Airlines crash, after the US suggested the incident may have been caused by a Russian anti-aircraft missile.

"I call for a swift, independent international investigation," Kaja Kallas, the EU's foreign affairs chief, wrote on social



Vladimir Putin - President

media platform X. She said the incident was a "stark reminder" of the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, which was shot down by a surface-to-air missile fired by Russia-backed rebels over eastern Ukraine in 2014. "Our thoughts are with the families and friends of the victims. I wish for a speedy recovery to the injured," Kallas said.

Statements by Azerbaijani officials suggest Baku believes the plane was hit mid-air, while the US has said it had "early indications" Russian air defence may have been responsible for the crash. Russia has

previously said that Grozny was being attacked by Ukrainian drones that day.

The Embraer jet had flown from Azerbaijan's capital Baku to Grozny, in Russia's southern Chechnya region, where the incident occurred, and then travelled, badly damaged, another 450 kilometres across the Caspian Sea.

Footage shot by passengers before the plane crashed showed oxygen masks down and people wearing life jackets.

Later videos showed bloodied and bruised passengers climbing out of the wreckage. There were 29 survivors.

Baku cited injuries from objects that had penetrated the aircraft's fuselage from outside and testimonies from survivors as evidence of "external physical and technical interference".

The crash underscored the risks to civil aviation even when aircraft are flying hundreds of miles from a war zone, especially when Ukraine has deployed drones en masse to try to hit back at Russia behind the front lines. Russia uses electronic jamming to confuse the geolocation and communication systems of Ukrainian drones, which it also targets with air defence systems.

In 2020, Iranian Revolutionary Guards mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian airliner, killing all 176 on board. And in 2014, Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine, with the loss of 298 passengers and crew, by what Dutch investigators said was a Russian BUK missile system. Russia denied involvement.



Emergency specialists work at the crash site of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane. At least 28 survivors, including two children, were hospitalized.

Running banks and airlines

The provinces are already running banks: Bank of Punjab, Sindh Bank and Bank of Khyber. Balochistan is the only province that does not have a bank of its own, but given the precedent, it is bound to go for one as soon as it can.

KP and Punjab recently said they would be interested in running their airline as well. A good question to ask here is why. Why should the provinces have their own banks or be running airlines?

The federal government is already battling with state-owned enterprises. It has quite a few that are making losses, some even in industries where profits are very possible. Private sector firms make profits in this sector.

The government has been talking of privatising all SOEs, in particular the loss-making ones, and has been under pressure to do it quickly to manage the fiscal deficit. There seems to be pressure from the IMF and other lenders and donors as well to do it. This is why the privatisation process for PIA has been prioritised over the last six-odd months. Given all this, why would the provinces want to buy or set up and run airlines?

Why do provinces need to run banks and airlines? There are plenty of private sector alternatives available in these areas. At one point in time, it might have been the case that the Pakistani economy was too small or that entrepreneurs did not have the capital to set up banks or airlines or did not have the requisite knowhow about the management of such businesses. We live in a different time now. There are quite a few local and multinational players in these businesses; why would the provinces want to come into this space?

Take the case of banks. What do provincial banks add to the banking landscape? All provincial banks have been in trouble at one point or another. All of them, over time, have been accused of indulging in financial corruption at the behest of the political leadership of the day.

Provincial governments do not have any advantage in terms of knowledge or market understanding that they could bring to the banking sector. Why should they have banks then? And of course, provincial banks have been used to fund pet projects or friends of political leaders. This is exactly what is wrong with the provinces having banks.

Will the situation be any different if a province owns an airline? What can provincial governments bring to the table if they run an airline? Better knowledge? Better understanding of the business? What is the advantage here? They might stipulate, as they have done in the case of provincial finances and banks, that provincial businesses should go through that airline, but how does that help? It just creates another liability.

The government and state have a responsibility, in some cases legally as well, to provide goods and services that have the element of public good to them or are considered to be the right of individuals. For example, Article 25A of the Constitution asserts that the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all five-to-16-year-olds in the country. This is in the basic rights section of the Constitution. It is a right of citizens to have this free education and it is an obligation too, as it is compulsory to be provided that education. The state should provide it. But we also know that approximately 26 million five-to-16-year-olds are not in schools in Pakistan. Should the state not focus its attention more on providing schooling for children rather than think of owning and running banks and airlines?

The same is more or less the case for health, including public health. Though access to health services is not recognised as a basic right in our Constitution, we are failing, terribly, in Pakistan to provide even the basics of decent healthcare and welfare. We do not provide safe drinking water to all citizens, we cannot even inoculate all of our children (Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only countries in the world right now that have not been able to eliminate the poliovirus); 40 per cent of our children are malnourished and most of the poor are provided very low-quality preventive healthcare facilities, if at all, in the country.

But in no province, despite the announcement of an education emergency by the prime minister this year, are there any ongoing efforts that are even remotely likely to address the issues that have been mentioned here. And yet, the provinces want to run airlines and are putting their efforts into running banks.

The provinces have been trying to improve the quality of service in education, health, water and sanitation and other

areas, but have, by and large, not been able to do much for many years. For the last 10 to 15 years, the provinces have been expanding services and improving the quality of services through public-private partnerships as well. And with success in education (largely in Punjab) and health (largely in Sindh), the PPPs have been expanding quite rapidly.

Recently in Punjab, the government seemed to have decided to place a total of 12,000 or 13,000, out of some 35,000 primary schools under PPPs. Teachers, parts of the educational bureaucracy, and other stakeholders have been criticising the government for 'privatising' education. But, whether or not we see it as privatisation, the fact remains that the government has been unable to manage schools and has looked for help from the private sector to run its schools, and the same government wants to run banks and airlines!

Should the provinces run banks and airlines? The answer seems to be obvious. They should not. But logic, efficiency and optimality seldom win the day in Pakistan.

The writer is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, and an associate professor of economics at Lums.

US Company wants to launch cargo service in Pakistan

A US-based company, Barron Air, has announced plans to launch a cargo air service in Pakistan. The company has approached Pakistan's civil aviation authorities to express its interest in initiating the service within the country.

According to Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) officials, Barron Air is a prominent name in the U.S. cargo industry and provides outsourced services to major companies, including FedEx Courier. The introduction of Barron Air's services in Pakistan is expected to create new job opportunities across the country.

South Korea orders safety probe after deadly airline crash

South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok on Monday, December 30, ordered an emergency safety inspection of the country's entire airline operation as investigators worked to identify victims and find out what caused the deadliest air disaster on South Korean soil.

All 175 passengers and four of the six crew were killed when a Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 belly-landed and skidded off the end of the runway at Muan International Airport, erupting in a fireball as it slammed into a wall. Two crew members were pulled out alive.

The top priority for now is identifying the victims, supporting their families and treating the two survivors, Choi told a disaster management meeting in Seoul.

"Even before the final results are out, we ask that officials transparently disclose the accident investigation process and promptly inform the bereaved families," he said.

Cries of anguish echo through airport lounge as desperate families wait for identification of victims

"As soon as the accident recovery is conducted, the transport ministry is requested to conduct an emergency safety inspection of the entire aircraft operation system to prevent recurrence of aircraft accidents," he said.

As a first step, the transport ministry announced plans to conduct a special inspection of all 101 Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by South Korean airlines beginning on Monday, focusing on the maintenance record of key components.

Jeju Air flight 7C2216, arriving from the Thai capital Bangkok, was trying to land shortly after 9am (0000 GMT) on Sunday at the airport in the south of the country.

Investigators are examining bird strikes, whether any of the aircraft's control systems were disabled, and the apparent rush by the pilots to attempt a landing soon after declaring an emergency as possible factors in the crash, fire and transportation officials have said.

Experts say many questions remain, including why the plane, powered by two CFM 56-7B26 engines, appeared to be travelling so fast and why its landing gear did not appear to be down when it skidded down the runway and into a concrete embankment. CFM International is a joint

venture between GE Aerospace and France's Safran.

On Monday, December 30, transport ministry officials said as the pilots made a scheduled approach, they told air traffic control that the aircraft had suffered a bird strike, shortly after the control tower gave them a warning birds were spotted in the vicinity.

The pilots then issued a Mayday warning and signalled their intention to abandon the landing and to go around and try again. Shortly afterwards, the aircraft came down on the runway in a belly landing, touching down about 1,200 metres (1,310 yards) along the 2,800-metre runway and sliding into the embankment at the end of the landing strip.

On Monday December 30 morning, investigators were trying to identify some of the more than two dozen remaining victims, as anguished families waited inside the Muan airport terminal.

Cries of anguish echoed through a lounge at Muan International Airport as families waited for news of relatives killed in the plane crash. Grieving families are increasingly desperate - and angry - as they wait for formal identification of the remains of their loved ones, hoping to hold funerals and properly mourn.

"I apologise deeply... but the extent of the damage to the bodies is profound," an official told families at a briefing on Monday, trying to explain the immense hurdles facing workers trying to recover remains while also preserving crash-site

evidence.

"There are many cases in which arms and legs have been severed," he said, his words causing cries of shock and horror among the waiting families.

Using finger prints and DNA analysis, authorities have identified 146 of the victims, and are working hard on the 33 still to be verified.

Soldiers were still combing through wetlands near the airport - apparently looking for body parts - and an AFP reporter saw blood-stained seats and splatters of human remains on the ground near the wreckage.

Park Han-shin, who lost his brother in the crash, said he was told by authorities that his brother had been identified but has not been able to see his body.

Park called on victims' families to unite in responding to the disaster, citing a 2014 ferry sinking that killed more than 300 people. Many relatives of the victims of the Sewol ferry disaster complained it took authorities too long to identify those killed and the cause of that accident.

Transportation ministry officials said the jet's flight data recorder was recovered but appeared to have sustained some damage on the outside and it was not yet clear whether the data was sufficiently intact to be analysed.

The recorder has been transported to Seoul and an analysis will begin when a team of US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and Boeing officials arrive in the country late on Monday, December 30, the officials told reporters.



Flames and smoke rise from the tail section of a Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 aircraft after it crashed at Muan International Airport in South Korea's province of South Jeolla on Sunday, December 30. The plane was carrying 181 people.

AirSial celebrates 4th Anniversary



Mr. Fazal Jilani, Chairman, Mr. Ameen Ahsan CEO, Mr. M. Yousaf, Director and other guests cutting the cake to celebrate 4th Anniversary of AirSial at its Head Office, Sialkot.



Group photo taken on the occasion of a dinner hosted by AirSial to celebrate its 4th Anniversary at Ramada Plaza Hotel-Karachi, shows Mr. Fazal Jilani, Chairman, Mr. Ameen Ahsan CEO, Mr. Qaisar Iqbal Baryar, Sr. Vice Chairman and Mr. Tariq Amin, COO with others.

Transit of goods from China to UAE via Pakistan begins

The transportation of goods, originating from China onwards to Dubai via Pakistan, started on Saturday, December 28, according to officials. The National Logistics Corporation (NLC) has launched the Multimodal Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR) service linking China to the UAE via the Khunjerab Pass.

The TIR, a global transit system, allows for sealed cargo to be shipped from a country of origin to the destination in sealed load compartments, which do not require manual inspection by customs authorities during transit. The first shipment arrived from Kashgar, China, to Sost via the Khunjerab Pass. The cargo has been sent to Gawadar from where it will be shipped to the UAE.

A ceremony was held in Sost, Hunza, to mark the arrival of the first container from China. The event was attended by Customs Assistant Collector Sost Imtiaz Shigri, representatives of Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar chambers of commerce, traders, customs and NLC officials. The NLC said the successful launch of the multimodal TIR service, linking China to the UAE via Pakistan, would boost regional connectivity. The initiative underscores Pakistan's "importance as a transit hub", officials said.

The TIR system is globally recognised for its efficiency and cost-effectiveness as it enables seamless movement of goods across borders with minimal customs intervention. The integration of Pakistan with the multilateral trade framework would position the country as a crucial corridor for regional trade and economic integration, Mr Shigri, the Customs assistant collector, said while addressing the event. He added Pakistan would explore markets in the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and Europe through the TIR system.

"Khunjerab Pass is a gateway for transit trade. CPEC trade also passes through this route, and it is a historical achievement for Pakistan."

In future, TIR shipment flow will



In a first-of-its-kind operation, a Transports Internationaux Routiers consignment arrives from China on Saturday, December 28, before being dispatched to Gawadar for onward transmission to Dubai.

increase the volume of trade through the Khunjerab Pass, he added.

This will help achieve the purpose of CPEC, and it will economically benefit the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, said Mr Shigri.

An NLC official explained a

multimodal solution means the use of land and sea to ship goods. He said Central Asian countries already trade with Afghanistan through the Khunjerab Pass. "It is NLC's vision to make this operation global."

CPEC back under planning ministry

The authority formed to oversee the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project was being wrapped up as it had become dysfunctional, Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal said on Wednesday, December 18, adding that control of the project was now back with his ministry. Talking to reporters during a trip to China, he said that the CPEC Authority was created during 2019 to take the project away from Ministry of Planning and Development, which had successfully managed it for half a decade, from 2013 to

2018. "And when CPEC Authority was created, it proved to be ineffective; and after one year, it was made dysfunctional. So, it only existed on paper," he added.

Mr Iqbal said now that the authority was being wound up, control of the project would be back with his ministry, giving the example of China's National Development Reform Commission, which oversaw Beijing's end of the economic corridor project. He hoped this would bring more clarity and focus to the CPEC project, enabling it to regain its former momentum.

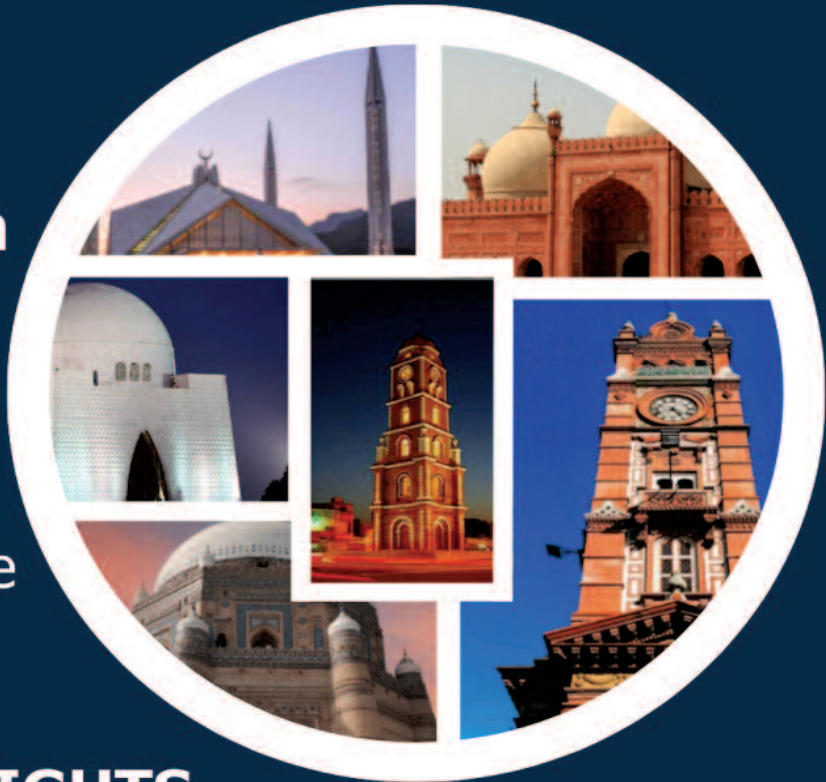




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Eight MoUs signed with Belarus to boost trade

Exports jump 13pc in first five months



Ministers Jam Kamal Khan and Alexey Kushnarenko witness signing of eight agreements at the Business Forum on Monday, 25 November.

Pakistan and Belarus on Monday, November 25, signed eight memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and agreements in various sectors to realise the true potential of bilateral trade.

The MoUs and agreements were signed during the Pakistan-Belarus Business Forum, co-chaired by Commerce Minister Jam Kamal and Belarus' Minister of Energy Aleksei Kushnarenko. The MoUs were signed before Belarus's president's arrival in Islamabad.

Both ministers witnessed the signing of these documents, which are expected to pave the way for deeper economic ties. The MoUs will involve a five-year collaboration arrangement between JCS Bellakt and Nutrifood & Pharmaceuticals and a product supply agreement between JSC Minsk Motor Plant and Shahzad Trade Links in 2025.

JSC Belshina and Shahzad Trade Links agreed to sell tyres in the Pakistani market, as did JSC BelVitinipharm and Mustafa Brothers. Logistics collaboration will be established between RUE Beltamozh service and the National Logistic Corporation.

RUE Belmedpreparaty and Bio-Medical System signed a memorandum of understanding for pharmacy registration and supply and a metal supply deal between JSC Beltsvetmet and Raas International Trading in 2025. JSC Tractor Works and Green Corporate Initiative will cooperate on agricultural machinery.

Pakistan's exports to Belarus fell 10.23pc to \$1.798 million in FY24 compared to \$2.005m the preceding year. However, imports from Belarus surged 393pc to \$27.637m in FY24, up from \$5.601m the previous year.

Speaking at the business forum, Mr Kamal said there is a need for trade diversification, emphasising the untapped potential in sectors such as food, pharma, textiles, logistics, and energy.

He highlighted that the bilateral trade volume needs to reflect the economic capabilities of the two countries. He stressed the need to diversify trade, capitalising on the potential of respective strong sectors.

Mr Kamal said all economic sectors are open to foreign investment and priority areas include energy, infrastructure, telecommunications, manufacturing, minerals, ICT, agriculture, and many more.

The minister said that eight B2B MoUs/contracts reflect the complementarity of bilateral trade and will pave the way for more to happen.

Speaking at the forum, Aleksei Kushnarenko said events of this format were an effective platform for direct dialogue between the business circles of Belarus and Pakistan.

He said that Belarusian agricultural machinery, industrial, petrochemical, and dairy products are in demand in the Pakistani market, and light industrial goods and food products supplied from Pakistan are in demand in Belarus.

Pakistan's merchandise exports slowed in November and fell into the single digit due to a reduction in international demand, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

The growth momentum picked pace in July owing to improved orders from the international community and stability in the exchange rate. The exports grew 11.83 per cent in July, followed by 16pc in August, 13.52pc in September, 10.64pc in October and 8.98pc in November. The exports reached \$2.80bn in November against \$2.57bn in the corresponding month last year. On a month-on-month basis, exports dipped 5.97pc. In the first five months, export proceeds stood at \$13.69bn in July-November FY25 against \$12.16bn over the corresponding months of last year, showing an increase of 12.57pc.

Global buyers have redirected clothing sourcing from Bangladesh and China and placed orders with Pakistan in the past few months. It allows Pakistani exporters to capitalise on the opportunity and capture the market. The exporters, especially the textile sector, were unhappy with the government's decision not to release refunds and rebates under different categories. According to the exporters, this squeezes their margins and limits their capacity to reinvest and expand operations. They said immediate action is needed to prioritise export sector liquidity by fast-tracking refunds and resolving taxation issues. Making exports a top priority will allow businesses to optimise their potential and contribute significantly to the economy.

According to the PBS data, imports grew 3.90pc to \$22.34bn in July-November FY25 from \$21.50bn over the last year. The imports dipped 3.83pc in November to \$4.39bn from \$4.52bn in the same month last year. Month-on-month, imports declined 3.83pc. The IMF revised its import forecast downward by \$3.3bn from \$60.5bn to \$57.2bn for the FY25, converging with the government's projection of \$57.3bn. In FY24, imports fell by 0.84pc to \$54.73bn compared to \$55.19bn in FY23. The trade deficit in July-November FY25 decelerated by 7.39pc to \$8.65bn from \$9.34bn over the last year. In November, the deficit decreased by 18.60pc to \$1.58bn from \$1.95bn last year. The trade gap contracted to \$24.08bn in FY24 from \$27.47bn in the preceding year.

SDPT - The busiest dry port in the country

Sialkot Dry Port Trust was established in 1985. This is the first ever in the private sector in Asia, initiated by the founder trustees, 52 leading businessmen of Sialkot, and Seth M. Iqbal was the driving force behind the formation. The dry port also paved the way for numerous successful public partnership projects that were subsequently launched from the platform of SCCI. The successful example of the SDPT fostered the confidence among Sialkot's business community to jointly undertake numerous other projects including the SIAL and AirSial, said Mr. Waheed Sandal, Chairman of the Sialkot Dry Port Trust in a brief interview with Flyer International.

He said SDPT is one of the busiest dry ports in the country with more than 250 employees, regional offices at Lahore, and Islamabad, and a terminal office at Karachi. Initially, Pakistan Railways was the only mode of transportation by the Dry port to reach its destinations. With the efforts of the long-serving and founder chairman Seth M Iqbal, the license for the first Bonded Cargo Carrier in the Private Sector was approved by the Govt. in 1991 and the Port Services Limited (PSL) was formed by the trustees. Now, it has the largest Bonded Carrier in the private sector with an impressive fleet of customs-bonded vehicles that provides an additional edge to this dry port.

He told Flyer that all the modern technology amenities are used at SDPT, for example, the tracking system, insurance of the customs Bonded carrier, etc., average travel time is 48 hours to Karachi, Tracking of Vehicles, breakdown solution, Monitoring System, Customs bonded vehicles are available at very reasonable charges and 24 hours customs clearance, etc.

SDPT is located in Sambrial, Sialkot, it created a Pivot for this golden triangle and attracted other important facilities and projects to its vicinity. This includes the Sialkot International Airport and the Sialkot export processing Zone. These serve the industrial centers of Gujrat, Wazirabad, and Gujranwala. Sambrial has become the hub of International Cargo and industrial development in this area.

Mr. Sheikh Abdul Waheed Sandal was elected as Chairman of Sialkot Dry Port Trust in 2022 for the term 2023-



2024. He has more than six decades of business experience and was elected as chairman for numerous associations including as president of SCCI. He got an education from Government Commercial College, Sialkot. He joined his father's firm Loyal Sports which manufactured footballs, in 1962. Later he joined his brother's company PHEDRA Industries in 1967, where he pioneered the production of Ski gloves in Pakistan. Mr. Sandal, along with Haji Aftab Barlas, led the creation of the Pakistan Gloves Manufacturers & Exporters Association in Sialkot and was elected to serve as its Chairman for four terms (1989-90, 1995-96, 1996-97, and

2004-05). He is a lifetime member of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry. As the President of the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce & Industry in 2006, he initiated many projects including the Business Centre with the help of the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA).

He was also instrumental in keeping the NIKE business in Pakistan after the decline of Saga Sports. As Chief Executive of Port Services Ltd, Abdul Waheed Sandal enhanced its transport services and turned it into an efficient organization. He has served as the SDPT Vice Chairman (2001-03) and Vice President of FPCCI.



Sh. A. Waheed Sandal, Chairman, SDPT with Mr. A.S. Azad, Editor, Flyer International.

Deals signed with Abu Dhabi Ports for infrastructure

Pakistan and Abu Dhabi Ports Group on Friday, November 08, signed four memorandums of understanding (MoUs) to enhance cooperation across various sectors, including rail, airport infrastructure, maritime shipping and logistics.

The Prime Minister's Office said that the MoUs were signed during a visit by a high-level UAE delegation led by UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, who met with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

PM Shehbaz witnessed the exchange of MoUs, which involved the ministries of maritime affairs, aviation and railways and the Federal Board of Revenue with the Abu Dhabi Ports Group.

These agreements will help the two sides explore potential collaborations in customs, rail, airport infrastructure and maritime shipping and logistics.

Under the MoUs, Pakistan and Abu Dhabi Ports Group aim to improve digital customs control, develop dedicated freight rail corridors, upgrade Pakistan's maritime fleet and marine services and enhance international airport facilities.

During the meeting, PM Shehbaz expressed gratitude to UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum for their steadfast support to Pakistan, highlighting the longstanding ties between Pakistan and the UAE rooted in shared history and culture.

He emphasised that the visit underscored the UAE's commitment to increasing its investment footprint in Pakistan and noted that these investments would play a key role in boosting Pakistan's economy.

Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi thanked the prime minister for the warm welcome and hospitality. He expressed satisfaction with AD Ports' existing investments in Pakistan and a strong interest in expanding involvement in shipping, port efficiency improvements, logistics and customs digitisation.

The UAE delegation included Sheikh Ahmed Dalmoock Al Maktoum,

chairman of Kaheel Group; Capt Mohamed Al Shamisi, managing director and Group CEO of Abu Dhabi Ports Group; UAE Ambassador to Pakistan Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi; and senior officials from AD Ports.

The Pakistani delegation included Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, Special Assistant to PM Tariq Fatemi and senior government officials.

In a separate development, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reiterated the government's commitment to achieving \$25 billion in IT exports over the next three years, highlighting the government's efforts to promote the telecommunications sector.

He highlighted the Information Technology Park project, expected to significantly boost the country's exports, as a milestone towards this target.

Chairing a meeting to review ongoing IT projects and digitisation efforts, the premier expressed satisfaction with progress on the IT Park in Islamabad and instructed officials to consult Korean experts on

reducing the project timeline, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

During another meeting on Friday, November 08 with a five-member delegation from the Holland-based VEON Group, led by Chairman Augie K Fabela, PM Shehbaz discussed the government's plan to introduce 5G internet services to provide high-speed connectivity nationwide, including in remote areas. "The 5G service will also help the government realise its vision of a Digital Pakistan," he added.

The telecommunication sector has a significant role in promoting a cashless and digital economy, he said, adding that the government was willing to collaborate with VEON Group in IT, digitisation and artificial intelligence.

VEON's delegation appreciated the government's efforts towards achieving economic stability and said that Pakistan had become an important investment destination for the IT and telecom sectors. Minister of State for Information Technology and Telecommunications Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Ali Pervaiz Malik, Coordinator to the PM Rana Ehsan Afzal and other relevant senior officers also attended the meeting.



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif witnesses the exchange of MoUs between Pakistan and Abu Dhabi Ports, on Friday, 08 November.



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Draft policy seeks financial security for ship owners



Under the draft policy, all private and public marine training institutions will have to obtain a licence from the maritime ministry.

The Ministry of Maritime Affairs has prepared the draft of a new shipping policy, which includes provisions aimed at providing financial security to the owners of registered ships.

'Pakistan Shipping Policy 2024' will replace Pakistan Merchant Marine Policy 2001, as well as the amended version of 2019. The ministry organised a workshop of stakeholders on Wednesday, November 13 to discuss the draft of the new shipping policy.

Maritime Affairs Secretary Syed Zafar Ali Shah, chairpersons of port authorities, senior officials of the maritime affairs ministry and stakeholders from the private sector participated in the workshop.

The policy makes it possible by legislation to furnish a bond of adequate amount to owners of any registered ship if it is detained or seized for any reason within the territorial jurisdiction of Pakistan, and it should be within 24 hours after taking the surety bond.

The secretary of maritime affairs informed participants of the workshop that the Shipping Policy 2024 has been made in accordance with the standards and rules of the International Maritime Organisation.

It was noted that the government should ensure that if the case is settled, the bail bonds are returned within one month.

In this regard, a help desk should also be established within the ministry of maritime affairs and special courts related to maritime affairs should also be set up having powers equal to high courts.

The draft proposes that the newly registered Pakistani shipping company will pay \$0.75 per gross registered tonnage for five years, while currently the Pakistan

National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) is paying \$1 per gross registered tonnage on its revenue.

The rebate of \$0.25 to new companies is likely to encourage domestic and national investors to show interest in maritime industry.

The draft has proposed that the registered Pakistani shipping companies would be allowed to seek financing from foreign financial institutions and banks.

A proposal to grant tax exemption for 10 years to new foreign shipping companies was brought forward by the participants of the workshop, and they stressed for assistance by state authorities to Pakistan shipping companies in opening foreign currency accounts.

Pakistan sees significant increase in imports from Iran

Pakistan's imports from Iran have witnessed a substantial surge, with a 47 per cent increase on a yearly basis, ARY News reported citing government sources.

According to details, the country's imports from Iran stood at \$533 million from July to November 2024, up from \$398 million during the same period last year. The first five months of the fiscal year saw a 34 per cent increase in imports from Iran.

In November 2024 alone, the volume of imports from Iran reached \$129.7 million, marking a significant rise from \$88.4 million in November 2023. Earlier, it was reported that Pakistan rice exports increased by 35.40 per cent during the first five months of the current fiscal year (2024-25) in comparison to the exports of the same period last year.

According to data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), more than 2.377 million metric tons of rice, including basmati

rice and other types, were exported between July and November 2024, valued at \$1.515 billion. This is in contrast to the 1.721 million metric tons that were exported during the same period last year, valued at \$1.119 billion.

Exports of basmati rice increased by 34.64 per cent in the final five months of the current fiscal year, totaling 370,282 metric tons of the commodity valued at \$386.116 million, compared to 244,664 metric tons and \$286.778 million during the same period last year. Meanwhile, the country earned \$1.129 billion by exporting rice other than basmati in the last five months of the current financial year as compared to the exports of \$832.523 million in the same period of the last year. In comparison to the 1.476 million metric tons shipped during the same period previous year, more than 2.006 million metric tons of rice other than basmati rice were exported during the first five months of the current fiscal year.



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FBR allows tourists to import vehicles without Customs duty

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has approved the temporary importation of vehicles by tourists into Pakistan without the need for Customs duty payment for a period of three months.

As per the amended Customs Rules 2001, outlined in SRO 1965 issued on Monday, December 02, tourists importing vehicles against a carnet-de-passage or a bank guarantee can now have their vehicles delivered by the Customs officer at the point of entry. The delivery will be without any Customs duties, provided the tourist declares that they will not transfer ownership of the vehicle to anyone else during their stay in Pakistan.

If the tourist is unable to export the vehicle within the three-month period, they can apply for an extension. The extension, not exceeding three months, will be granted by the respective collector if the tourist submits a valid carnet-de-passage or bank guarantee, along with an assurance that they will not leave Pakistan during the extended period.

In the event that the same vehicle re-enters Pakistan within a year, temporary release will be permitted only for 14 days, unless the vehicle is being operated by a recognized foreign tour agency. In such cases, re-entry will be allowed for up to three months at a time.

In cases where a vehicle cannot be exported due to health issues, accidents, or other uncontrollable circumstances, the chief collector of Customs may grant an extension for up to six months.

This extension is conditional upon the submission of a fresh bank guarantee or a valid carnet-de-passage if the original guarantee does not cover the extended period. Failure to obtain the extension will result in the vehicle being surrendered for adjudication purposes.

Additionally, if a tourist imports a vehicle with the intention of passing through Pakistan to a foreign destination, and does not have a carnet-de-passage or bank guarantee, Customs officers may allow the vehicle to pass through Pakistan without paying Customs duties. This is conditional on escort charges, which will be determined by the respective collector, and the vehicle details will be recorded in the tourist's passport.

On October 26, FBR issued a draft

amendment to Pakistan's Customs Rules 2001, introducing significant changes to

the temporary import rules for vehicles brought into the country by tourists.



Exports jump 13pc in first five months

Pakistan's merchandise exports slowed in November and fell into the single digit due to a reduction in international demand, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on Monday, December 02. The growth momentum picked pace in July owing to improved orders from the international community and stability in the exchange rate. The exports grew 11.83 per cent in July, followed by 16pc in August, 13.52pc in September, 10.64pc in October and 8.98pc in November.

The exports reached \$2.80bn in November against \$2.57bn in the corresponding month last year. On a month-on-month basis, exports dipped 5.97pc. In the first five months, export proceeds stood at \$13.69bn in July-November FY25 against \$12.16bn over the corresponding months of last year, showing an increase of 12.57pc.

Trade gap narrows 18pc in Nov

Global buyers have redirected clothing sourcing from Bangladesh and China and placed orders with Pakistan in the past few months. It allows Pakistani exporters to capitalise on the opportunity and capture the market.

The exporters, especially the textile sector, were unhappy with the government's decision not to release

refunds and rebates under different categories. According to the exporters, this squeezes their margins and limits their capacity to reinvest and expand operations.

They said immediate action is needed to prioritise export sector liquidity by fast-tracking refunds and resolving taxation issues. Making exports a top priority will allow businesses to optimise their potential and contribute significantly to the economy. According to the PBS data, imports grew 3.90pc to \$22.34bn in July-November FY25 from \$21.50bn over the last year. The imports dipped 3.83pc in November to \$4.39bn from \$4.52bn in the same month last year.

Month-on-month, imports declined 3.83pc. The IMF revised its import forecast downward by \$3.3bn from \$60.5bn to \$57.2bn for the FY25, converging with the government's projection of \$57.3bn.

In FY24, imports fell by 0.84pc to \$54.73bn compared to \$55.19bn in FY23. The trade deficit in July-November FY25 decelerated by 7.39pc to \$8.65bn from \$9.34bn over the last year. In November, the deficit decreased by 18.60pc to \$1.58bn from \$1.95bn last year. The trade gap contracted to \$24.08bn in FY24 from \$27.47bn in the preceding year.

Nation pays glowing tribute to Quaid-i-Azam



Government and military officials offer Fateha at the Mazar-i-Quaid on the 148th birth anniversary of the nation's founder.

The nation on Wednesday commemorated the 148th birth anniversary, December 25 of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah showing great patriotic zeal and reverence.

The celebrations began with special prayers at mosques for the progress, prosperity, and unity of Pakistan. The day was observed with a 21-gun salute in provincial capitals and national flag hoisting at major government and private buildings.

An elegant change of guards ceremony was held at the Quaid's mausoleum in Karachi to pay tribute to the Founder of Pakistan.

Seminars, conferences, debates, cultural events, and exhibitions were organised nationwide to mark the day. These events highlighted the Quaid's struggle and achievements, also promoting his vision for Pakistan as a progressive, inclusive, and democratic state.

Schools and colleges arranged debate and art competitions, and essay writing contests focusing on the Quaid's leadership and his principles of unity, faith, and discipline.

The television and radio channels broadcast special programmes, highlighting the Quaid's role in the creation of Pakistan. Newspapers published special supplements, recounting his unparalleled contribution to the nation. Lok Virsa hosted a series of events to celebrate the day. The celebrations included an exhibition of artisans-at-work,

while a cake-cutting ceremony was also held, followed by a tribute paid to the Quaid through a patriotic songs show. Documentaries on the Quaid's contributions were also screened, offering insights into his life and vision. A Quaid Day Safari Cycling Rally was held from Safari Club to Mini Golf Club with participation by the youth. The Benazir Income Support Programme also organised a ceremony at its headquarters.

A distinguished barrister and politician, the Quaid led the All-India Muslim League from 1913 until Pakistan's independence on August 14, 1947. He served as Pakistan's first governor-general until his death on Sept 11, 1948. Paying glowing tribute to the Quaid, AJK Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq noted that the great leader had not only changed the history but also the geography of the Indian subcontinent. In a statement issued from Muzaffarabad, PM Haq said Quaid-i-Azam had transformed the political, economic, and social landscape of the world by realising the dream of a state for which nations struggled for centuries.

The Quaid had not only defended the identity of Muslims as a separate nation but also turned an ideology into a political reality. "His commitment, integrity, and discipline continue to guide us and are proof of his greatness."

The premier pointed out that the Quaid called Kashmir the jugular vein of Pakistan. He always supported the Kashmiri people,

and it was due to his love for them that wherever he went to Kashmir, people were fervently devoted to him.

"Even today, he remains alive in the hearts of the Kashmiri people," Mr Haq said.

The PM also saluted the Kashmiri people who had raised the word of truth in the face of India's worst oppression. He affirmed that time is not far when India-held Kashmir will be liberated and become part of Pakistan.

Chief of the Army Staff Gen Syed Asim Munir while speaking at a ceremony St Joseph's Catholic Cathedral Church in Rawalpindi paid a solemn tribute to the founder of the nation. He highlighted that the Quaid's visionary leadership, unwavering determination, and steadfast adherence to the principles of faith, unity and discipline had not only paved the way for the creation of Pakistan but also provided a timeless blueprint for nation-building, said an ISPR news release.

The COAS remarked that the Quaid's enduring commitment to the ideals of freedom, equality, and religious tolerance continued to inspire and guide the nation in addressing contemporary challenges, from safeguarding territorial integrity to fostering internal stability. "As we commemorate this festive season, let us reaffirm our collective resolve to transform Pakistan into the peaceful, prosperous nation envisioned by the Quaid," the army chief concluded, urging all citizens to work tirelessly towards achieving this shared aspiration.



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Lahore to become Pakistan's 'first state-of-the-art smart city'

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, during her official visit to China, unveiled a partnership with Huawei Technologies to transform Lahore into Pakistan's first state-of-the-art smart city.

During her visit to Huawei's headquarters in Shanghai's Longgang District, Maryam received a warm welcome from company representatives.

She invited Huawei to invest in Punjab, particularly in the Nawaz Sharif IT City, and assured full cooperation for establishing assembly and manufacturing plants in the province.

Additionally, she proposed the development of retail offices and after-sales service centers to strengthen Huawei's presence across Punjab. In a comprehensive meeting with Huawei's President for Government Affairs, Wang Chengdong, the chief minister discussed a detailed roadmap for Lahore's transformation into a cutting-edge digital city. Their discussions focused on advancing e-commerce, enhancing ecosystem production, and digitalising the health and education sectors.

Wang highlighted Huawei's ongoing projects in Pakistan and explored opportunities for deeper collaboration, aligning with Punjab's strategic goals for digital transformation.

The CM expressed particular interest in Huawei's initiatives in health and education, recognising their potential to complement Punjab's broader development objectives. She applauded Huawei's involvement in Lahore's first Safe City project and encouraged the company to expand its role in building a modern, secure digital ecosystem. She emphasised that the vision of a "Digital Punjab" relies on partnerships with global technology leaders like Huawei and proposed their support in capacity-building programs, IT research, and the development of Punjab's first fully AI-based university.

These efforts, she noted, would equip Punjab's youth with cutting-edge digital technologies, fostering innovation-driven growth and economic development in the province. The chief minister highlighted the transformative role of technology in governance and urban development, reaffirming her commitment to innovation-led progress.

She stressed that modernising Lahore into a smart city would set a precedent for



other cities in Pakistan, driving economic growth, creating jobs, and improving urban living standards.

The visit concluded with Maryam

touring Huawei's facilities, where she explored their advanced technological capabilities and discussed further collaboration opportunities.

Kalabagh to get Rs. 41 million cable car over Indus River

The Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP) has approved a cable car for tourists at the Indus River in Kalabagh, Mianwali. The project, estimated at Rs. 41 million, aims to boost tourism by offering a unique experience with scenic views of the river and surrounding areas.

The decision was made during a PDWP meeting held on Friday, November 29. Officials expect the cable car project to significantly enhance tourism in the region.

Additionally, the meeting approved a Rs. 198.2 million scheme under the Chief Minister's Fund to promote e-mechanization through the local manufacturing of agricultural machinery. The total cost of the

approved projects is Rs. 239.2 million.

It is important to mention that the provincial government has taken several important initiatives to boost tourism. Earlier this year, it announced a glass train service linking Rawalpindi and Murree.

This train will run between Rawalpindi and Bhurban in Murree, with work beginning on the initial phase, Project Concept One (PC-1). This 65-kilometer train route will start from Saddar in Rawalpindi and travel through scenic spots such as the Margalla Hills and Barakahu, ending at Bhurban, Murree. The project is being developed as part of the broader Murree Development Plan.

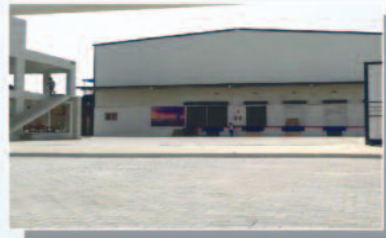




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Congregation celebrates Christmas with aplomb in garrison city

As the Christian community celebrated Christmas in the garrison city with religious fervour and enthusiasm, the army chief joined them at St. Joseph's Cathedral - where the city's biggest gathering was held - on Wednesday, December 25, underscoring the spirit of inclusivity and harmony.

and pay visit to parks," said Eman Bhatti, a resident of Satellite Town.

He said children were especially excited as they got new clothes and gifts.

Mushtaq Masih, a resident of Kohinoor Mills, said that despite harsh weather people gathered at Sacred Heart Church Westridge and performed religious rituals.



Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir arrives to attend the annual Christmas mass at the St. Joseph's Catholic Cathedral Church, on Wednesday, December 25.

The congregation extended a warm welcome to Chief of the Army Staff Gen Syed Asim Munir, expressing gratitude for his presence and solidarity on the cherished occasion.

The altar and podium of the cathedral got purple covers and flowers while priests also wore purple attire as the Christians believe that purple colour is associated with riches, royalty and authority.

The churches in Rawalpindi had organised midnight and morning services where prayers were offered. On the occasion, people decorated Christmas trees and made special meals. Cakes and other bakery items are commonly known as special meal, but people said spicy biryani and fried chicken are also part of every meal on Christmas.

The localities where Christians live such as Mohanpura, behind Holy Family Hospital, Westridge Bazaar, Allahabad, Arya Mohallah, Gowalmandi, Dhoke Ratta, Javed Colony, Dhoke Ellahi Bux, Dhoke Chaudhrian, etc were also decorated.

"Music programmes and decoration of houses are main part of the celebrations but people also arrange private family parties

He complained that families faced problem in cooking because of low gas pressure.

Police had made elaborate arrangements for security outside and inside the churches by deploying police personnel there.

The Water and Sanitation Agency, the Rawalpindi Waste Management Company, and the Rawalpindi and Chaklala Cantonment boards organised ceremonies for over 4,000 of their workers from the Christian community.

Speaking at the Christmas Mass on Wednesday, Gen Munir acknowledged the contributions of Christians and other minority communities to Pakistan's cultural, social, economic and national progress. He said that their contribution to the country's progress remained a source of pride and strength for the nation, according to the Inter-Services Public Relations. The COAS conveyed his heartfelt Christmas greetings to the Christian community across the nation. He emphasised that "Christmas serves as a profound reminder of the universal values of compassion, generosity, and goodwill - principles that bind our diverse society together".

Lahore to get first floating restaurant on the canal

Lahore is set to introduce its first-ever floating restaurant on the Lahore Canal near Harbanspura. The Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) has allocated Rs. 350 million for the project, which will include a floating dining boat alongside additional recreational facilities.



These will feature seating areas, cafes, and dedicated play zones for children, transforming the canal area into an attractive leisure spot. To bring the project to life, the PHA has shortlisted three firms- Babar & Co, HRD Construction, and Riyaz Enterprises-for its construction.

Alongside the floating restaurant, the PHA plans to revamp an underutilized picnic site in the same area, to attract more visitors and make it a popular destination.

The engineering team at PHA has crafted a comprehensive plan to breathe new life into the canal area, creating an inviting space for families and tourists.

The floating restaurant promises diners a memorable experience, blending scenic views with open-air dining. Locals have expressed excitement, seeing it as a refreshing departure from traditional dining venues, offering a closer connection to nature.



Young girls play ice hockey during a training session in Harchin Valley, Upper Chitral, on Wednesday, December 25.



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In a first, Shandur to host winter sports events

Shandur – the world’s highest pologround – is set to create another history of being the highest ice hockey ground as an extravaganza of winter sports is going to be held on December 28 on its 1.5-kilometre-long



frozen lake.

Adviser to chief minister on tourism, culture, archaeology, and museums Zahid Chanzeb inaugurated the event on Wednesday, December 25.

Speaking on this occasion, he said that the government was making history by holding the Shandur winter sports competitions for the first time at Harchin Valley in Upper Chitral.

He said Shandur polo ground was internationally famous for the polo festival held in summer, but ice hockey, curling and speed-skating competitions were being held there for the first time in the province’s history. He said the initiative was aimed at establishing Shandur ground as a year-round destination for tourists.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority, Winter Sports Federation, the district administration of Upper Chitral and Chitral Scouts, are jointly organising the competitions.

It is to mention here that the first phase of the event began on Sunday in the Laspur Valley of Upper Chitral. Over 100 athletes, including women, from both Lower and Upper Chitral districts are participating. During this phase, players would be selected to compete in the final matches at Shandur Top on December 28.

Players from various valleys, including Gabor, Garam Chashma, Kalash, Madaklasht, Booni, Parwak, Yarkhun Lasht, Harchin and others are participating in the competitions.

Decaying the Indus delta

The Indus delta, once a pristine ecosystem, has lost its glory. Listed amongst the 40 most biologically rich ecoregions in the world, it is also a Ramsar site. Unfortunately, its mangrove forests and fish stock in its estuaries are dwindling and communities are abandoning their abodes due to scarce livelihood resources. Abject poverty, food insecurity and morbidity are rampant. The prosperous past of the area has given way to deprivation over the decades.

Commissioned in 1932, Sukkur Barrage was the first major diversion structure on the Indus river. The last century witnessed a series of dams and barrages being built on the Indus and its tributaries. The Tarbela and Chashma reservoirs on the Indus and Mangla Dam on the Jhelum river are the major storage sites. Since the Sutlej Valley project (1922-30), the rivers of the Indus basin have become entangled with three major dams, 23 barrages, 12 inter-river canals and 45 main canals. This web of canals has sprawled a massive irrigation system that has drastically curtailed flows to the delta area.

The massive upstream diversion that continued over a century has culminated in an ecological disaster in the Indus delta. The Indus delta was spread over an area of 600,000 hectares between Sir Creek to the east and Phitti Creek to the west. It had 17 active creeks, which have now shrunk to just two - Khobar and Khar.

According to Census 2023, three deltaic districts of Sindh (Thatta, Sujawal and Badin) have eight talukas with a population of about two million people. This population is directly affected by the degradation of the delta. Declining fish catch, degraded farmland, increased frequency of cyclones and the malfunctioning Left Bank Outfall Drain have together aggravated poverty, unemployment, malnourishment and migration to other areas.

The declined river flow has had a detrimental effect on the delta. It has curtailed sediment transportation, which is a critical ingredient of the deltaic ecosystem. The silt forms the bed that hinders sea encroachment along its shoreline and also provides fertile soil to grow and sustain the mangrove forests. The mangroves are a breeding ground for several species of fish. The flow data of the last 25 years shows that for 12 years, flows below Kotri Barrage were less than 10 million acre feet (MAF) that was provisionally agreed on in the inter-provincial Water Apportionment Accord of

1991. Consequently, sediment transport to the delta has declined. The Indus delta would receive 400 million tonnes of silt in the pre-Tarbela years, which has declined to about 125Mt per year.

According to a report by the International Panel of Experts, 5,000 cusecs is the minimum flow required below Kotri Barrage to sustain the deltaic ecosystem. However, water flow data reveals that except for the two monsoon months (mid-July to mid-September), the desired quantum of water doesn’t cross the gates of Kotri Barrage. In other words, no silt reaches the coastline for most of the months, paving the way for sea intrusion.

In 2001, the government of Sindh estimated that up to 0.5 million hectares of fertile land in the coastal districts (12 per cent of the total cultivated area in the entire province) was affected by seawater intrusion. The report of the International Panel of Experts in 2005 mentioned that coastal accretion was about 30 metres every year.

A research paper by Dr Altaf Ali Siyal of the US-Pakistan Centre for Advanced Studies in Water mentions that the active delta occupied an area of about 13,900 square kilometres in 1833, which has shrunk to 1,067 sq km, marking a colossal reduction of about 92pc. In 2005, the IUCN reported the area of the active delta as 1,190 sq km. A fresh survey through satellite technology is required to determine the quantum of precious land lost to the sea. The panel of experts recommended that a total volume of 25 MAF every five years should be released to transport the requisite amount of silt.

The research revealed that an area covered with mangrove forests comprised 103,413 hectares or 16pc of the tidal floodplains during 1990, which slowly decreased to 63,296 hectares or 9.81pc of the tidal floodplains in 2005. Recently, the provincial government made efforts to revive the mangrove ecosystem. Its efforts saw an increase in the mangrove cover to 81,324 hectares in 2017. Sustaining the mangrove cover requires regular freshwater flows to the estuaries.

Amid this devastation of a fragile ecosystem, constructing new canals upstream for corporate farming will further suffocate the delta, which is a national asset. The delta’s resuscitation is a national obligation. A moratorium on new upstream diversions is urgently needed for the Indus delta to survive.



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A European paradise where you can live and work without visa

Svalbard is a strikingly beautiful archipelago, nestled far above the Arctic Circle, where snow blankets the landscape for much of the year. This

aren't plentiful. Many people who move to Svalbard work in the tourism sector, serving as tour guides, hotel staff, or in hospitality roles. Research scientists also



remote island community offers a unique and inviting atmosphere to people from all corners of the globe. And the best part? You don't need a visa to live or work there.

Svalbard, governed by Norway, stands out for its unique immigration policies. Thanks to the 1920 Svalbard Treaty, people from any country can live, work, and explore the archipelago without the need for a visa or residence permit. This open-door approach has made Svalbard a one-of-a-kind destination. Unlike most places, Svalbard has an incredibly simple immigration system—no visas are needed. Whether you're from the European Union, the United States, or anywhere else, you can pack your bags and head to Svalbard without the hassle of visa applications or permits.

While Svalbard itself operates under this visa-free policy, getting there typically involves passing through mainland Norway. And this is where things get tricky: mainland Norway is part of the Schengen Area, so if you are from a country that requires a Schengen visa, you will need to secure one to enter Norway.

In case you are wondering, it's essential to be self-sufficient as jobs

flock to the islands to study its unique environment.

Although, living in Svalbard presents its own set of challenges. The harsh environment features winter temperatures that can drop below -20°C , along with extended periods of darkness. In contrast, summer brings 24 hours of daylight. Housing can be scarce and costly, and the sense of isolation is often pronounced.

Healthcare in Svalbard can be challenging, as the archipelago doesn't provide social welfare services. While emergency medical care is available, residents must pay for their medical expenses out of pocket. If you plan to stay long-term, having health insurance is essential. Many residents opt for international health insurance to protect themselves against unforeseen medical costs.

However, it's essential to plan ahead. Make sure you have a steady income or job prospects, access to health insurance, and a well-prepared mindset for the isolated, extreme conditions of this Arctic island. Svalbard might be visa-free, but it's not without its challenges. But for those who embrace its challenges, Svalbard can offer a rare and unforgettable way of life.

China develops new train that can travel at the speed of an airplane

The current fastest operational train in the world, the Shanghai Maglev, can hit speeds of around 286 miles per hour. While that is incredibly fast, it may be put to shame by another maglev train in China that could reach speeds of about 621 miles per hour, Interesting Engineering reported.

The new train, still in development, would combine maglev technology with "near-vacuum tubes," theoretically allowing it to transport passengers at around the speed of many airplanes while hovering just off the ground.



Perhaps even better, passengers would be able to use their phones and have full 5G access while the train is in motion thanks to technology being developed by researchers at China's Southeast University, per the news outlet.

Maglev, which is short for "magnetic levitation," refers to the technology that allows trains to essentially levitate just above the tracks with the use of powerful magnets. Because there is no friction between the train and the tracks, maglev trains reach much greater speeds than standard trains.

By combining this technology with the near-vacuum tube technology, Chinese researchers hope that the two systems will become more than the sum of their parts. A super-fast train powered by vacuum tubes is not a novel idea - you may recall Elon Musk's proposed and subsequently abandoned Hyperloop concepts - but it has been too expensive and too difficult for any company to pull off.

This is all good (or, at least, potentially good) news, as more advanced train technology is better for the planet. Trains have been shown to be the most planet-friendly form of long-distance travel, producing less air pollution per passenger mile than cars and airplanes.

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